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MASTERARBEIT

Leadership Legitimacy through Moderate Political Reform: Assessing the Concept of Intra-Party Democracy and its Role in China's Political Transition

von

Raffael Heiss, BA

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Abstract - English

My thesis is dealing with intra-party democracy as one of the most important and most frequently discussed components of China's current moderate political reform process. Though many Western observers (especially the media) tend to neglect the importance of China's political reforms, I am arguing that intra-party democracy, though not directly aiming at a Western style of democracy, is important for two reasons: on the one hand, it provides a significant source of legitimacy for the CCP by creating mechanisms of supervision, accountability and moderate participation within the party; on the other hand, intra-party democracy (among other reforms) has created a political climate which makes future democratic reforms more likely, e.g. by the introduction of a tenure system and limitations on officials' individual powers. These two outcomes of China's moderate political reform – regime stabilization *and* openness for deeper reform – will direct China's future transition and, indeed, will make it distinct.

Abstract – Deutsch

Die vorliegende Arbeit behandelt das Konzept innerparteilicher Demokratie, welches eine der wichtigsten Komponenten des aktuellen politischen Reformprozesses Chinas darstellt. Obwohl viele Beobachter aus dem Westen (bes. die Medien) politischen Reformen in China die Relevanz aberkennen, argumentiere ich, dass Chinas innerparteiliches Demokratiekonzept einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Legitimität des Regimes und die künftige politische Transformation leitet. Einerseits trägt es wesentlich zur Popularität der kommunistischen Führung bei indem es die Parteiinterne Kontrolle, die Verantwortlichkeit der Führung und die Partizipation der Parteibasis erhöht bzw. verbessert; andererseits schaffen die Reformen ein politisches Klima das den Weg für tiefere Reformschritte ebnet, so etwa durch die Einführung von Amtszeitbegrenzungen und die Reduktion der individuellen Machtbasis von politischen Führungskräften. Diese beiden widersprüchlichen Entwicklungen – Regimestabilisierung *und* wachsende Anreize für tiefere Reformen – werden den künftigen Transformationsprozess Chinas bestimmen und ihm besonderen Charakter verleihen.

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1 Introduction

“Politically, we can reach a democracy within the Communist Party of China first, and then a national democracy. We can have the rule of law first, and then democratic elections. This is the strategically reasonable route to take for development.” (Global Times Interview with Cheng Li, Director of Research at the John L. Thornton China Center, 2011)

Since the beginning of its open door policy, China has been experiencing an unprecedented economically successful development. Its economy has been growing constantly at enormously high levels leading to a GDP per capita (PPP) increase from \$251 in 1980 to \$7519 in 2010 (IMF World Economic Outlook 2011). Even though modernization theorist arguments would suggest that the increasing life quality, educational levels and demands for political participation resulting from economic growth would trigger a process of political change towards a western style of democracy, the Chinese one-party system proves to be resilient and signs of a decreasing legitimacy of the Communist leadership are hard to find: the government’s policy strategies reflect the people’s priorities, the number of party members is constantly increasing and the CCP’s (Chinese Communist Party) top leaders enjoy high rates of approval. The most prominent arguments to explain China’s resilient authoritarianism in the context of economic modernization are the good macro-economic performance of the government and the strong sense for national unity among the people. Though these factors have an undeniably strong influence, I will to focus on China’s moderate political reforms as an explanatory variable for the government’s popularity and dwell on the example of the leadership’s prominent concept of intra-party democracy (dangnei minzhu /党内民主). For that purpose, I try to answer three interrelated questions:

- What is the Chinese leadership’s understanding of democracy and intra-party democracy and how does it differ from Western perspectives of democracy?
- Are measures of intra-party democratization able to significantly improve the relationship between the party/state and society and thus serve as a substantial source of the CCP leadership’s legitimacy?
- How will measures of intra-party democracy direct and affect China’s future political transition?

The first question requires for a descriptive analysis of the Chinese leadership's understanding of democracy and intra-party democracy. For that purpose I will analyze relevant documents in which official positions on democracy are presented. As I will show, the Chinese leadership's ideas of democracy emphasize that democracy can only be established in the context of a one-party system – of course dominated by the CCP. Such a system, however, contradicts the basic idea of Western democracy: the competition *between* parties. The second question will be answered by analyzing the institutions of intra-party democracy in terms of their contribution to leadership legitimacy. Indicators such as the degree of transparency and accountability, the limitation of power of top-leading cadres and participative rights in decision-making processes significantly support the legitimacy of the system (strengthening the, to use Weber's terms, rational-legal legitimation of the CCP's leadership). Though China is not aiming at creating a Western style of democracy, intra-party democratization does improve all of these factors to a greater or lesser extent. Hence, I will argue that such moderate political reforms serve as a significant source of legitimacy. I will answer my third question, concerned with China's future political transition, by drawing a combined conclusion from my empirical and theoretical analyses. I will argue that intra-party democracy is not supposed to lead to any form of Western democracy. Instead it will support the CCP's one-party system and enhance legitimacy in the coming years. At the same time it will make the system more open to reforms. As long as the CCP will, to speak in Confucian terms, act benevolently, it will continue to play the dominant role in China's politics for a long time ahead.

As mentioned above, I believe that modernization theory plays a minor role in explaining China's political developments. Of course, radical economic reform cannot occur without the decline of central power (liberalization), however, as Gill notes,

“...there is no necessary and inevitable link between liberalization and democratization, but there is a logic which leads from the former to the latter. This logic is contingent, though, upon the regime either being willing to allow this to proceed or being too weak to prevent it.” (Gill 1996: 71)

This suggests that political actors play the most important role in determining whether a country democratizes and at what point in time. In the Soviet Union, for example, the central government was willing to introduce reforms. At the end, however, it was too weak to control

the reform process which then became radicalized by democratic and nationalist (ethnic) groups (p. 57). The Chinese political leaders want to avoid such a situation and thus choose a much slower path of political reform, which is more similar to the reform processes of other East Asian countries. In my theoretical part (chapter 4) I will therefore try to elaborate on the fact that modernization theory is only of limited use in the case of China, since modernization is asymmetrical (high in terms of economic development, low in terms of politics) rather than parallel, as the theory would suggest. Hence, I will turn to examine the role of political elites who will, as I argue, significantly determine the timing and the direction of political change.

Before to the theoretical discussion, I will discuss the meaning of good governance and democracy throughout China's history (chapter 3). I will conclude that the definition of the term has become more liberal during the reform era, though limitations are obvious as the CCP leadership binds political reform to its permanent leadership. With reference to polls, I will come to the conclusion (though it is often said that the Chinese do have a completely different understanding of democracy) that a vast majority of the Chinese people do relate democracy to the free and fair election of political leaders.

In chapter 5 I will discuss the foundations of the CCP's legitimacy. According to the literature, nationalism and economic growth are the most important constants that make the CCP survive. As I will argue, however, moderate political adaption since the opening reform is also an undeniable process which significantly improves the relationship between the CCP and the Chinese people. Intra-party democratization is currently promoted as the most important reform issue by the CCP and, as the initiating quotation indicates, should not be viewed as an end in itself but rather as an important step in China's liberalization process with the potential of paving the way to a national democracy in the future.

As I am dealing with the phenomenon of intra-party democracy, it is important to describe the basic structures of the Chinese ruling party (chapter 6). In doing so, I will describe the most important institutions, the party's vertical organization (administrative levels) and its relation to the state institutions.

In Chapter 7 I will finally discuss the major components of the official concept of intra-party democracy. Additionally, I will discuss the importance of intra-party democracy from two different theoretical perspectives and draw conclusions for the Chinese case. In a document analysis, I will present an idea about what Chinese leaders mean when they talk about democracy and intra-party democracy. Furthermore, I will dwell on the important

development of informal bipartisanship within the CCP. On the basis of these discussions, I will analyze the institutional mechanisms of intra-party democratization: the inclusion of private entrepreneurs in the party, the fight against corruption by introducing mechanisms of supervision, the introduction of tenure and age regulations and the expansion of intra-party elections.

2 Personal Interest & Research Methods

I have been interested in Chinese culture and politics since the beginning of my studies. This is why I chose to study in Shanghai (Fudan University) for a semester and have tried hard to understand the success story of China's economic transition as well as its much slower process of political change. During my time in China I gained the impression that the Chinese can actually act and discuss much more freely than one would expect from following Western media reports about China. Even more interestingly, most people (I have met primarily students) have a very positive and optimistic opinion about the central government. This high rate of popularity is also confirmed by polls (see chapter 3.3). Therefore, I became interested in the causes for the CCP's high approval rate and the stability of China's political system. In China I had the opportunity to study Chinese culture and learned that Confucian values are still deeply rooted in the minds of the Chinese. Legacies of Confucian values, such as the merit-based selection of officials (state examinations), the acceptance of one's status in society (subordination), and the demand for a benevolent leadership (as exchange for subordination) surely serve as an important factor that explains why the CCP still enjoys high rates of popularity. In my thesis, however, I will not deal with culture as a distinct explanatory factor, but as the context within which various variables (namely economic growth, nationalism, and moderate political reform) play a significant role in providing legitimacy for the Chinese leadership. I will discuss all these three variables in chapter 5, however, my thesis primarily focuses in the variable of political reform.

In order to answer the questions I have presented in the introduction, I will use three kinds of sources:

- *Secondary Literature:* I will use secondary literature to select and combine the information available through prior research in order to present answers to my questions. In doing so I will primarily focus on debates in the field of political science. However, since I think that culture plays a significant role in every transition process, I will also dwell on cultural characteristics (most importantly Confucianism) which shape the process and outcome of China's transition (this is especially true for chapter 3). Of special importance will be information provided by academic journals which provide the latest research results on China's political reform. I have tried to include a wide range of journals in order to integrate different perspectives, however, region-specific journals, such as the Journal of Contemporary China or Asian Survey might be slightly overrepresented, since they provide comparably more articles about China's transition than other journals. As these journals try to present an objective view on Asian developments, however, this overrepresentation does not negatively affect the objectivity of my analysis. Moreover, the direction of an article depends much more on the author rather than the journal. On the one extreme end, some authors view China's political reforms as insignificant and stagnating. Minxin Pei (2008) even predicts a collapse caused by the people's dissatisfaction with the limited decentralization of power. On the other extreme end, some academics from Chinese Universities, such as Pan Wei from Beijing University, argue that Western style democracy would not even be suitable in China and that a law based regime with authoritarian elements would better contribute to China's development (Pan 2003). Most authors I have cited, however, agree that China's political reforms are important in terms of legitimacy and might pave the way for deeper political reforms. This perspective is promoted most notably by Cheng Li (2009), director of the Brookings Institution.
- *Government & Party Documents and Media Reports:* I will make use of documents, such as the Party Constitution, speeches and reports of National Party Committees, a Government White Paper on Building Democracy in China, and a Human Rights Action Plan from the Chinese government which includes a chapter on political participation. I will systematically investigate the content of these documents in terms of how democracy is understood by the Chinese leaders, how this understanding differs from a Western perspective of democracy and how it will shape China's political future. Additionally, I will study Chinese media reports in English. English speaking Chinese newspapers, such as China Daily, are known to be more liberal in

presenting information about politics than newspapers in the Chinese language – probably due to the fact that they can only be read by highly educated Chinese who can use multiple channels of information anyways.

- *Opinion Polls & Statistics:* As a third source of information I will use statistics provided by different international organizations. For economic data I will make use of the *World Bank* and *International Monetary Fund* data pools. I will use them in graphs and to support my argumentation. Furthermore I include data from the *Freedom House* institution, which provide an index about how free people across the globe are. The *World Value Survey* provides data on people's attitude towards the government and the policy priorities of ordinary people. *Transparency International* produces data about corruption, such as the degree of corruption in different countries. It also provides data on people's attitude towards corruption in their country. This is important for my thesis, since corruption is one of the top political issues and undeniably related to the political reform strategy of the Chinese leadership.

Beside these three sources, I have also included an email-based interview with one of my former Professors at Fudan University. The goal of my thesis is to systematically combine information gained from all these sources to answer the three questions presented in the introduction.

3 Thoughts on Good Governance and Democracy throughout China's Contemporary History

3.1 Good Governance in Traditional Chinese Thinking: Benevolence and the

Mandate of Heaven

Confucianism is the main philosophy that has been shaping Chinese society for over 2000 years. In contrast to the two other prevailing belief systems, namely Daoism and Buddhism, traditional Confucianism does not pay much attention to transcendental phenomena. Instead, Confucianism can be viewed as an idea of a perfect social order. This order is characterized by a strict social and political hierarchy. Politically it assumes the king to be at the top, subordinating officials and the people at the bottom. Similarly to the European forms of monarchy, the Chinese king also legitimizes his rule in a transcendental way. He acts as mediator and integrator between earth and heaven¹. However, according to the principle of ren / 仁 (humanity/benevolence), the king is obliged to act in the interest of the people and serve as their provider. This principle is also valid for social hierarchies, like the relationship within a family (father at the top, elder siblings before younger sibling etc.). Mencius, a pupil of Confucius and beside him arguably the most important source of Confucianism, even emphasized the people's right to overthrow a ruler who does not act in the name of their interest and therefore fails to be benevolent (Chao & Lee 2006: 222). Just as the king has to act benevolently, the officials have the same obligation. Therefore, one central goal of Confucian ethics is to educate those who are to serve in state functions in a proper way. The Imperial Examination System can be regarded as an institutional consequence of Confucius's thinking and dominated the recruitment of the officials for more than 1000 years and was the major pillar of a meritocratic selection system. Such a system did not pay attention to a person's social background. Instead, everybody of every social level (more precisely, every man) could climb up the ladder and become an important official - as long as he was skilled enough. This meritocratic idea is still very important in Chinese society and might be regarded as a historical root for the fact that education in China is so valued so highly in China throughout all social classes.

Of course, Confucianism was banned during Mao's era, since its hierarchical order-system totally contradicted the communist idea of equality. Despite this suppression, however,

¹ The horizontal lines Chinese character for king (wang / 王) refer to those three respective levels.

Confucianism remained popular and it has been experiencing a revival in the reform era. This is especially obvious in its spiritual dimension, for example the revitalization of ancestor worshiping. But it has also become more important in the political debate, since political leadership rediscovered its legitimizing value. The promotion of a “harmonious society” refers to the Confucian idea of great harmony, which arises from a social order in which everyone accepts their place and role in society: “There is government when the king is king and the minister is minister; when the father is father and the son is son.” (Confucius, the Analects Section 3, Part 12; see also Schwartz 1985: 92) Therefore, the old Confucian value system which prevailed during the Chinese dynasties seems to become more important again. However, it should not be overestimated, since Chinese society has changed enormously since the downfall of the kingdom and even more since the opening of its economy, when increasing material wealth, the spread of information technology and the increasing attractiveness of Western values pushed for social change.

With all those structural and social changes in mind it seems to fall short to reduce China’s authoritarian resilience as culturally determined. However, due to the strong hierarchical order promoted in Confucian thought the question has been raised whether Confucian societies are unable to adopt the liberal values of democracy. The first considerations were made by Max Weber’s study of the Chinese religions. According to Weber, Confucian principles blocked the establishment of a capitalist economy. The traditional hierarchy of Confucianism places the literati and the farmers on top and businessmen at the bottom of the social order. Official positions, which were the most prestigious, could be reached by the so-called Imperial Examinations in which candidates had to prove profound knowledge of classical texts. The goal was therefore to reach high-level positions through the way of education in order to gain social profit and not to maximize one’s profit. The underlying intention was to create officials who lead the people by acting benevolently in the interest of the people (Schwartz 1985: 81). The low level of respect for market forces, however, seemed to be a logical obstacle to establish western-like economies. This was reflected in the remaining dominance of the agricultural sector which accounted for around 90% of production in the mid-20th century. A certain affinity for the communist ideology can be traced back to these principles – even though the communist dogma of equality contradicts other Confucian ideas, such as social order through a traditional hierarchy.

Samuel Huntington’s seminal study *The Clash of Civilizations* also deals with the Confucian culture and brands it as incompatible to western models of modernization. In a ranking of the

eight main types of civilizations (as defined by Huntington), Confucianism is ranked 7th (Merkel 2010: 80):

1. Western civilization (Liberalism, Protestantism)
2. Latin America (Catholicism)
3. A distinct Japanese culture
4. Orthodox culture
5. Hindu culture
6. African culture
7. Sinic culture
8. Islamic culture

Thus, according to Huntington, only the Islamic culture is more antidemocratic than the Sinic (or Confucian) culture. He argues that Confucian societies are group-oriented and hardly support individualism and competitive struggle:

“At the broadest level the Confucian ethos pervading many Asian societies stressed the values of authority, hierarchy, the subordination of individual rights and interests, the importance of consensus, the avoidance of confrontation, ‘saving face,’ and, in general, the supremacy of the state over society and of society over the individual.” (Huntington 1996: 225)

However, the ranking presented above does not seem to be supported strongly by evidence. Obviously, Taiwan and South Korea managed successful transitions to democracy. Moreover, the Japanese culture is also strongly influenced by the Confucian value system and fits into the category of “political Confucianism” as described by Huntington even better (Merkel 2010: 80f). Recent monitoring of the democratizations in Eastern European orthodox countries, like Ukraine, Russia or Serbia, also challenges the view that orthodox cultures are more hospitable to democracy. Though the regions influenced by Confucianism are only partly democratized, those countries which undertook a real political transition (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong) can be regarded as full liberal democracies. Ukraine and Russia, however, are mostly regarded as “defective democracy”, acting in a grey zone between democracy and authoritarianism.

According to such observations, today many authors argue that Confucianism is actually not that incompatible democracy and many aspects might even positively affect democratization.

This is also supported by the fact that exactly those countries in which the government accepted Confucianism, like Japan, South Korea and Taiwan (the latter even used it as state ideology) have embraced democracy, whereas those countries which suppressed it (China, Vietnam and North Korea) have remained autocratic (He 1996: 162).

In their comparative analysis of Taiwan's and China's transitions, Chao and Lee (2006) oppose strong arguments based on cultural determinism. They stress that even though the hierarchical order and the monarchical ideas of Confucianism undermine principles of democracy, other Confucian values and ethics support democracy. For example, the principle of equal rights and that everyone can become an official and even Prime Minister if his (or today also her) skills and knowledge are strong/deep enough. "‘Education knows no boundary’ is the sentence best summarizing the value that Confucius attached to the ordinary people." (p. 223) Therefore, compared to Europe, social status was less transmitted through blood relations, but rather had to be earned within the context of a meritocratic system. In this context, free expression is also regarded as a value derived from Confucianism. Again, the value of someone's opinion should not be reduced to their social status. Moreover, free discussion is the main form of how Confucian ideas were transmitted. Just as the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, Confucius teachings mainly result from open discussions with his pupils. Another supportive idea of Confucianism is the temperate tendency and the principle of the golden mean – which similarly can be found in Aristotle's virtue ethics. This idea is related to the democratic belief in toleration and compromise (p. 223). Despite the strict hierarchy with the king at the top, people still play a crucial role and are even considered to be "most precious, followed by the society, followed by the king." (p. 223) The ruler therefore is not free in acting. He rather has to act in accordance with his mandate of heaven (tianming / 天命). With regard to its legitimizing political function, the mandate of heaven is comparable to the European's divine right of the king. It is, however, also very different, since it includes the ruler's duty to practice good governance, governance that is responsive to the people's demands and interests. If this is not the case, it is the people's right to overthrow the government. Moreover, according to the mandate of heaven, a ruler does not have to be descended from any special heritage. Therefore, different to absolutist European monarchies, the Chinese system was based on benevolent rule and meritocracy rather than arbitrary rule and blood-based succession of power.

Having both in mind, the discussed non-democratic principles of Confucianism as well as the supportive elements, Chao and Lee (2006) believe that “[t]he culture of China is so resilient and divergent that it can support any form of government.” (p. 224, cf. also He 1996: 160ff)

This was also true for the Communist government, which was established after the victory of the Communists in the civil war in 1949. In the following section, I will discuss the changing definition of good government and democracy during Communist rule.

3.2 The People’s Democratic Dictatorship: Democracy and the Communist Rule

“The people’s democratic dictatorship was indeed a dictatorship, however democratic its intention” (Womack 2006: 133)

When the Chinese Communist Party took over power in 1949, the understanding of good governance changed dramatically. While previously it was the representation of the whole people by a king, mediating between heaven and earth, the government should now be controlled by the working class and the farmers – making up for the vast majority of Chinese society. This logic implied double standards: democracy should be provided for the working-peasant alliance; this alliance, however, should enforce dictatorship over all reactionary forces and those who resist the socialist transformation of society (Yang 2004: 7). At the beginning of the Communist rule, this counter-revolutionary part of society included mainly the remaining Guomindang members, relevant forces of the bourgeoisie, imperialists, later also landlords, rich peasants and all other forces resisting social transformation – all together accounting for five percent of the population (p. 8). This perception of a constantly existing and not entirely removable enemy within the population ultimately resulted in the catastrophic developments of the Cultural Revolution.

Thus, criticism was raised within the party, stressing the dominance of the dictatorship principle within the concept of democratic dictatorship. Deng Xiaoping admitted: “We did not consciously and systematically build the systems to guarantee the people’s democratic rights.” (Deng Xiaoping, cited on pp. 9f) Deng’s efforts to introduce constitutional reforms and to strengthen collective decision-making within the CCP can be viewed as a consequence (Pei 2008: 447). Nevertheless, even in Deng’s era, the principle of democratic dictatorship

remained intact and the slight political reforms were rather aimed at strengthening the party rule and fostering economic growth than at abolishing dictatorial elements.

3.3 ‘Socialist Democracy’ & ‘Democracy with Chinese Characteristics’: Towards a More Liberal Understanding of Democracy?

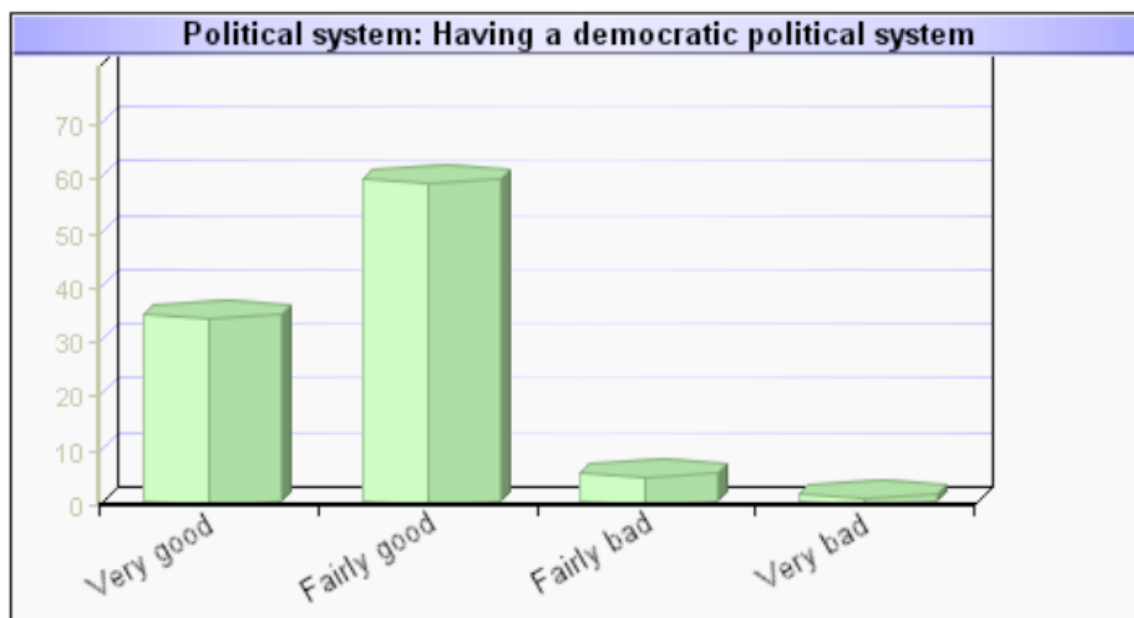
Even though Deng Xiaoping viewed political reform as a necessity to provide a proper and efficient context for the free market, a new discourse on state building and state-society relations was initiated in the early 1980s. This also was the time when the so-called “three-belief crisis” (sanxin weiji / 三信危机) – referring to a declining trust in socialism, Marxism and the CCP – emerged on the stage. This crisis rooted in the spreading corruption and inefficiency within the CCP and ultimately resulted in the Tiananmen protests (Zhao 1998: 288; He & Feng 2008: 143). The dramatic developments at Tiananmen changed the attitudes of the Chinese towards democracy: “Democracy for the Chinese then no longer meant a ‘rich and prosperous nation’ but the protection of individual political rights, properties, and freedom.” (He & Feng 2008: 143) But even though democratic ideas were strengthened, uncertainty remained about how to build the corresponding institutions in China without producing social chaos. Therefore, even intellectuals who promoted press freedom, legal reforms or a separation between state and the party were not as willing to promote competitive elections and independent political organizations.

A prominent example is Pan Wei, Professor at Beijing University, who suggests that western style democracy would not be able to solve current demands concerning socio-economic issues and corruption. He therefore believes that a “consultative rule-of-law regime”², similar to the ones in British Hong Kong and Singapore, would be more suitable (Pan 2003: 34ff). His model of a Chinese democracy is close to the official concepts of a ‘democracy with

² The idea is to replace the rule of the CCP with the rule of the law. For that purpose, a system of checks and balances must be established to guarantee the independence of judicial institutions. Moreover, the observation of the governmental bodies should be secured by building an extensive social consultative system, independent anti-corruption mechanisms and institutions observing social spending as well as by providing basic freedoms, such as the freedom of the press, speech assembly and association (Pan 2003: 34ff)

Chinese characteristics’ or a ‘socialist democracy’. These concepts do contain the idea of choosing leaders through elections, balancing power between governmental institutions (though not through a western separation of branches) and giving more rights to citizens. The second concept even refers to northern European systems which combine a big role of the state in terms of economic redistribution and strong means of public participation. However, as I will discuss in chapter 6.1.2 these official concepts on democracy are always discussed in the context of a sustaining overall leadership of the CCP. Hence, Womack (2006) turns to the term “party-state democracy” instead of the officially used terms, highlighting “...the chief characteristic of the political system, namely, that the communist party holds prerogative of political leadership and the state administrative organs of public affairs. (p. 140).

However, even though democracy defined in Western terms – as a system of competitive elections and a pluralism of political parties and organizations – is still associated with certain dangers, various forms of democratic institutions are discussed broadly among the elites and the people and democratic values are viewed to be universal and suitable for China. Moreover, the popular demand for democracy is already very high. As the table below shows, over 90 percent believe that having a democratic system is good.



Source: World Value Survey 2007

Even though the main opinion suggests that while agreeing on democracy, Chinese people mostly do not have a proper understanding of what democracy actually is, the vast majority of people think that elections are an essential characteristic of democracy. In evaluating the meaning of elections to democracy on a scale between ‘1’ (not an essential characteristic) and ‘9’ (an essential characteristic), the average answer was at ‘8.6’.

BASE=1579		Country
		China
Democracy: People choose their leaders in free elections.	Not an essential characteristic of democracy	2.2 %
	2	0.7 %
	3	0.7 %
	4	0.7 %
	5	4.4 %
	6	3.8 %
	7	6.6 %
	8	12.2 %
	9	23.1 %
	An essential characteristic of democracy	45.6 %
	Total	1579 (100%)
	Base for mean	1579
	Mean	8,6
	Standard Deviation	1,98

Source: World Value Survey 2007

At the same time, however, the statement “there exists democracy in our own country” turns out to be agreed at a rate of ‘6.7’, as the table below indicates. This shows that the CCP obviously operates well in integrating people into their system and in providing the feeling that the party works in everyone’s interest.

BASE=1457		Country
		China
Democraticness in own country	Not at all democratic	3.0 %
	2	3.2 %
	3	3.6 %
	4	4.2 %
	5	11.1 %
	6	17.2 %
	7	15.4 %
	8	21.5 %
	9	10.3 %
	Completely democratic	10.6 %
	Total	1457 (100%)
	Base for mean	1457
	Mean	6,7
	Standard Deviation	2,22

Source: World Value Survey 2007

4 Transition Theories in Comparison: Turning from Modernization Theory to Political Elites & Lesson Drawing

4.1 Electoral vs. Liberal Democracy: A Western View of Good Governance

In contrast to the debates about what democracy could be for China, the western academic debate on democracy and political transition provides more detailed explanations of the term. The most basic definition of a democratic system is provided by Josef Schumpeter who views political elections as the core factor defining democracy: “the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.” (Schumpeter 1976: 269) A similar description of democracy is provided by Robert Dahl. He suggests that “...all citizens must have unimpaired opportunities:

1. To formulate their preferences
2. To signify their preferences to their fellow citizens and the government by individual and collective action
3. To have their preferences weight equally in the conduct of the government, that is, weight with no discrimination because of the content or source of the information” (Dahl 1971: 2)

Therefore, Dahl views the electoral dimension and its necessary contextual conditions (citizens’ rights, rights to associate and to organize political parties, freedom of expression, right to vote etc.) as the core factor (cf. table 1.1, p. 3). This is also expressed by the use of his core independent variables, inclusion (participation) and liberalization (public contestation) (cf. figure 1.2, p.7). However, he also stresses that these two conditions are, though necessary, not sufficient to call a system democratic. “[S]ince democracy may involve more dimension than the two [mentioned above] ...and since (in my view) no large system in the world is fully democratized, I prefer to call real world systems that are closest to the upper right corner polyarchies.” (p.8)

Using such a minimalist explanation of democracy makes an observation and measurement pretty easy. Either the factor of competitive elections is present or not. However, later studies on democratization added other factors to the electoral component.

4.2 Modernization Theory and It's Explanatory Problems in the Case of China

4.2.1 Characteristics and Development of Modern Societies

The modernization of a society describes the process of changing a relatively primitive society into a more complex society³. This complexity is characterized by 'functional differentiation' meaning that society is divided in various subsystems, such as an economic, political or a civic one. Each of them is further divided, e.g. the political zone in different branches of the government, the economic zone is characterized by labor division and the civic sphere is divided in various organized interest groups. The most important elements characterizing a modern society are a market economy based on competition, a competitive multi-party democracy with free and fair elections, *Rechtsstaatlichkeit*, a protection of property and civic/political rights and a tolerant civil society accepting human dignity and individualism (Pollack 2008: 50f). Accordingly, Parsons has derived four 'evolutionary universals' which are inevitable for a society to adapt itself to an ever changing environment, including: a bureaucratic organization, a universalistic legal system, market organization and democratic association and elections. The missing of one of those universals significantly mitigates the system's ability to survive and would ultimately lead to political collapse (Merkel 2010: 68; Parsons 1964: 347-356).

In his well-known AGIL-Paradigm, Parsons identifies four main functions a society has to fulfill. These functions correspond with the four main subsystems culture, politics, economy and the social community (Parsons 1976: 172ff):

³ Modernization theorists usually refer to industrialization as the main source of modernization.

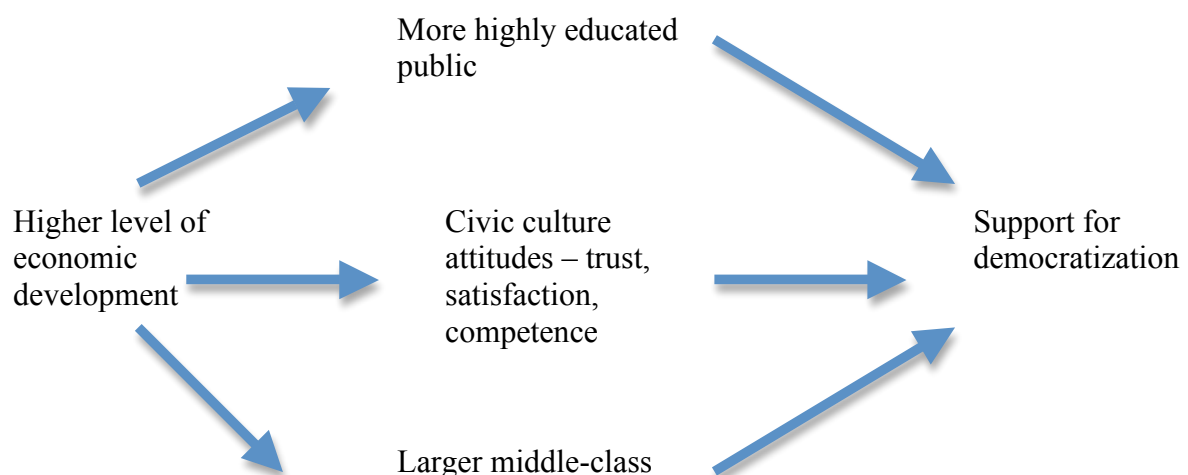
Pattern-Maintenance	Goal-Attainment
Maintaining the cultural values within which the institutional structure is embedded (<i>Culture</i>)	Setting goals and making corresponding decisions according to the changing situations (<i>Politics</i>)
Adaption	Integration
The ability of a society to interact with its changing environment and to gather resources in order to attain the goals formulated in the political system (<i>Economy</i>)	The society and its subsystems (e.g. religion and politics) must be integrated and harmonized e.g. by making laws to allocate rights and obligations (<i>Social Community</i>)

The four evolutionary universals described above are prerequisites for a society to fulfill the four functions of the AGIL paradigm. Therefore, Parsons views democracy to be a necessary consequence of modernization. An authoritarian determination of social norms, political goals or even cultural suppression and total economic control (as opposed to the adaptive power of a free market organization) undermines the system's ability to adapt to a changing environment.

Applying these ideas to China, one could observe that its leadership has abandoned tightened economic control and its severe cultural suppression – which was at its peak during the Cultural Revolution. This can be viewed as a result of the post Mao reformers' believe in the limited functionality of their system – especially its economic inefficiency. In contrast to the Soviet Union and other Communist countries, China's leaders decided to reform the system and improve its functions. For that purpose Deng Xiaoping aimed to “liberate and expand the productive forces” and to develop a “market economy under socialism” (Deng 1979: Talk with Frank Gibney). For that purpose he reintroduced the “four modernizations”, which were first formulated by reformist Zhou Enlai and include China's national defense, its science and technology, the agricultural system and the industry. As modernization thus advanced in the context of economic liberalization, political control proved to be relatively resilient. A separation of government branches is not seriously considered by the leadership, democratic associations are only allowed in a very limited form and the bureaucracy is still controlled by the nomenklatura system of a Leninist structured party. Despite these deficits, the Chinese system seems to work well in terms of integration, as we will see later.

4.2.2 Modernization Theory and Political Transition

Based on Parsons's structural-functional systems theory, Seymour Martin Lipset found a direct connection between economic development and democratization. Basically, he assumes that "...the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances to sustain democracy." (Lipset 1959: 75) A nation is doing well under the condition of proper economic development: "...economic development involving industrialization, urbanization, high educational standards, and a steady increase in the overall wealth of the society, is a basic condition sustaining democracy" (p. 86) The general wealth of a society is measured in income at purchasing power parity per capita (p. 75). The figure below shows the independent variable (wealth) and the most important mechanisms through which it affects democratization. More material wealth, for example, leads to better institutions of education, since more money is available for investing in the education sector. Moreover, material wealth (and education) increases the desire to participate politically and to therefore build a civic culture and corresponding organizations. This all is accompanied by an increased number of (urban) middle class people, who arguably are the main driving forces of democracy (cf. Huntington 1991: 67).



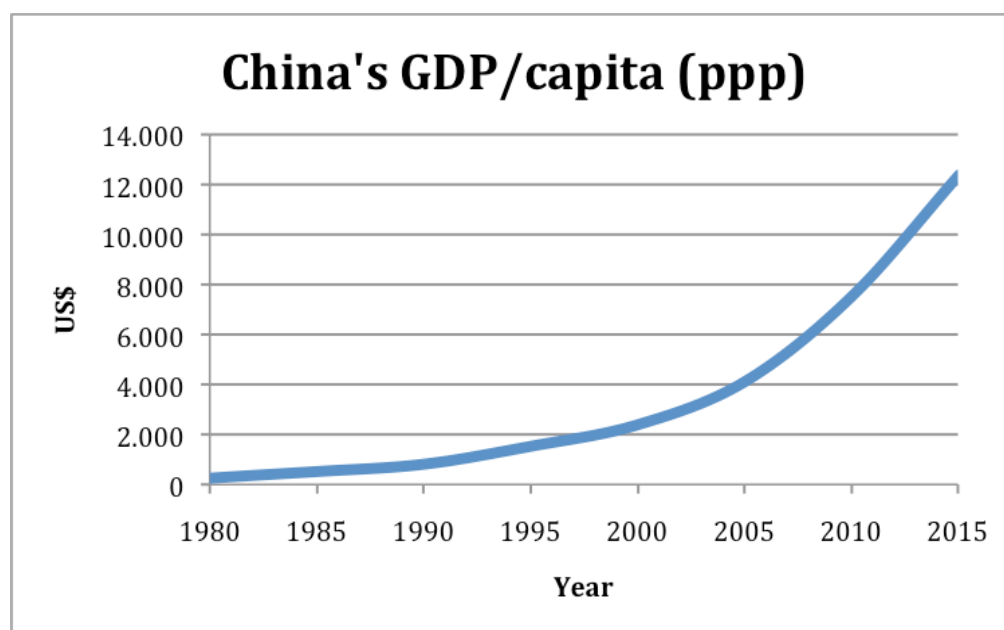
Source: Huntington 1991: 69.

The logic of modernization cannot be regarded as deterministic or sufficient for a country to introduce democratic reforms. It is very difficult to predict at which state of economic development a country democratizes. The transition level modernization theorists usually are

referring to (between \$1000 and 6000 real GDP/capita) is vague and does not fit the empirical observations (Merkel 2010: 75; Pei 2008: 19). As Huntington argues: “In 1976 Czechoslovakia and East Germany were well up in the wealthy economic zone where they ‘should’ have been democratic already, and the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Poland, and Hungary were high in the transition zone with per capita GNP over \$2,000.” (Huntington 1991: 63) Similarly, strong economic growth rates do not necessarily lead to democracy, as testified by Brazil’s 10 percent growth rate from 1960-1975, Iran’s 8 percent growth rate 1980-1987 and of course also China’s immense growth since its opening reform (p. 72).

4.2.3 Modernizing China: Democracy Right Ahead?

China’s economy has been growing continuously over the past three decades. The graph below depicts China’s GDP per capita growth since the year 1980. Note that the number for 2015 is a projection of the International Monetary Fond (IWF).



GDP at purchasing power parity per capita from 1980 to 2015 (measured numbers till 2010, predicted for 2015). Own Illustration based on numbers of the IMF world economic outlook, April 2011.

Despite an immense improvement in the people's living standard and the emergence of well-educated and well-situated classes, especially in urban and coastal areas, the support for the current leadership system proves to stay high. Therefore, the question remains whether modernization theory can explain developments in China. Based on China's economic growth rate Rowen (2010) argues:

“China will in the short term continue to warrant a Not Free classification, but by 2015 it should edge into the Partly Free category. Indeed, I will go further and predict that, should China's economy and the educational attainments of its population continue to grow as they have in recent years, the more than one-sixth of the world's people who live in China will by 2025 be citizens of a country correctly classed as belonging to the Free nations of the earth.” (Rowen 2010: 38)

Rowen assumes that every country which reaches a GDP per capita of at least \$8000 would be at least partly free in the Freedom House “Freedom in the World” rating. In the Year 2025, as he predicts, China's GDP will be at a per capita level of about \$14.000 and will be a complete democracy (Rowen 2010: 48). According to the IMF data, China's GDP/capita (ppp) is predicted to be at \$8289 for the year 2011, whereas at the same time China is still ranked poorly (6.5 from 7 points) in terms of political freedom by Freedom House in the same year.

Even though connections between economic growth and democratic demands obviously exist, such predictions are very vague and it is disputable how worthy they are. I think it is much more important to study the dynamics of elite conflict within the CCP and to study the policy interests and reform willingness of China's leadership. In doing so, one can find more precise conclusions about China's political development in the near future – rather than speculating about what might happen in 10 or 20 years. Therefore I will turn to the elite-centered approach to political transition, arguing that political change is triggered and directed by the political elites whereas structural factors are of secondary importance.

4.3 Elite-Centered Approach and Lesson Drawing

4.3.1 *Basic Assumptions of the Elite-Centered Approach*

For the elite centered approach, economic, cultural or structural explanations are not sufficient to explain why a country democratizes. It argues that the latter theories cannot determine the time and circumstances under which a regime change happens. On the other hand, the elite-centered approach acknowledges that all those factors do have significant impact on the transition, since they provide the context within which elite actors choose to introduce reforms or not. However, the timing of the process and its development is determined by the political elites. These elites choose to build democratic institutions due to strategic (rational) reasons: i.e. in case they believe that democratic reforms produce benefit or reduce costs in comparison to the preservation of the current authoritarian system.

The elite-centered approach can be divided into two methodologically distinct trends:

Descriptive & empiric approach: such approaches, most notably represented by Schmitter and O'Doyle use inductive methods to describe the transitional phases (liberalization – democratization - consolidation) using examples of specific countries and to create general statements about how transitions are introduced and developed by ruling (and oppositional) elites.

Rational Choice approach: this approach is represented by the studies of Przeworski and stresses that a description of cases is not enough, but that the strategies of key actors and their constellation can be analyzed and resolved by using game theory. By understanding the interests and strategies of elite actors, transitions and their development cannot only be described, but also predicted. (Merkel 2010: 85ff; Bos 1996: 83)

I will take advantage of the conclusions of both the inductive and deductive approaches, since they do not contradict but rather complement and interact with each other.

4.3.2 Actors & Negotiation Pacts

As mentioned above, actors' interests, strategies and preferences are the most important independent variables determining the process of democratization. Despite acting in an environment of structural constraints they mostly act independently and therefore shape strategies the political future of the country with their individual or group interests. According to Marks three circumstances determine the transition:

“(a) The institutions of the existing regime fail to regularize and contain political activity, but become themselves a locus of political struggle; (b) political power is contested by two or more groups, each of which is composed of actors having heterogeneous preferences or incomplete information about the responses of other actors in the same group; and (c) choices made within one group influence the choices of the other group”. (Marks 1992: 48; cited in Bos 1996: 87)

As pointed out in the quotation, a split into an oppositional group and a ruling group is an essential milestone in the transition process. Whereas the oppositional group clearly promotes a regime change in the form of democratization, the ruling elite is further divided into softliners and hardliners. Whereas hardliners defend the current (authoritarian) institutions, softliners are open to reforms. Of course, also the opposition is not a homogenous group. It is rather a composition of people, mostly intellectuals, artists, human rights activists and so forth who are bound for the purpose of cracking down the current regime. Just as the ruling elite, the oppositional forces can be distinguished by their degree of radicalism (Bos 1996: 88).

The question if and how a country democratizes strongly relies on which actors can manage to enforce their interests. This depends on the distribution of (power-)resources, e.g. military support, people's trust, financial resources, manipulative resources etc. The ruling elite of course dominates the most important state resources. The most important resource of the oppositional forces is the mobilization of the masses. Most recently, this could be observed in the revolutions that started in late 2010 in Tunisia and other parts of the Arabian world. The Arabian mass mobilization, however, took place within a different context than the transitions in communist countries. Factors may include the less repressive state apparatus, the use of new media to debate and organize protests and the more active role of the international community. Though a possible Chinese political transition would also take place in a very different context than the ones of Eastern Europe, social media and the flow of information are much more effectively controlled by the state and international intervention is much less

likely due to China's economic, political and military capacities. Moreover China's huge size in terms of geography and people makes a revolution from below less feasible. As I will argue later, the good performance of the Chinese government – both its macroeconomic policies and its moderate political reforms – are even more important for China's stability.

So a Chinese revolution similar to the Arabian revolutions is not at all likely in the short or mid run. A more likely scenario is an incremental democratization from above as it has happened in Taiwan or South Korea, where the elite responded to stronger demands coming from the society (and internal forces). He & Feng describe a possible scenario as follows:

“Under internal or external pressures, political leaders and elites in the incumbent authoritarian regime split into a liberal / reform group and a conservative / status quo group. During political struggles, the liberal / reform group, with cooperation from social democratic forces, the middle class and labor unions, defeats the conservative / status quo group for political democratization.” (He & Feng 2008: 153)

The reform group within the ruling class and oppositional forces of society form a “negotiation pact” which can pave the way for a peaceful democratization. As He & Feng point out, such a way of democratization can be of limited success since the vital interests of the elite are protected by the pact (p. 153). However, the cases of other East Asian countries' developments show that such negotiation pacts can lead to full democracies, too and that they seem to be successful especially in East Asian countries (Cho 2009: 91).

The question of who initiated the transition is also important. A transition can be initiated by oppositional mass-mobilization (revolution) or by the ruling elite (reform).

4.3.3 Actors & Lesson Drawing

In order understand China's specific political pathway we have to go further than just analyze elite constellations and their possible strategies and interests. The CCP's political decisions do not take place independently from external developments. Two of those developments are of special importance to the Chinese trajectory. First, the developments of the “four tigers”, namely South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore have played a significant role for China's economic reforms. Second, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakdown of Eastern

European Communism provided the CCP with information about possible consequences of a political transition from Communist rule.

As Richard Rose puts it:

“Confronted with a common problem, ...nations can learn from how their counterparts elsewhere respond. More than that, it raises the possibility that policymakers can draw lessons that will help them deal better with their own problems. If the lesson is positive, a policy that works is transferred, with suitable adaption. If it is negative, observers learn what not to do from watching the mistakes of others.” (Rose 1991: 4)

Based on that argument, I assume that the Chinese development is indispensable connected to the developments of its most relevant environment: the *cultural related East Asian* countries and *politically/ideologically related Soviet Union*. With reference to the elite-centered approach I assume political elite actors and their interests/strategies as the core independent variable. I further assume that their decision-making is not independent from environmental observations. The logic of Chinese “scientific decision-making” is rather closely related to studying and observing other developments and chose programs and development paths that have worked out elsewhere.

In the next two sections I want to dwell on the developments in these regions and connect it with China’s decisions on their development path in a rational-choice analysis.

4.3.3.1 Positive Lessons from East Asia: the Four Tigers’ Development

China could draw a positive lesson from the four tiger countries. These countries similarly drew a positive lesson from Japan, which itself drew lessons from Western countries (Rose 1991: 14). What China learned was that its economic system was inferior to the market economy and that culturally related countries were able to adopt the system with huge success. Deng Xiaoping explicitly showed a huge amount of respect for the tremendously fast growing East Asian economies and even named Singapore as a model for China: "Singapore's social order is rather good. Its leaders exercise strict management. We should learn from their experience, and we should do a better job than they do." (Deng, cited in the New York Times 9.8.1992) Singapore had a constant annual GDP growth rate of about 9 percent and above since the 1960s. Just like the other three East Asian tigers Singapore’s success can be explained by its high saving and investment rate and its commitment to the export oriented

development path combined with an active macroeconomic guidance by the state⁴ (Wong 1998: 54, 56). As Gulati (1992) with reference to World Bank data points out: "...while the annual rate of increase of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Four Tigers was at 9.5 percent during the period of 1963-73, it was only 4.1 percent in the countries which followed the import-substitution industrialization (ISI) strategy. Despite a world-wide slowdown in economic activity during the 1973-85 period, income per capita continued to grow at an annual rate of 5.9 percent in the former group of countries, but actually declined at an annual rate of 0.1 percent in the latter." (pp. 161f)

However, the Chinese were and are certainly aware of the specific conditions existing in the four tigers, like the colonial past of Hong Kong and Singapore, and the extensive foreign aid to South Korea and Taiwan as a strategy to counter Communist influence. As Rose argues there is no guarantee that "...a programme now in effect in country X would be effective if transferred to country Y." (Rose 1991: 8) As Wong puts it, this has also been recognized by Deng Xiaoping:

"What has distinguished the economic role of the Singapore government from that of other developing countries is essentially its different *modus operandi* and the different institutional environment in which it operates. Deng Xiaoping knew that. China could emulate Singapore, or any other country, only eclectically." (Wong 1998: 61)

Therefore China is searching for its own path of development. The concept of a "socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics", as currently promoted by the CCP's leadership can be regarded as a theoretical attempt to pave the way for a unique Chinese way of development.

⁴ For example by - either alone or jointly with a local or foreign company - financing, operating or managing a wide range of industries, e.g. in manufacturing, trading or banking. At the same time, however, government spending has remained lower than in Western countries, which is due to the strict rejection of welfare state institutions (Wong 1998: 56, 58f). Beside the dominant state role and the export orientation Gulati argues that the colonial past and its infrastructural legacies as well as foreign aid (e.g. the role of the US in South Korea and Taiwan) have played a significant role, too (Gulati 1992: 161ff).

4.3.3.2 Negative Lessons from the Soviet Union: Political Instability and Economic Downfall

Whereas the East Asian Tigers provide a positive lesson, especially in terms of economic performance, the collapse of the Soviet Union provided a negative lesson for the Chinese leadership. Therefore, Marsh rejects the view that the Soviet denouement is an analogy to China's future, since "...Chinese policymakers [were now] seeking to draw lessons from the Soviet collapse that would help them better navigate the waters of Communist reform." (Marsh 2003: 261) As the opening policy has demonstrated, the Chinese Communists were able to react much earlier than the Soviet Union to change themselves and make their economy more efficient. Ideological determinism was much more strongly bound to the figure of Mao Zedong and when he vanished from the political arena, the way had already been paved for the reformists. Whereas the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s in China were shaped by the economic disaster of the Great Leap Forward (leading even to negative growth rates) and the political denunciations throughout the Cultural Revolution, the four East Asian tigers' growth rate was constantly beyond 9 percent. While the Chinese leadership learned from those countries that market economy in combination with a still centralized but efficient and macro-economically active state might help China to accelerate economic growth, the Soviet Union sustained its Communist economy system until glasnost and perestroika. Just as the East Asian states provided positive examples, the Soviet Union's comprehensive economic *and* political reform aspirations were a negative lesson for China.

Though the CCP had always stressed the non-interference in Soviet affairs, its leadership under Deng Xiaoping and then Jiang Zemin articulated⁵ displeasure with Gorbachev's liberal aspirations, seeing him as a revisionist and a betrayer on Marxism-Leninism (Graver 1992: 3ff). At the same time, however, the Chinese showed a deep interest in the Soviet Union's transition process and outcome. Deng himself stressed that the example of Eastern Europe should be studied and lessons should be drawn: "some countries have gotten into serious trouble. It seems that socialism has been weakened, but people...can learn from these lessons. This can help us improve socialism and lead it on the path to healthier development..." (Deng, cited in: Marsh 2003: 264) Similarly, Deng's successor, Jiang Zemin, stressed the importance of studying the failure of the Soviet Union and that the result should be a new

⁵ It should be noted that the CCP avoided to demonstrate its reservations against Gorbachev's leadership publically. The CCP under Deng Xiaoping stressed that ideological disputes should not be introduced into Sino-Soviet relations, and state-to-state ties should continue to develop on a stable, cordial basis." (Graver 1992: 4)

development of Marxism-Leninism (ibid.). For that purpose, Chinese research institutions, like the Institute for Eastern European, Russian, and Central Asian Studies strongly focused their research on Russia's transition process. Moreover, new research institutions like the China Reform Forum at the Central Party School or the Center for Russian Studies at the East China Normal University were created to study the developments in the Soviet Union. In contrast to the situation in the West, where the interest in the transitional process faded shortly after the collapse and most research turned to the question of democratic development and consolidation, the Soviet collapse is still a major topic in China's social sciences research (Marsh 2003: 264f).

While the Chinese hence have definitely learned from the Russian example, there are also distinct elements characterizing the Chinese way of development. Contrary to the Soviet Union, the CCP has changed much earlier, namely in the late 1970s⁶. Moreover, it is not as much ethnically polarized as the Soviet Union was. More than 90 percent are Han Chinese and nationalism within China provides a strong bound that supports regime stability. The most striking difference that Chinese scholars emphasize is that ideology is only a minor (in fact vanishing) element that binds the Chinese society and provides stability. The relaxation of Communist ideology and its replacement with traditional Chinese values (especially related to Confucianism) is a core element that should contribute to the survival of the CCP. Nationalism, a turn to traditional Chinese values in combination with economic growth and moderate political adaptation seem to be an efficient way to keep up the regime's stability. The CPDSU, on the other hand, was not able to transform itself to produce the necessary positive outcome (especially social inclusion & high economic growth). This resulted in a systemic crisis and finally the collapse of the whole union (Marsh 2003: 266f).

But even worse than this dissolution of the union was the outcome of the transformations: Yugoslavia ended up in bloody wars and Russia had to fight internal instability, also resulting in an internal war with the federal subject of Chechnya. Economically, the transformation ended in a disaster, too. Russia needed much more than a decade to reach its economic level of the 1990s. Politically, most countries ended up in authoritarian regimes, where people are denied to participate in politics and have to suffer the consequences of corrupt and nepotistic political elite (e.g. Kazakhstan, Belarus, or Uzbekistan). Also Russia and the Ukraine are far away from consolidated democracies. An interesting phenomenon in these countries is a

⁶ It should be noted that the Chinese Communist party came to power not earlier than in 1949, whereas the Soviet Union had already been founded in 1922.

reemergence of Communist parties and a serious nostalgia: according to a 1999 Russian survey, about 64 percent would choose to go back to their lives in the Soviet Union and 77 percent regret the collapse of the Union (Marsh 2003 268f).

5 Foundations of a Resilient One-Party System: Nationalism, Economic Growth & Moderate Political Adaption

5.1 Nationalism: Between Political Integration and Democratization

As outlined above, modernization theory fails to explain the Chinese path of development. Despite high rates of economic growth and the development of prosperous urban societies the Chinese one party system seems to be stable after all and its high approval rate suggests that there are other factors than democratic mechanisms which keeps the CCP alive. The most prominent of them are economic growth (closely related to good governance performance), a government-supported sense of nationalism, and – the topic of my thesis – moderate political adaption and reform.

Nationalism is a phenomenon that has been used by the CCP strategically to foster its power position. It argues that it is due to the Communist rule that China has liberated itself from foreign powers. The humiliations of the Opium War and the dramatic period of the Japanese invasion are deeply enrooted in the minds of the Chinese people. The emancipation of the West and Japan and the recovery of China's self-assertiveness in the international arena are commonly (not wrongly) perceived to be achievements of the CCP. Nationalism in the sense of identification with the nation, support of national interests and a revival of the national culture (as a response to globalization) is very present in Chinese society. More radical forms, promoting wrong historical facts about Japan or the West, promoting a rigid and hate-based international policy agenda and approving totalitarian methods are a minority within Chinese society and elite. However, relatively strong nationalism within the Chinese society, reinforced by the government's communication strategy, tends to stabilize the current regime rather than push for political reform. This is due to the fact that nationalism is primarily aimed at presenting a sense of unity to the outside world. Therefore nationalism tends to be conservative, reinforcing the current (sometimes also the past) system, which is closely related to the nation's history and culture. Also Confucianism plays a significant role. Confucianism's emphasis on the governments performance rather than on where its power is coming from also supports the current regime (Cong 2009: 833; 837).

The current Chinese government promotes a soft nationalism that can be combined with harmonious relationships to formerly adverse nations. Radical forms of nationalism hostile to political reform and a potential "Westernization" exist but are a minority within the Chinese society and elite. Moderate nationalism, on the other hand, also supports the current system,

but is more open to political reform, as long as it does not endanger China's national unity. A severe problem resulting from Chinese nationalism – which is primarily a Han-nationalism – is a perceived incompatibility between political unity and democratization. Separatist movements in non-Han regions, most notably Tibet and Xinjiang, are closely related to the demand for democracy. Therefore, the Chinese nationalists are cautious about too much democracy since they feel that increasing democratic rights in absence of a solution to the national question might trigger a disintegration of the nation (Cong 2009: 846). Accordingly, even moderate nationalism – as represented by the current leadership – cannot support radical political change but rather favor (if at all) incremental political reform.

5.2 Continuous Economic Growth: A Vital Challenge for the CCP

“If the economic growth occurs without economic crises democracy evolves slowly, as did in the nineteenth-century Europe.” (Huntington 1991: 72)

The second main source of regime legitimacy in China is the government's performance, especially in macro-economic terms. Economic growth as a legitimating factor, however, is also dependent on a certain amount of nationalism, since not all groups profit from the economic liberalization (Zheng 2009: 2; Chao & lee 2006: 219). Rather, traditional beneficiaries of the Communist system, such as workers and farmers are considered to be the relative losers of the opening policy. As a consequence China has developed from a very equal (agricultural) economy to one of the most unequal societies in the world⁷. Such a rapid rise in inequality goes far beyond the initial idea of “letting some people get rich first” (Zhao 2001: 27). Moreover, the inequality is multidimensional (coastal-central, urban-rural, winners-losers within each of these groups) (Zheng 2006: 244). The resulting disparities thus tend to polarize the society, and might give rise to riots that challenge the systemic transformation. This was already the case in the students' protests in the late 1980s. The protests were caused and triggered by the consequences of the economic transition – especially high inflation and spreading corruption – rather than by the sole demand for democracy, as it is mostly framed by Western media.

⁷ At the very start of the economic reforms the Gini-Coefficient was 0.21 for urban areas and 0.16 for rural areas and increased up to 0.28 and 0.34 respectively for the year 1995 (Zhao 2001: 27). According to World Bank statistics, China's Gini-Coefficient is 0.42 – which is even higher than the one of Russia which is 0.38 (World Bank Gini Index).

However, despite a growing socio-economic gap, the Chinese seem to value the fact that their economy has been developing constantly with high rates of growth and that their living conditions are improving on average. This demand is reflected in an opinion poll of the World Value Survey. According to the turnout of a first choice question with the options “high level of economic growth”, “strong defense forces”, “people having more to say about how things are done” and “trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful”, Chinese people significantly prefer continuing economic growth over more political participation. 45 percent chose economic growth as most important whereas only 8 percent chose participation to be most important. A second first choicer question, with the options “a stable economy”, “progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society”, “ideas count more than money” and “the fight against crime” confirms the same priority structure. 52 percent chose “a stable economy” as their first choice, even 34 percent chose “the fight against crime”. Only 10 percent chose “a more human society” and only 4 percent chose “ideas over money.” (World Value Survey 2007).

The overall high valuation of economic growth despite the accompanying phenomenon of social inequality is closely related to the previously discussed nationalism. In an answering mix consisting “maintaining social order”, “fighting rising prices”, “giving people more say” and “protecting freedom of speech”, maintaining order had 46 percent of the first choice votes, fighting rising prices 34 percent, whereas giving people more say and protecting press freedom only received 15 and 5 percent respectively (World Value Survey 2007).

National unity and economic growth therefore seem to be top priorities to the Chinese people, and are considered to be even more important than the expansion of political liberties. However, despite the importance of economic growth and national unity, the CCP leadership knows well that at least a moderate or incremental political reform is needed to fit the demands of a modernizing society.

5.3 Moderate Political Adaption

The third source of the CCP’s legitimacy is its ability to learn from developments inside and outside China and the willingness to adapt its political institution and ideology to the new realities. This is a phenomenon that is new to a communist regime. The system itself with its rigid ideological foundation is generally meant to be unable to transform itself since any form of institutional change would undermine the core idea the revolutionists have fought for.

These are the arguments of “path dependency” approaches, arguing that once a specific way (primary institutional, but also applicable to ideology) is entered, a deviation from this path is connected to costs that are calculated to be worse than the continuation of the current path. The more time a regime has spent on a specific path, the more unlikely is a (radical) institutional or ideological redirection. This path dependency is considered by its advocates to be an explanation for the question why the Chinese system could change in the late 1970s whereas the Soviet Union failed to change its system. The Soviet Union was founded much earlier than the People’s Republic (1922 vs. 1949 respectively) and the Communist ideology and institutions were much more deeply integrated into the society than it was the case for China. In economic terms, Shirk states:

“Chinese central planning was .. more primitive and less inclusive than Soviet central planning had been; even during periods with a relatively high level centralization, the Chinese central bureaucracy (planning commission and ministries) controlled the production and allocation of fewer than 600 products, whereas the Soviets had central control over as many as 5,500 products...” (Shirk 1993: 13)

Despite the fact that Communism was less impregnated in China than in the Soviet Union, difficulties of legitimizing its systemic reforms are perfectly obvious. The introduction of the “three represents theory”, for example, was a contested change that was introduced by Jiang Zemin’s “elitist faction”, a faction whose highest priority is a deeper integration in the world economy. The inclusion of liberal minded business elites into the party, however, was unthinkable some decades before and still opposed by hardliners and members of the populist faction⁸. Even though political reform measures are much more sensitive and thus slower in progress than economic reforms, the CCP managed to receive a huge amount of legitimation among the Chinese people. As Bo Zhiyue argues, China is not in a crisis of legitimacy, as it is often framed by Western scholars and media:

“More than nine out of ten people (93 per cent) in China consider President Hu Jintao a trustworthy world leader, while less than fifty per cent of the people in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States have any confidence in their respective leaders (Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy, and George W. Bush) to do the right thing regarding world affairs.” (Bo 2010b: 117)

⁸ The different policy orientations of the two main political factions within the CCP, the populist and the elitist faction, will be discussed later in chapter 6.2.

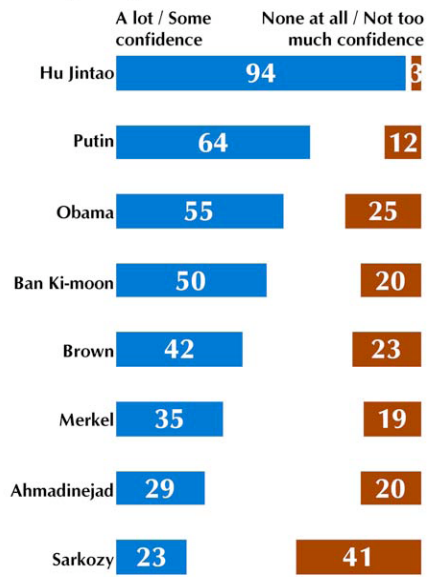
It should be noted, of course, that the lower satisfaction rate with democratic governments might be related to factors like the majority principle of elections, the existence of more critical citizens in democracies or the impotence of the people to change the political situation in authoritarian regimes (acquiescence to the situation). As Womack notes:

“In legislative democracies many people disagree with the government’s policies but accept the political system as their own. In party-states it is not uncommon for people to agree with policies and to have a high regard for the abilities of current leaders and yet to be alienated from the political system” (Womack 2006: 146)

This provides an explanation of the numbers presented below, however, as I have shown by opinion polls in chapter 2.3, a relatively high proportion of the Chinese believe that democracy is already a present phenomenon in their own country. Moreover, the confidence rate in Hu Jintao seems to be exceptionally high with 94 percent. Hence, it must be acknowledged that the legitimacy rate of the Chinese government is very high among the people.

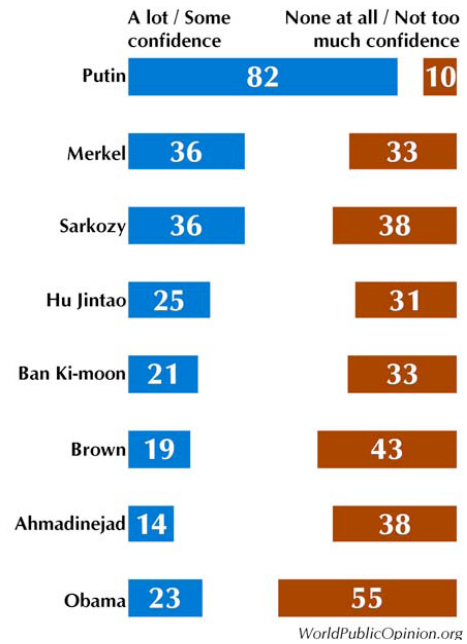
The Chinese on World Leaders

How much confidence do you have in each leader to do the right thing in world affairs:



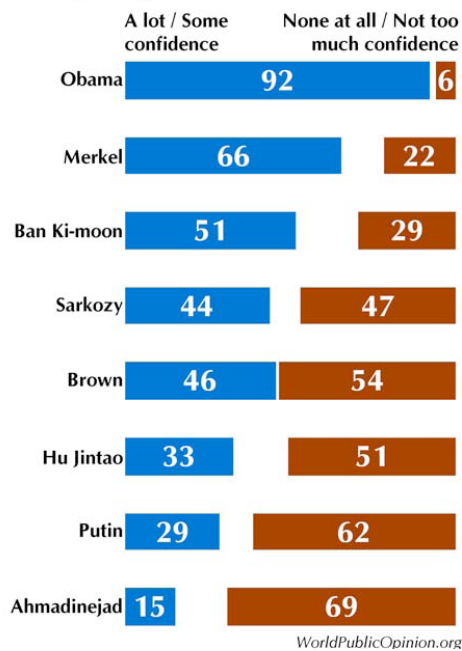
Russians on World Leaders

How much confidence do you have in each leader to do the right thing in world affairs:



Britons on World Leaders

How much confidence do you have in each leader to do the right thing in world affairs:



Schubert argues that a large proportion of that legitimacy is related to political reform and established “zones of legitimacy” through which people in fact are able to express themselves in political terms. Relying on David Easton’s concept of regime legitimacy, he identifies adaptations “...in terms of ideology (moral legitimization), structure (institutional order), and roles of authority (quality of personell)...” (Schubert 2008: 194)

- *Ideology*: The CCP has introduced ideological adaption to make it a governing party, instead of a party based on class struggle. In doing so it has introduced the “three represents” and the concept of a “harmonious society”. The fight against corruption and the structural changes discussed below further strengthened the moral base of the party.
- *Structure*: In terms of structure, the CCP has introduced legal reforms that have made officials more accountable and gave more rights to the people (rule of law). Moreover, the autonomy of the people’s congresses (from the party) has been enhanced by introducing new selection mechanisms and strengthening the constitutional basis. Intra-party reforms have further institutionalized decision-making and personnel recruitment and limited power to top positions.
- *Personal Authority*: The CCP has also enhanced the trust in its officials through professionalizing cadre management and recruiting qualified young cadres. The introduction of a new national civil service system has helped to make recruitment and evaluation more transparent. Related training programs (domestic and abroad) helped to increase the quality of cadres. (Schubert 2008: 194-199)

These three sources of political legitimacy are relevant to the concept of intra-party democracy. The CCP though still promoting revolutionary slogans and China’s specific way of socialism has in fact abandoned class struggle and instead aims at representing the whole society. The transformation of the ideology is even more strongly present within the society and some scholars even feel a danger in the re-emergence of the importance of

social status in combination with a rising money-worshipping culture⁹. Structural adaptations within the party, such as the expansion of electoral mechanisms or enhancing the accountability of cadres, also support the legitimacy of the CCP. The expression of the intra-party democracy as the ‘life-blood’ of the party illustrates the importance of structural change. The goal of these reforms is to enhance the trust in the cadres and make them accountable. New regulations such as educational requirements for certain official positions also enhance the personal authority of CCP cadres.

As we will see later, political adaption is working slow and lags far behind the economic reforms. However, as it is not properly recognized by Western media, political reform in China does contribute to the regime’s legitimacy, even though its exact impact is difficult to evaluate (Schubert 2004: 200).

⁹ The high respect for social status is deeply rooted in the minds of the Chinese and has survived during Communist rule. In traditional Chinese thinking, however, social status is related to the knowledge and virtue of a person and the aim of every son was to become an important official and pass the Imperial Examination (keju / 科举). Merchants, on the other hand, were at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In modern China, the respect for social status has continued to exist; however, in times of marketization, globalization and individualization money has risen to become one of the main sources for high social respect.

6 China's Ruling Party: Assessing the Subject of Political Reform

The Chinese Communist Party is the largest party in the world, counting more than 80 million members. In 1949, the Communist party had only 4.5 million members. This number was increased to slightly below 40 million in 1980 (Saich 2001: 95). This continuous increase in membership during the past 30 years indicates that the CCP's rule has been further strengthened in the reform era, rather than having eroded. Beside the CCP's constant legitimacy, this can also be explained by certain privileges related to membership, such as personal connections, traveling abroad or getting cheap housing.

Despite significant reforms in the economic sector, the CCP's Leninist party structure has survived with only little changes. At the same time, China (and also Vietnam) experienced a tremendous economic development resulting from the economic reforms, whereas the Soviet successor states and CEE experienced years of recession. Central Europe real GDP has been under its 1990s level for over a decade and Russia's GDP per capita in 2005 was still 10 percent below its pre-transition level. The fastest growing economy in CEE, Poland, grew by 44 percent during its first post-transition decade. China's economy almost tripled over the same period (Walder 2006: 15f, Frank & Segert 2007: 124). Of course, there are relevant factors which have to be taken into account, such as China's lower starting level of economic development, cultural disparities or its continuous political stability. One dimension of the latter point is the continual strength of China's party state. While the structure of cadre selection remained strongly centralized the criteria changed since Deng Xiaoping knew that the economic reforms could only be successful when they were accompanied by certain political adaptations, especially in terms of cadre management. He therefore stressed to integrate young and educated people into the party's elite. Therefore, the number of college graduates in top political institutions has been increased tremendously since the beginning of the reforms. At that time the government transformed from a "personalistic regime with totalitarian pretensions" into a "techno-authoritarian state" (Yang 2004: 68). As noted above, despite these changes conventional selection mechanisms have not changed significantly, even though some more participative elements have been added (e.g. grass root elections). The hierarchical Leninist structure, on the other hand, has remained. In the following passages I will revisit the organizational structure of the CCP.

6.1 Organization and Institutions

6.1.1 *The National People's Congress and the Central Committee*

Formally, the *National Party Congress* (NPC) and the *Central Committee* (CC) are the two most important institutions of the CCP. Art. 10 of its party constitutions states: “The highest leading body of the Party is the National Congress and the Central Committee elected by it.” (CCP Constitution, Art. 10, 3) In practice the power is shifted to the Politburo and its Standing Committee, since both the NPC and the CC are too large in terms of members and do not assemble frequently enough to become essential in strategic policy making. The NPC assembles only every 5 years and includes more than 2000 delegates. These delegates are not permanent and so their rights and duties are not permanent, but do only exist during the time the NPC is in session. Therefore, Saich states: “Such a large number of delegates meeting over such a short space of time means that it is rarely, if at all, that anything of consequence is seriously debated.” (Saich 2001: 86) Therefore, its role in policy development is reduced to the revision of basic ideological guidelines, the overall development strategy or the revision of the constitution – all on the basis of the leadership’s proposals. More importantly, the NPC elects two core leadership institutions: the Central Committee for Discipline Inspection and the Central Committee¹⁰. The CC functions as the NPC’s representation while it is not in session (and, formally, it is during that time the leading organ of the party). It includes about 250 delegates representing the top cadres from the party, military and state. It assembles once a year for only a couple of days – which is comparatively more frequently than the NPC assemblies, but still too rare to fit its theoretically assigned top-leading role. The CC can hence be regarded as a “...rubber stamp to decisions made elsewhere...” (Saich 2001: 86), namely by the senior leadership’s draft decisions that are prepared in the forefront of the CC meetings.

Every CC has *five plenums*, before its reelection by the next National Party Congress:

The first plenum usually elects the members of the Politburo and its Standing Committee. It also approves the General Secretary, as nominated by the Central Committee. Moreover, it determines the members of the Central Military Commission and approves the leadership of the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion on the electoral mechanisms of party congresses and Central Committees see chapter 6.3.

The second plenum prepares for the National People's Congress, in theory the most important body of the state. It nominates candidates for the NPC's standing committee, the National People's Political Consultative Conference¹¹ and the State council, arguable the executive government part of the state (which is of course harmonized with the party leadership).

The third plenum is usually concerned with economic policies. This can be dated back to Deng's economic reforms which were launched at the third plenum of the 11th CC in 1978. Since then, every third plenum has dealt primarily with economic issues.

The fourth and fifth plenums are concerned with political and personnel questions. At the fourth plenum of the 15th CC, Hu Jintao was appointed Vice-President of the Central Military Commission – a position that paves the way to party leadership. At the fifth plenum of the 17th CC in 2010, Xi Jinping has been assigned as Vice-President of the Central Military Commission. He is expected to succeed Hu Jintao as General Secretary and President for the 18th Central Committee. The fourth plenum also discussed measures of intra-party democracy, like the expansion of democratic nomination systems and term tenures. (Bo 2009: 2ff)

As mentioned above, the Central Committee cannot be regarded as an essential strategic policy making institution. Its core functions are to elect the party's core leadership institutions and to approve the senior leadership's policy drafts. Beyond those formal functions the CC also reflects the top leader's discussions, their priorities and the overall direction of Chinese politics. The issues of corruption, intra-party democracy, and arrangements for Xi Jinping to overtake the next generation's party leadership have been discussed in the various plenums of the CC and reflect the dynamics of the leadership's policy preferences and discussions (Saich 2001: 86).

6.1.2 The Politburo, Its Standing Committee and the Secretariat

In practice, the Politburo, its Standing Committee and the Secretariat are the most important institutions of the CCP. The Politburo and its Standing Committee are both elected by the

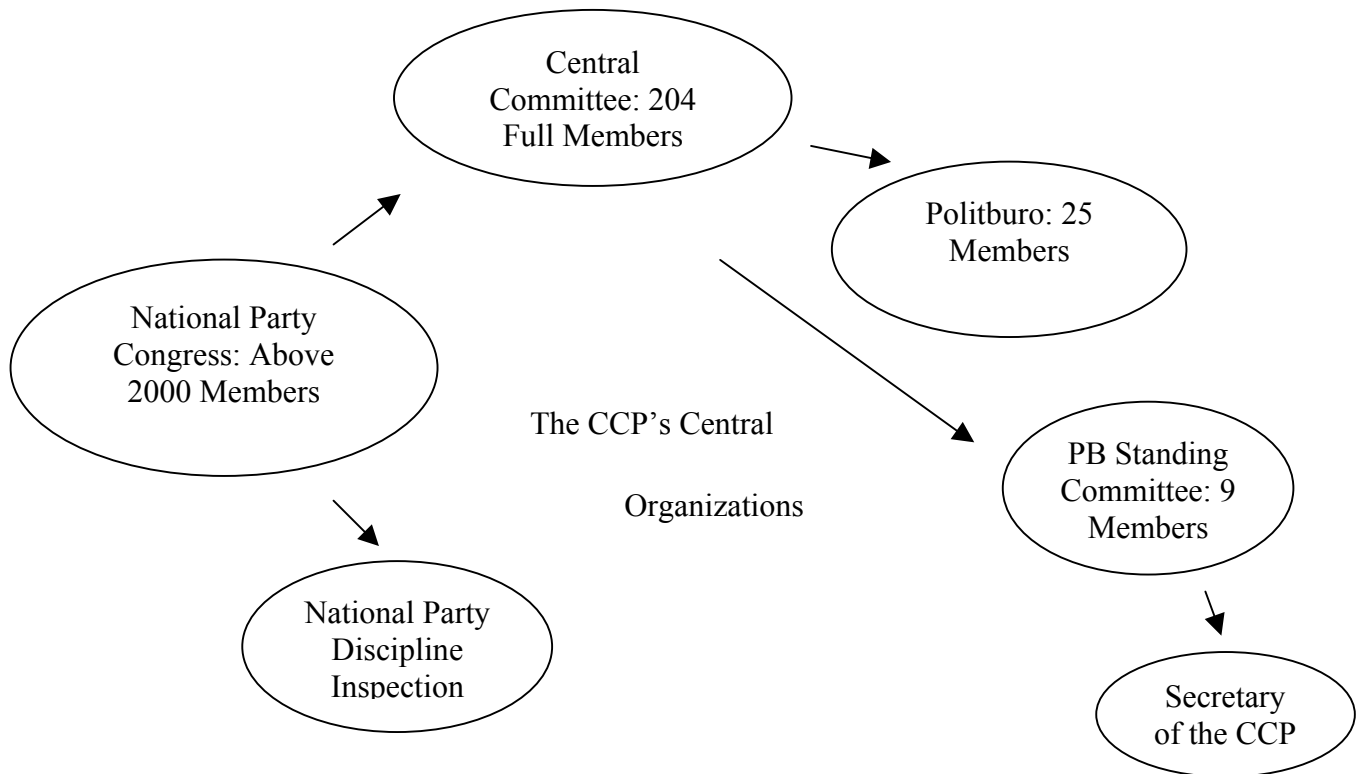
¹¹ The National People's Consultative Conference is not a party but a state organization that integrates also independent members and members from the eight democratic parties which are allowed to exist under the leadership of the CCP. It holds a consultative function in legislative concerns.

plenary session of the CC. In contrast to the CC, the Politburo and the Standing Committee are both permanent organs, and are therefore “...the de facto top leading organs of the party for most of the time.” (Yang 2004: 44) Hence, the Politburo does not only represent the CC, but has also significant influence over it – e.g. by convening the plenary sessions of the CC and control its departments (e.g. the Organization Department, responsible for cadre appointments and promotions).

The institution of the General Secretariat was reintroduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1982 as a reaction to the abolishment of the position of the chairman after Mao’s death¹². Just as the Politburo, it had been directly elected by the Central Committee and had provided a second power base beside the Politburo. Under Zhao Ziyang, the Secretariat’s autonomy was downgraded and it became a small sized “...working office of the Politburo and its Standing Committee.” (Saich 2001: 89) Its members were no longer elected by the CC, but determined by the Standing Committee of the Politburo (and only approved by the CC). Therefore, the Secretariat was no longer a competitive institution to the Politburo, but just an extension of it. However, the office of the General Secretary, not despite but rather due to the fact that it is now harmonized with the leadership in the Politburo and its Standing Committee, is the highest ranked office of the CCP and is therefore also the prerequisite position for the office of the President (highest state level office).

¹² The position of the chairman was closely related to Mao’s charisma and his role in the communist movement. Both his successors Hua Guofeng and Hu Yaobang could not fill the vacuum left by Mao’s death and perform a charisma-based leadership. Moreover, Deng Xiaoping, who became the de facto leader of the country already during Hu Yaobang’s time as the party’s chairman, had problems gaining a majority in the Politburo. As Saich states, there was even a discussion of whether to abolish the Politburo. However, the Politburo remained in place but was complemented by a secretariat (with the general secretary as its head) which provided Deng with an alternative power source and cemented its party control (Saich 2001: 89; Yang 2004: 46). It should be noted that Deng himself never (except the early period from 1956-1965) occupied the position of the general secretary, since he could rely on his informal acceptance status. However, he decided over the appointment of the general secretary (Hu Yaobang - Zhao Ziyang -Jiang Zemin).

Chart: Central Leadership Organizations of the CCP



The arrows indicate the direction of election; note that the General Secretary is only nominated by the Standing Committee of the Politburo and approved by the Central Committee (however, in fact determined by the Standing Committee).

6.2 The Federal Structure of the CCP: Regional and Local Party Organizations

The CCP holds organizations at every administrative level. These local organizations are equally designed as the central organizations. At every level exist a local Party Congress (except at the prefecture, the village and the primary level), a local Committee and its Standing Committee. Just as at the central level, the local Committee and its Standing Committee are both elected by the local Party Congress for a five-year term. Local (Standing) Committees are therefore accountable to both the higher level party organizations and the Party Congress of the corresponding level. Contrary to the central level, local Party Committees assemble at least twice a year. Moreover, the Standing Committees under the leadership of the corresponding Party Secretary are the permanent “day-to-day” leading organs of the local party organization (Yang 2004: 53).

As I will discuss later in the section on intra-party democracy, the township, the village and the primary level do serve certain grassroots functions, since at these levels grassroots-electoral mechanisms have been tried (township level) or even established (village and primary level). More recently, also county heads were chosen via direct elections. However, according to the principle of democratic centralism, the power structure within the CCP is still organized top-down rather than bottom-up. Accordingly, lower level party organizations are accountable to the next higher level and have to report on their work or on electoral outcomes regularly. Even at the grass-roots level, candidates for election are predetermined by higher-level party organizations to ensure a predictable outcome.

Table: The Federal Structure of the CCP

CENTRAL LEVEL	National Party Congress Central Committee Politburo
PROVINCIAL LEVEL AUTONOMOUS REG. MUNICIPALITIES	Provincial Party Congresses & Committees Municipal Party Congresses & Committees
PREFECTURE LEVEL	Prefecture Party Committee
COUNTY LEVEL	County Party Congresses & Committees
TOWNSHIP LEVEL	Township Party Congresses & Committees
VILLAGE LEVEL	Village (or Neighborhood) Party General Branch & Village (or party Neighborhood) Meeting
PRIMARY ORGANIZATIONS	Primary Party Committees (e.g. in schools, research institutions or companies)

6.3 The Party & the State

As it is typical of Communist systems, party and state can hardly be distinguished in China. However, the influence of the party goes beyond the control of state institutions. Leading Party Members' Groups (LPMG) exist in all relevant central and local non-party organizations, beside state institutions also in cultural and educational institutions. The LPMG are in charge of observing the proper implementation of party guidelines and policies. However, different views exist on the role of the party within society and state. In 1987 Zhao Ziyang, at the time general secretary of the CCP, called for a pragmatic reduction of the CCP's role in state affairs – which he viewed as a necessary adaption to the economic reforms. The political reform should include a horizontal power delegation from the party to state organs and a vertical delegation within the party (administrative decentralization). Therefore dual positions in party and corresponding state organizations were to be abolished. Moreover, the LPMG in state and other non-party organizations as well as the influence of Party Committees over academic and economic organizations were to be abolished. These innovative proposals had been accepted at the 13th NPC (1987) and the implementation started immediately after the congress. However, as a consequence of the student demonstrations at Tiananmen Square and the fear of a collapse of socialism as experienced in Eastern Europe, China's leadership (still under Deng's guidance) changed its course by slowing down or even reversing Zhao Ziyang's policies at the 14th NPC in 1992. In doing so the LPMG were reintroduced and their influence was even expanded under Jiang Zemin. Zhao Ziyang had been removed from the political arena in 1989 due to his support for the students during the Tiananmen incidents (Heilmann 2001: 88; Saich 101ff).

The separation between state and party institutions has not yet been implemented. Instead, the party has further consolidated its dominant position in political issues. The emphasis on intra-party democratization moreover shows that the CCP leadership has drifted away from the differentiation approach – which has worked out badly for the Soviet Union and its succeeding states – and views intra-party reform as an alternative approach to adapt the political system to the demands of increasing economic modernization.

7 Intra-Party Democracy: Strategy, Components and Relevance for Democratization

7.1 Competition vs. Participation: Intra-Party Democracy as a Prerequisite for Democracy?

The question whether intra-party democracy should be a prerequisite for calling a country democratic depends on the theoretical understanding of democracy. The prominent *model of competitive democracy* views the competition between various political parties as the defining element of a democratic system. According to the model, parties act just like companies in a free market. While companies compete for consumers, parties compete for voters. From this perspective, intra-party democracy is not at all desirable since it would undermine the competitive capacities of party organizations for two reasons:

- Inefficiency: Intra-party democracy would undermine party cohesion and would hence reduce the competitiveness of parties in the political market.
- Curvilinear Disparity & Responsiveness: In accordance with May's law of curvilinear disparity - arguing that political activists at the bottom tend to be much more extreme than the (moderate) party leadership – intra-party democracy would make the party leaders more dependent on extreme party member activists instead of the moderate average voter. This is supposed to lead to a radicalization of party politics (Teorell 1999: 365f).

Despite the criticism of the competitive model, intra-party democracy has become more relevant in Western countries, especially within the last three decades and the so called *model of participatory democracy*, pushing for a maximum integration of party members and supporters, has become more important in the political reality. Therefore, countries have introduced institutional mechanisms aiming at a better inclusion of the party base into decision-making processes, most prominently the selection of party leaders. However, mechanisms and range of member and supporter inclusion differ between countries. The United States' primaries for candidate nomination, for example, tend to produce a maximum inclusion in terms of leadership selection. Due to their loose party organization, however, party members play a minor role in codetermining policy directions. Other parties, such as the British Labour Party have also introduced electoral systems including the whole party

membership, however, granting the party members with a seat in parliament relatively more weight (*electoral college*). Other European countries established party conventions including only selected party members who decide over the selection of their leaders *and* also certain policy directions (Cross & Blais 2010: 3, 11; Kenig 2008: 243).

The fact that intra-party democracy does not seem to be a necessary prerequisite for calling a country democratic and has significantly developed in the West mostly after the conditions of competitive democracy had been established, raises the question why intra-party should be studied in China – a country that still lacks the qualities of a competitive democracy. First, I think the fact that China's politics are dominated by a single party makes its political system less vulnerable to the two risks of intra-party democracy mentioned above: the lack of external competition reduces the pressure for organizational efficiency and its huge number of members (approximating the population of Germany) limits the influence of radical activists. Second (and even more importantly), since China's one-party system seems to remain stable due to the reasons discussed in chapter 3, intra-party democratization might be a Chinese solution to produce limited democratic legitimation while at the same time preserving the CCP's dominance. In the long run, intra-party democracy could even pave the way for a national democracy, for example by giving party members more rights and the formal establishment of competitive factions within the party.

7.2 Assessing the Official Strategy of Intra-Party Democratization

7.2.1 Why Intra-Party Democracy? Analyzing the Leadership's Strategy

In contrast to other authoritarian regimes, the Chinese leadership actively discusses paths and concepts of democratization. It generally acknowledges that democracy is the best way to enhance a regime's legitimacy, its accountability and thus its governance efficiency. However, the majority in the Chinese government believes that democratic structures are especially valuable for fully developed countries. For developing countries, like China, too much participation would lead to instability and would therefore damage all the achievements of the CCP leadership – most notably economic strength. This, of course, is not at all an implausible prediction, especially after observing the post-Soviet Union developments.

Arguing that the CCP's single goal is to remain in power is therefore does not acknowledge the whole problem. Of course, lots of officials do have a strong interest in preserving certain perks and privileges. However, discussions in both the academic and political elite show that the pragmatic idea (there is no better alternative to the CCP's rule) is even more important. A sudden abolishment of the CCP from its leadership position is hence not discussed as an option – not even in the most liberal reformist groups. Therefore, the Chinese political reform debate can be regarded as ambiguous: on the one hand the Chinese leadership appreciates the achievements of Western style democracy; on the other hand it refuses to loosen the party's position as the single source of power.

As a consequence the Chinese discussions on political reform turned towards party-internal reforms. This development can be seen to root in the Tiananmen incident and the leadership's fear of losing control over the reform process. This led to a reversal of core reforms aiming at separating the party from the state: "It was Jiang [Zemin] along with his advisors, who first articulated the main concepts of intraparty democracy, such as 'governing Party' and 'governing capacity'..." (Li 2005: 389). Under Hu Jintao, intra-party reform became the most central political reform issue that was discussed as an inevitable measure to counter recent challenges, especially the one of corruption. Transparency and supervision are therefore the core elements of Hu's intra-party democracy concept. From a Western perspective of democracy, the tightening of supervision mechanisms can hardly be viewed as a big step towards democracy. Especially since such supervision mechanisms tend to be top-down rather than bottom-up – as we will see later in this chapter. However, in Chinese thinking, relating good governance to acting benevolently and in the interest of the people, such mechanisms contribute to good governance.

7.2.2 Exploring some Documents: Where is China aiming at?

"The Chinese had been immersed within an autocratic political culture for too long and it was not practical to start a participatory democracy right away." (SUN Yat-Sen, cited in: Chao & Lee 2006: 222)

7.2.2.1 The Government White Paper on Building Political Democracy in China (2006)

The official political reform discourse in China generally assumes democracy to be something very positive and that democracy is not something unique to Western countries, but something universal. Accordingly, the preface to the *White Paper on Building Political Democracy* states: “Democracy is an outcome of the development of political civilization of mankind. It is also the common desire of people all over the world.” (White Paper 2006: Preface) Even though democratic values should be universally accepted, the paths to realize democracy differ between countries. Therefore, the Chinese leadership refuses to imitate other western models of transition and democracy, but wants to follow a unique Chinese way, a “socialist democracy with its own characteristics” (Preface). The goal is therefore not the simulation of a western democratic model, but to build up an own system that reflects the will of the people and fully guarantees their rights and interests (Conclusion). The White Paper also provides insight into the government’s idea of democracy:

„Democratic rule means that the CPC sticks to the principle of ruling the country for the people and relying on the people in its rule, guarantees that the people are the masters of the state, upholds and improves the people's democratic dictatorship and the democratic centralism of the Party and the state, and promotes people's democracy by enhancing inner-Party democracy.“ (Chapter VIII)

The ‘unique’ characteristic of the Chinese way of democratization therefore seem to be the sustaining rule of the CCP – a factor which, out of a western viewpoint, would actually undermine the core idea of democracy as an institutional arrangement allowing the struggle of competing ideas and organized interests. According to the Chinese official argumentation, however, “...the CPC's leadership and rule in China is an objective requirement of the country's development and progress.” (Chapter II) According to the government, the CCP guarantees the country’s integrity and stability, its path towards a prosperous nation and to guarantee that the people become masters of their country. Democratization is therefore viewed an improvement of the party’s legitimacy, its relationship with the people and the quality of its government. It is not viewed in terms of multiparty competition and the free organization of political interest groups.

Therefore, chapter VIII of the White Paper is entitled “*The Democratic Rule By the Communist Party of China*”. It strongly stresses mechanisms of inner-party democracy: the

supervision and limitation of power, the expansion of electoral systems, the strengthened role of the party congresses at each level, the expansion of collective decision making and so on. As other documents, the White Paper also dwells on the rule of law as one of the key factors China is developing in order to establish a more accountable government. Even though the White Paper confirms the status of the people's congresses as supervisors of the judicial system, it also insists on the independence of the courts from administrative powers (Chapter VIII).

Confusingly enough, the document does not leave any doubt that China's current status is already the one of a socialist democracy that allows people to be masters of their country, an observation that can hardly be confirmed by a western definition of democracy – electoral or liberal. On the other hand, the White Paper also emphasizes that China's democracy is incomplete and that China's path of democratization will be a “historical process of continuous improvement and development” (Conclusion):

„The democratic system is not yet perfect; the people's right to manage state and social affairs, economic and cultural undertakings as masters of the country in a socialist market economy are not yet fully realized; laws that have already been enacted are sometimes not fully observed or enforced, and violations of the law sometimes go unpunished; bureaucracy and corruption still exist and spread in some departments and localities; the mechanism of restraint and supervision over the use of power needs further improvement; the concept of democracy and legal awareness of the whole society needs to be further enhanced; and the political participation of citizens in an orderly way should be expanded.“ (Conclusion)

As other documents and the official rhetoric of the CCP, the document remains vague in suggesting detailed plans for the future. Instead, the focus is on the general agenda of improving the status quo. In that respect the paper makes clear that the CCP aim at slow changes within the system, and that there is, of course, no intention to change the whole system. This becomes obvious in the chapter on multiparty cooperation which, according to the government, “...can avoid both the problem of insufficient supervision common under one party rule, and political chaos and a lack of stability and unity that may be caused by the disputes and strife of several parties.” (Chapter IV) A shift from multi-party cooperation to multi-party competition is therefore not to be expected in the near future. Chapter five explicitly deals with the expansion of grassroots democracy. It promotes that electoral systems are to be extended in order to “continuously enhance the degree of democracy” (Chapter V). This correlation shows that even though democracy is viewed differently from

western models, the Chinese leadership does see a strong correlation between the quality and quantity of electoral systems and the degree of democracy¹³.

However, though recognized as an essential part, introducing elections is not the top-priority. Other elements are viewed as more important to solve China's recent challenges. Creating an effective legal system, making officials work in accordance with the law and strengthening the relationship between the CCP and the people (legitimacy) are viewed as even more important to democratic governance. The introduction of elections can contribute to these goals and are therefore viewed as a means rather than an end in itself.

7.2.2.2 Hu Jintao's Report (2007)

The President's speech at the Central Party Congress, held every five years to determine the new leadership of the People's Republic, provides the guidelines of the following years' policies. The last party congress took place in 2007, where Hu Jintao was confirmed as party leader (and therefore also as President of the PRC). In his speech he stated that political adaption to economic growth and the recognition of a "growing enthusiasm" about participating in politics is inevitable. For that purpose he reaffirmed ideas already presented in the Government White Paper:

„We must uphold and improve the system of people's congresses, the system of multiparty cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the CPC, the system of regional ethnic autonomy, and the system of self-governance at the primary level of society.“ (Hu's Report 2007: Chapter XI)

Hu Jintao strongly emphasizes the importance of the CCP's leadership function in the context of a law-based and 'scientific governance strategy'¹⁴. In doing so, a socialist democracy must

¹³ This also confirms the public opinion poll presented earlier (see chapter 2.3), suggesting that the majority of the people view elections to be very important elements of democracy.

¹⁴ Scientific governance is the main development strategy introduced by Hu Jintao. It is based on already proven (and therefore reliable) methods of governance which should guarantee economic growth, social welfare and, at the end, social harmony. It is therefore a technocratic strategy with the goal of reducing the social inequalities that emerged from the free market policies. The strategy is hence closely related to the overall policy goals of Hu Jintao's populist faction, discussed in chapter 7.2.2.

be established. Its most important principle is that “the people become masters of their own country”. Accordingly, Hu openly promotes further institutional democratization:

“We need to improve institutions for democracy, diversify its forms and expand its channels, and we need to carry out democratic election, decision-making, administration and oversight in accordance with the law to guarantee the people's rights to be informed, to participate, to be heard, and to oversee.” (Hu’s Report 2007, Chapter VI)

The ideas presented in this quote are closely related to a more western understanding of democracy. They strongly refer to basic rights such as freedom of information and political participation. It also deviates from Jiang Zemin’s report in 2002 which strongly emphasized democratic centralism and called for a further centralization of party structures (Jiang’s Report 2002: Chapter X).

Hu’s Report also dwells on intra-party democracy; stressing that his government will reform and expand the inner-party electoral nomination system:

“We will spread the practice in which candidates for leading positions in primary party organizations are recommended both by Party members and the public in an open manner and by the Party organization at the next higher level, gradually extend direct election of leading members in primary Party organizations to more places, and explore various ways to expand intra-Party democracy at the primary level.” (Hu’s Report, Chapter XII)

This statement provides a quite detailed idea of how to realize more participation. However, the statement is limited to the primary party level institutions (lowest level). Hu Jintao, however, avoided addressing the extension of elections to higher level institutions. Though not issued in his official report, such an extension is already the reality in a trial form.

7.2.2.3 The National Human Rights Action Plan (2009-2010)

In 2009 the Chinese government released their first human rights action plan. The plan contains 5 sections: a section on the guarantee of economic, social and cultural rights; one section on civil and political rights; a section on the rights of women, minorities, children, elders and disabled; a section on education; and a section on international human right treaties. For our analysis the section on civil and political rights is most important. It calls for

an improvement concerning the transparency of governmental affairs, for example by expanding e-government at the local level, publishing important policy reports, and improving the government release system. In doing so, it "...will release information on natural disasters, emergencies and production safety accidents in a timely and accurate manner." (Chapter II, 5)

Beside information freedom, the plan also deals with furthering political participation: "The government will expand citizens' participation in political affairs in an orderly way at all levels and in all sectors, so as to guarantee citizens' right to participate." The expansion and improvement of local self-governance is named as one central feature of that process. Moreover, elections within the people's and party congress systems are to be improved and deputies will be elected according to the ratio of urban-rural population, ethnic minorities, women, returned overseas Chinese etc. The plan also states that the consultation with the eight democratic parties will be enhanced and incorporated in decision-making and the ratio of personage with no party membership and no political affiliation will also be increased. Both the cooperation with the eight democratic parties and the inclusion of non-party members into government decisions are bound to their acceptance of the CCP's overall leadership and are not at all meant to turn into any form of confrontation.

Just as the two previous documents, the plan does not mention any new electoral methods that could be introduced nor does it mention an extension to higher levels (Chapter II, 6). In September 2010 the Government released a White Paper issuing the progress of its Human Rights Plan. It outlines the measures the government has undertaken in accordance with the plan. Its major reforms included the modification of the People's Congress's electoral law, now requiring a representative number of rural and urban delegates and a more equal representation of ethnic minorities and regions. In addition, local elections have been expanded to new areas. Such measures, however, confirm my findings in the previous documents that the CCP's priority is an improvement of the status quo rather than introducing far reaching changes.

7.2.2.2 Conclusions: Improving the Status Quo

As the documents discussed above show, the phenomenon of democracy is central in China's political discussions. In Hu Jintao's 2007 report, the word democracy occurred 36 times¹⁵. However, the fact that a clear definition is missing confuses the term and the overall goal of people becoming masters of their own country is lacking the corresponding institutional reform strategy. Even more confusing is that the CCP leadership does perceive their system as democratic already. Their goal is thus to make their system more democratic, which implies that the CCP aims at linear improvement within the system rather than radical change.

Therefore, the main unique feature of a "democracy with Chinese characteristics" is the resilience of the one-party rule. From a Western perspective, the problem with the above described model of democracy is that a one-party rule is inevitably connected to suppression of deviating political thoughts and groups. Therefore, Cho (2009: 87) comes to the conclusion that democracy with Chinese characteristics fails to provide anything fundamentally new. It rather relies on the principle of the democratic dictatorship and the dominant leadership of the CCP. Also the two main characteristics of a Chinese Style democracy formulated in a Government White Paper, namely electoral democracy and consultative democracy, only refer to local elections and the consultative integration of the eight democratic parties under the control of the CCP – both have been existing since the 1980s. Therefore, Cho concludes: "...democracy with Chinese characteristics is closely connected to the political system that has existed for the past few decades." (p. 88) Even though this observation can hardly be denied, reforms suggested in the official concept of democracy are still of great importance for China's political present and future. And that is for two reasons: a) the Chinese government obviously enhances its legitimacy with such reforms and improves the relationship with its people. The introduction of elections at the local level (experiments even go up to the municipal level), enhancing educational levels of officials, strengthening their supervision and introducing reductions on their individual power are all important measures to increase accountability and thus trust in the government; b) moderate political reforms can pave the way for future reforms by reducing the incentives of individual officials to preserve the current system, e.g. by introducing age and tenure regulations.

¹⁵ In Jiang Zemin's report in 2002 the word occurred 29 times and in the Hu Jintao's 2002 report it occurred 33 times. This indicates an upward trend of issuing democracy, but also that discussion was generally intensive during the last decade.

7.3 Factional Balancing within the Party: A Reality in Chinese Politics

7.3.1 Causes for the Increasing Importance of Factional Politics

Even though the creation of factions within the CCP is officially prohibited, informal factional competition has a long tradition. At least due to two changed circumstances the relevance of factional politics has increased dramatically in the last two decades: First, increasing tensions within Chinese society – resulting especially from socioeconomic, center-region and also ideological cleavages – have polarized the policy interests both within the people and the CCP elite. Second, China has been experiencing its first period without the existence of a, to use Weber's terms, traditionally or charismatically legitimized leader. Before the Communist period, the king was the traditionally legitimized ruler. Later, both Mao and Deng could rely on their charisma and their past "heroic" roles (Mao's role in the Communist Revolution; Deng's role in the Cultural Revolution). The leadership generations after Deng however, had to turn to a more rational leadership style. Of course, nationalism and economic performance play a significant role in legitimizing the CCP's rule. However, since these two factors might not be sufficient to stabilize the regime in the long term, the Chinese leadership has turned to institutional solutions enhancing accountability and thus legitimacy, such as the introduction of term limits and limited electoral mechanisms. However, these limited power-balancing institutions have also provoked or strengthened certain forms of competition along the cleavages described above.

The most important cleavage that came up after the reform and opening policies was the growing socio-economic gap. Whereas most groups significantly gained wealth, some others, especially those groups that had been favored during Communist rule, such as the workers and farmers, were now marginalized and can be regarded as losers of the reforms (Li 2009: 12; Zheng 2009: 2). As those groups became pressurized by the new competitive environment and suffered especially from the high inflation rate, new groups emerging from the private market gained disproportionately more material wealth. Moreover, the new market structure provided even more incentives for certain officials to misuse their power and corruption has become one of the most prominent issues shaping the Chinese political and reform discourse. Socio-economic disparities can also be observed among the regions. Whereas the coastal and urban areas are growing fast, inland and rural areas are lagging behind.

Along these socio-economic cleavages two factions compete with each other in a moderate way. On one end a populist faction, under the leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, and on the other end an elitist faction, under the leadership of Jiang Zemin.

7.3.2 The Current Leadership: The Populist Faction

There are six offices of power in the Chinese political system: The position of the head of the Politburo (General Secretary), the position of the Presidency (head of state), the position of the head of the armed forces (Central Military Commission), the head of the State Council (head of the government), the chairman of the National People's Congress (legislative power and huge influence over the judicial system), and the chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Hu Jintao occupies the three most important power positions: he is General Secretary of the CCP, head of the Central Military Commission and President of the PRC. Wen Jiabao, also member of the populist group, is in charge of the position of Prime Minister. The other two positions, head of the National People's Congress (and consequently of its Standing Committee, too) and the position of the chairman of the CPPCC, are headed by Wu Bangguo and Jia Qinglin respectively – both members of the elitist faction. However, the number two position to every of those top level offices is charged by a member of the opposite faction.¹⁶ This, of course, demonstrates the moderate nature of the factional competition, since both seem to – despite some disagreements on certain policy issues – be cooperative in terms of position sharing.

However, in terms of policy the factional interests diverge. The populist group under Hu Jintao tends to respond especially to the needs of the lower classes. As noted earlier, three decades of market reforms have led to a huge socio-economic split between new economic elites and reform losers. The populist faction under Hu wants to respond to the needs that have emerged especially in the lower classes. In doing so, they emphasize the subsidy of less developed western and central regions and social justice and fairness. The favoring of inland regions had already been a prominent issue during the Jiang era. However, the Hu-Wen coalition has implemented this idea with specific programs, including the reallocation of

¹⁶ For example, the position of the Vice Presidency is occupied by elitist member Zeng Qinghong or the second ranked official in the Politburo is elitist member Wu Bangguo etc.

resources from coastal to western regions and infrastructure projects such as railway building, the construction of gas pipelines or the creation of new airports (Li 2005: 394). Through the establishment of a “social democracy”, social justice should be enhanced. For that purpose the Chinese government has sent delegations to Europe to study their models of social democracy (Zheng 2007: 6). The goal is to combine certain mechanisms of participation (such as grassroots democracy and intra-party democracy) with social policy measures to respond to the growing socio-economic gap and the uncertainty among those who cannot respond to the self-organizational challenges that came along with the free market. Measures in this direction seem to be welcomed by experts:

“In a December 2004 survey of scholars conducted by China’s Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), 57 percent of respondents believed that the Chinese leadership had made progress in improving the standard of living of weaker social groups, compared to only 9 percent who felt this way in the 2003 survey.” (Li 2005: 396)

7.3.3 China’s Future Leadership? The Elitist Faction

The elitist faction is formed out of two main sub-factions: the Shanghai-Gang around Jiang Zemin and Zeng Qinghong (Vice-President till 2008); and the so-called princelings. The most important leader of the elitist group was Jiang Zemin. His political career started in Shanghai where he became mayor and party chief in 1985. Many of his inner circle members also had their background in Shanghai (especially in the branches of finance, information technology or education). For that reason the group was also referred to as *Shanghai-Gang*. However, with the political retreat of Jiang and also Zeng Qinghong, the Shanghai-Gang started to decline. Even more important was the abandonment of Chen Liangyu as Party Chief of Shanghai in 2007 – who was known to be a protégé of Jiang Zemin. In July 2007 he was charged with severe misuse of social security funds for his personal enrichment, allowing illegal companies to purchase state-owned enterprises and even abusing his power in return for sex (Bo 2010a: 134; Li 2005: 395). This was fatal for the Shanghai-Gang since “...the central leadership has in effect put an end to the practice of promoting Shanghai cadres to the highest Party apparatus or the State Council in Beijing.” (Bo 2010a: 134) In 2007 Zeng Qinghong, after Jiang the most important figure of the Shanghai-Gang retired from his position as Vice-President and Politburo-Member at the 17th Party Congress. However, Xi

Jinping climbed up the ladder and became Vice-President. He can now be regarded as the most central figure of the elitist faction and the most likely candidate for replacing Hu Jintao in 2012.

Xi Jinping belongs to the second, now even more important, sub-faction, the *princelings* (taizidang / 太子党). The term refers to cadres that descend from families with political background. Xi Jinping's father, Xi Zhongxun, was Vice Premier of the State Council between 1959 and 1962 and an important ally of Deng Xiaoping (Bo 2010a: 141). In accordance with the elitist's policy direction, he promotes a further integration of China into the world market and a concentration on GDP growth. In doing so he represents the wealthier part of China's society - such as entrepreneurs, cultural elites and the economically advanced coastal areas.

China's socio-economic cleavage can therefore be regarded as quite similar to the Western cleavage between "right" and "left", along which liberal-conservative and social-democratic parties have been established. The elitist faction tends to support the wealthier part of society and stresses economic efficiency whereas the populist faction supports the lower classes and stresses socio-economic egalitarianism.

7.3.4. Factional Politics and Political Reform

In the Western media, the current leadership was frequently accused of tightening internet censorship and violating human rights. In fact, Hu Jintao's leadership did not tighten but rather maintain the censorship of the internet. However, since several crises have emerged during his leadership, such as the SARS crisis in 2003, Zhao Ziyang's death in 2005 or the riots in Tibet and Xinjiang in 2008 and 2009 China's control over the Internet became more obvious to the Western media. Despite these observations, the status of the media in general was improved during Hu Jintao's terms. In his fight against corruption he even delegated a watchdog-function to the media (Gong 2008: 87f). Also in local government scandals, the media used to play a more crucial role, e.g. by extensively covering the 2007 "vaccine crisis" in Shanxi province, where several children died from vaccine which had not been properly stored by the local government. Even though pictures of harsh military and state interventions during the riots in Xinjiang and Tibet dominated Western media coverage, the central government under the Hu-Wen coalition was in general more tolerant towards social protests and only intervened in very sensitive cases, such as ethnic riots (Scheucher 2009: 30).

Also in terms of political reform the populist's rhetoric is promising. Despite the fact that Hu Jintao is not a liberal, his rhetoric shows that the Chinese leadership is well aware of the advantages of democracy and political freedom. On the one hand, Hu and his allies believe that China is not yet ready for full democracy; on the other hand, they emphasize that China is on its way and that democracy is the final goal for China. Wen Jiabao represents a minority within the Chinese leadership with a very western idea of democracy: "When we talk about democracy, we usually refer to the three most important components: elections, judicial independence, and supervision based on checks and balances." (Wen, cited in Li 2009: 4f) In an interview with CNN journalist Zakaria, Wen applies these three components to China:

"No. 1: We need to gradually improve the democratic election system so that state power will truly belong to the people and state power will be used to serve the people.

No. 2: We need to improve the legal system, run the country according to law, and establish the country under the rule of law and we need to view an independent and just judicial system.

No. 3: Government should be subject to oversight by the people and that will ask us, call on us to increase transparency in government affairs and particularly it is also necessary for the government to accept oversight by the news media and other parties." (CNN Interview with Wen Jiabao in 2008)

In his recent speech Hu Jintao announced:

"Since the reform and opening up policy was introduced, the Party has reviewed both positive and negative lessons in developing socialist democracy, and it has come to the conclusion that without democracy there can be no socialism and socialist modernization, and that the essence of socialist democracy is that the people determine their own destiny." (Hu Jintao, Speech at the CCP Anniversary Gathering, 2011)

Even more enthusiastic about democracy are populist leaders of the fifth generation. Li Yuanchao and Wang Yang have strong experience in the establishment of political democracy. Under their leadership, direct elections have been tried in Nanjing and Shenzhen respectively. When Wang Yang became governor of Guangdong, arguably china's most liberal province, Wang announced to make the province a pioneer in "thought emancipation" (sixiang jiefang / 思想解放).

Whereas the populist fifth generation stresses political liberalization, the elitist coalition emphasizes further economic liberalization while at the same time being politically more conservative. Most important figures among them are Xi Jinping, Wang Qishan, Bo Xilan and Wang Huning. The former three are all taizidang and Wang Huning is a member of the Shanghai-Gang. All four are (were) protégés of the two major leaders, Jiang Zemin and Zeng Qinghong.

“...leaders with princeling backgrounds usually do not fare well in elections. Princelings’ privileged life experiences and “helicopter-style” rapid upward career advancements have elicited vocal criticism and opposition—not only from the Chinese public but also from the delegates to the Party Congress.” (Li 2008a: 84)

As this part is still a minority, the support for the elitist faction within society is predicted to be weaker than the one of the populist group. Consequently, the populist group around Hu Jintao is expected to be relatively more open towards democratic elections and supervision (Li 2005: 392; Li 2008a: 85f).

7.4 Major Components of the Official Concept of Intra-Party Democracy

The CCP is well aware of the huge challenges that might endanger its leadership, among them corruption, a dealignment from its people and an integration of people’s rising demands for participation. Still, the Chinese’s sense for national unity is strong and the high economic growth rate provides good reason to support the CCP’s governance. However, as economic growth cannot be sufficiently controlled by the CCP’s economic policies, the party is highly interested to integrate various societal interests to survive even in times of future crises. For that purpose, intra-party democratization aims at providing institutional mechanisms which make the party more accountable and give people a feeling of being part of the system. One of these changes is to make the CCP a “people’s party”, representing the whole society rather than only certain segments. This is actually a huge deviation from the idea of the people’s democratic dictatorship – which the CCP is still promoting officially.

7.4.1 Expanding the Social Base: The Three Represents & a Harmonious Society

As for other parties around the world, the loosening linkage between party and society is also a problem for the Chinese Communists and as other parties the CCP tries hard to reach a

maximum inclusion of the societal forces into the party (He 2006: 198). In doing so, the theory of the “Three Represents” (san ge dai biao / 三个代表) was introduced in 2000 by Jiang Zemin and adopted into the constitution at the 16th party congress (Wong 2010: 60f). It was a reaction to the changing conditions resulting from the economic opening and the rise of a private economic sector. According to the concept, the CCP represents the most advanced productive forces, the most advanced culture and the interest of the majority of the people¹⁷. With that concept, the CCP actually turned away from the principle of the “Democratic Dictatorship”, meaning that a peasant-worker’s ally (democratic element) would dominate other forces in society (dictatorial element). Rather, the new approach marks a radical transformation of the party by formally integrating new societal forces – like business elites and financial managers – into the party and by giving them the possibility to participate in the political arena. The proposal of Jiang was adopted by the 16th Party Congress in 2002 and from then on business elites became an important pillar of the CCP. However, it seems contradictory to represent the elitist productive forces on the one hand and, on the other hand, the workers’ and farmers’ interests. Therefore, it does not seem to be coincidental that at the fourth session of the 16th Central Committee (2004) the concept of a “harmonious society” (hexie shehui / 和谐社会) was presented and introduced. Prime Minister Wen Jiabao views democracy, the rule of law, justice sincerity and social balance as key factors creating harmony (Heberer & Schubert 2006: 19f). Therefore, the concept of a harmonious society can be viewed as both an instrumental concept that should integrate a strongly polarized society into the leadership system of the CCP as well as a political program (setting policies which enhance social balance and justice). The concept of harmony strongly refers to the Confucian value system that views social order and the submission of people to their positions in society as core elements. This is interesting since the CCP had suppressed Confucian ideas up to 1978 since their hierarchical structure and their reactionary ideas about government did not fit the Communist ideology (cf. the Confucian ideas of good governance in chapter 2).

Due to these contradictions, Minxin Pei (2008) predicts a collapse of the regime. This will result from the mounting governance deficits of the CCP apparatus and the limited reform that

¹⁷ The inclusion of the productive forces is the most important point of Jiang’s theory, whereas the two other represents refer to the traditional elements represented in the CCP. The most advanced culture is represented by the Marxist ideology and socialist ethics; the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population refers to the classical clientele of the CCP. However, others argue that the most advanced culture might also emphasize a commitment to cultural diversity and the interests of the majority of the people refer to the government’s fight against corruption and a strengthened openness of the party to the people (Womack 2006: 136).

lags behind the demands of the people. Even though it is true that for many parts of society the reform process is too slow and demands for more participation are rising, the CCP still enjoys high rates of approval. As I argue in my paper, political reform is, though slow, an important source of legitimacy that will contribute to the regime's continuous stability.

7.4.2 Improving Internal Supervision: Corruption as a Driving Factor

“If not effectively curbed, corruption will cost the Party the trust and support of the people. The whole Party must remain vigilant against corruption, be fully aware that fighting corruption will be a protracted, complicated and arduous battle, and give higher priority to combating corruption and upholding integrity.” (Hu Jintao, Speech at the CCP Anniversary gathering, July 2011)

Even though corruption has been a constant phenomenon during Communist rule, the CCP leadership has, even though it tried hard, never managed to significantly contain it. This might have been related to the Leninist structure of the party, its total control over the appointment system and a corresponding lack of effective (independent) supervision. However, the problem of corruption became even more serious in the 1980s and the beginning of the economic reforms (Burns 2006: 49f). These reforms, of course, have significantly changed the conditions and enhanced incentives for various forms of corruption, e.g. by allowing the free flow of money and making new private investors dependent on certain officials' approvals. Spreading corruption, however, is a phenomenon that severely endangers the CCP's rule – especially at a time when the Chinese leadership can no longer rely on such legitimizing factors as charismatic personalities, ideological propaganda or a hostile international environment, and instead has to turn to *good performance* as its arguably main momentum of legitimation. According to the 2010 Transparency International Corruption Barometer, about 46 percent of the Chinese believe that corruption has increased over the past three years, whereas only 25 percent believe that it has been reduced (29 percent believe it has been the same) (Transparency International 2010: 42). This perception is a serious problem for the Chinese leaders since they know that corruption is the main sources of political protest. Hence, the Chinese leadership tries hard to delegate responsibility for unethical behavior to individual leaders rather than the system itself (Hartig 2008: 73; Schucher 2009: 15).

The recent return to Confucianism (harmonious society and rule in the people's interest) reflects the people's demand for good governance and benevolent leaders. Confucian values

and ideas, however, are also used by the government. On the one hand, the Confucian social order is determined by a strict hierarchy and harmonious behavior of each individual according to his or her own role in society; on the other hand it mandates the officials and politicians to act in a benevolent way and thus promotes a *subjective form of responsible governance*. However, becoming a virtuous ruling party makes certain mechanisms of institutional supervision (*objective responsibility*) inevitably important. The corresponding systemic deficits are also recognized by the CCP leaders. As part of intra-party democracy they have promoted new regulations of supervision by giving power to various actors within and outside the party (Li Chelan 2008: 2; Gong 2008: 79).

One of the most important measures to counter corruption by strengthening the transparency within the party is the CCP's "Internal Supervision Regulation" (ISR) from 2004. Its official goal is to promote intra-party democracy and to strengthen internal supervision mechanisms. Even though so called "Discipline Inspection Commissions" (DIC) have been existing since the very beginning of the CCP's rule, these institutions have failed to effectively prevent misbehavior among cadres, since they were controlled by the Party Committee of the corresponding administrative level. Therefore, an ambivalent situation occurs: the DIC "...was supposed to oversee the members of the party committee at the same level while all of its actions had to be approved by the same committee." (Gong 2008: 86) The ISR addresses this issue by enhancing the DICs autonomy of the Party Committee. Hence, the DICs are now allowed to report their findings about cadres' misbehavior internally to their immediate supervisors (i.e. the upper level Discipline Inspection Commissions). Interestingly, the ISR also provides an unprecedented acknowledgement of the supervisory function of the media and welcomes their critical watchdog role, especially in making individual corruption scandals public (pp. 87f).

The ISR clearly suggests that the top party leaders at each level are the main subjects of the regulations. As Gong argues, 57% of the employees in the 38 state owned enterprises complain that their boss can make arbitrary decisions without consulting anybody. Similar tendencies can be observed at the regional party level, where party heads gained more power due to increased decentralization while at the same time the supervision mechanisms remained low or even inexistent. This led to the so called "yibashou phenomenon"¹⁸, referring to the fact that such high ranking cadres are strongly tempted to become corrupt. This can be

¹⁸ The Chinese term "yi ba shou /一把手" means "leader number one". I will dwell on that in chapter 6.3.5.

related to the strength of individual party leaders who could decide independently on the most important issues. The ISR thus prescribes that “...all party organs must exercise ‘collective leadership’ and prevent the absolute power and arbitrary behavior of any single individual in decision making.” (p. 83) This regulation must also be applied to the central institutions, such as the Central Committee and the Politburo. According to news sources collective decision-making was also adopted for all state-owned enterprises (SOE) in 2010 (People’s Daily, 16.7.2010).

The ISR also mandates every standing committee – also the Central Standing Committee – to provide an annual report on their performance, especially in terms of anti-corruption measures. It further suggests that individual party members are to be rewarded for reporting any wrongdoings of leading officials. However, as Gong points out, such bottom up supervision very often lacks effectiveness. First, dependencies exist that might decrease the incentives to report the misbehavior of higher ranked officials. Second, procedures, once initiated, must be approved and investigated by higher level authorities and therefore strongly depend on their cooperation (Gong 2008: 85ff; Li 2009: 9).

New supervision regulations are important mechanisms to make the Chinese government more efficient and responsible. In the post-Deng era, the CCP has increasingly tried to present itself as a ruling party acting on the basis of law. A supervision of certain cadre duties, such as whether they act in accordance with the constitution and general policies and represent professional norms is inevitable. However, the problems with which a one-party state is confronted are undeniable. Supervision institutions still lack “autonomy” a top-down mentality still dominates – even though some small steps have been made towards including the party base into the supervision process. From a Western perspective (an understanding of democracy as described in chapter 3) it is thus difficult to accept these regulations as a form of intra-party democratization – as it is labeled by the CCP leadership.

7.4.3 Collective Decision-Making and Participative Governance

The trend towards collective decision making (decision by votes) is even more significant. The concentration of power in the hands of individual party leaders has been an important cause for the spread of corruption and arbitrary decision-making. The inclusion of all

members of e.g. a Party Committee enhances the accountability and legitimation of important decisions and balances the power among e.g. party branch members. Collective decision-making has been introduced at all administrative levels for major policy decisions in socio-economic affairs, huge construction projects, financial expenditure or important personal decisions. Such decisions are to be made during the meetings of the Party Committee and are thus no longer in the hands of the Party Secretary alone. For personal appointees, for example, at least 2/3 of the members of a committee have to be present and at least 2/3 of the votes are needed to confirm a candidate (Li 2009: 8f).

Beside these regulations, a new form of governance has been established. In accordance with Hu Jintao's principles of scientific and democratic decision-making, the CCP leadership welcomes consultations especially from research institutions and think tanks, but also from other political parties (namely the eight democratic parties) and various interest groups, for example in the field of environmental policy. After the complete absence of the public in governmental decision-making during the past years, "...the Chinese government [now] experiments with public hearings as the preferable form of public involvement in decision-making processes, and has institutionalized public hearings as compulsory steps in various laws." (Zhong & Mol 2008: 901) Though the primary intention of the Chinese leadership might be to make policy making more effective or even scientific, the broader inclusion of social actors also makes decisions more accepted among the people and hence increases the legitimacy of policy outcomes.

7.4.4 The Introduction of Tenure and Age Regulations

One of the most important political reform measures in the reform era are the limitations on tenures of high ranked political offices. The early reform leadership did not want to continue a "dead or life" struggles on political succession, but to regulate it in a rational way. Therefore, the reform elite under Deng Xiaoping abolished the "life tenure" system and introduced term and age limits to top political offices in 1982. These (*state-constitutional*) regulations, however, only apply to state positions, such as the office of the President, Prime Minister or the National People's Congress's Chairman at any given administrative level. According to the regulation, such positions are tenured to five years and the office-holder is not allowed to stay in office for longer than two terms. Moreover, age-limits have been established in the last

decade. These regulations responded to the gerontocracy phenomenon, meaning that most of the top positions are occupied by the elderly. For ministerial and provincial officials a mandatory retirement age of 65 has been established and restrictively implemented (Gang 2004: 257f; Li 2009: 9).

However, there were no such concrete formal regulations adopted in the *party-constitution*, though Article 36 stipulates:

“Leading Party cadres at all levels, whether elected through democratic procedure or appointed by a leading body, are not entitled to lifelong tenure, and they can be transferred from or relieved of their posts.

Cadres no longer fit to continue working due to old age or poor health should retire according to the regulations of the state.” (Party Constitution of the CCP)

On the basis of these vague provisions, informal regulations were introduced to adjust the party cadre system to the new state regulations. With Hu Jintao’s succession as Party Secretary, one can derive an informal regulation that is similar to the office of the President (five years tenure, two terms). Similarly, age limitations are also informally adopted for party cadres. At the 15th Party Congress in 1997, age limits of 70 years were first introduced in the election of the Politburo members “when Qiao Shi (71), Liu Huaqing (81), Yang Baibing (77), and Zou Jiahua (71) retired from the Politburo, with the only exception for Jiang, who was then 71.” (Gang 2004: 258) For the 16th and also the 17th Party Congress the age limit was even lowered down to 68 years. However, the informal regulation was not applied to those Politburo members who were promoted to higher levels, such as Hu Jintao, who was a member for two terms before he became General Secretary (Dumbaugh 2007: 5; Gang 2004: 258; Miller 2010: 2f).

Term regulations can be regarded as one of the most important reform steps. When they were introduced under Deng’s leadership, Deng himself was less affected by the rule since he did not even need an official office to be politically influential. Even when he retired from the Politburo in 1987, an informal regulation stipulated that Deng would still have the final word in policy issues (Gang 2004: 259). With his death and the charismatic vacuum he left, power distribution became more law-based and predictable. Though term and age limitations do not necessarily make the system more accountable to the people, they transformed the system in a way that fewer incentives exist for individual leaders to work in their own interest, e.g. to spend most of their time to expand their power and influence. Due to the limited prospect of

leaders to establish a long term power-base, officials might thus be more open to further transform the system for the next generation, with less intention to pave their own or their protégés' career paths. In such a system, further political reform is much likelier than in a system which primarily serves the individual leaders rather than the people.

7.4.5 Inner-Party Elections: Types, Incentives, Impact

“The election of delegates to Party congresses and of members of Party committees at all levels should reflect the will of the voters. Elections shall be held by secret ballot. The lists of candidates shall be submitted to the Party organizations and voters for full deliberation and discussion. The election procedure in which the number of candidates nominated is greater than the number of persons to be elected may be used directly in a formal election or this procedure may be used first in a preliminary election in order to draw up a list of candidates for the formal election. The voters have the right to inquire about the candidates, demand a change or reject one in favor of another. No organization or individual shall in any way compel voters to elect or not to elect any candidate.”
(CCP Constitution, Chapter II, Art. 11)

7.4.5.1 Election vs. Selection: The Nomenklatura System in Decline?

As we have seen earlier, state and party structures can hardly be distinguished from each other in China. The state and party hierarchy are harmonized and top cadre positions normally correspond with top offices in the state apparatus (e.g. the General Party Secretary is ex officio expected to become State President). However, since certain offices in the party usually entitle cadres for an equal state position rather than the other way around, the mode of inner-party cadre management and appointment systems is of great importance. As a Leninist party, the CCP adopted a nomenklatura system which enabled the party leadership to fully control the recruitment process. The system aimed at two main functions: the selection of a) competent officials and, perhaps even more importantly, b) loyal personnel that sustains the power of the party (Burns 2006: 33).

Though the system failed to fulfill those functions throughout most of the CCP's 60 years of history¹⁹, China's opening up and the spread of corruption, as discussed in the previous

¹⁹ Burns argues that the nomenklatura system only fulfilled its two main functions (recruiting both loyal and competent cadres) in the mid-1950s period, a period when elite conflict was low and party discipline was high. Moreover, the mid-1950s were dominated by *organizational rationalization*

chapter, have further challenged the nomenklatura system. The practice of top down appointment and the lack of an independent supervision organ created temptations for misusing certain powers and it was called into question whether the most competent people could really be recruited through the nomenklatura system. Inner-party elections are perceived to be one part of the solution, making local cadres accountable for their political actions and to delegating responsibility to the voters.

However, it should be noted that the CCP does not want to give up its power monopoly (Li 2008b: 2). Elections in China are controlled and possible outcomes are calculated not to undermine the vital interests of the party. It is hence impossible that candidates with notorious anti-CCP attitudes or even attitudes that counter the very basic party line would participate in an election. Therefore, elections in China can be regarded as non-competitive or semi-competitive. Generally, three types of elections exist:

Single-Candidate Elections (dange xuanju / 单个选举): such elections are non-competitive since only one person stands for election for one specific office. Such elections function as confirmation of a person nominated earlier by certain party institutions (mostly higher party branches). An example would be the appointment of the General Secretary. The Central committee theoretically elects (practically approves) the General Secretary who is nominated (practically determined) by the Politburo's Standing Committee.

Multi-Candidate Elections or more seats than candidate elections (cha'e xuanju / 差额选举): though usually semi-competitive rather than fully-competitive elections, multi-candidate elections at least provide the voters with the possibility to reject those candidates who have the weakest approval rate. In an election to a Party Committee with 10 members and a candidate-list with 13 members, the 3 candidates with the lowest votes would fail to enter the committee. However, there are also more competitive situations, e.g. some elections to local party heads and Vice-Secretaries.

Preliminary Elections (yuxuan / 预选): in such elections, the party members first vote to confirm a certain candidate list. This is e.g. the case in the forefront of the election to the Central Committee (Li 2008b: 4f).

(“tidying up the system”) and organization departments appointed and promoted cadres according to clear criteria (administrative ability and political loyalty). However, the efficiency of the system faded with increasing elite conflict in the forefront of the Cultural Revolution and collapsed in 1966, when more than 70 percent of top officials were purged and organizational departments could no longer operate (Burns 2006: 42ff).

All these elections can be distinguished by using the conventional categories of direct (including all members of a certain constituency) or indirect (voters are delegates who were elected earlier). The first scenario can be observed in elections of local Party Secretaries, government heads or people congresses' deputies. The latter scenario is typical of the people's congress's levels above the county level.

Though the expansion of electoral mechanisms drastically transforms the selection system in China, the Leninist party structure and the nomenklatura system controlled by the Organization Departments at the various levels remain intact. The role of the Organization Departments remains strong in deciding about core positions at the central and local levels. Moreover, their role in the election processes should not be underestimated since candidates can hardly be nominated without the approval of the Organization Department.

7.4.5.2 Digression: The Roots and Meaning of Grassroots Democracy in China

"The residents' committees and villagers' committees established among urban and rural residents on the basis of their place of residence are mass organizations of self-management at the grass-roots level. The chairman, vice chairmen and members of each residents' or villagers' committee are elected by the residents." (Art. 111, Constitution of the PRC)

7.4.5.2.1 Early Elections to Village Committees

Before the open door policy in the late 1970s, direct elections were limited to the election of the members of the basic township people's congresses. The members of these basic people's congress were in charge of electing the members of the congress of the next higher level (county), which were again in charge of determining the members of the next level's people congress (prefecture) and so forth. The new electoral law enacted in 1979 extended the right to direct election to the township people's congresses. Moreover, it saw to it that the election is processed via secret polls rather than just raising hand and that the number of seats is lower than the number of candidates (Jacobs 1991: 174). The new form of *village self-governance* occurred in Guangxi Province in the early 1980s, when the Communist brigades and production teams stopped working due to the agricultural reform as part of the open door policy. At this time, however, village self management was informal (non-governmental) and "...did not take part in the allocation of state resources such as land or quotas." (Li & O'Brien 2000: 466) Village committees therefore did not enact or implement state policies, but were rather concerned with paving roads, mediating villagers' disputes, running day care centers, raising funds to rebuild schools etc. When reports about the Guangxi experience arrived in Beijing, Peng Zhen, a prominent proponent of grassroots democracy since the early days of the CCP's rule and then vice chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC), played a significant role in the subsequent expansion of the village committees. According to him, village self-governance should help to create a sense of citizenship and participation within the Chinese people, who lacked this experience throughout their history. Village elections in his view were therefore only a first step and the expansion of the system to the township and county level should be aimed for (pp. 466ff). However, despite constitutional regulations were introduced in 1982, village committees were often appointed and controlled by the township administration and not directly elected. In 1987, however, they became formalized by the enactment of the trial version of the *Organic Law of Village Committee* (fully adopted in 1998). Again, Peng Zhen pushed forward the

legislation process describing the question of local democracy as "...a matter of 'life or death' for the Party." (p. 474) His statement was consistent with the widespread opinion among party-members that the survival of their system significantly depended on its ability to integrate the members and the people into the decision-making process. This seemed to contribute not only to the participative demands of the people, but also to the efficiency of the whole system, since the supervision of numerous local cadres would be delegated to the villagers (pp. 474f). The law was then implemented and elections are nowadays held in all 31 provinces (600.000 villages). Studies state that the Chinese people care about their right and in many villages voter turnout is beyond 90 percent (Han & O'Brien 2009: 360). Even though mixed opinions exist about whether village elections ultimately contribute to a comprehensive democratization, most scholars do acknowledge the positive role of village elections in terms of citizenship consciousness, cadre accountability, and governance legitimacy (Han & O'Brien 2009: 367f; Li 2003: 650f).

In the mid-1990s direct elections were started to be extended to the township levels. The first township elections were held in 1995 in Sichuan Province, which can be regarded as one of the pioneering areas of grassroots-democracy. Since then elections have been expanded and several hundreds of township governors, vice governors and Party Secretaries were elected through various forms of multi-candidate elections (Lai 2004: 2f).

7.4.5.2.2 Local Elections & Democratic Citizenry

Local elections are mostly supported not because of their great meaning in terms of institutional transition, but due to their impact on the democratic identity of the people: "Rural people have been quick to recognize that elections provide a means to dislodge corrupt, imperious and incompetent cadres." (Li & O'Brien 2000: 481) As people use their right to vote and also use their right to complain about certain deficits (like interferences in the electoral process) they build an understanding about how democracy could work and how it is to be defended. As many Chinese intellectuals and officials argue, China does not have a tradition of self-government and democracy but rather one of obedience and suppression. They argue a political culture has to be built in the forefront of creating serious democratic mechanisms, since such mechanisms could trigger instability or even chaos. Hence, it is too easy to view village election simply as an instrument to secure the maintenance of the CCP's rule. Following the official discourse on democracy, it rather seems to be a first step leading to further democratic institutionalization, e.g. the extension of village elections to the

township level. As Hu Jintao states: “As an important part of China’s overall reform, political restructuring must be constantly deepened along with economic and social development to adapt to the growing enthusiasm of the people for participation in political affairs.” (cited in People’s Daily, 15.10.2007)

7.4.5.2.3 Limitations on Local Self-Government

The electoral process is an important source of legitimacy and fundamental for a democratic system. However, post electoral events are also important and significantly determine the credibility of the system. Therefore, Han & O’Brien (2009) argue:

“Members of village committees may win their position through the ballot box, but once they gain office they still must take into account (and often compete with) township governments, village Party branches, and social forces, such as clans, religious organizations, and criminal gangs.” (Han & O’Brien 2009: 368)

These factors have to be taken into account when evaluating local elections, since interventions of such groups significantly weaken the potential of the democratically elected committees. One example is the intervention of the *township government* which formally represents the lowest level of the state apparatus. Even though the formal task of the township government is to guide (*zhidao*) rather than to lead (*lingdao*) the village committee, conflicts often turn out in favor of the township government. The village committee is expected to implement unpopular tasks assigned by the township level, such as collecting levies. Moreover, the village committee depends on the financial resources of the township government (pp. 369, 376, cf. also Heilmann 2002: 81).

According to the Organic Law, the *local party branch* remains the center of power in the villages. The Party Secretary is therefore considered to be the number one leader (*yi ba shou* / 一把手), whereas the committee director is considered to be second (*er ba shou* / 二把手). (Han & O’Brien 371f) Power conflicts therefore again mostly turn out negatively for the village committee, which also results in frustration of the elected members. According to Chinese news sources “...57 committee members from four townships in Qixia Prefecture, Shandong, resigned in protest against Party branches that monopolized village politics.” (p.

372) Moreover, most candidates in local elections are party members and therefore are in conflict between representing the villagers and obeying the influence of higher party levels.

Since 2002 mechanisms have been installed to reduce or modify these influences. In many areas, the party members must first stand for an election as village committee director to be then chosen as the Party Secretary. Such a de facto election of the Party Secretary can enhance the accountability of the local government. On the other hand, it also increases the dependency on the party branch and, again, raises the question of who the local government should serve.

Beyond the state and party influence, local governments are also confronted with *powerful social groups*. Powerful family clans might influence local politics to secure their family's interests. Of special importance are also *guanxi* networks (关系). The term circumscribes the relationship structure (or social capital) of a person. Such relationships are favor-based and, in comparison to western models of relationships, people feel much more committed. *Guanxi* relationships therefore tend to reinforce corruption. However, even though such interferences exist, they do not devalue the importance of such elections in terms of political participation and the establishment of a sense of citizenry.

7.4.5.3 Direct and Indirect Elections within the Party Congresses System

As mentioned earlier, the National Party Congress (NPC) is formally the highest party organ. It assembles every five years and counts more than 2000 members (at the 17th NPC, 2217 members took part). The members of the NPC are delegated in a similar way as the National People's Congress – the legislature body of the PRC. Party Congresses at the very bottom - township and, since a reform of the election law in 1997, the county congresses, too - are elected directly by the local party members²⁰; all further levels are elected indirectly, regularly by the lower level's party congresses via *multi-candidate elections*. The 38 delegations of the National Party Congress are also dominantly determined by the Party Congresses at the provincial level (31 delegations). The remaining seven delegations are elected by other

²⁰ The election to the local People's Congresses are not related to party membership. To be elected as a deputy to a local People's Congress, however, does require a commitment to an officially recognized political organization (the CCP or one of the eight democratic parties), since "independent candidates" are not accepted by law (China Daily, 29.6.2011).

important groups and organizations, such as the People's Liberation Army, the major state-owned enterprises, or the ethnic Taiwanese. Similarly to Central Committee elections, multi-candidate elections were also introduced to the election of the Congress' members. In 2007, the number of party members contesting for the National People's Congress was raised by the Organization Department from 10 to 15 percent (Bo 2010b: 13; Li 2008b: 5).

During its plenum session, the NPC elects the members of the Central Committee – which is due to its more frequent meetings (every year) and lower number of members strategically more important than the NPC. Since the 12th Party Congress in 1982 the members to the Central Committee are to be elected via multi-candidate elections, requiring an at least 5 percent higher number of candidates compared to the available seats in the Central Committee. At the 17th Party Congress 204 full members to the Central Committee were elected out of 221 candidates (8.3 percent more candidates). Moreover, the Congress elected 167 alternate members out of 183 candidates (9.6 percent more candidates). The 5 percent requirement is of course pretty low and the party's control of the nominations further puts limitations of the free choice of the party members. Moreover, the nomination of candidates is tightly controlled by the Politburo, though numerous party cadres from all levels are included into the selection process. However, the elections still provide the members of the Party Congress with the option to dismiss the least popular candidates. Whereas the voter turnout is not visible for the full members, a turn out ranking exists for the alternate members. It indicates that members of the elitist faction, especially those descending from wealthy families with political heritage tend to get the lowest number of votes. When Xi Jinping was first elected as an alternate member of the Central Committee at the 15th Party Congress (1997), he received the lowest number of seats among the alternate members. According to the party constitution, “[v]acancies on the Central Committee shall be filled by its alternate members in the order of the number of votes by which they were elected.” (Chapter III, Art. 21) Therefore Xi did not have any chance to fill the position of a full member at any point of his term. Today, however, he is the most likely candidate to succeed Hu Jintao in 2012 as party leader. (Gang 2004: 271f; Lam 2007: 8f; Li 2008b: 6, 8; Li 2009: 7f)

Prior to the multicandidate-election, preliminary elections are held in every delegation to confirm their candidates for both the list of alternate and full membership candidates. These preliminary elections are closely observed by the party leadership:

“If some candidates favored by the top leadership or designated Politburo members received a very low number of votes during the preliminary election in a given delegation, the top

leaders would make an effort to persuade delegates in the delegation to change their minds before the formal election.“ (Li 2008b: 6)

It is yet unclear whether this method will be also plied to determine the members of the Politburo – which is still non-competitively elected by the Central Committee.

7.4.5.4 Elections to Local Party Branches: Villages, Townships and Counties

Direct elections to cadre positions were first tried in the beginning of the 1990s at the village branch level. The introduction of elections to party positions must be regarded as essential since the party branch is officially (and even more important informally) in a stronger position than the corresponding state (or village) organization. However, in comparison to the elections to the village committees, elections of local party positions are less common and the general practice that the upper party organization decides about the members of a village Party Committee is still dominant. In the 1990s, however, some regions started to experiment with a two-ballot electoral system involving both the public and the party members of the corresponding administrative level. In a first step, candidates are recommended by the villagers through secret votes and nominated by the township Party Committee in accordance with the voter turnout. Second, the village party members elect the local village secretary or other local party positions (Gang 2004: 272). This procedure, however, is still only applied to limited cases. As Chen Na, a professor from Fudan University, explains, the selection of local party secretaries is usually decided by both opinions from upper level party institutions and the party members of the village: “Generally speaking it is not a simple process of election or appointment; it is a combination of election votes from the grassroots and opinions from above.” (Chen Na 2011, email-based interview) In such a process candidates are predetermined by the upper level party branches and finally elected by the votes of the village party members.

With the approval of the National Government, some provinces experiment with elections to even higher party branch positions. Between 2002 and 2007, Li Yuanchao, a fifth generation member of the populist faction, initiated multi-candidate elections to several heads of counties or urban districts in Nanjing. This was highly approved by the leaders in Beijing and Li Yuanchao was then promoted to head of the powerful Organization Department of the CCP (Li 2009: 8). The department plays a crucial role concerning promotions within the

nomenklatura system. Whereas in the 1990s many local officials hesitated to try electoral methods at the village level (Li & O'Brien 2000: 17), the promotion of apro-election cadres might have provided more incentives to try democratic methods within the legal framework and party guidelines. In 2008 some heads of municipal bureaus were elected through multi-candidate elections by municipal people's congresses (i.e. indirectly) in Shenzhen (capital of Guangdong Province) (Li 2009: 8).

More recently in June 2011, an election was held to determine the head of the Yangxi County Committee (Guangdong Province). As mentioned earlier, county is one administrative level above the township. The election was comparatively competitive since all party members who fit the requirements of the office (being a county-level official with at least two years government work experience and holding a university degree) were allowed to participate in the election. Out of 21 eligible candidates, six chose to contest for the office. Directly after their final speeches, 136 members voted and the two candidates with the highest amount of votes competed in a final election round for the office. Li Mengzhi, an official of housing and urban-rural development of Yangjian (the prefecture-level city within which Yangxi county is located), at the end won the election and became Secretary of the county committee (China Daily, 19.6.2011).

However, even though such experiments exist, elections to Party Committees still are an exception, especially above the village level. On the other hand, reports about election trials show that the Chinese leadership is seriously considering elections as means to enhance legitimacy, even at higher administrative levels. However, the CCP leadership obviously also fears that a fast spread of such elections might be too difficult to control and that too many trials in many provinces might raise the demand for elections and block the way back. Hence, the CCP limits its trials to a few provinces (especially Guangdong and Jiangsu) and there only to a few cases. However, once such a process has been started it is difficult to reverse it. As village committee elections are established all over the country (note that this is not true for the village party branches), people start to view those elections as their legitimate right and an abolishment would most probably trigger serious protests (cf. the psychological phenomenon of *negativity bias*).

7.5 Intra-Party Democracy and its Relevance for Democratization from a

Transition Theory Perspective

This chapter aims at providing an overview of changes within the CCP described by China's leadership as intra-party democratization. While the official concept of intra-party democracy only includes intentional institutional reforms, I have also dwelled on unintentional developments, such as the emergence of informal factional competition. Both are limited phenomena and the term 'democratization' as used in transition theory does not yet fit the reality of Chinese politics. The Chinese political system is actually still in the stage of 'liberalization'. The question whether China will or will not go the conventional path which transition theory would suggest (namely from liberalization to a Western style democracy), however, is still open. As the Chinese leadership and many Chinese intellectuals argue, China's political development is distinct and will go a deviant way compared to prior transformed countries. China will democratize, but it will not adapt a western model of democracy; instead it will produce a 'democracy with Chinese characteristics'. As I have argued in the document analysis, the unique characteristics seem to be limited to a resilient one-party rule. Bearing in mind that the suppression of political thoughts and organizations is a necessity to preserve a one-party state, such a 'Chinese style democracy' could not be regarded as democratic according to the two main conceptions of democracy (electoral and liberal) presented in chapter 4.1.

However, even though China's democratization lags behind, the reforms discussed above do have a significant impact on the relationship between the people and politics. Means of participation have been enhanced significantly, most notably through the establishment of local elections and more competitive modes of selection at higher levels (e.g. multi-candidate election to the Central Committee). Tenure regulations, though still young, have proved to work well in limiting power of top officials and party leaders. In contrast to other authoritarian regimes, the Chinese system lacks a single group that concentrates power and seeks to delegate positions and power resources among their members. Instead, China has developed a rationalized government system within which political ascendance is based on merit and the political support of a broad base, rather than only a little circle of power-holders.

Such a system of institutional power limitation significantly decreases the incentives to block reforms. As argued earlier, official positions with a clear date of expiry will use fewer

resources to expand their power and spend less energy in preserving a system that serves individuals rather than the public. Strengthened factional competition can further enhance the chances for political democratization, especially if one faction views democratic mechanisms as supportive enhancements of their chances to implement their policies. Even though there seems to exist a broad consent between the factions on implementing political reforms incrementally and slowly, elections seem to favor the members of the populist group rather than the members of the elitist group. This is why the most determined advocates of democratic reform are to be found in the populist faction.

As has been pointed out, however, national unity and economic growth are currently the top priorities both for China's political leadership and in the minds of the vast majority of the people. This is why political reform, though discussed vitally among the elites, is not yet discussed as an end in itself, but rather as supportive to the other two top priorities.

With Xi Jinping ascending to the office of party leader and president in 2012, this course will not be reversed but probably even intensified. Xi, as a princeling and a member of the elitist faction, is primarily interested in deepening China's integration in the world economy and sustaining China's high economic growth rates.

8 Conclusions: Moderate Political Reform as a Source of Regime-Legitimacy and a Foundation for Future Political Change

The goal of my paper was to answer three questions about the Chinese leadership's understanding of democracy and intra-party democracy; the impact of intra-party democracy on party(-state) – society relations and the importance of intra-party democracy for China's future democratization. In my theoretical part, I have argued that modernization theory seems to contribute little to the explanation of China's political transformation. While there is obviously a logic leading from economic transformation to moderate political liberalization, there seems to be no necessary link to democratization (Gill 1996: 71). Therefore, I have turned to an elite centered approach, arguing that democratization depends much more on political actors. Political actors, however, do not decide independently of what is happening in their environment. I have argued that the development in East Asia and Eastern Europe/Central Asia are fundamental for the CCP leaders' decision to continue economic liberalization in the context of only moderate political reform. Learning from the Soviet Union's collapse was therefore not less important than the Tiananmen protests for the decision to slow down and even reverse political reforms at the National Party Congress in 1992. It is also important to note that, even though living standards are rising significantly, Chinese people seem to be quite satisfied with the current political order and view further political reform to be less important than economic growth and national unity. Therefore, China's leadership has no reason to put political democratization at the top of the political agenda. However, despite political reforms in China are moderate, the institutional changes introduced as intra-party democratization are far from insignificant and should be studied well, as my analyses have shown. Below I have summarized my results as answers to the questions I have presented at the very beginning of my thesis:

What is the Chinese leadership's understanding of democracy and intra-party democracy and how does it differ from a Western perspective of democracy?

As I have presented in my document analysis, the Chinese leadership's understanding of democracy is different from a Western perspective of democracy. Even though some high

ranking officials, most prominently Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, openly defend liberal-democratic ideas, a consensus exists that the CCP must preserve its dominant role for a long time ahead. The Chinese leadership, however, also knows that a lack of legitimation endangers its rule and thus has turned to establish institutional mechanisms within the party to address this problem. At the same time, the intra-party reform process is slow and hardly comparable with the intra-party democracies of Western parties, where party democracy is defined by a leadership election system, where a broad base is involved. In China, such elections are perceived to be less important and direct intra-party elections are reduced to the local level. Also indirect elections (via the party congress system) are limited as the selection of candidates is controlled by the CCP's Organization Department. Therefore, it can be concluded that intra-party democracy is not yet compatible with the democracy models used in transition theory. However, China's intra-party institutional reforms still do enhance the leadership's position in society.

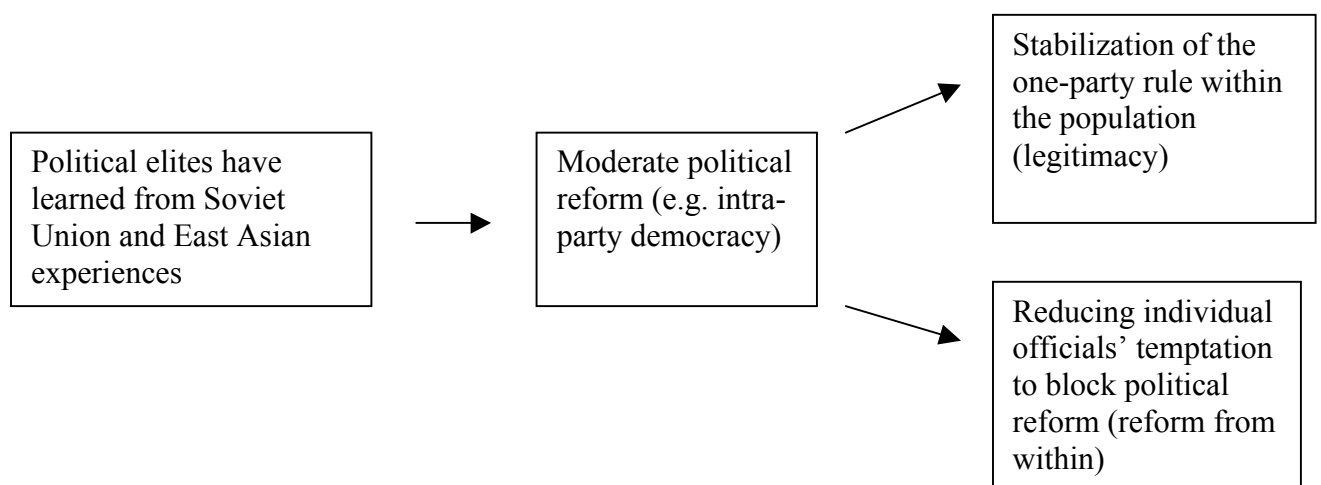
Are measures of intra-party democratization able to significantly improve the relationship between the party(-state) and the society and thus serve as a substantial source of the CCP leadership's legitimacy?

Even though political reform has been slow, the Chinese governance system has been improved significantly in terms of rational-legal legitimation. One of the most important changes is the introduction of a regulated tenure system and retiring requirements, since it has solved one of the most crucial functional problems of Communist systems - the regulation of leadership alternation (Frank & Segert 2007: 141). The prominent (Western) observation of the Chinese leadership to be an exclusive circle of power-holders with no interest in a political opening can hence be hardly approved of. Elections as a means of participation are still very limited but enhance the people's capacity to act as citizens and participate in politics. The most important element enhancing the party-society relation, however, is that intra-party democracy reforms are improving good governance (= benevolent behavior of leaders) by making government and party positions temporary rather than life-long, by supervising whether officials act in accordance with the party-line and the law and by making them accountable to their voters (at least at the local level). Moreover, the inclusion of new societal forces which have emerged from the free market (business forces) and the de facto deviation from the 'democratic dictatorship' ideology has provided the basis for CCP to gain acceptance from all parts of society.

How will measures of intra-party democracy direct and affect China's future political transition?

Intra-party democracy as understood by the CCP leadership can be regarded as a program to preserve rather than abolish the one-party system. Hence, intra-party democracy is not supposed to enhance a development towards a Western style democracy. The Chinese leadership views it as one step in the direction of building a 'democracy with Chinese characteristics'. As said above, such a Chinese democracy would still lack the important element of competition and would necessarily be suppressive to survive. However, despite intra-party reforms aim at preserving the CCP's rule and are not meant to build a Western style democracy, I have argued that they are still highly significant. On the one hand, China's intra-party democratization enhances the legitimacy among the people and thus stabilizes the one-party system (see question two); on the other hand, paradoxically, it also contributes to establishing a context which substantially decreases the temptation of individual officials to use the system for selfish purposes and, though not directly aiming at a national democratization, creates a positive climate for future reforms. Therefore, the Chinese concept of intra-party democracy contributes little to make China a democracy as defined in transition theory. However, the process is still very important for China's future transition since it significantly improves the conditions for democratization.

Including my theoretical considerations, one can derive the following causal diagram from my argumentation:



China's political elites have learned, first, from East Asian countries that market economies are more efficient than their own economic system and, second, from the Soviet Union that too fast and uncontrolled political reform can lead to political chaos (esp. separatism) and socio-economic problems (as experienced especially in Russia, but in fact in all post-transitional countries²¹). Under the influence of such observations, the Chinese leadership has decided to maintain its political control, while at the same time giving people incrementally more rights and introducing moderate mechanisms of participation. Corresponding political reforms, along with constant economic growth and nationalism as intervening variables, have led to a stabilization of the CCP's leadership and provide the party with a significant source of legitimacy. At the same time, however, moderate political reforms, such as the introduction of term limits, local elections, strict supervision and increased accountability have also decreased the temptation of high ranking officials to block further political reforms aiming at more participation. The existence of term limits even for offices such as the General Secretary, the President or the Chairman of the National People's Congress are of special importance in this context.

Considering these two consequences of China's political reforms, it is most likely that the Communist Party will direct China's process of development for quite a long time ahead. Legitimacy through political reform will be critical. As demonstrated by the financial crisis of 2007, economic success can hardly be guaranteed by politics but depends on many other factors which can hardly be influenced by the national government. Also national unity will be challenged in the future, as cleavages such as regional and urban-rural inequalities become intensified and the ethnic question is – though not as critical as it was for the Soviet Union – far from being resolved. Therefore, the Chinese leadership is well advised to continue and intensify its political reform process, in order to successfully diversify its sources of legitimacy. As depicted in my causal model above, the political reforms have significant influence on the leadership's legitimacy and stabilize their dominant position. At the same time, they create a positive political climate for deeper reforms. These reforms will be implemented within the one-party system. In case that the CCP continues to act in the interest of the people (sharing the same priorities with the people) and further improves its governing system, the CCP will be able to play a dominant role, even without being forced to suppress other political organizations. For that purpose, however, the CCP has to change its definition of a 'Chinese democracy' and move away from institutionalized one-party domination. Such

²¹ For a discussion on the socio-economic problem of Central Eastern Europe, see Kornai 2006: 227ff.

a step might pave the way for a ‘democracy with Chinese characteristics’ which also fulfills the requirements of Western definitions of democracy.

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Curriculum Vitae

Persönliche Daten

Name: Raffael Heiss, BA

Geburtsort: Rum, in Tirol (Österreich)

Email: raffael.heiss@gmx.at

Tel.: 0043650/5960336



Schulbildung und Akademischer Werdegang

1993 – 1997 Volksschule Telfes.

1997 – 2001 Hauptschule der Pädagogischen Akademie Innsbruck.

2001 – 2005 Bundesoberstufenrealgymnasium (BORG) Innsbruck. Matura mit gutem Erfolg.

2005 – 2008 Studium der Politikwissenschaft an der Universität Innsbruck. Bis Anfang des Zivildienstes (Juli 2006) paralleles Studium (Lehrfach Gitarre) am Konservatorium Innsbruck. Abschluss des Studiums der Politikwissenschaft erfolgt im Sommersemester 2008 mit dem akademischen Grad „Bachelor of Arts“.

- Seit 2008 Magisterstudium der Kommunikationswissenschaft and der Universität Wien. Besondere Interessen: Politische Kommunikation; Interne und externe Organisationskommunikation; Publikums-, Markt- und Meinungsforschung.
- Seit 2008: Masterstudium Politikwissenschaft an der Universität Wien: Besonderes Interesse: Politische Kommunikation, Governance und Policy Analyse; Transformationsforschung und Demokratisierung.
- Feb. – Juli 2010 Master Exchange Programme for Media and Communication Management (MCM) an der Fudan University (School of Journalism) in Shanghai. Organisiert von der Universität Wien, der Universität Salzburg und der Fudan University in Shanghai.

Praktika und Berufliche Erfahrung

- Feb. – Mai 2006 Praktikum im Rahmen der Ausstellung „Migration in Bildern“ für das „Join In“ Projekt der EU zur Bekämpfung von Diskriminierung am Arbeitsmarkt.
- Arbeitsschwerpunkte: Recherche & Textproduktion, Organisationsassistentz und Produktionsassistentz bei einer Kurzfilmproduktion.
- Juli – März 2006 Ableistung des Zivildienstes beim Roten Kreuz (Innsbruck).

- August 2007 Praktikum bei der SPÖ Tirol im Zuge des Studiums der Politikwissenschaft (keine Parteiaffinität).
- Arbeitsschwerpunkte: Archivarbeiten (Digitalisierung von Ausschussprotokollen) und Mitarbeit an einer Umfrage (Formulierung von Fragen, aktive Befragung und quantitative Datenauswertung).
- Juli 2009 Journalistisches Praktikum in der Redaktion für Innenpolitik der „Tiroler Tageszeitung“ in Wien.
- Aufgabenbereich: Erstellung redaktioneller Texte auf Basis eigenständiger Recherche (Besuch von Pressekonferenzen, Parlamentssitzungen oder Recherche über Nachrichtenagenturen). Die Texte wurden in der Printausgabe der Tiroler Tageszeitung veröffentlicht.
- April – Mai 2010 Mitglied der studentischen Redaktion zum Expo-Blog der Tageszeitung „der Standard“ (online Version) im Rahmen des MCM Programmes.
- Aufgabenbereiche: Koordination und Themenberatung in der Redaktion; Ausarbeitung einer kurzen Reportage für den Standard („Chinas Wille zur Bildung“ - erschienen auf der Hauptseite des Ressorts „Bildung“ auf derstandard.at).
- März – Juli 2011 Leiter des Fachtutoriums „Medien & Demokratie: Leistungen und Defizite Moderner Mediensysteme“ – eine benotete Begleitveranstaltung zur Vorlesung „STEP6 - Medienkunde“ (Teil der Studieneingangsphase des Bachelorprogramms).

Besondere Kenntnisse

Fremdsprachen: Englisch (fließend verbal und in Schrift)

Italienisch (Grundkenntnisse)

Chinesisch (Grundkenntnisse)

EDV: Microsoft Office (Word, Office, Excel); SPSS
(Statistikprogramm)

Führerschein: Klasse B

Hobbys und Interessen

Musik (mehrmaliger Preisträger des Jugendwettbewerbs „Prima la Musica“ für klassische Gitarre), Berge und Wandern, Reisen.

Innsbruck, September 2011

Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Ich erkläre hiermit an Eides Statt, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbständig angefertigt habe. Die aus fremden Quellen direkt oder indirekt übernommenen Gedanken wurden als solche kenntlich gemacht. Diese Arbeit wurde bisher weder in gleicher noch in ähnlicher Form einer anderen Prüfungsbehörde vorgelegt und auch noch nicht veröffentlicht.

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