

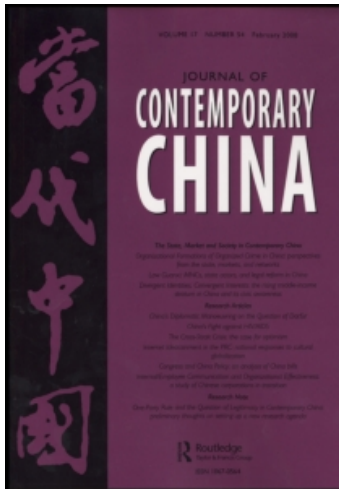
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# The Debate on Party Legitimacy in China: a mixed quantitative/qualitative analysis

BRUCE GILLEY and HEIKE HOLBIG\*

*We report results here from a mixed quantitative–qualitative analysis of 168 articles published in China on the question of regime and party legitimacy. We find that ideology remains a leading strategy of future legitimation for the CCP, alongside better known strategies of institution-building and social justice. We also find that liberalism, while less often proposed, remains a potent critique of regime legitimacy. We use these results to make predictions about the evolutionary path of institutional change of China’s political system, linking up Chinese elite debate with the wider scholarly debate of authoritarian durability.*

## Introduction

One of the most intense debates currently underway among scholars, cadres, and policy-makers in China is how to maintain the legitimacy of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This debate has its origins in China’s analysis of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It spilled into public view in the early 2000s, when a series of party pronouncements implicitly raised the question of the CCP’s legitimacy as a pressing (and sanctioned) topic of discussion. Since then, a remarkable proliferation of articles, conferences, and research projects in China has been visible that have tackled this challenge.

What are opinion-leaders saying? To date there has been no systematic attempt to delineate and measure the various policy communities in this debate. Through a mixed strategy of quantitative and qualitative research, we seek to fill this gap, and to contribute to a rapidly emerging field of China studies.<sup>1</sup> Knowing what is being said

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1. Gunter Schubert, ‘One-party rule and the question of legitimacy in contemporary China’, *Journal of Contemporary China* 17(54), (2008), pp. 191–204; Andre Laliberte and Marc Lanteigne, eds, *The Chinese Party-State in the 21st Century: Adaptation and the Reinvention of Legitimacy* (Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2008); Thomas Heberer and Gunter Schubert, eds, *Regime Legitimacy in Contemporary China: Institutional Change and Stability* (Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006).

by participants in the debate will help us to understand the actual evolution of the CCP's survival strategy in coming years.

We find that most participants in the debate believe that the CCP's legitimacy is vulnerable to growing challenges. In terms of strategies, we find that opinion divides into four main clusters, which we label ideology, liberalism, institutions, and social justice. Importantly, we find that ideology remains the most distinctive and frequently-mentioned strategy of legitimation among these authors, despite its relative absence from many outside accounts of regime legitimacy in China.

In the sections below, we first describe the historical background to this debate. We then provide quantitative and qualitative evidence about proposed strategies of legitimation. We conclude by making some predictions about how CCP policies will evolve in response to this debate.

### Historical background and ground rules

Our analysis is based upon 168 articles published between 2003 and 2007 (mostly from 2005 to 2007) from the China Academic Journals Database. Operated by the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) at Qinghua University, this is the largest full-text database available in the field of Chinese scholarship, covering around 8,500 Chinese academic journals, among them 3,400 social sciences and humanities journals (end of 2007).<sup>2</sup> The selection criterion used was any article with the word 'legitimacy' in the title and with a substantive focus on the political legitimacy of China's political system, state, regime, or ruling party. The articles appeared in the journals of party theory organs, party schools, public policy schools, academic institutions, and policy think tanks.

Given the nature of the database, dissident as well as internal (classified) discussions of the question of political legitimacy in China are not included in the sample. Rather, the selected articles reflect the 'public' sphere of elite discussions of this question. This 'public' sphere is of course far from being a free space in which various viewpoints generated from civil society contend. About half of the participants in the debate have a background in the Central Party School in Beijing or in one of its provincial or municipal equivalents—the main providers of ideological and political training for party and state cadres.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, as Shambaugh has illustrated recently, the Central Party School is the CCP's 'primary think tank for generating new ideas and policies concerning political and ideological reform'.<sup>4</sup> Like other theoretical debates and policy initiatives of past years, the debate on legitimacy was launched and framed by the party leadership via the party school system, and as we discuss below, those participating in it obey certain rules of constraint. Yet while this is clearly a bounded debate, our analysis shows that within the confines of these rules, the articulation of diverse viewpoints is indeed possible, and widely evident

2. The homepage is: [www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net).

3. The Central Party School is under the direct guidance of the CCP's Central Propaganda Department. Cf. Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship. Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), pp. 11, 17, 59.

4. David Shambaugh, 'Training China's political elite: the party school system', *China Quarterly*, 196, (December 2008).

in the articles we examine. In other words, our assumption is that this debate has both a top-down and a bottom-up dynamic, giving room to diverse views and arguments which can be discerned and analyzed in a meaningful way.

While communist parties in theory are supposed to be legitimate by Marxist–Leninist definition, the CCP has, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, been more concerned with its empirical legitimacy.<sup>5</sup> According to one source at the Central Party School, those concerns were heightened when the Kuomintang lost power in Taiwan’s presidential election of 2000.<sup>6</sup> The same year, then-party general secretary Jiang Zemin articulated his ‘Three Represents’ theory, which was portrayed by the CCP as a strategy to redefine its legitimacy. Resistance to the theory’s abandonment of traditional Marxist modes of legitimation, however, kept the debate at bay. Some veteran party officials also did not want their own revolutionary merits to be discounted.<sup>7</sup> There were relatively few articles published on the question of legitimacy up to 2004.

The debate intensified, however following a party plenum in 2004 which issued a resolution on strengthening the ‘governing capacity’ of the party. ‘The party’s governing status is not congenital, nor is it something settled once and for all’ (*Dang de zhizheng diwei bu shi yu sheng ju lai de, ye bu shi yi lao yong yi de*) read the document.<sup>8</sup> Zhang Feng from the Central Institute of Socialism calls legitimacy the ‘unspoken word left to the understanding of the audience’ by this resolution.<sup>9</sup> The resolution threw the doors open to a wider discussion of the CCP’s legitimacy. ‘Legitimacy . . . is the key element reflecting the governance capacity of the ruling party’, noted Lanzhou University professor Li Jie.<sup>10</sup>

In early 2005, party general secretary Hu Jintao discussed his own new theory of ‘Harmonious Socialist Society’ as a re-legitimation strategy at a meeting of provincial cadres at the Central Party School. He stated that the concept was ‘essential for consolidating the party’s social foundation to govern and to achieve the party’s historical governing mission’.<sup>11</sup> We believe that it was this speech that eventually reined in senior cadres who were blocking the discussion of the CCP’s legitimacy,

5. Two examples are: Liu Xuejun, ‘Sugong shuashishi zhizheng fangshi hefaxing de zhengzhixue fenxi’ [‘A political science analysis of the CPSU’s loss of legitimacy’], *Makesizhuyi Yu Xianshi* [*Marxism and Reality*] no. 5, (2006); Hao Yuqing, ‘Hefaxing: Sulian jubian poxi’ [‘Legitimacy: an interpretation of the Soviet Union’s violent change’], *Huadong Shifan Daxue Xuebao Zhexue Shehui Kexue Ban* [*Journal of East China Normal University—Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition*] no. 5, (2002). On this debate see David Shambaugh, *China’s Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

6. Communication with researchers from the CCP’s Central Party School in February 2008.

7. Communication with researchers from the CCP’s Central Party School in February and March 2008.

8. ‘Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jiaqiang dang de zhizheng nengli jianshe de jue ding’ [‘Resolution on Strengthening the Construction of the Party’s Governing Capacity’] (hereafter as ‘Resolution’), approved by the 14th plenary session of the 16th CCP Central Committee, 16–19 September, English translation available in *China Quarterly, Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation* 180, (July–September 2004), pp. 1153–1171, at p. 1154.

9. Zhang Feng, ‘Lun zengqiang dang zhizheng de hefaxing’ [‘On increasing the CCP’s ruling legitimacy’], *Zhongyang Shehuizhuyi Xuebao* [*Journal of the Central Institute of Socialism*] 134(2), (April 2005), pp. 5–10.

10. Li Jie, ‘Lun hefaxing shijiao xia dang de zhizheng nengli jianshe’ [‘On the construction of the Party’s governing capacity from the perspective of legitimacy’], *Neijiang Shifan Xueyuan Xuebao* [*Journal of Neijiang Teacher’s University*] 21(1), (2006), pp. 27–30, at p. 27.

11. Zhang Shulin, ‘“Liang ge xuanze” yu dang de zhizheng hefaxing’ [‘“Two choices” and the legitimacy of party rule’], *Xin Dongfang* [*New Orient*] 4, (2006), pp. 15–19. Hu Jintao’s long speech was published only four months later, obviously in the context of a new climax of social protests; cf. *Renmin Ribao*, (27 June 2005); an English translation is available in *BBC Monitoring Global Newslines Asia Pacific Political File*, (2 July 2005).

leading to the intense discussion of legitimacy in the following years. Articles about the CCP's legitimacy in 36 party school journals rose from 14 in 2002 to 81 in 2006.<sup>12</sup>

We found just one article—written by Xin Yan, probably a pseudonym, and published in a hardline party journal from Shanxi province in 2005—that sought to maintain the de facto ban on public discussions of CCP legitimacy. Titled ‘What is the real political purpose of raising the question of “political legitimacy”?’’, the article argues that discussing the CCP's legitimacy will have ‘serious negative consequences’ by ‘raising the question of whether China should still be led by the CCP’.<sup>13</sup> While such views ultimately failed to carry the day, they are a vivid reminder of the class struggle psychology that continues to stalk this entire debate.

The corpus of articles analyzed here reveals a set of rules that applies to Chinese elite discourse which is quite different from the rules guiding, for example, elite discourse elsewhere. In particular, participants adhere to three key ‘rules of the game’.

- *Rhetorical bandwagoning.* First and foremost, basically all articles refer to party rhetoric, either by citing recent party documents or remarks of former paramount leaders, or by echoing official slogans. Every now and then, official discourse opens windows of opportunity for critical debate, generating ‘hot topics’ by licensing certain, potentially sensitive, issues for wider discussion. This does not mean, however, that elite discourse is a simple echo of official discourse. Party rhetoric defines the opportunity structures for debate, but it does not hinder critical discourse and dissonance.
- *Citing Western scholarly literature.* Another way of legitimizing critical arguments is to embed them in references to Western classics of social science and philosophy. Today, there is a rich repertoire of Western scholarly literature available in Chinese translation.<sup>14</sup> Despite widespread suspicions about a ‘peaceful evolution’ and infiltration of Western ideas, such ideas still enjoy special authority in elite discourse in China. They are used, first, to break out of the cage of party rhetoric, second, to emphasize the universality and importance of the topic, and third, to introduce new concepts and frames for analysis.
- *Avoiding citation of Chinese peers.* In striking contrast to the widely used practice of citing Western authors, Chinese authors who have participated in the same discourse are rarely cited by their peers. We found only a handful of cross-references made by these authors to other articles on political legitimacy by their Chinese peers. Given the multitude of contributions on this topic published over a time span of several years, this suggests that there is still a latent fear among

12. See Bruce Gilley, ‘Legitimacy and institutional change: the case of China’, *Comparative Political Studies* 41(3), (2008), pp. 259–284, Figure 3, p. 270.

13. Xin Yan, ‘Tichu “zhengzhi hefaxing” de wenti jiuqing juyou he zhong zhengzhi hanyi?’ [‘What are the political implications in raising the question about “political legitimacy”?’], *Dangshi Wenhui [Abstracts of CCP History Studies]* no. 10, (2005), pp. 52–53, at p. 53.

14. Mostly cited authors of theoretical works related to the concept of political legitimacy are Jürgen Habermas, Samuel Huntington, Max Weber, Seymour Lipset, David Easton, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Aristotle. Repeated references are also found of works by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Gabriel A. Almond, Michael G. Roskin, Douglass North, and John Rawls, as well as of China experts such as Frederic Teiwes, Stuart R. Schram, and Gordon White. Combing through the endnotes (included in more than 90% of articles), one is surprised by the fact that works of all of these authors have been translated into Chinese since the early 1980s.

scholars of being grouped with others, categorized as holding a partisan view and ending up as representing the ‘wrong line’.

The discussion that we track, therefore, is a ‘debate’ in the sense that the authors are writing on the same topic within the same rhetorical traditions and constraints and are making implicit references to competing conceptions. Discussions rarely take the form of controversial direct responses to other articles. This is therefore a discordant chorus, but one that we believe needs to be studied carefully given its implications for the CCP’s future.

### Descriptive

Working with two native-Chinese speaking social science research assistants, we developed a coding manual and coded the 168 articles.<sup>15</sup>

The first question we coded was the authors’ perceptions about the current state of CCP legitimacy. While 30% believed the CCP already faced a legitimacy crisis (*hefaxing weiji*), a larger proportion (68%) believed that legitimacy was under some form of challenge or threat (*tiaozhan*, *weixie*, *wenti*, *ruodian*, etc). We also looked at the perceived sources of legitimacy challenges or crisis. In general, globalization and other international factors are downplayed (mentioned in 34% of articles) compared to domestic factors like changing values (63%), changing interests (61%) and the exhaustion of revolutionary-historical legitimacy (51%).

The official recognition of the weakening of revolutionary legitimacy in 2004 is partly responsible for this debate, as mentioned. Nonetheless, the open discussion of this topic is still remarkable. Zhejiang Party School professor Dong Ming, for instance, describes the CCP’s revolutionary legitimacy claims as ‘totalitarian’ and unsuited to China’s present needs.<sup>16</sup> Sun Yaoxian, a member of the Xuzhou municipal party committee in Jiangsu province, goes further to argue that the CCP’s revolutionary legitimacy was weak from the start since its victory in 1949 depended upon contextual and accidental factors.<sup>17</sup>

One set of strategies in response to these legitimacy challenges concerns economic performance. We found that half of all authors (50%) mention economic growth as a crucial component of a legitimation strategy, while over one third (35%) stressed the importance of social equality.

A second type of strategy related to mentions of various ideological theories. Not surprisingly, the Three Represents was noted by more authors than any other (39%). Also frequently mentioned were Marxism (34%) and Deng Xiaoping Thought (24%). Less frequently mentioned were Hu Jintao’s Harmonious Socialist Society concept (18%) and Maoism (13%).

15. The entire coding book and coding data are available upon request.

16. Dong Ming, ‘Shanzhi shiyu li de Zhonggong zhizheng hefaxing tanwei’ [‘An exploration of the CCP’s legitimacy from the perspective of good governance’], *Changbai Xuekan* [*Changbai Journal*] 121, (2005), pp. 10–15, at p. 12.

17. Sun Yaoxian, ‘Lun Zhongguo Gongchandang changqi zhizheng de hefaxing jichu de gonggu’ [‘On the consolidation of the foundation of the CCP’s long-term ruling legitimacy’], *Shandong Shehui Kexue* [*Shandong Social Science*] 115(3), (2005), pp. 24–29.

As far as institutions and governance are concerned, the main emphasis was on the rule of law (62%), social incorporation (44%), and the control of corruption (38%). Matters of greater horizontal accountability—people’s congresses (27%) and the separation of party and government (17%)—were mentioned less often.

Finally, while half of all authors (50%) use the word ‘democracy’ in discussing their strategies, the meanings attached to that term vary widely. Mentions of diminished sub-types of democracy are evenly spread across electoral democracy (20%), inner-party democracy (13%), and consultative democracy (12%).

### Four dimensions

The percentages cited above tell us about the relative *frequency* with which different strategic options are mentioned. They do not, however, identify distinctive policy or epistemic communities, and how they are knit together. Factor analysis provides a way to do this. It is an alternative descriptive tool that looks not for frequently-occurring variables but for distinctive and closely-knit clusters of variables, some of which may appear very infrequently. Thus a variable with a high *average* score may not be strongly associated with any distinctive view because it is widely dispersed across *all* strategies. That may be because it is seen as substantively important to all strategies or because it is ritualistically invoked in the justification of all strategies. Conversely, variables that appear infrequently may be strongly associated with a certain cluster of opinion.

We performed a principal components factor analysis on the 26 ‘prescriptive’ variables in our codebook. Four factors were retained, explaining collectively 82% of the variations in strategies across the 168 articles. We label these four clusters of opinion: ideology (which explains 26% of all variations), liberalism (22%), institutions (21%), and social justice (13%). The specific variables and their factor

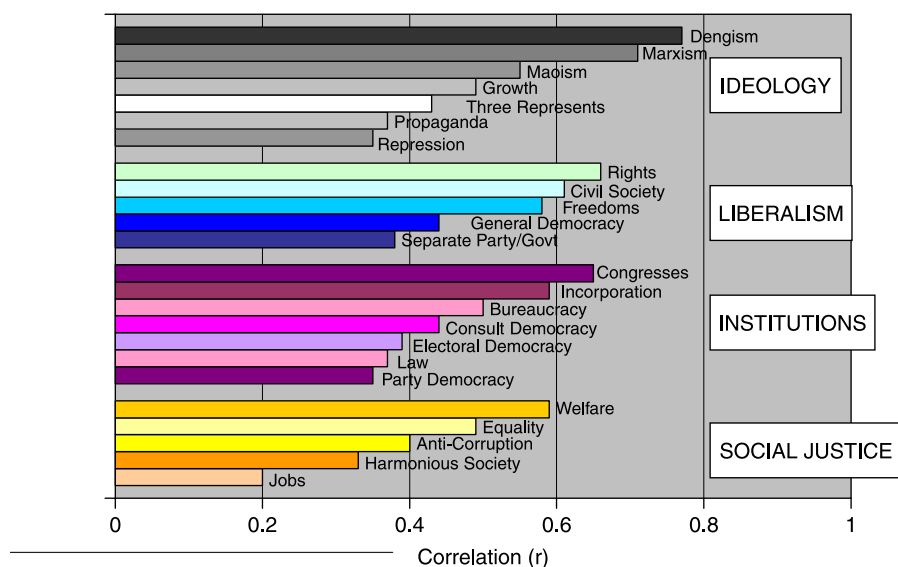
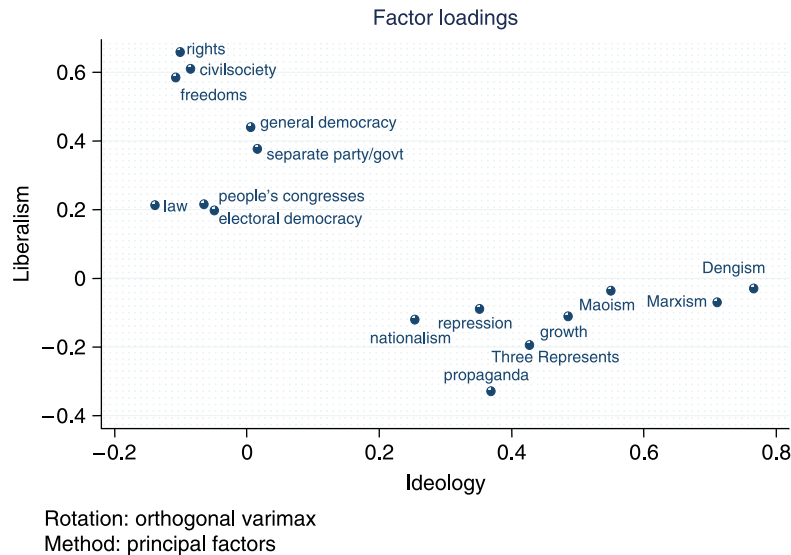


Figure 1. Four dimensions of legitimacy strategy (factor correlations *r*).



**Figure 2.** Correlations ( $r$ ) of variables along ideology and liberalism.

loading correlations to these four dimensions are shown in Figure 1. The dispersion of selected variables along the two strongest factors—ideology and liberalism—is shown in Figure 2.

Factor analysis reduces the distinctiveness of some frequently mentioned variables. The rule of law, for instance, despite being widely mentioned among authors, clusters only weakly along two dimensions, ideology and institutions. Conversely, rights, freedoms, and civil society, which are less frequently mentioned overall, nonetheless, cluster together strongly as part of the liberal legitimization strategy. Liberal strategies may be *fewer in number* than institutional and ideological ones, but they are *more united* in their prescriptions for the CCP.

Quantitative analysis serves a useful function of framing the debate. But the exact meanings of the four strategies cannot be understood without considering how they are discussed by authors. We thus turn to qualitative analysis to better understand what is being said.

18. 'Speech to cadres and soldiers of the Beijing Martial Law Corps', Beijing, 9 June 1989, available at: <http://web.peopledaily.com.cn/deng/>.

19. For example, Sun Xiaowei and Sun Yan, 'Yishixingtai: Zhongguo Gongchandang zhengzhi quanwei hefaxing rentong de sixiang jichu' ['Ideology: the ideological fundament of identification with the legitimacy of the CCP's political authority'], *Daizong Xuekan [Journal of Daizong]* 7(3), (2003), pp. 5–6; Wang Shanfeng, 'Zhongguo Gongchandang zhizheng hefaxing jichu de bianqian he chongsu' ['Historical change and rebuilding of the CCP's political legitimacy'], *Nanjing Gongye Daxue Xuebao—Shehuikexue ban [Journal of Nanjing Industry University—Social Sciences Edition]* no. 5, (2006), pp. 25–29, at p. 43.

20. Lu Ailin, 'Shehui zhuanxing qi Zhongguo Gongchandang zhizheng hefaxing ziyuan de weihu yu chonggao' ['The maintenance and reconstruction of the resources of CCP's ruling legitimacy during social transformation'], *Lilun yu Gaige [Theory and Reform]* no. 6, (2005), pp. 56–60; Lu Ailin, 'Xin shiqi weihu yu peiyu dang de hefaxing ziyuan de lujing xuanze' ['The strategic choice to maintain and cultivate the legitimacy resources of the CCP in the New Era'], *Qishi [Seeking Truth]* 1, (2006), pp. 18–21.



## Ideology

Following the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989, Deng Xiaoping told an assembly of PLA officers that ‘our biggest mistake was in the area of education, in particular ideological and political education’.<sup>18</sup> While it has often been assumed that ideology has become irrelevant to the CCP since then, the writings here tell us that Deng’s words are still taken seriously in China. Most of the authors believe that the weakening of ideology is one of the main challenges to party legitimacy. This is due to the fading of memories of the communist revolution, the discrediting experiences of Maoist campaigns, the collapse of Soviet communism, the economic woes faced by workers and farmers, and the ideological pluralization that has come with marketization, economic globalization, new technology, and ‘Western culture’.<sup>19</sup> Yet for most of these writers, ideology still lies at the very heart of party legitimacy. It is, in the words of Lu Ailin of Henan’s Zhongyuan Industrial College, who is one of the most prolific writers in contemporary China on party legitimacy, the ‘key factor for public identification with the political authority’.<sup>20</sup> According to an article by Central Party School scholar Li Haiqing published in the party’s theory organ *Seeking Truth* in 2005, ideology fulfils various functions crucial to political, social and economic life, such as interpreting political order, cementing national identity, mobilizing support, and reducing economic transaction costs by enhancing social trust.<sup>21</sup> Ideological adaptation and innovation are thus seen as *the* prerequisite of re-legitimizing party rule. The authors differ mainly in their preferences for specific strands of the mainstream ideology.

### ‘Three Represents’

Since its launch in early 2000, the Three Represents<sup>22</sup> has been advertised as the core of the CCP’s ideological reconstruction. Legitimacy is not claimed any longer with reference to the CCP’s long revolutionary history and traditional ideological dogmas, but instead by emphasizing the vitality of the CCP resulting from its ability to adapt to an ever-changing environment and to reform itself from within. Chen Yajie from the Central Party School and Qi Xingfa from the Guangdong Provincial Party School both argue that the Three Represents is about reconstructing the party’s legitimacy—providing the correct analysis of the domestic and international challenges to party rule as well as the solutions to tackle them.<sup>23</sup>

21. Li Haiqing, ‘Zhengzhi hefaxing de yishixingtai weidu’ [‘The ideological dimension of political legitimacy’], *Qiushi* [Pursuit of Truth] no. 9, (2005), pp. 66–69.

22. The precise wording of the Three Represents (*San ge daibiao*) formula goes: ‘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 interests of the greatest majority of the people’. It had first been formulated by the former CCP general secretary Jiang Zemin in early 2000; for a detailed analysis of the concept cf. Heike Holbig, ‘Ideological reform and political legitimacy in China: challenges in the post-Jiang era’, in Heberer and Schubert, eds, *Regime Legitimacy in Contemporary China*, pp. 13–34.

23. Qi Xingfa, ‘Dui “San ge daibiao” guanyu dang zhizheng hefaxing de yiyu jieshi’ [‘Interpreting the “Three Represents” connotation of the legitimacy of party rule’], *Lilun Xuekan* [Theory Journal] 5, (September 2003), pp. 81–84; Chen Yajie, ‘Cong Zhonggong zhizheng de hefaxing jichu ziyuan ji qi zhuangkuang kan “San ge daibiao” de tichu’ [‘Looking at the formulation of “Three Represents” from the perspective of the legitimacy resources and the present situation of CCP rule’], *Shanghai Dangshi yu Dangjian* [Shanghai Party History and Party Construction] 5, (2003), pp. 7–10.

24. Qi Xingfa, ‘Dui “San ge daibiao” guanyu dang zhizheng hefaxing de yiyu jieshi’.

The articles we analyzed pay particular attention to the second of the three ‘Represents’—the direction of advanced culture—which stands for the ideological basis of legitimacy. To bring forth a progressive socialist culture, the party must not dogmatically cling to the Marxist classics, but rather develop Marxist theory with the times and enrich it with modern elements of patriotism, nationalism, science, social morals, community-mindedness, and a law-abiding mentality, the articles aver. The third of the three ‘Represents’—the fundamental interests of the greatest majority of the people—is interpreted as the ‘mass base’ of the CCP’s legitimacy, and it is the most disputed one. Defending Jiang Zemin’s theory against the implicit accusation that the CCP has betrayed its original class nature, Qi Xingfa and others argue pragmatically that only by incorporating the new economic and social elites and allowing them to participate politically can the party adequately expand its ‘mass base’ and uphold its ruling position.<sup>24</sup>

### Marxism

Marxism is unequivocally regarded as the leading ideology and ultimate source of the CCP’s political legitimacy in this debate. Most articles reflect or even explicitly refer to party documents: the report of the 16th Party Congress in November 2002 ascribed to Marxism the role of ‘the fundamental guiding thought for the establishment of party and state’.<sup>25</sup> As Huang Jifu from the Guangzhou Academy of Social Science put it: ‘The CCP can’t do without its forefather [Marx], but simply reeling off the forefather’s words all the time won’t work either’.<sup>26</sup>

The authors that dwell on the significance of Marxism do so for various reasons. Shandong law professor Zhang Lianguo argues that the historical materialism and proletarian outlook underlying Marxist thought justifies the ruling status of the CCP. Should Marxist theory ever be discarded, the party would lose its legitimacy as a ‘natural’ ruling party (something the plenum decision of 2004 explicitly said has already happened).<sup>27</sup> According to Liu Changfa from the Zhengzhou Municipal Party School, Marxism forms a ‘scientific compass’ for party rule. To maintain its appeal, it has to be adapted to changing social realities.<sup>28</sup> The launching of a heavily-invested ‘Academy of Marxism’ under the auspices of the prestigious Chinese Academy of Social Science in late 2005 reflects the party’s hopes to modernize Marxist theory and thus to gain a new ideological framework to integrate an increasingly complex society.<sup>29</sup>

25. Zhang Lianguo, ‘“San ge daibiao”: Shichang jingji tiaojian xia qianghua Zhonggong zhizheng hefaxing de xitong gongcheng’ [“Three Represents”: system engineering to strengthen the legitimacy of CCP rule under market economy conditions], *Jiangsu Shehuikexue* [*Jiangsu Social Sciences*] no. 4, (2003), pp. 192–197.

26. Huang Jifu, ‘Lun Zhongguo Gongchandang zhizheng hefaxing de tedian’ [‘On the characteristics of the ruling legitimacy of the CCP’], *Tanqiu* [*Exploring Truth*] no. 72, (2002), pp. 16–17.

27. Zhang Lianguo, ‘Lun Deng Xiaoping zhengzhi hefaxing sixiang de tese’ [‘On the characteristics in Deng Xiaoping’s thoughts on political legitimacy’], *Xueshu Luntan* [*Academic Forum*] 169(2), (2005), pp. 1–7.

28. Liu Changfa, ‘Shilun Zhonggong zhizheng diwei de hefaxing’ [‘On the legitimacy of the CCP’s ruling status’], *Zhonggong Zhengzhou Shiwei Dangxiao Xuebao* [*The Journal of the Party School of CCP Zhengzhou Municipal Committee*] 73(1), (2005), pp. 11–13; cf. also Li Haiqing, ‘Zhengzhi hefaxing de yishixingtai weidu’.

29. *Xinhua News Agency*, (16 January 2006); *South China Morning Post*, (23 January 2006), p. 20.

*Dengism*

Many authors mention Deng Xiaoping Theory in a purely canonical manner. Among those who refer to Deng Xiaoping's theoretical or practical achievements in their own right, about one half do so to bolster the 'correct' view of the Three Represents of welcoming new economic elites into the CCP. As a rule, these articles stress the important role of economic growth and rising living standards in stabilizing party rule. Countering this view, the other half argues that economic growth is not enough to legitimize the CCP. Rather, they demand that the party leadership should find new ways to bring about social equality and, while allowing private entrepreneurs and other new economic elites into its ranks, continue to care for the working masses who will always form the CCP's main social basis.

A significant number also cite Deng Xiaoping Theory as part of a concern for political participation, for a greater role for people's congresses, for general democracy, and for the provision of civil rights. This does not imply, however, that proponents of Deng Xiaoping Theory are all liberal-minded. Various authors combine their pledge for Deng's formula of performance legitimacy with an emphasis on tighter controls of the media, dissenting groups in the populace, or of civil society at large. For example, a law professor Zhang Liandong who defends Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic vision of legitimating party rule through economic growth and prosperity, defends with equal vigor the use of repressive force ordered by Deng in 1989 to safeguard social peace and the party's ruling status. To eventually prove socialism's superiority over capitalism, the 'Four Cardinal Principles' formulated by Deng (upholding the leadership of the CCP, the dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism, as well as Marxism–Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought) have to be adhered to. Should these ideals ever be abandoned, the party would lose its political legitimacy, and China would fall into chaos and disarray. Interestingly, Zhang cites Kang Xiaoguang and Jiang Qing, two proponents of Neo-Confucianism, to support his positive assessment of Deng Xiaoping's formula of political legitimacy.<sup>30</sup>

*Maoism*

Besides a merely canonical use, Maoism is referred to as an ideological source of legitimacy mostly in a historical context to describe the party's dominant mode of legitimation during the first decades of the People's Republic. The revolutionary struggle and the victorious 'liberation' of China under Mao's leadership, the personal charisma of Chairman Mao, the crucial role of ideological indoctrination and propagation of the 'mass line' are evoked as the core elements of this historical mode of legitimation—a mode regarded as increasingly outdated in the course of reform and opening up.

It is only in a few articles that Maoism is explicitly juxtaposed with Deng Xiaoping's prioritization of economic growth and raising living standards as a currently relevant source of legitimacy. According to Wu Xiaotiao from Gansu Provincial Party School, market-oriented reforms have bred corruption and social disparity and alienated the party elite from the masses.<sup>31</sup> In a way, this criticism

30. Zhang Lianguo, 'Lun Deng Xiaoping zhengzhi hefaxing sixiang de tese'.

31. Wu Xiaotao, 'Shehui jiegou shiye xia Zhonggong zhizheng de zhengzhi hefaxing de lishi kaocha' ['A historical review of the political legitimacy of CCP rule from a socio-structural perspective'], *Gansu Lilun Xuekan* [*Gansu Theory Research*] 170(4), (July 2005), pp. 33–38.

of ‘Dengism’ seems to resonate with the problematization of the earlier reform period’s ‘growth-only’ mentality by proponents of the Harmonious Socialist Society concept detailed below. However, the prescriptions for relegitimizing party rule through Maoism are more conservative than those attached to the Harmonious Socialist Society. Authors recommending Maoist ideology as a source of legitimacy emphasize the indispensable mass foundation of legitimate CCP rule and the urgent need to fight against corruption and bureaucratism which are haunting the party’s rank and file. They also tend to support traditional propaganda and other devices of the Leninist party-state.

### *Nationalism*

Nationalist positions, which appear in about 15% of articles, are spread quite evenly over the legitimacy discourse analyzed here. While not clustering specifically with other ideological factors, nationalism nonetheless serves as an integral part and important ingredient of ideological modernization. Thus, a majority of authors propagate an ‘enlightened’ version of nationalism which is embedded in a discussion of culture as an ideological resource. To strengthen social cohesion, ‘emotions of belonging and identification’, ‘national unity’, and ‘national self-confidence and pride’, some articles argue, the CCP should abandon the rigid framework of traditional state ideology—criticized by Lu Ailin as ‘state religion’<sup>32</sup>—and instead develop a new ‘national culture’ or ‘mainstream culture’. Only by blending traditional Chinese and modern global culture in an open-minded and flexible manner can the party maintain its progressive nature and tap into the ‘national spirit’ as a source of political identification and legitimation of its rule.<sup>33</sup>

In the context of globalization, a few authors adopt a more aggressive nationalist stance. As Xu Haibo, professor at Shenzhen University and author of a book on ideology in the age of China’s social transformation<sup>34</sup> argues, globalization has put enormous pressure on the Chinese nation-state. As Western powers are dictating the rules of the game of international organizations and try to force their own value systems upon China, national identity has gradually been eroding and giving way to a ‘globalized identity’. To counter these dangerous trends and the pressure, China has to stress its ‘national interest’, independence and security. By equating the ‘national interest’ with the ‘common interest of the Chinese nation’ represented by the CCP,

32. Lu Ailin, ‘Shehui zhuanxing qi Zhongguo Gongchandang zhizheng hefaxing ziyuan de weihu yu chonggao’.

33. For example, Yin Desi, ‘Lüelun “San ge daibiao” yu zhizheng dang de hefaxing’ [‘A brief comment on the “Three Represents” and the legitimacy of ruling parties’], *Tanqiu [Exploring Truth]* no. 2, (2002), pp. 4–9; Liu Changfa, ‘Shilun Zhonggong zhizheng diwei de hefaxing’; Fang Zhenghong, ‘Yi xianjinxing jianshe gouzhu dang de zhizheng hefaxing de yishixingtai jichu’ [‘Building up the CCP’s ideological base by constructing its progressive nature’], *Dang de Jianshe [CCP Construction]*, (June 2006), pp. 54–56.

34. Xu Haibo, *Zhongguo shehui zhuanxing yu yishixingtai wenti [China’s Social Transformation and the Issue of Ideology]* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 2003).

35. Xu Haibo and Yang Xianping, ‘Goujian “Hexie shehui” yu Zhongguo Gongchandang de zhizheng hefaxing’ [‘Building a “harmonious society” and the legitimacy of CCP rule’], *Shenzhen Daxue Xuebao [Journal of Shenzhen University—Humanity & Social Sciences]* 22(6), (November 2005), pp. 41–45.

36. Zhang Lianguo, ‘Lun Deng Xiaoping zhengzhi hefaxing sixiang de tese’; Xiao Heping and Wang Shide, ‘Lüelun dang de xianjinxing yu dang zhizheng de hefaxing’ [‘On the party’s progressiveness and the legitimacy of party rule’], *Lilun Shiye [Theoretical Perspective]* no. 1, (2002), pp. 32–34.

the party's ruling status is legitimized.<sup>35</sup> Western democracies, another author argues, share a strategic weakness in that they cannot 'fully concentrate their national power' due to their multi-party systems. The progressive Chinese one-party-state, by contrast, derives its legitimacy from realizing 'the great historical cause of the country's prosperity and strength, people's well-being and the nation's great rejuvenation' and by tackling the adverse international competition and the foreign attempts to 'Westernize' and 'split' the Chinese nation.<sup>36</sup>

Wan Jun from the Central Party School writes about the mistaken beliefs in a global democratic order and their vain hopes for a 'peaceful evolution' of the Chinese political system. Nonetheless, he warns that a resort to nationalism in China would present a 'double-edged sword'. While nationalist sentiments may hold a positive potential for social mobilization, they can easily grow out of control and cause a destructive mentality of aggression. Particularly in a multiethnic state such as China, nationalist aspirations may not enhance social cohesion but rather subvert China's fragile national unity. 'As we urgently need to throw ourselves into the waves of world-wide economic globalization', he concludes, 'we cannot do without a nationalist strategy of legitimation, but we should not use it in a rash manner, and always be very prudent and careful when applying it'.<sup>37</sup>

### Social justice

One ideological theory, Hu Jintao's Harmonious Socialist Society, tends to be mentioned by the same authors who emphasize the legitimizing role of social equality and justice, welfare, the control of unemployment, and the anti-corruption struggle. The qualitative analysis of the legitimacy discourse confirms that there is a certain line of division between those who are preoccupied with economic performance and ideological innovation designed to shore up the CCP's role, and those who demand a fundamental shift of party politics towards social justice. Indeed, the three non-ideology dimensions are distinctive in their emphasis on making the CCP more responsive to social needs and demands. Compared to the warnings of growing social disparity by authors holding Marxist and Maoist positions, proponents of the Harmonious Socialist Society tend to be much more trenchant in their criticism of the excessive reliance on economic growth during the first two decades of reform, and of the social ills that have come with it. Huang Lijuan, a professor at the Tongzhou Municipal Party School in

37. Wan Jun, 'Xin shiji Zhongguo Gongchandang chuantong hefaxing ziyuan mianlin de tiaozhan' ['Challenges for the traditional resources of legitimacy of the CCP in the new century'], *Kexue Shehuizhuyi [Scientific Socialism]* no. 3, (2003), pp. 30–33.

38. Huang Lijuan, 'Gongchandang zhizheng diwei hefaxing chutan—Jiantan yi fa zhizheng' ['Brief exploration of the legitimacy of CCP's ruling position—discussing the rule according to law'], *Chutian Zhuren [Chutian Owner]* no. 7, (2003), pp. 32–34.

39. According to Huntington, autocratic rulers may undermine their basis of power by adopting reforms, improving economic performance and thus breeding demands for political participation and democratic freedom, but may risk the same result if they do not do so. Cf. Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 177.

40. Zhang Feng gives a Gini coefficient of 0.47 (Zhang Feng, 'Lun zengqiang dang zhizheng de hefaxing'); others argue that while the precise value of the Gini coefficient for China is discussed widely, experts agree that it is still on the rise: Long Taijiang and Wang Bangzuo, 'Jingji zengzhang yu hefaxing de "zhengji kunju"' ['Economic growth and the "political performance trap" of legitimacy'], *Fudan Xuebao—Shehui Kexue Ban [Fudan Journal—Social Sciences]* no. 3, (2005), pp. 169–176.

Guizhou, for instance, argues that ‘economic growth cannot provide a long-term basis for legitimacy . . . because the moment that growth slows, the political system could face collapse’.<sup>38</sup> In the age of economic globalization and world market interdependence, economic growth is regarded as more and more fragile.

These authors believe that the Harmonious Socialist Society (and the ‘Scientific Development Concept’ that is closely linked to it) presents a programmatic solution to China’s ‘performance dilemma’ and an innovative model of political legitimation. Samuel Huntington’s ‘King’s dilemma’ (translated as *zhengji kunju*, ‘dilemma of political achievements’, or ‘performance dilemma’) serves as a popular starting-point for a critical analysis of the first two decades of economic reforms.<sup>39</sup> As some illustrate vividly, the reforms have produced a disturbing degree of social inequality and injustice, reflected in an alarmingly high and still increasing Gini coefficient.<sup>40</sup> The situation is made more precarious by the prospect that even with sustained economic growth, the satisfaction of material needs will be followed by immaterial ones. Growing demands for political participation, the pluralization of ideas and life styles, the formation of a ‘third sector’ of associations and non-profit organizations, and the Internet put increasing pressure on party rule and foreshadow a crisis of confidence, if not an outright crisis of CCP legitimacy.<sup>41</sup> Economic reforms, after more than two decades, have thus arrived at a crossroads. If the social ills are not remedied, Xu Haibo warns, Chinese society might fall back to the level of development of the pre-reform period.<sup>42</sup>

To tackle these problems, these articles stress the urgent need to restore social justice and to create common prosperity in three main ways. One is an emphasis on ‘people-centered’ policies. Similar to official rhetoric, these articles abound with idioms containing the character ‘*min*’—the people—in a multitude of variations too broad to illustrate here. It is interesting to note in this context, however, that the Three Represents which in their original formulation by Jiang Zemin had a conspicuously elitist background are now given a populist reinterpretation. In a way, the Three Represents are translated into the Three People (*san wei min*): the party must ‘exercise its power for the people, have passion for the people, and seek benefits for the people’.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the essence of the Three Represents is now described as ‘establishing a party that is devoted to the public interest and governing for the people’ (*li dang wei gong, zhizheng wei min*).<sup>44</sup> Without explicitly criticizing the elitist concept of the Three Represents, it is subtly but unambiguously transformed into a formula of populist legitimation.

A second, and more innovative aspect is the introduction of a new model of development. In the name of the so-called ‘Scientific Development Concept’ first formulated in early 2004, the National People’s Congress adopted new guidelines for

41. *Ibid.*

42. Xu Haibo and Yang Xianping, ‘Goujian “Hexie shehui” yu Zhongguo Gongchandang de zhizheng hefaxing’.

43. For example, Fang Zhenghong, ‘Yi xianjinxing jianshe gouzhu dang de zhizheng hefaxing de yishixingtai jichu’.

44. *Ibid.*; see also Zhang Shulin, ‘Shilun Hu Jintao dui dang de zhizheng hefaxing ziyuan kaifa’ [‘Exploration on the development of legitimacy resources of the CCP by Hu Jintao’], *Zhonggong Zhengzhou Shiwei Dangxiao Xuebao* [Journal of the Party School of CCP Zhengzhou Municipal Committee] no. 2, (2006), pp. 4–7.

45. Cf. Heike Holbig, ‘Demokratie chinesischer Prägung. Der 17. Parteitag der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas’ [‘Democracy, Chinese style. The CCP’s 17th Party Congress’], *China aktuell—Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* no. 6, (2007), pp. 32–55.

social and economic development in March of the same year, followed by the concept's incorporation into the CCP's constitution in 2007.<sup>45</sup> Under it, the party promises to strive for 'comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable development' instead of the previous preoccupation with quantitative growth. Particular emphasis is given to the 'scientific' character of the concept, signifying the objective qualifications of the party-state to formulate and implement this progressive concept. As various authors elaborate, the CCP's legitimacy can only be restored if it actively arranges for redistributive mechanisms between the socioeconomically privileged and the underprivileged, between the urban and rural populace, between coastal and interior regions and this harmonizes social interests. Some authors stress the capacity of the party-state to 'lead development' and project a specific redistributive role of the party-state in pursuing social justice which supports the normative justification of its leading position in the country's modernization process.

Last but not least, a few articles dwell upon a third aspect, which could be called a 'self-responsibility' approach to society. In contrast to party rhetoric which emphasizes the need for maintaining stability through rigid instruments of party-state control, the Harmonious Socialist Society formula expounded here entails an explicit recognition of social complexity, of diverging social interests, and of pluralist tendencies translating into demands for political participation. According to official party documents, such a society is one 'in which all the people will do their best, each individual has his proper place, and everybody will get along in harmony with each other'.<sup>46</sup> One author, for example, takes up this rhetoric in the name of 'self-creation, self-development, self-realization'<sup>47</sup> by demanding to create conditions that allow everyone a fair chance to develop his or her individual abilities. It is also in this context that a small number of authors request the intensification of political reforms, the institutionalization of democratic mechanisms and the provision of civil rights to satisfy the growing demands for political participation.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, citizens are expected to actively contribute to social harmony by subscribing to traditional schemes of social self-governance based on Confucian ethics of individual self-discipline. In this sense, the Harmonious Socialist Society concept presents a unique blend of classical liberal and traditional Confucian norms of social governance.<sup>49</sup>

As Guo Jianming from the Chinese Academy of Social Science argues, while future welfare policies will continue to require a sufficient measure of economic growth and performance, the emphasis on 'performance-type legitimacy', which

46. For example, *Xinhua News Agency*, (25 September 2005).

47. Yin Qingyan and Liu Lixin, 'Dang de zhizheng hefaxing chuyi' ['Brief analysis of the legitimacy of CCP rule'], *Xin Shiye* [*New Vision*] no. 3, (2004), pp. 31–33.

48. *Ibid.*; Long Taijing and Wang Bangzuo, 'Jingji zengzhang yu hefaxing de "zhengji kunju"'; Wu Jian, 'Lun zhizheng dang hefaxing de youxiao ziyuan' ['An exploration of effective resources of the legitimacy of ruling parties'], *Kexue Shehuizhuyi* [*Scientific Socialism*] no. 1, (2006), pp. 48–51.

49. For the revival of Confucianist values cf. Sebastien Billioud, 'Confucianism, "cultural tradition" and official discourses in China at the start of the new century', *China Perspectives* no. 2, (2007), pp. 50–65; Luigi Tomba, 'Baolei Zhongguo. Yezhu xiaoqu de kongjian yu zhili' ['Fortress China. Space and governance in China's proprietary communities'], in He Zengke, Thomas Heberer and Gunter Schubert, eds, *Chengxiang gongmin canyu he zhengzhi hefaxing* [*Citizen Participation in Rural and Urban Areas and Political Legitimacy*] (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2007), pp. 285–302.

50. Guo Jianming, 'Hexie shehui hexie zhengzhi: Yunyu yi zhong xin zhengzhi hefaxing de moshi' ['Harmonious society, harmonious politics: producing a new model of political legitimacy'], *Zhonggong Zhejiang Shengwei Dangxiao Xuebao* [*Journal of the Party School of Zhejiang Provincial Committee*] no. 6, (2006), pp. 53–57.

at best produces specific support, must be replaced by an emphasis on a new ‘harmony-type legitimacy’ to produce diffuse support for party rule (note the use of David Easton’s concepts). If this lesson is not learned in time, the author warns, ‘social instability will eventually swallow up the previous achievements in efficiency and accumulation of wealth’.<sup>50</sup>

### Liberalism and institutions

The two dimensions of liberalism and institutions are closely linked in theory: both concern the question of political system design. However, their distinctiveness is shown by the variables that cluster in each: authors who espouse institutional strategies of legitimation are concerned with an effective and incorporative organization of political power, while authors who espouse liberal strategies of legitimation are concerned with limits on that power.

It is notable that electoral democracy is conceived of as an institutional strategy of legitimation rather than as a liberal one. Writers who discuss elections tend to do so in the context of extending the reach and effectiveness of state institutions, not as empowering society vis-à-vis the state. Peng Zhongyi and Li Qi of South China University, for instance, describe elections as operating within an ‘appropriate constitutional setting’ whose aim is to rebuild institutional capacity, and thus legitimacy.<sup>51</sup>

Secondly, the rule of law is only weakly aligned with the institutional strategy despite its frequent appearance across all 168 articles. As mentioned, law is seen as a multi-faceted source of legitimacy, one that serves social justice, liberalism, and institutional strength, often in mutually contradictory ways. For instance, Xu Yongjun of the College of Public Administration of Jilin University argues that the rule of law should be part of a broader ‘humanitarianism’ to replace the ‘hegemony’ of CCP rule,<sup>52</sup> while two civil servants from Hubei, Xu Sugang and Zhong Fang, cite the rule of law as part of a proposal for a decisive withdrawal of the CCP from legal affairs and the judiciary.<sup>53</sup> For Deng Xianming and Xiao Runhua, writing in the house journal of Heilongjiang’s Institute of Administrative Cadres, ‘law is nothing more than popular rule since law is a reflection of people’s wishes’.<sup>54</sup>

Beyond these general observations, strategists in both liberal and institutionalist camps propose a range of new and innovative approaches.

51. Peng Zhongyi and Li Qi, ‘Zhengfu hefaxing de xin xianzhenglun jiedu’ [‘An interpretation of the new constitutionalism in government legitimacy’], *Guihai Luncong* [*Guihai Tribune*] 21(2), (April 2005), pp. 31–35, at p. 33.

52. Xu Yongjun, ‘Yi ren wei ben: Dangdai Zhongguo zhengzhi tongzhi hefaxing zhi jichu’ [‘People first: the foundations of legitimacy in China’s politics’], *Xueshu Luntan* [*Academic Forum*] 168(1), (2005), pp. 12–15.

53. Xu Sugang and Zhong Fang, ‘Yi fa zhi guo: Yi zhong “hefaxing” ziyuan’ [‘Ruling by law: a kind of resources for “legitimacy”’], *Wanxi Xueyuan Xuebao* [*The Journal of West Anhui University*] 21(4), (August 2005), pp. 36–39.

54. Deng Xianming and Xiao Runhua, ‘Hefaxing de yiyi, neihan ji tigao’ [‘The significance, intension and enhancing of legitimacy’], *Heilongjiang Sheng Zhengfa Guanli Ganbu Xueyuan Xuebao* [*Journal of Heilongjiang Administrative Cadre Institute of Politics and Law*] 51(6), (2005), pp. 5–8, at p. 7.

55. Zhou Tianyong, and Changjiang Wang, eds, *Gongjian: Shiqida hou Zhongguo Zhengzhi Tizhi Gaige Yanjiu Baogao* [*Storming the Fortress: A Report on Political Reforms after the 17th Party Congress*] (Urumqi: Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps Press, 2008).

56. Li Haiqing, ‘Zhengzhi hefaxing de renquan jichu lunxi’ [‘Analysis on the human rights foundation of political legitimacy’], *Lilun Shiye* [*Theoretical Perspectives*] no. 2, (2007), pp. 45–47, at p. 47.



The importance and boldness of liberal proposals for a renovation of CCP legitimacy is of course widely noted in China today. The 2008 book *Storming the Fortress*,<sup>55</sup> published by Central Party School reformers, encapsulated much of the force of liberal proposals, including widening rights for citizens and expanding direct elections. This is no longer a deviant and implied discourse but a mainstream and explicit one.

Freedoms and rights represent the strongest affirmations of this strategy owing to the ambiguous way in which democracy and elections are understood. Thus Central Party School scholar Li Haiqing argues that the CCP has to make a clean break with the absence of rights from both Confucian and Marxist traditions and put rights—not just social and economic rights but also labor rights and legal rights—at the center of its legitimation strategy: ‘Rights awareness will directly determine the extent to which people will struggle for rights. So if rights are an important aspect of political legitimacy, we should be pro-actively encouraging rights awareness through publicity and training’.<sup>56</sup>

While rights and freedoms are a fairly unambiguous strategy, the treatment of civil society is more circumspect. Those who mention it are not just writing in a liberal vein (although it groups with them most distinctly) but also in terms of ideology and institutions. The Central Party School’s Zhang Shulin warns that civil society drains resources from the party state,<sup>57</sup> while Professors Tang Yuanhua and Song Yinjun, writing in the house journal of the Shanghai Party School, talk of the ‘double-edged sword’ of civil society that may support but may also oppose party policies.<sup>58</sup> The shared concern of these non-liberal strategists is how to manage the development of civil society in such a way that it is legitimating rather than delegitimizing for the CCP. Their strategy involves greater party penetration of civil society groups with the purpose of asserting ideological leadership over them, and by having more regular forums in which the party meets with civil society representatives. Likewise, Professor Ni Xianmin of the Chongqing Science and Technology Academy, believes that the CCP needs to maintain ‘control and leadership’ over civil society in order to unlock its legitimating effects, citing figures that show that less than 5% of civil society groups have established party branches.<sup>59</sup>

Not all writers have such an ambivalent attitude however, consistent with civil society’s grouping with the liberal strategies. Fujian Normal University’s Wei Jiawang, for instance, believes the party needs to encourage more political freedoms and political participation in order to deal with challenges to its legitimacy, and civil society is a key to this. Attempts to ‘crush’ or ‘obstruct’ civil society were fruitless

57. Zhang Shulin, “‘Liang ge xuanze’ yu dang de zhizheng hefaxing”, p. 17; Zhang Shulin, ‘Shilun Hu Jintao dui dang de zhizheng hefaxing ziyuan kaifa’, p. 5.

58. Tang Yuanhua and Song Yinjun, ‘Shimin shehui dui dang zhizheng hefaxing de shuang chong yingxiang ji duice’ [‘The double effects of civil society on CCP legitimacy and the solutions’], *Dang Zheng Luntan* [Party & Government Forum], (November 2006), pp. 16–18.

59. Ni Xianmin, ‘Gongmin shehui de xingqi yu Zhongguo Gongchandang zhizheng hefaxing de goujian’ [‘The emergence of civil society and the construction of CCP legitimacy’], *Xueshu Luntan* [Academic Forum] no. 11, (2006), pp. 69–72, at p. 72.

60. Wei Jiawang, ‘Shimin shehui zuzhi yu Zhongguo Gongchandang zhizheng hefaxing de goujian’ [‘The structure of civil society and the construction of the CCP’s ruling legitimacy’], *Liaoning Xingzheng Xueyuan Xuebao* [Journal of Liaoning Administration College] 7(4), (2005), pp. 23–25, at p. 25.

61. Dong Ming, ‘Shanzhi shiyu li de Zhonggong zhizheng hefaxing tanwei’, p. 13.

since new groups would spring up to replace those put under party control. Instead, the party should try to win their support through honest attempts to answer their concerns and by giving them more direct channels of communication, for example through local people's congress delegates.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Dong Ming of the Zhejiang Party School (one of the provinces where proto-civil society is most advanced) argues for positively encouraging the 'rapid development' of civil society so that it can balance the power of the state and the market and ensure that freedom is combined with order.<sup>61</sup>

Democracy bridges the liberal and institutional schools. Writers in both schools invoke the term, and variously apply it to their broader strategic menus.

Institutionalists tend to consider elections as a mechanism to strengthen popular participation without necessarily weakening party control. Tang Xubin of Henan University, for instance, considers democracy and democratic elections as a means to ensure that 'political power is used in accordance with the wishes of the party and the people'. This means it must be complemented by a robust legal system, because democracy without some form of Singaporean-style legal system 'would be difficult for the party or the people to handle'.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, the specifics offered jibe closely with many liberal proposals (a reminder that institutionalists are not necessarily illiberal): the expansion of direct elections to the township and county levels and the removal of the party's control of nominations over those elections.

Ai Lisheng of the Hunan Party School, for instance, notes that the constitution requires the direct popular election of every people's congress delegate in townships and counties, and for indirect elections by people's congress delegates for government leaders at those levels and for congresses and government leaders at provincial and national levels. To bring this to fruition, he calls upon the party to relinquish its power of nomination for people's congress delegates and government leaders at the county and township levels as part of building a 'non-party political competition system' in China—a phrase that recalls Uganda's 'no party democracy' of 1986–2006. The party's role would shift from micro-managing cadres to ensuring the fairness of these elections and adjusting itself to the results as they trickle up to the national level.<sup>63</sup>

Another bridging proposal between liberal and institutional camps is the separation of the party and government, which is most closely associated with the liberal proposal but crops up in institutional proposals as well. Thus Lu Ailin, in one article in the authoritative journal *Seeking Truth*, raises the separation of party and

62. Tang Xubin, 'Chongsu Zhongguo zhengzhi hefaxing jichu de biran xuanze' ['The inevitable choice of rebuilding the political legitimacy foundation in China'], *Jianguhuai Luntan* [*Jianguhuai Forum*] no. 1, (2004), pp. 71–76, at p. 75.

63. Ai Lisheng, 'Zhizheng hefaxing he kexuexing shiye xia de zhengzhi jingzheng jizhi' ['A political competition system seen from the perspective of legitimate and scientific rule'], *Zhongguo Kuangye Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban)* [*Journal of China University of Mining & Technology (Social Sciences)*] no. 3, (2005), pp. 43–47, at pp. 46 and 47.

64. Lu Ailin, 'Yi fa zhizheng yu Zhongguo Gongchandang zhizheng de hefaxing' ['Lawful governance and the CCP's ruling legitimacy'], *Qiushi* [*Seeking Truth*] no. 1, (2005), pp. 21–23, at p. 23.

65. For example Dong Wenfang, 'Jianguo hou wo dang zhizheng hefaxing jichu de lishi bianqian ji qi qishi' ['The transformation of legitimacy bases of the CCP since the founding of the PRC and its enlightening guidance'], *Shandong Shehui Kexue* [*Shandong Social Sciences*] no. 8, (2004), pp. 101–103; also Xue Hui, 'Zhongguo Gongchandang hefaxing jichu de tiaozheng yu chongjian' ['The adjustment and reconstruction of the legitimacy bases of the CCP'], *Dangzheng Ganbu Luntan* [*The Party and Government Cadres' Forum*] no. 3 (2004), pp. 7–8.

government in the context of the creation of a constitutional state where ‘the concept of the law being above everything is deeply embedded’. The failure to separate the party from both government and judiciary, he writes, harms not just the implementation of laws but also the party itself, which is corrupted and ‘loses its spirit of overall leadership’.<sup>64</sup> The revival of this concept, which went into abeyance after 1989 and challenges current trends to ‘partyize’ state and society, is one of the most unequivocally liberal positions in this discourse.

Institutionalists also raise several interesting specific suggestions in other areas. The revival of the role of people’s congresses is of course a long-standing institutionalist strategy, one given some force by a 2000 Legislation Law that clarified and strengthened people’s congress powers. What is perhaps most interesting is that the congresses are generally raised in the context of new institutions of horizontal (not vertical) accountability—consistent with its grouping in this camp.<sup>65</sup> Congresses are seen as still under party control but as having certain means to supervise and limit abuses by the party. In other words, party strategists conceive of the congresses as nascent legal bureaucracies—legislative machineries that pass ‘vast quantities of laws’—not as nascent parliaments with the power to check and balance the executive.

The rebuilding of administrative capacity to regulate and deliver services to China’s increasingly complex polity is another prominent concern of institutionalists. Niu Yuqing of the Hebei Party School argues for enhanced bureaucratic efficiency in order to ensure the ‘scientific’ basis of policies and to reduce the costs of governance, while at the same time not overlooking the fact that such efficiency must always be balanced with a concern for social fairness.<sup>66</sup> His article reflects the overlap between institutional and social justice camps.

Finally, as with people’s congresses, institutions of political consultation (the people’s political consultative conferences, or PPCCs) are perceived as mechanisms of efficiency and accountability rather than participation and contestation. Liang Nianqiong of Foshan Science and Technology College argues that the CCP’s United Front strategy (a form of alliance-building used by the CCP during the Sino–Japanese war and the civil war that included the formation of the PPCCs) was responsible for bringing the CCP to power in the first place and should therefore form a central role in the re-legitimation of the regime. In particular, this means giving PPCCs legal powers to review certain types of legislation and ensuring a given quota of non-CCP members have leading roles in government and judicial departments.<sup>67</sup>

However, strategists of PPCC innovation do not ignore the implicit democratic or liberal implications of the institutions in terms of expanding popular participation. Wu Zengji of Nanjing Normal University for instance advocates a much wider use of voting within PPCCs that would contribute to the strengthening of a ‘reasonable

66. Niu Yuqing, ‘Shilun Zhongguo Gongchandang zhizheng hefaxing ziyuan zhongxin de zhuanhuan’ [‘Exploration of the shifting center of the CCP’s legitimacy resources’], *Lingnan Xuekan* [*Lingnan Journal*] no. 3, (2007), pp. 46–48, 76.

67. Liang Yanqiong, ‘Tongyi zhanxian yu Zhongguo Gongchandang zhizheng hefaxing jichu de jiangou’ [‘The united front and the foundation of the CCP’s ruling legitimacy’], *Shenzhen Daxue Xuebao (Renwen Shehui Kexue Ban)* [*The Journal of Shenzhen University (Humanity and Social Sciences)*] 24(2), (March 2007), pp. 63–66.

68. Wu Zengji, ‘Zhiquan de hefaxing ji qi zai dangdai Zhongguo de shijian’ [‘The legitimacy of governance and its practice in China’], *Zhengzhi yu Falü* [*Politics and Law*] no. 2, (2007), pp. 57–62.

separation of powers' among regime institutions, while steering China clear of electoral legitimation and a 'Western style separation of powers'.<sup>68</sup>

What is notable about liberal and institutional strategists is the absence of any 'China vs. the West' notions in their discussions. These writers do not see themselves as helping to construct some uniquely Chinese model of political organization for the rest of the developing world to emulate. Their mentions of 'Western' forms of political organization tend if anything to be complimentary. Their proposals are complex, often explicitly borrowing from Western experiences, and are largely focused on resolving China's looming legitimacy crisis domestically, not building up an anti-Western global brand name for China.

### Conclusion

While some Western political scientists debate the analytic utility of the concept of legitimacy, the concept is very much in play and taken very seriously by thinkers in China today. China's political strategists today have replaced their concerns with the writings of one German *Makesi* (Karl Marx) with the writings of another German *Makesi* (Max Weber). For some this is for the practical purpose of maintaining the effectiveness and authority of state power. For others, it has an inherent normative value for a self-described 'democracy': Ai Lisheng of the Hunan Party School, for instance, argues that 'democratic governance means governing for and governing with the support of the people and upholding and ensuring the sovereignty of the people, and in the final analysis this means raising the governing legitimacy of the party'.<sup>69</sup>

Our analysis highlights the vigor and creativity with which China's public policy thinkers are tackling this question. While these views are not—and should not be treated as—a reflection of a broader public debate, they nevertheless represent a sampling of critical elite opinion being heard by party leaders. To the extent that the party responds to what it believes are the requisites of legitimacy, this debate will centrally shape political evolution in China in coming years.

In particular, our analysis leads us to make several concrete predictions about the course of political development and public policy that will follow in China. These are:

- a continued emphasis on ideology and its adaptation to changing social demands, coupled with a growing lure of culturalist/nationalist underpinnings;
- an ongoing shift from growth-centered performance to a post-growth mode of legitimation that emphasizes social equality, justice, and welfare;
- institutional innovations in the use of elections, people's congresses, and people's

69. Ai Lisheng, 'Zhizheng hefaxing he kexuexing shiye xia de zhengzhi jingzheng jizhi', p. 43.

political consultative conferences conceived of in terms of horizontal (institutional) rather than vertical (liberal) accountability;

- dim prospects for unequivocally liberal norms (civil rights, democratic freedoms, formal separation of party and government) but a strong remonstrative power of liberalism as a school of critique; and
- a battle over civil society, regarded by some as a threatening form of social autonomy free from party control but by others as a critical mechanism for generating social support for the regime (this battle became one of the central points of debate in the aftermath of the earthquake in Sichuan province in 2008).

The question of ‘authoritarian durability’ has returned to political science in the first decade of the twenty-first century. China looms as by far the most important example of that phenomenon, not just because of its size but because of its seeming abundance of the ‘prerequisites’ for democracy.

In explaining this durability, legitimacy must be given a central place. This is not only due to the fact that, as our results show, elite thinkers in China are citing Western literature on political legitimacy widely, and they are tackling the question of legitimacy in a rigorous manner, which may help to explain CCP endurance well into the future. Authoritarian durability cannot be understood as simple perpetuation of a rigid set of authoritarian institutions, but should be conceived of as a highly dynamic process of adaptation to changing domestic and international environments.<sup>70</sup> In this process, political legitimacy is constantly reproduced and reframed, and values are being adjusted.<sup>71</sup> We believe that in the ongoing process of adaptation, perceived legitimacy deficits or even legitimacy crises have to be taken into account as important triggers of institutional change within the context of authoritarian rule. It is against this background that we take the legitimacy debate among Chinese elites to be relevant to the pace and specific process of institutional change.

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70. For discussions of authoritarian durability in China see for example Bruce Dickson, *Democratization in China and Taiwan: The Adaptability of Leninist Parties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Andrew Nathan, ‘China’s Resilient Authoritarianism’, *Journal of Democracy* 14(1), (January 2003), pp. 6–17; Joseph Fewsmith, ‘Staying in Power: What Does the Chinese Communist Party Have to Do?’, in Cheng Li, ed., *China’s Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institutions Press, 2008), pp. 212–226, as well as various other essays in this volume; Shambaugh, *China’s Communist Party*; Elizabeth Pery and Sebastian Heilmann have coined the term ‘adaptive authoritarianism’ as the title of an ongoing research project on China (‘Adaptive Authoritarianism: China’s Party-State Resilience in Historical Perspective’, available at: [www.wcfia.harvard.edu/conferences/08\\_china/overview](http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/conferences/08_china/overview)), David Shambaugh, ‘Training China’s political elite: the party school system’, *The China Quarterly*, 196 (December 2008), pp. 827–844.

71. For example, see Edward Schatz, ‘Access by accident: legitimacy claims and democracy promotion in authoritarian Central Asia’, *International Political Science Review* 27(3), (2006), pp. 263–283; Anna Matveeva, ‘Legitimizing Central Asian authoritarianism’, unpublished paper, presented at the American Political Science Association’s Annual Meeting, August 2008 in Boston; William Case, ‘Legitimacy deficits and stunning elections: the Malaysian experience’, unpublished paper, presented at the American Political Science Association’s Annual Meeting, August 2008 in Boston.