

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Governing China Under Xi Jinping“

verfasst von / submitted by

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Angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of

Master of Education (MEd)

Wien, 2024 / Vienna, 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 199 510 511 02

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

MA Lehramt Unterrichtsfach
Geographie und wirtschaftliche
Bildung Unterrichtsfach
Geschichte und Politische
Bildung:

Betreut von / Supervisor:

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Acknowledgment

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody whose assistance and guidance enabled this thesis to slowly take form. First, I would like to extend thanks to the Hon. Dr. Kevin Rudd for his clarion position in the complexities of the relationship between Washington and Beijing. I will forever be grateful for his inspirations and perspectives he so succinctly laid out in his book *The Avoidable War*; may the conflict remain an avoidable one.

My sincerest thanks extend to Prof. Dr. Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik for her patience, input, and guidance throughout the research and writing process. I remain indebted to her masterful insights not only concerning the topics and themes of this thesis, but also concerning the complexities of Beijing politics and PRC history.

My thanks also extend to my mother who was gracious enough to wade through the initial draft. Additionally my thanks extend to Mag. Chris Zimmerman for his edits and critiques, which pushed this thesis beyond what I could imagine.

Most importantly I would like to thank my dearest wife whose input and encouragement helped me to continue my research despite the extraordinary personal events which occurred in our lives. This thesis is also written in dedication to my lovely daughter in full hope that she will grow up in a world in which men and women seek to understand each other better so as refute the inevitability of war. Dialog trumps force.

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Introduction

The Romans, therefore, foreseeing evils while they were yet far off, always provided against them, and never suffered them to take their course for the sake of avoiding war; since they knew that war is not to be avoided, but is only postponed to the advantage of the other side. – Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*¹

1. Situation and Problem

Across the centuries, pundits have contended with the apparent inevitability of path dependency, naming the fates as history's ultimate judge, and time its executioner. However, I contest Machiavelli's understanding of war's necessity, since it absolves us of duty and tempts us to become victims of its supposed capriciousness. As tensions mount today, enveloping the world in a supposed new Cold War,² the question of path dependency and historical determinism as they relate to the possibility of war between China and the USA, ought to spur lawmakers and analysts: not into an acquiescent position, but into one of action. War becomes inevitable only with the adoption of a historical deterministic assumption of its path dependency.

As headlines fuel obsession with China's growing economic and military power and increased global strategic influence, the metaphor of a new Cold War is only applicable if we learn from the previous one. Both Washington and Beijing maintain goals that fundamentally oppose the other, generating compounding points of conflict. Consequently, it is incumbent on both Washington and Beijing (as on Washington and Moscow in the 1960s) to improve communication and to demonstrate a willingness to abide by established rules.³ However, these developments will only materialize when each side commits to seeking a better understanding of the other.

This thesis seeks to build a theoretical model, not only in order to enable a more comprehensive understanding of political legitimacy in China, but also in order to identify the forces that shape and drive governance and policy in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Translated by Thomson and Ninian Hill, (Harvard Classics. vol. 36. New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910), 11.

² Michael Hirsh, "We Are Now in a Global Cold War," *Foreign Policy*, (2022).
See also Evan Osnos, "Sliding Toward a New Cold War," *The New Yorker*, (2023).

³ Osnos, "Sliding Toward a New Cold War."

2. Primary Interest

My initial interest in China grew out of the propagation of conflict between China and my home country, the USA, going back to the trade wars of 2018 under President Trump. My initial impulse was to wonder how they developed, and then why. These two questions guided my interest into the field of geopolitics and into a history of misunderstandings and ignorance between the two superpowers. To my chagrin, a lack of interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the other side has long been the rule in my home country, the United States. As the China scholar and former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd commented:

This [the linguistic, cultural, and philosophical divide] leads to the most basic American perception of China of all – namely, a profound sense of difference, mystery, and confusion about what China is about, what it is becoming, and what this may mean for American interests, values, and the future of US global leadership.⁴

This thesis seeks to provide a framework to counteract the pervasive ignorance, rooted in assumptions of Chinese dangers – assumptions based not on Chinese policies in and of themselves, but on American ideological projections on the PRC. Rudd has provided valuable guidance, observations, and perspectives built over years of analysis and engagement with China, both politically and personally; his 2022 book *The Avoidable War* largely forms the analytical underpinnings of my model. Although Rudd squarely honors the liberal traditions of the West, he does assume a valuable middle position – offering a clarion perspective of Washington and Beijing and the nuanced dynamics of the superpowers' relationship.⁵

3. Hypothesis

Secondary literature, studies, and analysis by many sinologists covering political legitimacy and governance in the PRC abound and have provided this thesis, by way of example, with valuable perspectives. Three scholars who ought to be mentioned here include Jinghan Zeng, a professor of China and international studies at Lancaster University and author of “The Chinese Communist Party’s Capacity to Rule: Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion,” as well as Heike Holbig professor at the Goethe University of Frankfurt and Bruce Gilley, professor at Portland State University who have written multiple papers on legitimacy within China and on the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) capacity to retain legitimacy.⁶ In their 2010 paper, which

⁴ Kevin Rudd, *The Avoidable War: The Dangers of a Catastrophic Conflict Between the US and Xi Jinping's China*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2022,) 5.

⁵ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 2-4.

⁶ See Bruce Gilley and Heike Holbig, “The Debate on Party Legitimacy in China: A Mixed Quantitative/qualitative Analysis,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 18, no. 59, (2009), 339–58.

focuses on the CCP's attempts to retain legitimacy, they find that while most scholars argue that the longevity of legitimacy for the CCP is linked with economic growth and national sovereignty, ideology and governance (including the CCP's ability to direct international discourse) constitute equally important sources of legitimacy.⁷ In his book *China's Leaders from Mao to Now*, the renowned sinologist and political scientist David Shambaugh focusses on the personality and governance styles of all major Chinese leaders. Other Sinologists such as Professor Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, Professor Daniel Leese, and historian Geremie Barmé examine Xi's political moves in light of PRC history.⁸ The political scientist Minxin Pei, a specialist on governance in China, argues that the PRC under Xi is returning to a totalitarian style of governance in response to decades of "reform and opening".⁹

Despite the growing wealth of literature, many of these scholars' conclusions remain disparate and provide only partial explanations for the interplay of forces that have made the PRC what it is, and what it may become. More specifically, the literature at hand does not offer a model that explains the relationship between the search for political legitimacy, sources of that legitimacy, and the variance in governance styles among Chinese leaders.

In his 2017 speech to the 19th Party Congress, General Secretary of the CCP, Xi Jinping, iterated a powerful narrative: "The Chinese nation, which since modern times began had endured so much for so long, has achieved a tremendous transformation: it has stood up, grown rich, and is becoming strong."¹⁰ This narrative finds wider resonance in the understanding that China under Chairman Mao Zedong stood up, under the Paramount Leader Deng Xiaoping got rich, and under Xi Jinping has become strong.¹¹ Interestingly, the narrative seems to understand the implicit relationships between political legitimacy, political success, and styles of governance. However, is there a model which can explain the complex but seemingly inherent relationships

Heike Holbig, "Ideology After the End of Ideology: China and the Quest for Autocratic Legitimation," *Democratization* 20, no. 1, (2013), 61–81.

Heike Holbig and Bruce Gilley, "Reclaiming Legitimacy in China," *Politics & Policy* 38, no. 3, (2010), 395–422.

⁷ Holbig, "Reclaiming Legitimacy in China".

⁸ See Chris Buckley, "Xi Jinping Is Rewriting China's History," *The New York Times*, 2021.

⁹ See Minxin Pei, "China: From Tiananmen to Neo-Stalinism." *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 1, (2020), 148–57.

¹⁰ Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Beijing, 2017, 9.

¹¹ David Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, (Cambridge, Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2021), 258.

between the imperatives of political legitimacy, the utilized sources of legitimacy through PRC history, and the variants in the styles of governance adopted by Chinese communist leaders? The answers to this question forms the focal point of this thesis and leads to the central hypothesis.

The intrinsic imperative placed on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for **political legitimacy** inevitably leads to preferences in the utilization of **political legitimacy mechanisms**, which largely dictate **styles of governance**.

4. Research Queries

A. Theoretical Queries

- *What is the imperative of political legitimacy placed on every Chinese communist leader?*

The second chapter will address this research query as it explores political legitimacy and the quest for it in the Chinese communist context.

- *How close is a style of governance tied to the quest for political legitimacy?*

The third chapter will focus on this research query as it introduces a model, which explores the relationship between governance styles and the three main sources of political legitimacy in the PRC.

B. Empirical Query

- *Which primary legitimacy mechanisms has Xi utilized to maintain political legitimacy, and what does this say about his style of governance?*

The final chapter analyzes three pivotal speeches delivered by Xi, which effectively function as policy establishment and policy positioning. The analysis of these speeches explores Xi's propensities in using the three sources of political legitimacy.

5. Response

The starting point of this master's thesis is the concept of political legitimacy and the role it continues to play inside the CCP, including its function in effecting good governance. The first and second chapters will therefore focus on the theoretical and definitional discussion of the term and its implementation in the PRC. Central to this thesis is an explanatory model that seeks to analyze political legitimacy as it stands as a constant throughout CCP history particularly as it relates to variants in governance styles of Chinese leaders. The third chapter will introduce this model and focus on understanding its various facets and levels, as well as the dynamic relationship among the model's elements. While the third chapter explicates and analyzes the complexity of relationships found on the model's different planes, the fourth chapter draws on primary sources to ascertain how and where Xi positions himself on the model. In this final chapter, this thesis will test the model by applying it to the leadership of Xi. This thesis asserts

that the model may provide a useful starting point to approach a more nuanced understanding of Chinese governance, and could provide further considerations in understanding governance under Xi; including his future policy propensities.

Because the dynamic relationship between political legitimacy and style of governance remains unpredictable, the analysis in the final fourth chapter will be multi-layered, adopting an inductive category assignment, which also include two levels of abstraction to increase the validity of the analysis. The starting point of the analysis will be *tifa* or watchwords repeatedly used by Xi Jinping in his speeches denoting his policy positioning.¹² The use of *tifa* in conveying political messages loaded with multiple layers of meaning demonstrates Xi's policy propensities over time since the slogans are set and used over time.¹³ For the creation of codes (the *tifa*) and broader categories, the content analysis relies on the expertise of sinologists well-versed in Mandarin Chinese, Chinese politics, and the use of language in politics. The basis of the analysis will be primary documents; in specific, three policy speeches of Xi delivered to the Party Congresses in 2013, 2017, and 2022. Thus, trends in his policy positioning may be identified to better demonstrate Xi's propensities in securing political legitimacy, as predicated on his use of the three main sources of legitimacy.

Chapter 1: Political Legitimacy Theory

From *The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America*:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. – That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, – That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer,

¹² Joseph James Alvaro, "Political Discourse in China's English Language Press," *World Englishes* 32, no. 2 (2013): 147–68, 149.

¹³ Alvaro, "Political Discourse in China's English Language Press," 150.

while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.¹⁴

1. Political Legitimacy

The question of political legitimacy is linked inextricably and persistently with the rise and fall of civilizations and power centers throughout human history. It endures both as a constant and as a point of contention through the establishment phases of human governance and weaves itself into the very fabric of the human narrative as both a motor and an inviolable consequence of man's pursuit for power and authority. Because of the intrinsic relationship between authority and political legitimacy, humans have long questioned and analyzed its almost magical attraction. However, this aspect does not overshadow its universal imperative as it compels each instance of authority, regardless of time and place, to reckon with its onus in sustaining and maintaining power.¹⁵ As the British social theorist David Beetham, Professor of Politics at the University of Leeds, notes:

Power, in other words, is a highly problematical, as well as recurrent feature of human societies. And because it is so problematical, societies will seek to subject it to justifiable rules, and the powerful themselves will seek to secure consent to their power from at least the most important among their subordinates. Where power is acquired and exercised according to justifiable rules, and with evidence of consent, we call it rightful or legitimate.¹⁶

Power is highly dynamic: as rulers seek to widen the parameters of their power, citizens continually seek to constrain them.¹⁷ This field of tension places those in authority in a precarious situation, reminding them that coercive power does not justify and wholly maintain the power instance's legitimacy. On the contrary, as Beetham notes, legitimacy rests "where power is acquired and exercised according to justifiable rules, and with evidence of consent...."¹⁸ Thus, every instance of authority requires some level of acceptance of its legitimacy by its subordinates. In this regard, a sovereign's power is most effective when it is

¹⁴ Adams Richard et al, "Declaration of Independence (1776)," Bill of Rights Institute, (2024).

¹⁵ Thomas H. Rigby and Ferenc Feher, *Political Legitimation in Communist States*, (St Antony's Ser. London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 1982), 2.

See also Fatos Tarifa, "The Quest for Legitimacy and the Withering Away of Utopia," 437–73. The social scientist, Fatos Tarifa, also strongly argues for the omnipresence of political legitimacy's imperative throughout time and place, regardless of political system. Tarifa, "The Quest for Legitimacy and the Withering Away of Utopia". 443.

¹⁶ David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, Issues in political theory. (Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press International, 1991), 3.

¹⁷ See Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 66-68.

¹⁸ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 3.

commensurate with the legitimacy the sovereign is granted by the people over whom he or she holds authority.¹⁹ Political legitimacy is never a zero sum game, but much rather runs along a spectrum of degrees. The question posed to those attempting to understand the dynamic forces of political legitimacy is the degree to which an instance of authority can demand and maintain effective sovereignty.

The absence of legitimacy is evident by virtue of the dire consequences of such a state: revolution, coups-de-tat, anarchy, or the emergence of a dictatorship, to name just a few. Beetham argues that the longer its absence, the more likely that incentives or tools of oppression will be implemented to ensure obedience. At the same time, coercive measures are both costly and inefficient, and result in forms of governance with a lower level of authoritative efficacy; at times even restraining the instance of authority from attaining its goals.²⁰ Thus, the constant necessity of political legitimacy remains throughout time fundamental. David Beetham argues:

These examples of the loss of moral authority... indicate that legitimacy is significant not only for the maintenance of order, but also for the degree of cooperation and quality of performance that the powerful can secure from the subordinate; it is important not only for whether they remain 'in power', but for what their power can be used to achieve.²¹

Beetham echoes Rousseau's argument laid out in *The Social Contract*. Rousseau writes:

The strongest man is never strong enough to be always master, unless he transforms his power into right, and obedience into duty. Hence the right of the strongest – a right apparently assumed in irony, and really established in principle. But will this phrase never be explained to us? Force is a physical power; I do not see what morality can result from its effects. To yield to force is an act of necessity, not of will; it is at most an act of prudence. In what sense can it be a duty?²²

Coercion may take the form of compulsion only to the extent that those in authority are able to wield it uniformly and continuously over the subordinates. However, repressive states often espouse major vulnerabilities. The Political Scientist Minxin Pei describes endemic corruption, predatory state policies, and economic privileges of political elites as characteristics of crony capitalism, compounding weaknesses that corrode the state's resilience and legitimacy.²³ Other

¹⁹ For further discussion on legitimacy outside the scope of a coercive state, see Tarifa, "The Quest for Legitimacy and the Withering Away of Utopia," 439-441 & 447.

²⁰ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 16, 20 & 28. c

²¹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 29.

²² Jean-Jaques Rousseau, and Tom Griffith, *The Social Contract*, Classics of World Literature. (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2013), Chapter 3.

²³ Minxin Pei, *China's Crony Capitalism: The Dynamics of Regime Decay*, (Cambridge, MA:

sociologists and philosophers assert similar arguments that power and violence do not engender longevity. Regardless of their physical coercive power, authority and the right to rule must be accepted.²⁴

The correlation between political legitimacy and the extent of power is universal and constant. To the degree that legitimacy delivers authority, stability, and efficiency, a sovereign will naturally demonstrate a desire to attain and maintain it.²⁵ As Beetham asserts:

The spectacular collapse witnessed over the past two decades of regimes whose control over a powerful military and administrative apparatus looked secure – in Greece (1974), Portugal (1974), Spain (1976), Iran 1979), Argentina (1982), the Philippines (1986) – demonstrates the importance of legitimacy to the effectiveness and continuity of a system of rule.²⁶

As the Declaration of Independence quoted at the beginning of this chapter succinctly suggests, legitimacy derives its validity from the consent of the governed, in whose hands lies the right to grant or withhold it. Similarly, American sociologist Seymour Lipset defines a legitimate government as one which “is generally accepted by its citizens,”²⁷ and legal professor Jean-Marc Coicaud defines legitimacy as being “the recognition of the right to govern.”²⁸ Through this understanding and with the acknowledgment of its universal imperative, political legitimacy is directly contingent on the relationship held by the two main players: the sovereign and the citizenry, or at least with those of the citizenry Beetham describes as “most important among their subordinates.”²⁹ This dynamic relationship lies at the very heart of political legitimacy and reflects the utter dependency of the sovereign on his subordinates. In his book *Legitimacy and Politics* Coicaud argues that “consent intervenes at the foundation of legitimacy

Harvard University Press, 2016), 261, 264-268.

²⁴ See Tarifa, “The Quest for Legitimacy and the Withering Away of Utopia,” 447.

²⁵ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 29.

²⁶ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 119.

²⁷ Quoted in Tarifa, “The Quest for Legitimacy and the Withering Away of Utopia,” 439. Note that while legitimacy discussions largely relate to democratic governments, Tarifa applies the same definitions to communist governments, arguing for the universality of said understandings of legitimacy as being applicable to non-democratic governments. see Tarifa, “The Quest for Legitimacy and the Withering Away of Utopia,” 440. To the extent that legitimacy is correlated to the degree of trust held by the citizenry in their government, legitimacy is not only universal, but also measurable. The third chapter begins with a discussion about trust the Chinese hold in their government, once again equating high trust with a high level of legitimacy.

²⁸ Jean-Marc Coicaud and David Ames Curtis, *Legitimacy and politics: A contribution to the study of political right and political responsibility*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10.

²⁹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 3.

because it lies at the base of the relationship that is constitutive of right in general and political right in particular.”³⁰ Furthermore, the concept of consent tears apart the assumption of a self-contained government impervious to influences by those it governs. On the contrary, the interests and demands of constituents influence governments. Failure to acknowledge the interests of the subordinates results in destabilization, causing a potential regime and system collapse; this is especially so in cases where too much is laid on the citizenry, who, as a result, are likely to rescind their consent. Beetham writes:

However much the institutions of the state may appear to be independent and self-contained, therefore, their operation, as with all systems of power, involves an interactive process between the dominant and the subordinate, in which the responses of the latter exert their own effects upon the character and effectiveness of rule.³¹

From this relationship, two central tenets of political legitimacy theory emerge.³² The first is the interplay between norms and laws and their justifiability. This is the creation of a legal edifice establishing the validity of those norms, establishing the parameters of a given society, and establishing the sovereign’s instance of authority. The second is the consent of authority granted by subordinates to specific individuals holding political power. This second tenet is largely subjective, relational and context dependent, since it relies on a relational construct between the sovereign and those he governs. The social scientist, Fatos Tarifa explains, “It [legitimacy] contains both an *objective* and a *subjective* connotation while relating to principles, means, as well as outcome of the use of power.”³³ Both tenets appreciate a different premise and, as we will see later, are contingent on two different traditions. These two tenets, the normative and the relational, will provide a heuristic lens through which this thesis views political legitimacy.³⁴

The first premise exhibits a normative character – one that proves universal and places the onus on the state to uphold and abide by valid structures by means of its vested authority. Coicaud asserts that these structures are based on normative values, enabling them not only to assume a normative character, but also to render normative authority to the right to govern.³⁵ These

³⁰ Coicaud, *Legitimacy and politics*, 14.

³¹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 119.

³² Baogang Guo, *China's Quest for Political Legitimacy: The New Equity-Enhancing Politics, Challenges facing Chinese political development*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 6.

³³ “The Quest for Legitimacy and the Withering Away of Utopia,” *Social Forces* 76, no. 2 (1997), 437–73, 439.

³⁴ Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 4-6.

³⁵ See Coicaud, *Legitimacy and politics*, 16-17. Coicaud relies on the idea of common values, which create a common identity for a given society. This identity stems from the

structures may take varying formal and informal forms, from codified laws and constitutions to traditional conventions, customs, and loose institutions.³⁶ They allow for the smooth functioning of society. They coordinate and maintain reciprocal relationships between individuals in power and their subordinates. They not only guarantee the normative legal instance of authority, but also guard the rights of subordinates to grant or deny their consent to be ruled.³⁷ Coicaud explains, “In this regard, the sovereign does not found the law but holds his authority on its basis.”³⁸ This normative function presupposes conformity to the laws by those in governance just as they preserve the normative character of common values projected into the law.³⁹

Just as the first condition proves integral to political legitimacy, so does the second. The second moves out of the normative sphere of values, laws, norms, and protected rights into the subjective relational dynamic of trust in the sovereign.⁴⁰ Furthermore, it establishes the realization of the reciprocal relationship between sovereign and citizenry through the discussion around the subordinates’ belief in the political system and in their trust in the sovereign. Although this power relationship assumes a hierarchical structure, strength is commensurate to the strength of the implementation and preservation of its reciprocal function. Not only must

institutionalization of values, as described by Talcott Parson in his concept of action systems. It is on the basis of these values that institutions are formed to preserve the values, and hence the collective identity, of the community. Coicaud argues that these values do in fact hold a normative function for society, and that their legitimacy rests on this.

³⁶ Coicaud, *Legitimacy and politics*, 18. Here Coicaud lays out his arguments most comprehensively: “Let us put this idea in other terms: the function of legitimacy is to respond to the need for social integration proper to the identity of a society. One has to show how and why existing or recommended institutions have the capacity to organize political power in such a way that the constitutive values of social identity actually do structure reality. To attain this objective of legitimacy presupposes, obviously, a successful empirical outcome: the concrete reality of life within the community has to correspond, in credible proportions, to the stated founding principles. However, this objective does not obtain independent of the justificatory force norms harbor within themselves. With political institutions standing as guarantors against all social disintegration by taking measures that are obligatory in character, the corollary of the exercise of power is the imperative to maintain society in its determinate identity. Here we have a criterion that allows us to appraise the legitimacy of political power.”

³⁷ Coicaud, *Legitimacy and politics*, 12.

³⁸ Coicaud, *Legitimacy and politics*, 19.

³⁹ Coicaud, *Legitimacy and politics*, 18.

⁴⁰ Tarifa, “The Quest for Legitimacy and the Withering Away of Utopia,” 439.

subordinates extend consent of authority, but those who govern must fulfill their duties of governance as well.⁴¹

Because legitimate rule does not directly and exclusively rest on tools of persuasion, but rather on the acceptance of the sovereign by the populace, consent originates from the people and is extended to the authority. Still, consent is not solely a positive act on the side of the governed, because it remains one of repudiation and surrender of personal agency to political institutions.⁴² Again, the legal theorist, Coicaud, provides a basic argument:

To the extent that those who govern respect the rights of the members of the community, and discharge their specific duties, individuals consent to renounce some of their capacities for action and turn them over to political institutions. In other words, they recognize in the latter the right to govern. The identification of power with right endures so long as consent exists. If consent be withdrawn, that is the sign of a lack of political legitimacy.⁴³

Especially in the case of non-democratic societies, the legitimacy gained by virtue of the consent granted to a sovereign may originate in a persuasive stance assumed by the government. The state utilizes a plethora of instruments and methods to convince the people of this. For instance, a communist system's claim to rule is woven together with ideology and the real threat of coercive persuasion. Persuasion is subjective and may be manipulated by ideology in concert with centralized manipulative coercive actions. Thus, communist leaders may provide sufficient grounds of persuasion on which the populace may put their trust in the centralized government. Evidence of this is found in the unspoken social contract of the CCP in which the populace grants the CCP political control in exchange for economic prosperity.⁴⁴

Thus, the degree to which a society functions strongly correlates to the degree of political legitimacy the instance of authority enjoys. Political legitimacy's universal appeal and demand creates a consequential imperative on all governments to uphold two tenets, the normative and the relational. Thus, governments are instituted among people as they wield authority, not only on the basis of codified rules and their justification, but also dependent on the relational consent of the governed.

⁴¹ See Edwin Amenta, Kate Nash, and Alan Scott, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, (Wiley, 2012), 122. See also Locke's understanding of the social contract in Alex Tuckness, "Locke's Political Philosophy," 2005.

⁴² Coicaud, *Legitimacy and politics*, 14.

⁴³ Coicaud, *Legitimacy and politics*, 14.

⁴⁴ Kevin Rudd, "The World According to Xi Jinping: What China's Ideologue in Chief Really Believes," *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, (October 10, 2022), 310.

2. Historical Development of Political Legitimacy Theory

The universality of political legitimacy is generally apparent in its consistent appearance in every age of human history, and more specifically in the political thinking of intellectuals down through the ages, as they have sought to domesticate its capriciousness and find a recipe for its successful utilization.⁴⁵ What emerges are three broad lines of argument that explore the dimensions and origins of political legitimacy. Beetham identifies these as moral justifiability, legal validity, and belief in legitimacy.⁴⁶ The three lines largely correlate to three thought disciplines: political philosophy, legal theory, and social sciences. In addition, each line of argument correlates to one of the two tenets of political legitimacy, creating two specific academic traditions that largely follow the normative tenet or the relational tenet, based on an empirical approach. Philosophers seek to understand political legitimacy under the rubric of moral justifiability, the establishment of norms, and in structures that enable a sovereign's validity. Thus, they approach the field of study with a normative understanding of political legitimacy. Similarly, legal experts seek to understand political legitimacy normatively; that is, not as a question of moral justifiability, but as a consequence of legal validity. By contrast, political legitimacy in the social sciences largely focusses on "the empirical consequences"⁴⁷ that legitimacy maintains for the particular instance of power. The social scientist places his interest in the consequences that political legitimacy has for power relations and conditions of support for those in power in a particular historical context. Because social science's role is one of explaining these consequences, the historical and political contexts play a bigger role in its approach and analysis.⁴⁸

It is vital to understand the sinuous path that political legitimacy theory has taken over the centuries. The following pages will briefly discuss the historical development of political legitimacy theory pursuant not only with the two central tenets of political legitimacy, but also correlating with the specific thought disciplines. This chapter will not attempt an extensive

⁴⁵ See Rigby, *Political Legitimation in Communist States*, 2-3. See also Tarifa, "The Quest for Legitimacy and the Withering Away of Utopia," 443.

⁴⁶ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 4-6. Beetham identified and categorized political legitimacy theory as stemming from three main disciplines: legal theory, political philosophy, and social science. This categorization is helpful both in its simplicity and in its breadth of exploring the long history of the field. Because the focal point of this thesis is not the unraveling and analyzing of political theories, Beetham's succinct categorization of political legitimacy is quite helpful in gaining a better understanding concerning the scope of political legitimacy theory.

⁴⁷ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 5.

⁴⁸ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 5-6 & 14.

theoretical analysis, but will rather establish the framework for a more nuanced theoretical discussion around political legitimacy in the context of communism generally and the PRC in particular. Due to the complexity and ambiguous nature of the concept, contiguous with fundamental differences in the theoretical traditions, it is necessary to secure a broad comprehension of the theory at hand so as to allow for a more nuanced understanding of the empirical approach this thesis assumes in its analysis.

2.1 Normative Tradition

The normative tradition concerns itself with the creation of structures of validity, or structures based on values, norms, or legal codes. Central arguments are informed by the philosophical and legal tradition and queries surrounding the justifiable imperative of subordination to these structures. Not surprisingly, this tradition is older than the relational tradition, and includes among its exponents such thinkers as Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, Hegel and others who attempted to identify universal norms that legitimize power.⁴⁹ David Beetham clarifies:

For the moral and political philosopher, power is legitimate where the rules governing it are justifiable according to rationally defensible normative principles. And as with any moral principles, these embody a universalizing claim; it is not the principles that happen to pertain in a given society that are sufficient, but those that any rational person, upon considered and unbiased reflection, would have to agree to.⁵⁰

Fundamental queries pertaining to the formation and justification of society's underlying structures began early in the philosophical tradition, as thinkers attempted to formulate the necessity for societal formation. What emerged was the concept of a social contract, later most clearly explicated by Rousseau in his *Social Contract*. The concept became analogous with the understanding of how a state can claim and maintain its legitimate authority.⁵¹ Additionally, legal theorists understood themselves as recipients and as coworkers in the normative tradition. Due to the diverse landscape of legal theorists and their corresponding legitimacy theories, this section will focus on the basic arguments that are fundamental to understanding the normative tradition.

In his *Republic*, Plato examines the beginnings of a society and the inception of a state through the character of Socrates. It is in the arguments produced by Socrates that Plato makes his strongest claim for the formation of society and the following function of the state. Socrates

⁴⁹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 8.

⁵⁰ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 5.

⁵¹ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 7. See also Tuckness, *Locke's Political Philosophy*, which propounds the concept of natural law as an antecedent to the formation of a state.

argues to Plato's older brother Adeimantus that a nascent state is born of man's inability of self-sufficiency and the struggle for survival.

"Society originates, then," said I, "so far as I can see, because the individual is not self-sufficient, but has many needs which he can't supply himself. Or can you suggest any other origin for it?"

"No I can't," he said.⁵²

Through their inability to provide for all their needs, people enter into a contract with one another in which expertise is exchanged for survival. The contract is reciprocal and mutual in that both sides find justification for the contract in the outcome produced by the contract: survival. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau similarly argues, "The engagements which bind us to the social body are obligatory only because they are mutual; and their nature is such that in fulfilling them we cannot work for others without also working for ourselves."⁵³ The contracts upheld within this closed circle forms a nascent society in which survival is secured. Plato, for his part, explains the formation of the state through the amalgamation of contracts binding a composite number of citizens together. He writes:

"And when we have got hold of enough people to satisfy our many varied needs, we have assembled quite a large number of partners and helpers together to live in one place; and we give the resultant settlement the name of a community or state?"

"Yes, I agree."⁵⁴

These basic building blocks of society form, for the political philosopher, the basis of a state, which, like citizens within the polis, is also formed through a contract. Similar to the understanding of mutual contracts made between citizens to ensure survival, the state must also enter into a contract with its citizens. Rousseau argues that this relationship is not necessarily patriarchal but in fact intrinsically reciprocal in function. He writes:

We see from this formula that the act of association contains a reciprocal engagement between the public and individuals, and that every individual, contracting so to speak with himself, is engaged in a double relation, viz. as a member of the sovereign towards individuals, and as a member of the state towards the sovereign.⁵⁵

⁵² Plato, H. D. P. Lee, and M. S. Lane, *The Republic*, Second edition (revised) / with a new introduction by Melissa Lane. (London: Penguin, 2007), 55-56.

⁵³ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 31.

⁵⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, 55-56.

⁵⁵ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 23.

In every contract, there are at least two parties. In order for the contract to be secured, each party must extend and uphold its side of the contract. In *The Republic* Plato suggests what the state offers in the contract. He asserts, “Strictly speaking, then, it is for them that we should reserve the term Guardian in its fullest sense, their function being to see that friends at home shall not wish, nor foes abroad be able, to harm our state.”⁵⁶ Here Plato touches on the central tenets of the state’s contract: to offer, secure, and maintain peace and security. Similarly, Thomas Hobbes in *The Leviathan* points to security as the appeal for the formation of family groups and demonstrates the necessity of security as man emerges from a natural state of competition and war.⁵⁷ He contends, that the result of these contracts is the “COMMON-WEALTH, in latine CIVITAS. This is the Generation for the great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that *Mortall God*, to which wee owe under the *Immortall God*, our peace and defence [sic].”⁵⁸

Hobbes not only identifies what the state offers, but also understands the consequences the contract carries for the citizenry. He argues that in exchange for peace and security, the citizenry must themselves offer something to the state. This, Hobbes contends, is the abdication of the civilian’s rights, which simultaneously represents the yielding of power, authority, and legitimacy to the sovereign. Hobbes points to the search for peace and security as the *raison d’etre* for this, because it is this search that leads citizens to revoke their own personal rights and concomitantly to bolster the state’s legitimate authority.⁵⁹ He writes:

The only way to erect such a Common Power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of Forraigner, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort, as that by their owne industrie, and by the fruites of the Earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly; is, to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will: which is as much as to say, to appoint one man, or Assembly of men, to beare their Person; and every one to owne, and acknowledge himselfe to be Author of whatsoever he that so beareth their Person, shall Act or cause to be Acted, in those things which concerne the Common Peace and Safetie....[sic]⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, 115.

⁵⁷ Thomas Hobbes, G. A. J. Rogers, and Karl Schuhmann, eds. *Leviathan*, A critical edition. Continuum classic texts. (London, New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), 94.

⁵⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 96.

⁵⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 74.

⁶⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 96.

Hobbes understands the transferring of these rights in the Platonic concept of contractual outcomes.⁶¹ The reduction and concentration of the will of the assembly to the representative position of one person relates unequivocally to the intrinsic dependency inherent in the power relationship. The assembly must decide to rescind its individual rights for the sake of peace and security for itself and the greater common good. Rousseau shares a similar understanding as he attempts to disentangle the freedom of repudiation from survival mechanisms inherent in the formation of the social contract. He writes:

These distinctions once admitted, so untrue is it that in the social contract there is on the part of individuals any real renunciation, that their situation, as a result of this contract, is in reality preferable to what it was before, and that, instead of an alienation, they have only made an advantageous exchange of an uncertain and precarious mode of existence for a better and more assured one.... Their lives, also, which they have devoted to the state, are continually protected by it; and in exposing their lives for its defense, what do they do but restore what they have received from it?... Do we not gain, moreover, by incurring, for what ensures our safety, a part of the risks that we should have to incur for ourselves individually, as soon as we were deprived of it?⁶²

The governed confer power to the authority over them and thus secure the authority's legitimacy. To recall Beetham, legitimacy therefore largely concerns not only the ability to maintain power, but also the “*degree of cooperation and quality of performance.*”⁶³

Consequently, the legitimacy of the sovereign pursuant to the normative tradition is predicated on or is a derivative of the contractual relationship between sovereign and society.⁶⁴ The dependency of the sovereign to his subordinates is reflected in Rousseau's much touted quote and opening lines of *The Social Contract* in which he notes the bonded nature of the sovereign. Rousseau writes, “Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains. Many a one believes himself the master of others, and yet he is a greater slave than they.”⁶⁵ Later Rousseau explains more fully the implications of the contract between sovereign and citizens.

⁶¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 74.

⁶² Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 32.

⁶³ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 28.

⁶⁴ Hobbes clearly outlines the argument that the rights of the sovereign - i.e. the privileges of his sovereignty - derive directly from this contractual agreement. Firstly the covenant is agreed upon by everyone. Secondly, the commonwealth grants “all the Rights, and Facultyes of him, or them, on whom the Sovereigne Power is conferred by the consent of the People assembled.” Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 97. This understanding reflects the utter dependency of the sovereign in his relationship to the members of civil society; cf. the later works on political legitimacy of Beetham and Coicaud, as referred to at the beginning of this chapter.

⁶⁵ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 15.

What, then, is an act of sovereignty properly so called? It is not an agreement between a superior and an inferior, but an agreement of the body with each of its members; a lawful agreement, because it has the social contract as its foundation; equitable, because it is common to all; useful, because it can have no other object than the general welfare; and stable, because it has the public force and the supreme power as a guarantee.⁶⁶

This same sentiment concerning the outcome of the social contract is found in the Declaration of Independence, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Thomas Jefferson, influenced by other Enlightenment thinkers, explicitly delineates the extent to which this concept forms the basis of a functioning society. In his own words:

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.⁶⁷

Although the earliest conceptualization of the social contract propagates the inception of political legitimacy in accordance with the normative tradition, its codification and justification is found in the law and other formalized canons of statutory weight. Fused to legal theory, political legitimacy theory finds its full maturation as a normative concept. Here the sovereign over multiple generations finds the source of his codified existence. Outlining the normative structure of legitimacy, Beetham maintains:

So too, the rules which determine who shall come to acquire the power of property, position or function, and by what means, confer the right to its exercise and the corresponding duty to acknowledge and respect it on the part of others. In a rule-governed social order we cannot separate power from legitimacy, since both occur simultaneously; in acquiring power according to the rules a person also acquires the right to exercise it.⁶⁸

Codified rules offer an unambiguous road map for the functioning of society and for the acquisition of an authoritative position. Although previously this may have been convention, the existence of a legal structure not only increases the longevity of social structures but also confers a structural legitimacy to the prerogative of the sovereign's authority. The citizenry, who recognize the authority of the legal structure, thus confers legitimacy.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 32.

⁶⁷ Richard, "Declaration of Independence (1776)."

⁶⁸ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 65.

⁶⁹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 65-67.

Edmund Burke repudiated the supposedly inherent grandeur of the French Revolution because he saw the consequences of the revolutionaries' tendency toward an undeliberated questioning of their constitution's normative authority. For Burke, the longevity of social stability depended on codified legislation that mirrored and maintained legitimate structures. Burke's view demonstrates the normative understanding of the purpose of those structures such as a nation's constitution, because it offers a path to legitimation over generations. Burke's central criticism of the French Revolution was its proponents' disregard for governmental structures and the historicity that gave them legitimacy.⁷⁰ He asserted:

The burthen of proof lies heavily on those who tear to pieces the whole frame and contexture of their country, that they could find no other way of settling a government fit to obtain its rational ends, except that which they have pursued by means unfavourable [sic] to all the present happiness of millions of people, and to the utter ruin of several hundreds of thousands. In their political arrangements, men have no right to put the well-being of the present generation wholly out of the question. Perhaps the only moral trust with any certainty in our hands is the care of our own time. With regard to futurity, we are to treat it like a ward. We are not so to attempt an improvement of his fortune, as to put the capital his estate to any hazard.⁷¹

In conclusion, the normative tradition's understanding of the role of political legitimacy binds itself from the outset with the concept of a social contract. In accordance with Platonic and Hobbesian thought, the necessity for this contract arises out of the imperative of survival. Hobbes and Rousseau understand the contractual alliance between citizens and state as central to a functioning society. It is within the confines of this contractual relationship that a mutual reciprocity emerges which informs an understanding of the central function of the state: the maintenance of peace and security. However, in order for the securing of this social contract, citizens, according to Hobbes and Rousseau, must repudiate specific freedoms in favor of the common good. It is through the united self-repudiation of the citizenry in offering legitimacy to the sovereign that the Hobbesian commonwealth is secured and maintained. Forged with the political-philosophical concept of the social contract, the normative understanding of legitimacy reflected in legal theories posits that codification of the contract in laws and statutes constitutes the last step to securing the specific rights, duties, and boundaries of authority. Hence, political legitimacy is not left up to the whims of the citizenry. Instead, the normative character of the law presupposes the continuation of political legitimacy, so long as the contract is upheld. Ultimately, the primacy of the contractual relationship becomes a prerequisite for

⁷⁰ See Edmund Burke. *Select Works of Edmund Burke*. Select Works of Edmund Burke v.2. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 81-83 & 92.

⁷¹ Burke, *Select Works of Edmund Burke*, 90-91.

formal and informal institutions of the society. Moreover, the legitimacy of these institutions is assumed, enabling institutions such as the constitution to extend and define the sovereignty of the sovereign.

2.2 Subjective Tradition

The second tradition of political legitimacy theory, rather than reflecting a normative understanding of law and institutions of validity, underlines the degree of consent the citizens grant their sovereign.⁷² David Beetham identifies this second strand of political legitimacy theory as being embedded in the social sciences, which seek an explanatory position of legitimacy by approaching the concept of legitimacy from historical reference points. While their approach is empirical, dependent on the historical context, the focus of the social sciences is on relational considerations of sovereign and constituents.⁷³ The social scientist gives attention first and foremost to political legitimacy in a quest to identify the implications of power relationships within a society and in the construction of legitimacy based on these power relationships. Steeped in history and adopting an empirical approach, political science is more concerned about the explanation of political legitimacy in specific social and time-specific contexts rather than the universal normative generalizations offered by political philosophers and legal theorists.⁷⁴ Although tangentially influenced by the long history of political legitimacy theory found in the works of Plato, Hobbes, and Rousseau, the same theory as advanced by social scientists finds its genesis and seminal juncture in the work of Max Weber.⁷⁵ While numerous sociologists have criticized and even rejected the Weberian approach, his relational understanding of legitimacy, including his three typologies of legitimacy, continues to be pivotal in the subjective tradition of political legitimacy.⁷⁶

Although trained as a lawyer, the German sociologist and economist Weber quickly turned his attention to the national economy and to the economic and political structures he observed in society. Through his work on social and economic organizations, he heralded the advent of the new social sciences of the 20th century.⁷⁷ Influenced by Kantian and Marxian thought, he introduced a subjective ontological approach through which he analyzed societal singularities

⁷² Coicaud, *Legitimacy and Politics*, 14.

⁷³ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 6.

⁷⁴ Amenta, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, 121.

⁷⁵ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 5-6.

⁷⁶ Amenta, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, 121.

⁷⁷ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 8.

in order to understand their function in maintaining societal structures and the role these societal singularities play in changing them.⁷⁸

Weber's approach to political legitimacy begins with the understanding that legitimacy stems from an individual's belief in the particular authority's claim to it and how this individual engages with that claim and "treats" the claim as valid. To quote him directly:

What is important is the fact that in a given case the particular claim to legitimacy is to a significant degree and according to its type treated as 'valid'; that this fact confirms the position of the persons claiming authority and that it helps determine the choice of means of its exercise.⁷⁹

Adhering to this subjective starting point,⁸⁰ Weber construes political legitimacy as precipitating from a subjective belief in a power relationship between subject and authority.⁸¹ While Weber speaks of the universality of such a belief, the degree of belief contingent on the authority remains idiosyncratic and subjective to individuals within a historical context. He thus locates the inception of political legitimacy in a contextualized, subjective framework, rather than a normative universal one. Central to his understanding of political legitimacy is Weber's concept of *Legitimitätsglaube*, a belief in legitimacy based on an individual's understanding of the context of an authoritarian relationship. Weber writes, "In general, it should be kept clearly in mind that the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a *belief*, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige."⁸² As derivatives of this concept, Weber establishes three *Idealtypen* or ideal types of legitimate power: the rational, traditional, and charismatic.⁸³ Each type is bound by its own validity to a particular belief system. These types have largely held influential power over the

⁷⁸ Max Weber, Alexander M. Henderson, and Talcott Parsons, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, (London: William Hodge & Co, 1947), 24-25.

⁷⁹ Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 327.

⁸⁰ Weber's subjective starting point is laid out most succinctly in his early discussions of rationality. In the introduction to a translation of Weber's *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Talcott Parsons explicates Weber's rejection of rationality as being objective. Weber's criticisms begin by pointing out the failure of the antecedent rational theory criteria not including the influences of the external non-social situation, the individual personality, and the value-orientation of the players. See Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 15-17.

⁸¹ Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 9.

⁸² Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 382.

⁸³ Keith Tribe and Max Weber, eds. *Economy and Society: A New Translation*, University Press Pilot Project, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019), 342.

social sciences in their pursuit to understand legitimacy. Parson, in his introduction, to Weber's *Theory of Social and Economic Organizations*, argued that Weber's typology "must count as one of Weber's few most important contributions to social science."⁸⁴ Because of their centrality to Weber's theory of legitimacy, the next pages will briefly outline the three types.

1. Rational manner: *A belief in legal authority as being legitimate through normative legislation, rules, and rights granted to those in positions of power.*

The rational manner accepts the existence of a strong bureaucracy predicated on a hierarchical structure of authority while still maintaining the importance of a belief of individuals in these structures. Legal norms generate bureaucratic power and gird a procedural type of legitimacy. These norms and corresponding authority establish themselves on a hierarchical ladder with those in a higher position enjoying authority over those below them. These norms transcend the individual in that each individual remains an individual outside the hierarchy until he or she claims a specific position in the hierarchy, which endows him or her with specific powers. Obedience is thus associated not with the individual but with the position the person holds within the larger hierarchy. Power and authority, including the relegation of specific duties, is delineated within each level of the hierarchy.⁸⁵

2. Traditional manner: *A belief in traditions as being legally legitimate and in the power granted by these traditions to those in authority.*

The traditional manner sees the origins of its legitimacy in its history and the natural development of traditional norms and rules. As Weber puts it, "A system of imperative co-ordination will be called 'traditional' if legitimacy is claimed for it and believed in on the basis of the sanctity of the order and the attendant powers of control as they have been handed down from the past, 'have always existed.'"⁸⁶ Weber clarifies the seemingly arbitrary freedoms of the sovereign by arguing that obedience to the sovereign's commands is based not only on tradition, but also on the freedoms granted in exchange for personal loyalty. While the rational manner forms its legitimacy claims around "the legality of statutory orders," the traditional finds its legitimacy claims in institutions, which have already stood the test of time.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 57.

⁸⁵ See Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 329-331.

⁸⁶ Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 341.

⁸⁷ See Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 341-342.

3. Charismatic manner: *A belief in a specific person and in the person's charismatic ability to rule.*⁸⁸

Perhaps even more than the aforementioned two traditions, the charismatic manner is intrinsically dependent on the subordinate's belief in the sovereign and in the sovereign's personality. The citizens understand this personality to be endowed with superhuman traits by a higher authority. Recognition of this personality by those under authority, from whom loyalty is guaranteed, is vital. This is demonstrated through acts performed by the sovereign, which show his exceptionality of character. Because the charismatic manner often bases its legitimacy on a transcendent source of legitimacy, evidence of which is found in the leader's own personality traits, the leader is burdened with a specific onus to continually demonstrate his exceptionality in front of the people. Failure to do this potentially becomes an existential threat.⁸⁹ In imperial China, belief in the godly charisma of the monarch was so strong that even meteorological phenomena were attributed to him.⁹⁰ Political legitimacy, as well as its acquisition and maintenance, remains fixed in the belief system (and therefore in psychology) of the individual, and becomes part of a group dynamic. Weber writes in context of the last typology, "What is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his 'followers' or 'disciples'."⁹¹

The consequential inference of Weber's belief systems-based approach is that political apparatuses maintain the ability to influence these systems in their spheres of authority through various methods and strategies in order to uphold and maintain the highest level of political legitimacy for themselves. Weber argues, "It is an induction from experience that no system of authority voluntarily limits itself to the appeal to material or affectual or ideal motives as a basis for guaranteeing its continuance. In addition every such system attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy."⁹² Thus, the instance of authority continually attempts to influence the belief systems found in its constituents.

⁸⁸ Tribe, *Economy and Society*, 341-342. See also Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 328.

⁸⁹ See Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 358-360.

⁹⁰ Tribe, *Economy and Society*, 375.

⁹¹ Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 359.

⁹² Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 325.

3. Synthesized Approach

Both the normative and subjective traditions, logically sound as they may be on their own terms, do not fully offer a satisfactory explanation to the complexities of political legitimacy. In response, David Beetham developed his own third methodological approach, in which he combines lines of argument from both traditions. Widely read in the social sciences, Beetham established himself as a leading scholar of Max Weber with his book *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics*. Through his synthesized approach, he attempts to mitigate a number of the deficiencies and failures in both traditions by exercising a more nuanced judgement. For the purpose of illuminating the issue of legitimacy within a communist system, this thesis adopts Beetham's approach to further analysis and conceptualizes political legitimacy in the communist context. The following paragraphs outlines Beetham's three elements of political legitimacy.

While Beetham is firmly embedded in the field of social sciences, he attempts to free himself of several Weberian assumptions.⁹³ In specific, while acknowledging the centrality of Weberian theory and his categorization of political legitimacy, Beetham rejects the Weberian premise and definition of legitimacy.⁹⁴ As Beetham asserts, "The Weberian definition not only misrepresents the role that beliefs play in legitimacy, but in making legitimacy primarily a matter of belief, it also ignores those elements which have nothing to do with beliefs at all."⁹⁵

In describing beliefs as fundamental to the analysis of political legitimacy, Weber creates confusion in the political sciences. The confusion carries far-reaching consequences, inviting the social sciences to conceive and analyze the elements, causation, and effects of political legitimacy in various political contexts. Central to the confusion is Weber's very definition of political legitimacy, which is wrapped up in the concept of *Legitimitätsglaube*. Beetham argues that Weber reduces the dynamic and complex nature of political legitimacy and the legitimacy of power to one of a subjective belief system.⁹⁶ Furthermore, Beetham points out the illogical conclusions of Weber's obsession with belief systems in securing and maintaining political legitimacy.⁹⁷ He writes, "The beliefs people hold are thus explained as the product of the

⁹³ John Schwarzmantel, "Remembering David Beetham – an Obituary," (July 19, 2022).

⁹⁴ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 24.

⁹⁵ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 12.

⁹⁶ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 7.

⁹⁷ See also Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 180. The inadequacy of Weber's argument concerning the origins of political legitimacy can be seen in his model's inability to discuss

cumulative influences to which they have been exposed. ... If people believe in the legitimacy of power, is this not because their ‘legitimations’ have been accepted? Is the question of their legitimacy not therefore in the hands of the powerful themselves?”⁹⁸ Beetham summarizes his criticism of Weber by arguing that Weber, through his definition, “misrepresents the relationship between beliefs and legitimacy”. Furthermore, he argues that “it takes no account of those aspects of legitimacy that have little to do with beliefs at all.”⁹⁹

In his book *The Legitimation of Power*, while acknowledging the work of Weber, Beetham ultimately rejects the centrality of Weber’s *Legitimitätsglaube* and turns his attention from the private sphere of citizens’ supposed beliefs to the public sphere in order to determine political legitimacy while keeping the empirical based approach.¹⁰⁰ In doing so, he returns to the work done on political legitimacy in the normative traditions and incorporates legal theorist and political philosophical thought into his understanding and work on legitimacy. His model thus reflects an interdisciplinary, contextualized understanding of political legitimacy in the social sciences.

Beetham argues that legitimate power espouses a complex character and merges three distinct elements or sources, which are qualitatively distinct from one another.¹⁰¹ Power is legitimate if:

1. it conforms to established rules which are understood to be legitimate (legal validity).
2. the rules themselves are justifiable and therefore legitimate in terms of a shared belief (justifiability of the rules).
3. consent is continually granted by those not in authority (evidence of consent).¹⁰²

Beetham understands these three dimensions as being normative, compounding, and universal for all societies regardless of time and place.¹⁰³

political systems outside of the Western tradition of liberal democracy. Beetham quite rightly points out the difficulties of Weber’s three typologies in explaining and justifying the source of political legitimacy in a communist system. When analyzing a regime like that of Stalin – or a government like that of Xi, to take a more relevant example – pursuant to Beetham’s criticism, it is difficult to assign a single typology to the individual leader.

⁹⁸ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 9.

⁹⁹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 13-14.

¹⁰¹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 15.

¹⁰² Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 15-16.

¹⁰³ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 21.

1. Legal Validity

The first instance, that of compliance to rules, creates the first layer of legitimacy. These rules are often strictly formalized in the context of constitutions, laws, and regulatory statutes, but they may also include informal agreements or customs that have gained credibility by means of their longevity. The formal and informal structures of society predicate the functioning of society; it is on their account that citizens make predictions as to the behavioral patterns of fellow citizens and governing bodies. In addition, the source of power and authority in a society finds its normative specifications through codified laws. However, even if these laws dictate the extent of authority, they derive their existence from the political authority. This leaves the governing, political order void of a positive normative authority from which to appeal its own validation. Beetham points out that many governments and societies validate their authority through the transcendent; either a divine being or another source creating the possibility of a belief. In the case of a secular communist system, legitimacy is derived from scientific or natural law arguments. Furthermore, external sources of legitimacy usually are augmented by internal sources. Internal sources can stem from traditions, for instance in hereditary societies.¹⁰⁴ Most widely used is the concept “of the people” as popularized by Abraham Lincoln in his iconic Gettysburg Address of 1863: “...government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”¹⁰⁵ However, legal validity merely sets the terms of the game and by itself cannot provide the legitimacy necessary for governing a state or nation.¹⁰⁶

2. Justifiability of Rules

Although external or internal sources of power, and rules and laws establishing the right of authority, validate the immediate instance of authority, the idea of belief in authority still plays a central role. Simple observance of established rules do not secure political legitimacy. This truth takes us to the second instance: the justifiability of the rules. Beetham writes:

To be justified, power has to be derived from a valid source of authority.... These justifications in turn depend upon beliefs current in a given society about what is the rightful source of authority; about what qualities are appropriate to the exercise of power and how individuals come to possess them; and some conception of a common interest, reciprocal benefit, or societal need that the system of power satisfies.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ See Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 70 & 73-75.

¹⁰⁵ Abraham Lincoln, “The Gettysburg Address,” Cornell University, (2013).

¹⁰⁶ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 68. See also Holbig, “Ideology After the End of Ideology,” 64.

¹⁰⁷ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 17 & 68.

While Beetham clearly uses the arguments of legal theorists in the first instance, he amalgamates this instance with that of the Weberian understanding, correlating political legitimacy with an individual's beliefs in the system they are living under. This belief is not a trivial, arbitrary matter, but leads to the acknowledgment of a shared interest as to the ends of a particular governing body.¹⁰⁸ In Beetham's theory, Weber's acknowledgment of the subjective element between citizen and state does not play a primary role but finds a subordinate place in a broader context.

3. Evidence of Consent

In the third instance, Beetham adds a further element not explicitly found in earlier Weberian or other arguments: he asserts that the governed must demonstrate their commitment to a system's legitimacy through acts of consent. Such consensual expressions are important for two reasons. First, they create a binding relationship for those performing them. Regardless of motive, a positive act directing an individual's consent to a higher instance of authority creates a normative confirmation of the person's commitment. Second, such acts confer consent through a public performative element, in that the subordinate gives credence to the authoritative legitimacy of those who wield power. In addition, this second element may be used by an authority for gaining legitimacy with others who have not given their performative consent or in a demonstrative function to third parties giving credence to the sovereign's power abroad.¹⁰⁹ Beetham continues:

What is common to legitimate power everywhere, however, is the need to 'bind in' at least the most significant members among the subordinate, through actions or ceremonies publicly expressive of consent, so as to establish or reinforce their obligation to a superior authority, and to demonstrate to a wider audience the legitimacy of the powerful.¹¹⁰

Central is not the belief system or even the degree of volition on the side of the populace, but the voluntary act of consent itself. Beetham explains:

...these (the acts) are important because they *confer* legitimacy on the powerful, not because they provide evidence about people's beliefs. They confer legitimacy because they constitute public expressions by the subordinate of their consent to the power relationship and their subordinate position within it; of their voluntary agreement to the limitation of their freedom by the requirements of a superior.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 161.

¹⁰⁹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 18-19.

¹¹⁰ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 19.

¹¹¹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 91.

In addition, through the act of consent, the governed not only agree to the sovereign and to the conditions of subordination that they are placing themselves under, but also affirm the first and second elements of Beetham's model. Acts of consent affirm the legal validity and justifiability of rules governing the relationship of sovereign and subordinates.¹¹²

It should be noted here that legitimacy is to be found on a spectrum, with divergences at both ends. Beetham concludes:

Above all, the analysis I have given above demonstrates that legitimacy is not a single quality that systems of power possess or not, but a set of distinct criteria, or multiple dimensions, operating at different levels, each of which provides moral grounds for compliance or cooperation on the part of those subordinate to a given power relation.¹¹³

To ensure legitimacy, all three instances must be secured.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, Beetham maintains the absolute necessity of political legitimacy for every political system. "Enhanced order, stability, and effectiveness – these are the typical advantages that accrue to a legitimate system of power as a result of the obligations upon subordinates that derive from its legitimacy."¹¹⁵ This imperative is normative in its analysis, as is evident in Beetham's inquiry into varying political systems and in his analysis of how they attain and maintain legitimacy.

4. Conclusion

Power and legitimacy runs like a double helix through the ages. For centuries, scholars, sovereigns, and others seeking to maintain their authority have sought to substantiate their claim to power through the pursuit of legitimacy. Due to its ubiquity, it has attracted the attention of countless scholars who have searched for the reason why some sovereigns enjoy a high level of efficacious governance while others find their demise in situations that demonstrate the utter absence of their legitimacy. The Greek philosophers sought to define and capture the myriad characteristic elements of political legitimacy. The normative tradition focused on universally accepted mores, traditions, and codified legislation to confirm a sovereign's legitimacy. This tradition, as reflected in the writings of Plato in addition to Hobbes, Locke, and other enlightenment thinkers, largely rests on the premise that society is predicated on a social contract from which the sovereign derives his power and authority. Although members of

¹¹² Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 96.

¹¹³ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 20.

¹¹⁴ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 20.

¹¹⁵ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 33.

society enter into this contract, the concept assumes an intrinsic deterministic progression into such relationships during the inception of any given society and nation.

Although the normative tradition is concentrated on universal laws governing the acquisition of political legitimacy, philosophers and legal theorists failed to understand the subjective elements found in the functioning of society and in the relationship between sovereign and constituents. Thus the second tradition, one of a subjective relational understanding of political legitimacy, which credits its inception with Weber's three typologies, rejected a pure normative approach. Instead, Weber and others focused on a subjective understanding of political legitimacy predicated on the belief systems of individuals and on the degree of belief citizens held in their government.¹¹⁶

Due to the insufficiencies of both traditions, this thesis adopts the synthesized approach of David Beetham, which gives credence to both by developing a model that adopts elements, which are both normative and relational in nature. This approach accounts not only for universal character traits of political legitimacy, thus acknowledging its ubiquity, but also turns to particular historical instances to understand how political legitimacy plays out in specific political systems.¹¹⁷ Due to the complexities of legitimacy even within one political system, Beetham's model offers an accessible and sensible entrance point for further analyzing political legitimacy. Such a model can help explain the intricacies of political legitimacy in the PRC from 1949 to the present.

¹¹⁶ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 6.

¹¹⁷ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 15-16.

Chapter 2: Political Legitimacy in the People's Republic of China

“The Chinese Communist Party is the vanguard of the working class ... the realization of communism is the highest ideal and ultimate goal of the Party.”¹¹⁸
–The Chinese Communist Party

From the inception of the PRC to the present, the Chinese experience is distinctly idiosyncratic. Beginning with the revolutionary epoch of Mao Zedong, through the era of Deng's reforms, and through the dawn of a new period under Xi, China has continued to undergo enormous changes on all levels, politically, socially, and economically. However, one thing that is evident throughout PRC history and central to understanding it is a one-party system rooted in a Marxist-Leninist worldview. The obvious benefactor since 1949 continues to be the CCP, which enjoys a monopolistic grip on authority and controls social, political, and economic domains. Rudd points out that although debates about Deng's economic reforms spawned talks of a shift towards liberal democracy, the preservation of the CCP's central, monopolistic position remains an “organizing principle for everything else in Chinese domestic politics and international policy.”¹¹⁹

All the same, its unconditional power brings added pressure to bear with respect to continually securing and maintaining the three facets of Beetham's political legitimacy theory; and the onus for this lies heavily on the CCP in general, and on its leaders in particular.¹²⁰ Due to the superordinate role the CCP and Chinese leaders assume in political and economic performance, and with the absence of a rival party, the retraction of legitimacy by the populace is potentially existentially dangerous. Xi unequivocally understands the existential importance of popular support stating at the outset of his first term in June of 2013, “Winning or losing the people's support is an issue that concerns the CPC's survival or extinction.”¹²¹ In addition, legitimization has not only secured power and authority for the CCP but also provided the basis on which goals and objectives have been achieved in any given period. As noted previously, tools of

¹¹⁸ Excerpt from 2013 CCP constitution, quoted in Jinghan Zeng, “The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion,” Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Politics and International Studies, (University of Warwick, 2014), 1.

¹¹⁹ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 85.

¹²⁰ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 1.

¹²¹ Quoted in: Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*, A Council on Foreign Relations Book. (Oxford, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Oxford University Press; ProQuest, 2018), 36.

coercion subsume time, energy, and resources and result in an inability to reach political and economic objectives laid out by the sovereign. According to Beetham:

...the contemporary state is a form of power-structure that requires legitimation, not so much to function, or even to survive over a period of time, but to achieve those purposes that depends upon the support of its population, and to maintain its political system intact in the face of serious policy failure or challenge to it.¹²²

Furthermore, the regime's legitimacy in China is a domestic claim, one that rests on the support of the majority for its centralized power. Additionally, legitimacy and party cohesion are inseparable. Regime legitimacy could not be substantiated without a certain level of party cohesion.¹²³ This next chapter turns its attention to political legitimacy in the PRC and thus to the first element of the hypothesis: the intrinsic imperative of political legitimacy in the Chinese communist context. It seeks to demonstrate the constant high demands of legitimacy placed on the CCP and the existential crisis of legitimacy a communist structure sets off when any one of Beetham's legitimacy criteria is challenged. Thus, this chapter also uses the first research query to instruct its attention and focus. In doing so, this chapter relies on Beetham's three elements of political legitimacy, as discussed in the previous chapter. Building on each criterion, this chapter discusses why the imperative is incumbent on the CCP and how the CCP attempts to fulfill each one.

1. Legal Validity

Legal validity takes shape in the normative tradition of legal theory as is regarded as the first criterion of Beetham's theory of political legitimacy. Like every political system, the PRC espouses a plethora of informal and formal rules, regulations, laws and other legislation creating a framework for the functioning of the country. Relative to these laws, citizens can hold valid assumptions as to the behavioral patterns of fellow citizens and of their government. Various forms of legislation both proscribe and limit the extent of political power that individuals in the PRC government assume and enjoy. However, the sinologist Heike Holbig points out that this first criterion does not provide legitimacy per se and is wholly reliant on the fulfillment of the other two.¹²⁴ Furthermore, Beetham argues that the more the government – in this case the PRC – appeals to this first element to increase its legitimacy, the more it must itself uphold all aspects

¹²² Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 118.

¹²³ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 4.

¹²⁴ Holbig, "Ideology After the End of Ideology," 64.

of the law.¹²⁵ Although it is a primary criterion for the PRC, legal validity is assumed through the application and observance of the law.

More important is the use of legal structures for the creation of important formal institutions. In his doctoral thesis on the CCP's capacity to rule, Zeng notes that internal stability of the CCP through formal institutions provides an important element to securing legitimacy for the party.¹²⁶ Formal legislation create and codify these institutions. Consequently, the institutions rely on legal validity, in part to offer internal stability and a path towards legitimation. In her research, Holbig comes to a similar conclusion. She notes, "Chinese Party analysts and scholars take the institutionalization of the regime seriously as a strategy of legitimation."¹²⁷ Furthermore, legal validity offers the PRC a stable basis on which legitimacy for governance may be built. As Beetham points out "The legitimacy of any political system is intimately linked with its basic organizing principles and rules of power...."¹²⁸

Under Deng, the CCP introduced the concept "rule of law." Since 2012, Xi has reaffirmed the party's commitment to this concept, and its resolve to abide by the legal framework of the PRC. In doing so, he is making a broader argument for legitimacy and demonstrating that the CCP abides by the law. In speeches to the 19th and 20th Party Congresses, Xi referenced the term "rule of law" forty-nine times. In addition, he introduced the most expansive campaign to date against corruption in the CCP, emphasizing "rule of law" to fight corruption in the party and in pursuing non-party members in senior positions of government.¹²⁹ Unlike Mao, who conducted party purges on the basis of ideology,¹³⁰ Xi has fought corruption by substantiating his claims to "rule of law" and then prosecuting party members on the basis of the law and financial impropriety.¹³¹ In his address to the 19th Party Congress Xi stated that, "the goal of creating a deterrent against corruption has been initially attained; the cage of institutions that prevents corruption has been strengthened...."¹³²

¹²⁵ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 68.

¹²⁶ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 3.

¹²⁷ Bruce, "The Debate on Party Legitimacy in China," 411.

¹²⁸ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 181.

¹²⁹ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 31.

¹³⁰ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders – from Mao to Now*, 322.

¹³¹ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 30.

¹³² Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, (Beijing, October 18, 2017), 7.

2. Ideology: normative justifiability of rules

While governmental bodies write and pass laws, thereby giving the ambiguity of power a clear structure, the question continually arises why those laws, and the specific instance of authority, are justifiable. In democracies, this is answered through the will of the people as they regularly cast votes for political parties and thus justify the rules of the game and the instance of authority. However, the Chinese people do not enjoy repeated opportunities of political participation in the form of ballot boxes,¹³³ and so the CCP must use other means to continue justifying the rules of the game – rules it created which proscribe its own instance of power.

Marxist-Leninist ideology is both the kingpin and the lodestone of the Chinese political framework,¹³⁴ and it performs an essential function relative to the justification of authority. Beetham describes the locus of authority in a liberal democracy as being bound to the concept of popular sovereignty reflected in the electoral system of representatives. However, because the CCP wields monopolistic supremacy, it is able to rely on its own ideology as the basic source for self-justification. Beetham explains:

...in the communist system authority was primarily located in an elaborated body of doctrine, Marxism-Leninism. Hence the reproduction of that doctrine, the protection of its orthodoxy, the identification of authentic interpreters, etc. assumed a central place in the organization of power.¹³⁵

Consequently, every Chinese leader since 1949 has utilized party ideology as a means to consolidating his position and instance of authority.

Four vital premises are intrinsic to the Marxist-Leninist worldview as it pertains to Beetham's second criterion, and all are fundamental to the communist worldview and the political system propounded in *The Communist Manifesto*. To be clear, Marxist-Leninist ideology is not summarized in these premises, but they nonetheless serve to create a framework in which they can engender desired authority and legal validity. They can be summarized as follows:

1. History is class struggle.
2. Rooted in oppressive structures, class struggle arises between two groups: the bourgeoisie and proletariat.
3. The masses find sole representation in the communist party.

¹³³ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 182.

¹³⁴ This thesis situates this statement in a discussion of the function of ideology in a communist system. To understand where it stands in a broader context, see Rigby, *Political Legitimation in Communist States*, 3-4.

¹³⁵ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 182.

4. The communist party's main objective is the abolition of private property and realization of communism.

Marxist-Leninist theory emerges from the first pivotal premise; that is, the deterministic, positivistic understanding of history as class struggle. As the opening line of *The Communist Manifesto* laconically states, "The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles."¹³⁶ Out of this premise arises the question of defining the parties involved in these struggles. The second premise defines and separates humanity into two groups based on structures of oppression. Thus emerges the concept of the proletariat, or the masses: an agglomeration of the majority defined by the oppressive power structure the bourgeoisie wields. Marx describes the resulting societal dichotomy:

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.¹³⁷

The third premise lies in the relation the communists assume with the struggle of the proletariat. Marx states:

In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole? The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould [sic] the proletarian movement. The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: (1) In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. (2) In the various stages of development, which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.¹³⁸

Marx describes the communists as an ambiguous universal group save for two elements, which eternally bind communists to one another. First, because the communists do not differentiate themselves from the struggles of the proletariat, they can bind the disparate group of the proletariat together even across national boundaries by uniting under the causes of the working class and its struggles. Second, in accordance with the positivistic understanding of history, the

¹³⁶ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, First Avenue classics (Minneapolis, MN: First Avenue Editions, a division of Lerner Publishing Group, 2018), 1.

¹³⁷ Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1.

¹³⁸ Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 16.

communists represent the proletariat and their ultimate goal: throwing off the shackles of oppression. However, since Marx did not see the communist party as a counterpart to other political parties burgeoning in the early 20th Century, it would be anachronistic to search for a discussion of the role of those parties in his writings.¹³⁹ Gray argues:

... a significant omission was his [Marx's] development of the role of parties. Such omission was intentional, insofar as some of Marx's words helped "spur" the discussion of parties later on, but he himself provided little guidance; indeed, the idea of "party" that would develop during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century would not have existed in Marx's own time.¹⁴⁰

And yet Marx does assert his deterministic understanding of the proletariat becoming a class and consequently a political identity.¹⁴¹ He remains silent as to the role this political identity will assume in the inevitable revolution he foresees.¹⁴²

Lenin modified Marx's understanding of communist representation from a universal uniting movement to a national struggle by construing Marx's understanding of communism as a 20th century political movement. Central to Lenin's revision is the concept of vanguardism. Vanguardism assumes an epistemological consequence denoting that only a small sector of a given population will be able accurately to ascertain historical and societal truths, and through their understanding work toward a better world. Gray notes that the premise for vanguardism is a group of people "capable of observing the actual dynamics influencing, shaping, and (in a sense) determining the direction of history, society, and human development."¹⁴³ Vanguardism deeply imbeds itself in the communist epistemology, the basis of which is scientism, or the understanding of the world through the laws of science. Because not everyone within the communist party can claim an advanced perception of the historical and societal truths, a small

¹³⁹ Phillip W. Gray, *Vanguardism: Ideology and Organization in Totalitarian Politics*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 56.

¹⁴⁰ Gray, *Vanguardism: Ideology and Organization in Totalitarian Politics*, 56.

¹⁴¹ Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 11.

¹⁴² Gray, *Vanguardism: Ideology and Organization in Totalitarian Politics*, 54. While it seems that Marx understood the role of the Party to be consequential, he failed to describe what the role would be. Even during the Second International the debate between evolutionary versus revolutionary Marxism and the role of the Party was not adequately solved. To quote Gray: "From The Communist Manifesto and some other writings, Marx appeared to consider the Party of the proletariat to be quite important. But here again, we find the difficulties of squaring the role of an active party with a theory of material determinism. In a strong sense, the issue of Party overlaps strongly with the second flaw of evolutionary versus revolutionary Marxism..." Gray, *Vanguardism: Ideology and Organization in Totalitarian Politics*, 56.

¹⁴³ Gray, *Vanguardism: Ideology and Organization in Totalitarian Politics*, 12.

more intellectually advanced group of communists are to create an avant-garde. Their mission is to educate the rest of the party, mobilize the population, maintain purity of party ideology, and to organize the masses when the great revolution begins. This group of illuminated people is to remain revolutionaries for the cause; people who continually lead the masses to a heightened understanding of their existence and to prepare them for further revolutions.¹⁴⁴

It is this third premise of Marxist-Leninist ideology that reflects the origins of Beetham's second criterion, justifiability of the rules, and the normative justification to the CCP's comprehensive claim to authority. It is on this premise that the CCP claims to represent the masses and to support the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat. Moreover, the CCP claims a universal monopoly of understanding inherent in the very formation of the party. Marx writes:

The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.¹⁴⁵

The adoption of this concept reconciles Chinese Marxist-Leninist ideology with a continuous logic. Through the introduction of vanguardism, the CCP claims sole representation of the proletariat. Thus, by definition, the communist party and the CCP in this particular case represent the people and, through their higher understanding of the truth, not only understand their problems, but also their positivistic position in history. The communists are the representatives not of themselves, as a political party in a pluralistic party system would be, but of the proletariat, whose definition lies in the majority of the citizens living in the state. Therefore, the communist party's interests simply reflect the interests of the majority; and because society is always steeped in class struggle, it joins the majority against the ruling minority. This leads to an important phenomenon: even while retaining a monopoly on power, the CCP is never part of the bourgeoisie, regardless of accrued wealth. By its very definition, it is a party of the people and always represents the proletariat. Because of the direct representation it offers, it reflects an intrinsic legitimacy, as by definition it represents the interests of the majority and thus effectively, from its inception and pursuant to its own philosophy, boasts the second element of Beetham's model: justifiability of the rules and thereby the instance of authority.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Gray, *Vanguardism: Ideology and Organization in Totalitarian Politics*, 2 & 25.

¹⁴⁵ Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ See also Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 181.

As Beetham points out, legal validity can be claimed by referencing internal and external sources. The internal source clearly is definitional in character; after all, the communist party defines itself as being the sole party representing the proletariat. However, the *Communist Manifesto* makes the external source of legitimacy clear: it is rooted in undeniable historical fact of class struggle.¹⁴⁷

The fourth premise is marked by the communists' justification for their very existence. Marx writes, "In this sense, the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property."¹⁴⁸ Here Marx demonstrates the extent to which the economy finds an intrinsic place within the philosophy of communism. To quote *The Communist Manifesto*:

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise [sic] all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.¹⁴⁹

The result is a centrally organized, highly bureaucratic economy in which political authority enjoys absolute or near absolute power over the economy, pursuant to the second principle, which dictates that the party intrinsically knows, understands, and is sole representative of the interests of the people. Not only does the communist party enjoy centralized political authority; it also enjoys centralized economic authority. Although this can provide a source of stable legitimacy for the CCP, the reverse is also true. Beetham notes that in the case of market failure and economic collapse in a centrally planned economy, the failure reflects directly on the government.¹⁵⁰

Several consequences arise through the acceptance of these four premises. The first is the justification of the rules of governance for the CCP through its history. In his book *The Decline of Communism in China, 1977-1989*, Professor Xueliang Ding explains the success of the CCP by means of its claims to legitimacy through maintaining the legal validity of its own internal source of authority. Ding demonstrates how Deng, during the moments of crises in the 1980s,

¹⁴⁷ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 73 & 181.

¹⁴⁸ Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 17.

¹⁴⁹ Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 25.

¹⁵⁰ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 141.

did not and could not stray from the path of the communist party and its determination to control both the political and the economic sphere, even as he attempted to balance one-party control with economic pluralism.¹⁵¹ He writes:

Political restructuring was opposed because it would mean sharing power with others. Formally abandoning the commitment to "public ownership" was unacceptable because it would mean giving up the *raison d'être* for Communist rule. As Marx and Engels (1972: 346) declare in the Communist Manifesto, "The distinguishing feature of Communism is ... the abolition of bourgeois property.... The theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property." Since that time, communist parties in power across the world have defined this as their ultimate goal and justified their rule by this commitment. If this principle were to be abandoned, the legitimating foundation of communist rule would crumble with it.¹⁵²

The second is the resulting positivist claim to CCP authority, through which the CCP secures the second criterion of Beetham's model. Resting on the presumed knowledge that the CCP is the only party that can truly represent the Chinese people and understand their position in history, the CCP can also claim that they are "able to ensure economic growth, provide social stability, and defend national sovereignty."¹⁵³ Although the current 96 million party members are representative of only some 7% of the population,¹⁵⁴ the CCP still strongly portrays itself as a mass political party that represents and admires the people.¹⁵⁵ Holbig points out that through such an absolute claim to authority (and the underlying justification thereof), the CCP is able to define and redefine their own ideology, collective values, and other terms such as "democracy" and "human rights" to reconcile them with their own ideology.¹⁵⁶ Such adaptability is one of the most important elements to securing the second criterion. The claim to absolute authority by the CCP may be secured through continuous revision of party ideology, which is then touted by the party as an infallible expression of Marxist-Leninist ideology.

¹⁵¹ Xueliang Ding, *The Decline of Communism in China: Legitimacy Crisis, 1977-1989*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁵² Ding, *The Decline of Communism in China: Legitimacy Crisis*, 2.

¹⁵³ Laliberté and Lanteigne (2008) quoted in Gilley, "The Debate on Party Legitimacy in China," 396.

¹⁵⁴ Nis Grünberg, "Who Is the CCP? China's Communist Party in Infographics," (2022).

¹⁵⁵ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders – from Mao to Now*, 19.

¹⁵⁶ Gilley, "The Debate on Party Legitimacy in China," 396. See also Timothy Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, (Cambridge University Press, 2016). The historian, Timothy Cheek specializes in the history of the CCP, the political system of the PRC, and in the CCP's intellectual history. In his book *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, Cheek discusses variances in terms and application of the terms in political discourse throughout the last century of Chinese history.

Holbig argues that although some scholars may conclude that ideology is dead in the CCP, it is not. She writes:

I would like to posit, however, that ideology still, and with a renewed emphasis since the turn of the century, plays an indispensable role in the quest to legitimize authoritarian rule in contemporary China, and that it does so precisely due to its high degree of adaptability.¹⁵⁷

Evidence of its adaptability is found in the transition from Mao's purely revolutionary struggle-based ideology to the adaptation and integration of economic terminology espousing a market-based commodity economy. Zeng points out that the adaptation of party ideology was the cause for severe debates within the top party ranks in the decades after Mao's death. With the erosion of faith in Mao and in Mao Zedong Thought, a cultural crisis began playing out in elite party circles as well as in society as a whole, and the party was forced to reconcile its own ideological claims with the public.¹⁵⁸ Consequently, Deng shifted from promoting a deductive governing position in which policy follows ideology to a pragmatic approach captured by the motto, "Seek truth from facts."¹⁵⁹ Thus, while continuing his commitment to ideology, he was able to adapt the ruling ideology to validate and justify his turn to economic prosperity. Zeng writes, "The most notable ideological transition was to break the view that 'the planned economy and the commodity economy are mutually exclusive'."¹⁶⁰

Adaptability of party ideology is vital because of Marx's apparent nescience concerning governance and the maintenance of power in a national context. Despite Marxist-Leninist ideology's function as the linchpin of CCP rule, it does not alter the fact that Marx himself never held a political position. Consequently, his rather convoluted writings concerned themselves with communism as a revolutionary force buttressed by historical materialism. Mao himself was and remained a self-proclaimed revolutionary, as evidenced by his obsession with

¹⁵⁷ Holbig, "Ideology After the End of Ideology," 62.

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 110-111.

¹⁵⁹ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 106. The Professor of International Studies and renowned Sinologist, Joseph Fewsmith, discusses in his book *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, how the introduction of objective truths especially after the fallout of the Cultural Revolution exposed the economic futility of performing exhausting labor. A report in 1978 clarified this transition, stating that economic laws are objective in nature. See Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 111.

¹⁶⁰ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 35.

“continuous revolution”.¹⁶¹ After catastrophic years of continued mass movements that left millions dead, Deng introduced structural reforms to the CCP’s governance, which subsequently led to ideological reforms. Through adapting the revolutionary ideologies of Marxist-Leninism and the dominant strain of Mao Zedong Thought, Deng attempted to establish the CCP as a governing body. Deng identified four “cardinal principles” that he saw as fundamental to the ideological framework of the party:

1. The principle of upholding the socialist path.
2. The principle of upholding the people’s democratic dictatorship.
3. The principle of upholding the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.
4. The principle of upholding Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought¹⁶²

By identifying these principles, Deng was able to solve a number of dilemmas. First, he maintained the underlying justifications for the CCP’s hold on power, as explained in the previous paragraphs, and as found in Marxist-Leninist ideology. Second, he honored the role of Mao Zedong, the leader founder of the PRC by upholding Mao Zedong Thought while distancing himself from the totalitarian style of leadership associated with Mao. Because the effects of these principles were so far-reaching Deng was able to reverse the primacy of ideology over policy, and thus establish his own rule of governance.¹⁶³

Ideological adaptation serves the principle purposes of party legitimacy when rooted in the legal validity and justification of the party, its institutions, and its legislation. However, Holbig, also pursuant with Beetham’s third criterion, identifies a third element that becomes fundamental to securing legitimacy: that is, acts of consent. Holbig writes:

“...three legitimating functions served by ideology which demand the constant adaptation of party theory, namely: the provision of normative justification for the rightful source of political authority; the definition of the proper ends and standards of regime performance; and the mobilization of consent of subordinates, or at least of relevant elites.”¹⁶⁴

The fulfillment of this last element satisfies Beetham’s model. Pursuant to the model, it is only after the CCP, or any other instance of authority, can boast the presence of all three elements, that a government can enjoy legitimacy.

¹⁶¹ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 27-28.

¹⁶² Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 118.

¹⁶³ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 118-119.

¹⁶⁴ Holbig, “Ideology After the End of Ideology,” 62-63.

3. Mobilization

Beetham's last element of legitimacy concerns itself with consent of the governed through performative acts. In liberal democracies, acts of political participation are not only encouraged but also welcomed and championed as expressions of the voice of the people. The very principle of an electoral system in which the voice of the majority consents to the legitimacy of the sovereign underpins the concept of a liberal democracy as expressed in the Declaration of Independence; "That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."¹⁶⁵ At frequent intervals the will of the people, bolstered by universal suffrage and other personal freedoms protected in civil society, obtains political leverage by means of political representation, either in the form of a party or specific people.¹⁶⁶

However, communist political systems such as the PRC fail to boast the inveterate traditions from which grows the support of constituents. The one-party system does not leave China incurious about popular political legitimacy. On the contrary, they are placed in a dilemma, which leaves them with no choice but to create other opportunities in order for the consent of the governed to be offered. Beetham identifies two primary modes of consent: the electoral and the mobilization.¹⁶⁷

From the inception of the PRC, the CCP's ability to mobilize the Chinese public has played a prominent role. Beetham argues, "In the absence of electoral consent, it was necessary to the mobilisation [sic] of a mass base for the party, with any degree of commitment."¹⁶⁸ Beetham describes mass mobilization as the formal mode of public affirmation in a communist system.¹⁶⁹

Mobilization has worn multiple political cloaks from the days of Mao up to Xi, but one thing has not changed: it remains necessary for the maintenance of political legitimacy. The American sinologist and political scientist Julia Strauss points out that the term *yundong* ("campaign") evolved into a political tool used by the CCP under Mao Zedong "to mobilize populations under its control towards party-directed goals...."¹⁷⁰ The CCP effectively utilized campaigns and

¹⁶⁵ Richard, "Declaration of Independence."

¹⁶⁶ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 163-164.

¹⁶⁷ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 151.

¹⁶⁸ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 185.

¹⁶⁹ David Beetham, *Revisiting Legitimacy, Twenty Years on*. First edition, (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), Chapter 2 in *Legitimacy and Criminal Justice: An International Exploration*, 21. See also Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*, 36.

¹⁷⁰ Julia C. Strauss, *State Formation in China and Taiwan: Bureaucracy, Campaign, and*

mass mobilization as tools to achieve policy objectives. Thus, each leader's campaign took shape in a different arena of political, social, and economic life and targeted the implementation of varying party policies. To be clear, the cadre system played a significant role throughout. Organized into groups, cadres could be quickly mobilized to ensure full implementation and conformity to policies throughout the populace. A recent example is China's national response to the COVID pandemic, which saw cadres being mobilized to implement the emergency response.¹⁷¹ Most notable were the widespread Mao-era mass mobilization campaigns,¹⁷² which engulfed every region, city, town, and family, and in some cases – as in the Great Leap Forward – left the countryside starving.¹⁷³ After Mao's death, Deng realized that such campaigns had led to an erosion of the CCP's legitimacy, had brought about chaos, and had stagnated the economy. In response, Deng repudiated this form of mass mobilization.¹⁷⁴ However, the CCP's ability to mobilize the population remained in itself impressive and significant. Strauss notes:

In the post-1978 era People's Republic, such different policy arenas as 'Spiritual Pollution,' crime, corruption, and the enforcement of birth control quotas have all involved extraordinary concentrations of political will and bureaucratic mobilization to realize a given goal without a concomitant level of mass mobilization.¹⁷⁵

Deng's ability to mobilize the population behind strategic goals did not focus on Maoist-era mass campaigns as the exclusive tool for mobilization. On the contrary, starting with Deng and continuing under Jiang Zemin, economic reform and the introduction of a market-based economy mobilized the population away from communist revolutionary struggle, creating an unprecedented economic motor of wealth accumulation and high production, and spawning the biggest and fastest economic growth in modern history.¹⁷⁶ China's entrance into the WTO in 2001 accelerated this economic growth: with unprecedented access to global capital markets, it allowed for an industrial boom.¹⁷⁷ As domestic production fueled heightened trade activity with

Performance, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 22.

¹⁷¹ Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 10-11.

¹⁷² Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 23.

¹⁷³ See Clayton Brown, "China's Great Leap Forward" *Association for Asian Studies*, Volume 17:3 (2012).

¹⁷⁴ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 16.

¹⁷⁵ Strauss, *State Formation in China and Taiwan*, 23.

¹⁷⁶ See Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 40.

¹⁷⁷ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 41.

the West, China saw its economy mature. Poverty rates declined, living standards surged, and the CCP enjoyed new levels of political legitimacy and party credibility.¹⁷⁸

4. Conclusion

As demonstrated in this chapter, the CCP constantly stands before the renewed demand of finding and securing legitimacy. The PRC's institutional structure and adherence to laws and legislation offers a foundation for legitimacy claims. However, legal validity alone cannot procure and sustain legitimacy. Thus, the CCP relies on Marxist-Leninist ideology as a foundation for securing normative justifiability. But, even if ideology provides a cornerstone for this endeavor, it also presents a risk, due to the reliance of each premise on the assumption of the previous one. Under a one-party system, the CCP must ensure the acceptance of its ideological, political and economic claims, which function as a path to securing Beetham's second criterion. Because of the inherent close relationship between the CCP government and the Chinese economy, economic performance can operate as a central tenet to the CCP's political legitimacy claim. However, pure economic performance may call into question the legitimacy of the CCP. Central to the CCP's response is found in Beetham's third criterion: acts of consent. As the previous paragraphs demonstrate, the fulfillment of this last criterion has been central to the Chinese experience since the beginning of the PRC, with the CCP and specific Chinese heads of state relying on mobilization in both the broad and narrow sense to garner support for their authority and to secure acceptance and implementation of their ideological policies. Under Mao, this largely took the form of mass campaigns. However, Deng found other mechanisms to mobilize the Chinese people behind his claims for legitimacy; and the central claim was his success in achieving economic growth and prosperity.

¹⁷⁸ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 41.

Chapter 3: The Model

“Popular support is related to the survival or the death of the party.”¹⁷⁹

—Xi Jinping

1. Introduction

In November 2022 the global communications firm Edelman conducted a survey of twenty-eight countries from around the world, including the United States, Kenya, Brazil, France, Germany, Japan, and China, among others. The survey studied trust and credibility among nation states under the rubric of a “polarized” world. The survey focused on four forces leading to polarization: economic anxieties, institutional imbalance, mass-class divide, and what was termed “the battle for the truth”.¹⁸⁰ The survey resulted in a global report that contained the “2023 Edelman Trust Barometer”; and the results for China were astounding. Eighty-nine percent of those surveyed in China stated that they maintained trust in their government, a proportion far exceeding the other twenty-seven countries. The data set on “trust stable amid economic headwinds” saw China topping the list both in 2022 and in 2023 with 83 percent showing high trust in NGOs, business, government, and media. When broken down, “trust in government” in China gained two percentage points between 2022 and 2023. On the data set studying societal polarization, China ranked in the last percentile, boasting a more unified country than twenty-six of the other countries.¹⁸¹

The World Values Survey reflects similar findings, with close to 47.6% showing “a great deal” of confidence in the CCP government, and 47% showing “quite a lot” of confidence in the government. Interestingly, from 2000 to 2004, confidence in the CCP government remained high, though only 38.5% reported “a great deal” of confidence and 56.7% “quite a lot” of confidence.¹⁸² In 2008, the Asian Barometer Survey found that 74% of Chinese respondents held the view that the communist government, regardless of blatant problems, was still the best political system for the country. Since 2000, confidence in the CCP government has risen.¹⁸³

The Ash Center at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government conducted a longitudinal survey assessing the CCP’s resilience over time. In 2020, it published their

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Zeng, “The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion,” 27.

¹⁸⁰ Edelman, “2023 Edelman Trust Barometer: Global Report,” 2023.

¹⁸¹ Edelman, “2023 Edelman Trust Barometer.”

¹⁸² World Values Survey, “WVS Database,” 2020.

¹⁸³ Cited in Zeng, “The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion,” 120.

findings; among the outcomes was a report showing that over all, domestic satisfaction with CCP governance had increased since 2003. Chinese citizens, including those from minority groups, boast a strong faith in their leaders' capacity for effective governance. In 2003, the government enjoyed approval ratings of 86.1%. This rate rose to 95.9% in 2009 before falling, from 2011- 2015, to 91.8%. Since 2015, the ratings have risen again.¹⁸⁴

Naturally, such surveys fail to explain the multifaceted complexities that contribute to such a high level of trust.¹⁸⁵ Undeniably, authoritarian political systems do not exactly profess a dedication to personal freedoms, such as freedom of expression in the public square. There is also increasing evidence of China's fractured academic landscape¹⁸⁶ and a diverse opinion landscape in the wider populace concerning a range of issues. Clearly, while the above-mentioned surveys seem to indicate a conclusive result, research done by Stanford professors show a variance in support for the regime.¹⁸⁷ This is hardly surprising, given the vastness of the Chinese populace. Consequently, this thesis does not seek to substantiate claims of homogeneity, as far as opinions about the regime are concerned. However, the surveys seem to convey a particularly high level of consent in the wider populace.

Beetham's last dimension of legitimacy is consent. He points out that consent does not necessarily denote the psychological belief of the individual in the legitimacy of the sovereign; for this can also be explained on the basis of rational choice or by systems of incentives and sanctions that influence an individual's readiness to give consent.¹⁸⁸ To a certain extent, the conclusions of the study may even misconstrue the real feeling and belief systems of the Chinese populace regarding the regime, since what is being measured is consent per se, and not

¹⁸⁴ Edward Cunningham, Tony Saich, and Jessie Turiel, "Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time," Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, July 2020, 1-3.

¹⁸⁵ This thesis acknowledges the organizational differences between the CCP and the PRC. Although at times throughout the PRC history, the leaders of the CCP have not been the same leaders of the PRC, it has been proven many times over that the PRC does the bidding of the CCP. Thus, the CCP and the leaders of the CCP have de facto executive power in China. For a more nuanced understanding of this relationship, see Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 18-21.

¹⁸⁶ Timothy Cheek's *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History* outlines the importance of intellectuals for those in power through modern Chinese history. It also addresses the continued rigorous intellectual debates over ideas, ideals, and political topics found among Chinese intellectuals today. See Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, xiii and Chapter 6.

¹⁸⁷ See Ilaria Mazzocco and Scott Kennedy, "Public Opinion in China: A Liberal Silent Majority?" Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022.

¹⁸⁸ See Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 25-27.

necessarily the level of belief the granter of consent holds. Additionally, as the Chinese scholar Xueliang Ding discusses in his book *The Decline of Communism in China*, the success of the regime is derived from the CCP's commitment to maintaining the political structure of communism despite various crises it has weathered.¹⁸⁹ Because the surveys do not necessarily reflect the true situation in China, this thesis will only speak of trust-based consent in the sense that Beetham describes it: consent that may or may not be a firmly held belief in the political system.

Nonetheless, salient questions remain. How has the CCP, as the sole political party in China over the last seventy years, maintained legitimacy? Pursuant to the variances in governance styles from Mao to Xi, how close is a style of governance tied to the quest for political legitimacy? Many may point to coercion and violence as being a central tenet to CCP rule. Undeniably, violence, and the threat thereof are recurring themes throughout party history. Under Mao's leadership, an estimated thirty to forty-five million people lost their lives through starvation.¹⁹⁰ Millions of others were killed during periods of terror, while others experienced sustained periods of psychological violence and party purges.¹⁹¹ Deng, although a more moderate leader, also used campaigns to target potential adversaries and internal enemies.¹⁹² The antipathy towards any real or perceived challenge to the CCP's monopoly of power is demonstrated further by Deng's use of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to violently suppress the student protests at Beijing's Tiananmen Square in June 1989.¹⁹³

As in this infamous historic instance, the CCP has not stopped short of utilizing their direct and complete control over the PLA when it deemed that armed force was necessary. However, as previously discussed, coercion does not facilitate efficient governance. On the contrary, history has proven the inefficiency of coercion to maintain legitimacy.¹⁹⁴ Because of the complexities of political legitimacy as discussed in the first two chapters, the reasons for China's pervasive culture of consent, in terms of the attitude of the governed toward those who govern them, are equally complex, and can be understood only by examining the labyrinthine path of the CCP's seventy-year history. Such a close look will not only unlock potential explanations for the variance in governance styles exhibited by CCP leaders over the decades in question, but will

¹⁸⁹ Ding, *The Decline of Communism in China*, 2.

¹⁹⁰ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 29.

¹⁹¹ See Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 21-22, 29, 78-79, 319-320.

¹⁹² Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 228.

¹⁹³ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 35.

¹⁹⁴ Tarifa, "The Quest for Legitimacy and the Withering Away of Utopia," 447. Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 183.

also be able to provide broader explanations as to the political direction the CCP government under Xi is taking at present.

Returning to the initial premise of this thesis, it seems vital, in today's geopolitical maelstrom, to consider and to attempt to explain the propensities of Xi and his cabinet. Identifying and understanding the CCP's goals and geopolitical red lines can aid in establishing guardrails between Beijing and Washington to ensure a sensible path forward in a relationship fraught with misunderstandings and potential conflicts. Failure to secure what Rudd describes as "managed strategic competition" may well carry devastating consequences. Rudd comments, "Should they [Beijing and Washington] fail, down the other path lies the possibility of a war that could rewrite the future of both countries and the world in a way we can barely imagine."¹⁹⁵

In the following chapter, this thesis introduces an analytical model that seeks to explain the dynamics surrounding the seeming longevity of political legitimacy in communist China's one-party system. It thereby relies heavily on the analysis of expert Chinese scholars and other sinologists. Its explicit focus, as pertains to the central hypothesis of this thesis, follows:

The intrinsic imperative placed on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for **political legitimacy** inevitably leads to preferences in the utilization of **political legitimacy mechanisms**, which largely dictate **styles of governance**.

The previous chapter discussed the CCP's continued imperative with regard to maintaining legitimacy. The following chapter will focus on establishing the second and third criteria of the hypothesis. By means of a model developed to better understand the dynamic relationships between the second and third criteria, this chapter analyzes the sources and mechanisms of political legitimacy for the CCP and the styles of governance it has exhibited. For empirical support, this thesis draws on the example of three Chinese leaders whom the renowned sinologist David Shambaugh identifies as being "transformational" instead of "transactional" with respect to PRC history: Mao Zedong, Deng, and Xi. The political scientist James MacGregor Burns developed the term "transformational" to describe leaders whose goal is the alteration of society. Ideology and the transformation of society and its institutions drive these leaders. Shambaugh categorizes these three principal players further, as per the sort of transformation they have come to be associated: revolutionary leader (Mao), heroic leader (Mao), ideologues (Mao, Xi), reform leaders (Deng, Xi), and ideational leaders (Mao, Deng, Xi).¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 2.

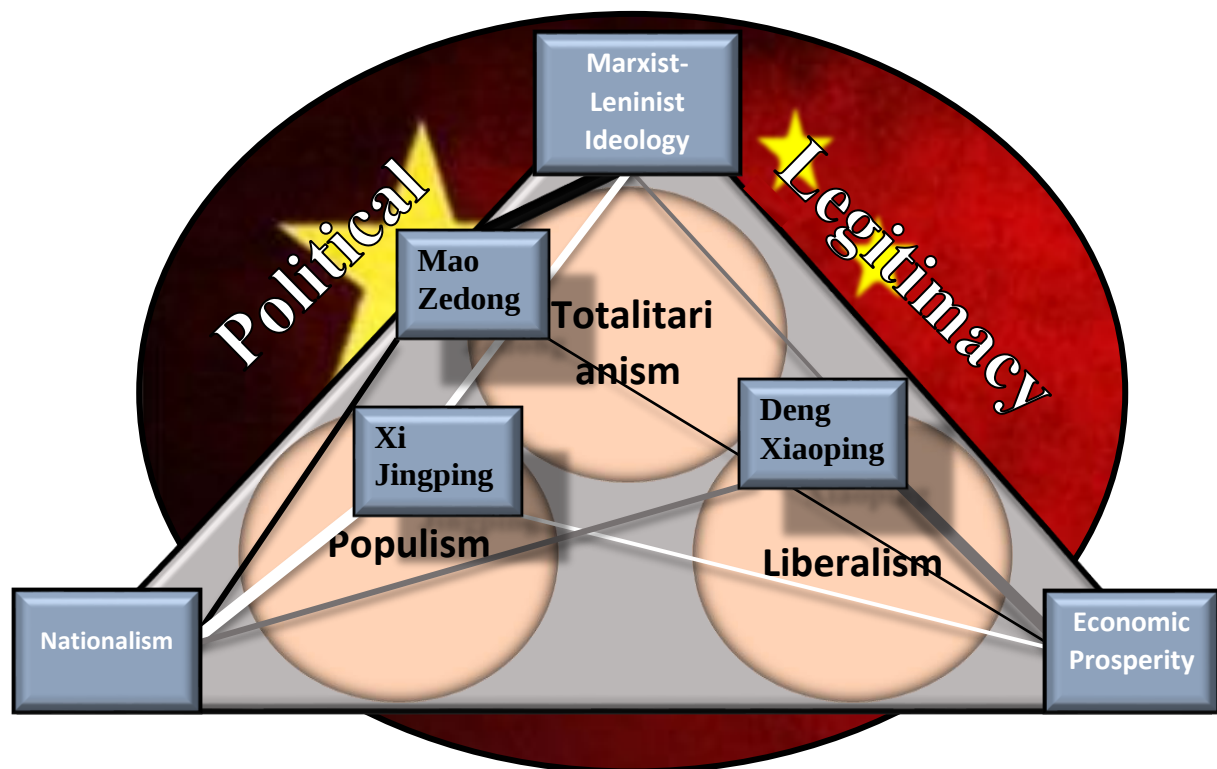
¹⁹⁶ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders – from Mao to Now*, 4.

2. The Model

Forming the basis and first plane of the model is political legitimacy as an instance of rightful power “acquired and exercised according to justifiable rules, and with evidence of consent.”¹⁹⁷

While political legitimacy forms the base of the model, three styles of governance are placed on the model’s second plane: totalitarianism, liberalism, and populism. This second plane accentuates the way the three styles relate in their display of both assimilating and contentious affinities. Each style of governance is not absolute but finds itself on a spectrum pursuant to its proximity with the others. Thus, a leader whose sole reliance for his legitimacy claim is economic prosperity will espouse a more liberal style of governance than a leader who, due to his stronger relationship to Marxist-Leninist ideology, positions himself on the model closer to that source of authority. The third plane establishes a dynamic triad between Marxist-Leninist ideology, economic prosperity, and nationalism. All three factors establish themselves as fundamental sources of political legitimacy in the history of the PRC.

As this chapter will more fully elaborate, the three sources work as mechanisms and provide a pathway to establishing political legitimacy for the CCP since the inception of the PRC. Mobilization mechanisms do not merely refer to the mass mobilization campaigns of Mao Zedong, but relate more directly to the mobilization of support behind policy or behind a leader’s claim to power.¹⁹⁸ Their dynamic relationships bind the model together at a



¹⁹⁷ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 3.

¹⁹⁸ See Holbig, “Reclaiming Legitimacy in China,” 404-406.

fundamental level. As later explained, the three sources sometimes develop a compatible, congenial relationship to the others; at other times, however, they act antithetically to the aims and goals of the others. They not only establish a dynamic relationship on the third plane of the model, but also enjoy a proximate connection to the specific style of governance on the plane below. Chinese communist leaders establish themselves on the last plane of the model. Each leader sustains a relationship to each source of legitimacy. Because of the constant imperative to sustain legitimacy in a one-party system, each leader, throughout his tenure, cultivates the relationship producing stronger or weaker bonds to each source. Depending on its strength, the bond pulls the leader towards one corner of the model or another. Finding a mean position between the three corners of the model, each leader finally assumes a unique style of governance.

The purpose of a model is to take a complex phenomenon or concept and simplify it in order to analyze the basic units or building blocks of the specific situation. This model does the same. Political legitimacy is inherently complex, and political legitimacy in the PRC equally, if not more so. This model does not boast a comprehensive nature that fully explicates the multifaceted complexities that produce legitimacy of power for the CCP. On the contrary, its strength lies in its modesty and in its ability to simplify a complex and thoroughly baffling situation with respect to the way an authoritarian political system can continually enjoy high levels of trust from the populace, and therefore can maintain high levels of political legitimacy even as its leaders espouse heterogeneous styles of governance. To be sure, the CCP's continued monopoly on power despite political, social, and economic crises substantiates its own legitimacy over time.

Undoubtedly, there are other factors at play than the three illustrated in the model. In fact, it would be portentous of this thesis to argue otherwise. It is true that, due to the outsized impact of Chinese leaders, their style of leadership assumed an extensive influence on the country's development. Personality types have definitely played (and continue to play) a role.¹⁹⁹ However, as the analysis and research of sinologists like Rudd make clear, the three sources of legitimacy seem to encompass the fundamental sources for the establishment and maintenance of power in the PRC.²⁰⁰ Moreover, as the further sub-chapter on styles of governance establishes, each governance style assumes an inherent relationship to each source of

¹⁹⁹ See Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 1.

²⁰⁰ See Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 57, 328.

legitimacy, providing explanations to the disparate governance styles of Chinese communist leaders since 1949.²⁰¹

In analyzing political legitimacy and its elements, this model restricts itself to the three sources of legitimacy as they relate to internal claims of political legitimacy. Foreign policy certainly plays a role here, also in influencing policy behavior. Clearly, Xi's success in foreign countries politically, economically, and militarily will increase his legitimacy at home.²⁰² In addition, China's aspirations to change the geopolitical order derive, at least in part, from its view of the Western political order as threat to the CCP.²⁰³ Nevertheless, as Rudd points out in *The Avoidable War*, Xi's first and primary interest is the maintenance of his own power, which depends first and foremost on his ability to attain and maintain his government's political legitimacy at home.²⁰⁴ This justifies the model's resilience in explaining not only Xi's policy and governance behavior, but also his attempt to establish legitimacy according to the three fundamental sources of political legitimacy. Nonetheless, after further research, this model could accommodate for the complex influences and elements foreign policy plays in regime legitimacy.

3. Governance

Political legitimacy inextricably weaves itself together with the thread of governance, as the lack of legitimacy not only assumes the potential of an existential threat to the authority in question, but also inhibits good governance.²⁰⁵ Similarly, a lack of good governance does not engender political legitimacy, and both are necessary for the proper functioning of any contemporary state.²⁰⁶ Although governance theory finds its home in neoliberal political systems,²⁰⁷ this thesis draws on Samuel Huntington's understanding of it, as per his argument, that "the most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government."²⁰⁸ For the contemporary state, good governance,

²⁰¹ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 2.

²⁰² Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 249.

²⁰³ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 268. See also Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "Wann und wie wird China an die Spitze des Weltgeschehens vorrücken?" Center for Strategic Analysis (2021).

²⁰⁴ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 85, 327.

²⁰⁵ Christopher K. Ansell, and Jacob Torfing eds., *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, Paperback edition, (Cheltenham, UK, Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), 197.

²⁰⁶ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 118-119.

²⁰⁷ Ansell, *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, 6-8.

²⁰⁸ Samuel P Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Seventh Edition. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 1.

like political legitimacy, remains imperative in terms of safeguarding a ruler's longevity and effectiveness, regardless of the structure of the specific political system. Like Huntington, Beetham also argues for the universality of legitimacy in relation to the ability of any system's capacity to rule.²⁰⁹

Whether a political system is based on democratic or liberal ideals, or on a more authoritative system, the ability to govern effectively and to sustain authority is dependent on the concepts of legitimacy extended from the governed to the sovereign, and on the sovereign's effective governance, as extending to the people.²¹⁰

Legal professor Jean-Marc Coicaud, who has explored this fundamental relationship between legitimacy and governance, defines legitimacy as "the recognition of the right to govern."²¹¹ *The Handbook on Theories of Governance* defines governance as "the interactive processes through which society and the economy are steered towards collectively negotiated objectives."²¹² Here we see the emergence of a more narrow definition as it identifies three elements that are vital to governance and once again attaches the concept to political legitimacy: the three elements being:

1. an interactive process, which is
2. steered towards
3. collectively negotiated objectives.

First is the dynamic relationship societal actors share with one another, as expressed in interactive processes. In their introduction to their *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, the professor of political science at the University of California, Berkley, Christopher Ansell, and Jacob Torfing, a professor of politics and institutions at Roskilde University, write:

The crucial insight is that no single actor has the knowledge, resources and capacities to govern alone in our complex and fragmented societies. Interaction is needed in order to exchange or pool the ideas, resources and competences that are required for the production of desirable outcomes.²¹³

Due to the concentration of power, these dynamics find convergence on the executive level in the position of the sovereign. Because the processes are interactive, the relationship does not emanate directionally from the sovereign. Instead, the relationship is dynamic, given that other

²⁰⁹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 119.

²¹⁰ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 118-119.

²¹¹ Coicaud, *Legitimacy and Politics*, 10.

²¹² Ansell, *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, 4.

²¹³ Ansell, *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, 4.

societal actors, both political and economic, in concert with the populace generally exert influence on each other and on the sovereign.²¹⁴ The exertion of influence and authority intersects with the second and third criteria of Beetham's political legitimacy theory (justifiability of the rules, and evidence of consent) in particular when regarding governance in the PRC. In fact, this first crucial element (1. an interactive process) forges political legitimacy to governance in a two-sided coin; political legitimacy breeds good governance and good governance propagates political legitimacy.

As the following sections will more closely argue, legitimacy and governance are not only closely related, but also seem to have such a close relationship, that out of the dynamics generated between them, a specific style of governance emerges. Thus, this first element establishes the relationship between the three sources of political legitimacy in the PRC found on the third plane of the model with styles of governance found on the second plane. Through the history of the PRC, political legitimacy acts as a central tenet to governance of the CCP, and the three main factors and mechanisms of political legitimacy act as proscriptive sources not only for governance per se, but also more specifically for the style of governance.

The second element (2. steering towards) relates to the active, directional influence these processes exert on the development of the economy and state. The dynamic assertion of influence from the bottom up and the top down assume an inexorable character guiding, steering, and pushing society through the decades and centuries. In the PRC, the directional influence not only correlates with specific governance styles and with their close ties to sources of legitimacy, but also influences the national meta-narratives that establish national objectives – the final element of the definition. This is evident, for instance, when Xi propagates the narrative that under Mao Zedong, China rose up; that under Deng, it became rich; and that under him, it will become strong.²¹⁵

The final element in the definition references objectives, which are “collectively negotiated”. In the context of the PRC, sinologists refer to the unspoken social contract regarding the people's acquiescence in exchange for economic prosperity.²¹⁶ Here we see the collectively negotiated objective the government follows to maintain its legitimacy. The adverb “collectively” does not necessarily guarantee an equal voice in negotiations, but gives credence to the influence the populace may have on the decision-making process of the sovereign.

²¹⁴ Ansell, *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, 201-202.

²¹⁵ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 258.

²¹⁶ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 310.

Clearly, governance does not happen in a vacuum but demands the participation of the person or people governing another person or group of people.²¹⁷ This is certainly true in the PRC in which the leader assumes a larger influence than in perhaps other political systems. Shambaugh writes:

Leaders matter in all political systems – but in some they matter much more. Leaders in totalitarian systems, or authoritarian leaders in single-party systems, are unconstrained by the checks and balances of democracies, and thus their actions are more determinative and have an outsized impact on their societies and the world beyond their borders. China is such a case.²¹⁸

Through its one-party system, China maintains an authoritative government. This thesis reflects the work of sinologists who continuously point to authoritarianism as the underlying organizing governing principle of the PRC.²¹⁹ Nonetheless, this principle does not preclude the disparate governance styles adopted by Chinese leaders since 1949. On the contrary, to argue that CCP leaders espouse a homogenous style of governance would belie the very real differences between the leaderships of Mao Zedong, Deng, and Xi, not to mention the other Chinese communist leaders.

The great sinologist Joseph Fewsmith avoids the term “authoritarian” because he feels it is too broad. He notes that there are few similarities between authoritarian systems, which begs the question of how universal the definition actually is. Fewsmith, in his analysis of Chinese governance, applies the term Leninism. Leninist systems are inherently authoritarian.²²⁰ This thesis, acknowledging that semantics do at times matter, adopts Fewsmith’s categorical critique and his adoption of Leninism as being the organizing political principle of the CCP since it came to power in 1949. Nonetheless, the right terminology continues to be debated; and a linguistic analysis of various theories on authoritarianism, Leninism, and their various empirical manifestations goes well beyond this thesis. Thus while understanding that PRC history is marked by Leninist regimes from Mao to Xi, this thesis will also use the term “authoritarian” to describe the CCP’s underlying governing system.

²¹⁷ Ansell, *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, 198.

²¹⁸ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 1.

²¹⁹ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 1-2.

See also Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 15-16 & 18-19. Fewsmith underscores this argument by noting that in a Leninist hierarchical system, power is not only derived from the position in the hierarchy, but also from the connections, the people filling those positions have within the system. Thus, the individual matters.

²²⁰ See Fewsmith, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 4.

The following paragraphs elucidate each style of governance as it establishes itself on the second plane of the model and as it directly relates to the corresponding source of legitimacy. As Huntington concedes, “They (communist political systems) may not provide liberty, but they do provide authority; they do create governments that can govern.”²²¹

3.1 Totalitarianism

3.1.1 Governance: Totalitarianism

Like all political theories, totalitarianism, at least as a theoretical development of the 20th century, finds different expressions in different schools of thought.²²² However, the universality of control and the ubiquity of ideology of totalitarianism can be found in most of the definitions. For the sake of brevity, the following is the complete definition from *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*.

Totalitarianism is here intended to define a system of governance based on a monopoly of power and politics by a party with a holistic ideology that is rendered compulsory for the entire collective. The fundamental characteristic elements of a totalitarian regime are: The affirmation of the supremacy of politics, understood as the submission of the individual and the masses to a single party; the militarization of the party through a rigidly hierarchical organization, implementing the principle of appointment from on high that culminates in the figure of the leader; the permanent organization and mobilization of the masses through a network of associations controlled by a single party that encompasses every aspect of public and private life; and the institutionalization of the ideology of the single party through a system of dogmas, symbols, rites, and commandments that assault the sum total of collective existence.²²³

This definition identifies the chief characteristics of a totalitarian state: the centrality of power, the hegemony of the party and its ideology, and the pervasive reach of politics into every part of societal and economic life. In such a state, the leader enjoys a high degree of control not only over the party, but also over society. Central to this form of governance is the presence of a strong individual leader and the erasure of relational lines between him and the masses; the most obvious historical examples being Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin. Personality and charisma seem to play a significant role. Even more fundamental than the leader’s personal ability to move the masses and mobilize them behind his powerful rhetoric is his own commitment to ideology, for it is through totalitarian ideology as expressed in one-party rule that the regime’s

²²¹ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 8.

²²² Michael Freeden and Marc Stears, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 64.

²²³ Freeden, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 65.

claim to authority is established.²²⁴ Along with it comes another more personal and volatile, but equally political, claim the totalitarian leader's claim to infallibility. To quote the influential philosopher and political theorist, Hannah Arendt:

The chief qualification of a mass leader has become unending infallibility; he can never admit an error. The assumption of infallibility, moreover, is based not so much on superior intelligence as on the correct interpretation of the essentially reliable forces in history or nature, forces which neither defeat nor ruin can prove wrong because they are bound to assert themselves in the long run. Mass leader in power have one concern which overrules all utilitarian considerations: to make their predictions come true.²²⁵

The differences between authoritarianism and totalitarianism are ambiguous. However, two vital differentiations are helpful. First, while totalitarian states espouse a highly developed guiding ideology, authoritarianism does not. Second, totalitarian states are able to mobilize a population towards a common, usually national, goal whereas authoritarian states often lack the power.²²⁶

3.1.2 Totalitarianism and Ideology

A vital element in the gradual concentration of totalitarian power over time is a unifying ideology. The totalitarian leader must possess and assume an ideology, which contains a structure of totality: totality in the sense of holistic systems of thought that place "a collective entity ... at the centre [sic] of their conception of man and society."²²⁷ The primacy placed in ideology is marked not only by its pervasiveness in all levels of society, thus to "assault the sum total of collective existence," but also by the fact that it functions as the legitimation for the one-party state.²²⁸ The prerequisite is the continued mass indoctrination of society. Ideology as a mechanism of legitimatization and mobilization does not stem from totalitarianism as dogma, but rather results from other ideologies and assumes the mantle of a totalitarian system or style of governance. Thus, Bolshevism, fascism, and National Socialism may be disparate in their ideologies but still share common ground in their expression: totalitarian governance.²²⁹

²²⁴ Freedon, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 65.

²²⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 7th. (Cleveland, Ohio: The World Publishing Company, 1958), 348.

²²⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica, "What Is the Difference Between Totalitarianism and Authoritarianism?"

²²⁷ Freedon, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 66.

²²⁸ Freedon, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 65.

²²⁹ Freedon, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 64-65.

In the case of Bolshevism and National Socialism, both ideologies saw the other as antithetical, as demonstrated by the extermination of Bolsheviks in Hitler's concentration camps; and conversely, Russia's disdain for the Third Reich. As evidenced in multiple totalitarian states such as Nazi Germany, the leader implements the tools of violence not to gain legitimacy but to enforce ideological narratives that in turn consolidate his grip on power. Arendt comments, "Wherever totalitarianism possesses absolute control, it replaces propaganda with indoctrination and uses violence not so much to frighten people ... as to realize constantly its ideological doctrines and its practical lies."²³⁰

3.1.3 Totalitarianism in the PRC

Due to the imperative placed on Chinese leaders to maintain a relationship to each of the three sources of legitimacy, elements of totalitarianism may be found in the leadership of Chinese leaders. A definition from *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* makes it clear what these totalitarian elements are: submission to a single party and leader, militarization of the party, permanent mobilization of the masses, and the supremacy of a holistic ideology.²³¹

Mao adopted a style of governance that came closest to a totalitarian one by effectively marrying his personality cult to a strong Marxist-Leninist ideology, which aided mass mobilization campaigns and secured his firm hold on power. Campaigns created a cornerstone for Mao's governance; campaigns which were ideological in creation and, at times, massively violent in their implementation. As Arendt shows above, totalitarian leaders implement violence to enforce ideological claims. Struggle sessions in Mao's campaigns and the unleashing of violent anarchic elements specifically during the Cultural Revolution provide further evidence of Mao's unrestrained totalitarian proclivities.²³²

In his article "China: Totalitarianism's Long Shadow", the political scientist Minxin Pei argues that these elements of totalitarianism are preserved in communist totalitarianism over time through institutions, the prime example being the CCP itself.²³³ Borrowing a term from Linz and Stepan, Pei speaks of "frozen post-totalitarianism," and suggests that the preservation process of these totalitarian elements began under the leadership of Deng. Deng's governance

²³⁰ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 341.

²³¹ Freedman, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 65.

²³² Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 319.

²³³ Minxin Pei, "China: Totalitarianism's Long Shadow," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 2 (2021), 5–21, 13.

style was not totalitarian per se; however, totalitarian elements were certainly evident, as Pei explains:

At the outset of China's transition from Maoist-totalitarian rule in 1979–80, the CCP leadership under Deng Xiaoping made a strategic choice to use economic reform as the means of saving the one-party regime that Mao's catastrophic rule had devastated. As Deng made plain in 1979, the goal of reform was not to end or change exclusive CCP rule, but to maintain it. Hence the deliberate and painstaking preservation of such key totalitarian institutions as the Leninist party-state, the repressive apparatus, state control of the economy's "commanding heights," and information restraints. In economic reform, private-sector growth, and global economic integration, post-Mao China has made strides that the post-Stalin regimes of the old Soviet bloc could never have imagined. Yet the choice to keep the legacy institutions of totalitarianism has blunted the liberalizing and democratizing effects of economic modernization.²³⁴

Pei points out that, due to the preservation of such post-totalitarian elements, Xi is now able to muster said elements as he swings back to a "neo-Stalinist path". Pei warns of the accruing crises that will mount with such a style of governance. He writes, "His [Xi's] neo-Stalinist strategy will almost certainly exacerbate existing tensions, create new challenges, and undermine the CCP's long-term survival prospects."²³⁵

3.2 Liberalism

3.2.1 Governance: Liberalism

Liberalism can mean anything and at the same time nothing. It can be a political theory, an ideological position, or even an underlying behavioral pattern of human interactions. Historically, it has assumed varying theoretical and ideological forms, creating a varied landscape of conflicting definitions and understandings. The variance in understanding pays tribute to liberalism's longstanding durability and ability to adapt to different contexts and historical settings. It is therefore difficult, if even possible, to settle on one unifying definition.²³⁶ Freeden, in his chapter on liberalism in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, writes, "It is crucial to recognize that liberalism is not a single phenomenon, but an assembly of family resemblances, with a rich and complex historical story and with numerous contrasting contemporary formations."²³⁷

²³⁴ Pei, "China: Totalitarianism's Long Shadow," 12-13.

²³⁵ Pei, "China: Totalitarianism's Long Shadow," 17.

²³⁶ Freeden, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 327.

²³⁷ Freeden, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 327.

However, there are certain elements that are common to even the most disparate theories, ones that seem to intersect and unite the various theoretical approaches. To quote Freeden once again:

It is helpful to begin by noting that there are elements of liberalism that are widely accepted. Despite its multiple varieties, liberalism is often described as an individualist creed, celebrating a particular form of freedom and autonomy, involving the development and protection of systems of individual rights, social equality, and constraints on the interventions of social and political power.²³⁸

The universal elements noted here provide a closer understanding to liberalism and its application in politics. Predominant in liberal thought is the concept of the individual and an increased autonomy in political, social, and economic conduct. In this sense, the government assumes not a constraining position but an enabling function to meet these liberal ends.²³⁹

3.2.2 Liberalism and Economic Prosperity

The British political theorist L.T. Hobhouse, positioned himself in the burgeoning neoliberalist movement in Britain towards the turn of the 20th century. The new movement's theoretical development introduced the idea of equality and social responsibility in the sense that "the health of the whole was dependent on the health of each and every party, requiring reciprocal assistance."²⁴⁰ In his book *Liberalism*, Hobhouse identifies central elements of the eponymous topic, many of which coincide with the previously quoted definition. Hobhouse states that along with civil and social liberty, economic liberty is also a central tenet to liberalism. In his explication of economic liberty, Hobhouse emphasizes that its cornerstone is the protection of the individual's right to economic autonomy. He writes, "Free contract and personal responsibility lay close to the heart of the whole Liberal movement. Hence the doubts felt by so many Liberals as to the regulation of industry by law."²⁴¹ If liberalism is to enable the individual, then it must also safeguard the individual from oppressive associations that manifest themselves in monopolies too powerful to overcome.²⁴²

Conclusively, both as a theory and as a style of governance, liberalism may be difficult to define due to long-standing discrepancies between competing theoretical approaches. Regardless of

²³⁸ Freeden, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 327-328.

²³⁹ Freeden, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 330.

²⁴⁰ Freeden, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 335.

²⁴¹ L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, [New ed.], (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press Inc, 1964), 22.

²⁴² Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 24.

its adaptations and the formulations used to describe it, notions of liberty, freedom, and personal autonomy are fundamental to them all. In addition, Hobhouse is quite clear about the government's regulating function under the goal of economic liberty including equality for the individual. He argues:

The distinction that I would claim for economic Liberalism is that it seeks to do justice to the social and individual factors in industry alike, as opposed to an abstract Socialism which emphasizes the one side and an abstract Individualism which leans its whole weight on the other. By keeping to the conception of harmony as our clue we constantly define the rights of the individual in terms of the common good, and think of the common good in terms of the welfare of all the individuals who constitute a society.²⁴³

Here we see the inherent connection between liberalism and the goal of economic prosperity as it strikes a balance on the edge of two-sided coin – the two sides being socialist economics and individualism. Forging a bridge between the two, liberalism seeks to unleash the creative forces of individual creativity and, simultaneously, the energetic forces of market production.²⁴⁴

3.2.3 Liberalism in the PRC

How, one might wonder, does an approach to politics steeped in liberal democratic philosophy apply to a centralized communist system like the PRC? While Mao placed a certain importance on economic reform in animating the economy, prosperity as a mechanism of political legitimacy proved unsuccessful under his leadership. Evidence of this can be found by examining the Great Leap Forward, in which state coercion instead of delivering the harmony found between social and individual economic factors and the effective motor of economic prosperity, ended in disaster under the superordinate role of Marxist-Leninist ideology.²⁴⁵ Mao's preoccupation with ideology as his primary mechanism of legitimacy led to its predominance over economic prosperity. The direct result was famine and death.²⁴⁶

Deng reversed the relationship, giving prosperity pride of place above the other three sources of political legitimacy found on the model. His policy position demonstrated his efforts to introduce reforms that engendered diminished party control over the economy and wider margins for personal economic autonomy.²⁴⁷ The reversal of the sources saw a fundamental change in the relationship between leader and populace. By regarding prosperity as a motor of

²⁴³ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 109.

²⁴⁴ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 109.

²⁴⁵ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 58-59.

²⁴⁶ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 319.

²⁴⁷ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 328-329.

open markets, Deng offered a model in which the state receded and society became stronger. While totalitarianism offered a strong state and a weakened society, Deng began to flip this relationship. The opening of private markets and establishment of new reforms enabled the private consumer to seek his own autonomy, which correlated to the enormous economic turn in Chinese history.²⁴⁸

3.3 Populism

3.3.1 Governance: Populism

The concept of populism remains difficult to define with any precision, as is evident from arguments among scholars who have sought to analyze it. As it is, the roots of populist theory are entangled in the emergence of liberal democracies, making any analysis outside the liberal democratic framework difficult.²⁴⁹

Political Scientist Cas Mudde points out that some of the confusion around it stems from the label that is attached to it; a label which is mostly ascribed to other groups of people in a descriptive manner.²⁵⁰ Whether the specific understanding carries pejorative or positive implications is context dependent. This pushes populism theories to develop contextually, dependent on a specific political environment, and it results in a heterogeneous landscape of theoretical considerations and analytical definitions. For instance, academics usually locate populism in Latin America in the context of left-wing progressive politics, whereas populism in Eastern Europe usually concerns itself with right-wing anti-European, anti-immigrant politics.²⁵¹ Nevertheless, most scholars agree that the phenomenon appeals in some way directly to the “common” people, primarily by identifying the elites and positioning the populist leader or party against the elites in defense of the will of the people. Using an ideational approach, Mudde defines populism as

a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ See Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 6-7.

²⁴⁹ Rovira Kaltwasser et al. eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

²⁵⁰ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

²⁵¹ Mudde, *Populism*, 1.

²⁵² Mudde, *Populism*, 5-6.

This ideational definition comprises three elements: the people, the elite, and the general will. While all three are vital to populist political discourse, the ideational approach quickly runs into explanatory limits because it remains in a discourse analysis, while populism as a dynamic political concept flows into the political arena, leaving discourse and language behind. Nonetheless, the ideational approach succinctly highlights its thin-centered ideology and the malleability of the populist appeal – something that enables political actors to amalgamate populist rhetoric with other political ideologies in order to garner support and trust.²⁵³

The approach is nuanced further by the argument that populism appears to be attached to other ideological elements that serve the promotion of specific politics. This in turn appeals to the populace and results in the establishment of higher trust and support levels. In other words, populism may take on various forms, cloaked in ideologies and party politics that are dependent on the political context. Mudde explains:

Seen in this light, populism must be understood as a kind of mental map through which individuals analyze and comprehend political reality. It is not so much a coherent ideological tradition as a set of ideas that, in the real world, appears in combination with quite different, and sometimes contradictory, ideologies.²⁵⁴

Again, according to the ideational approach, *the people* is one of the three elements of the definition. However, Kurt Weyland, a professor of government at the University of Austin, points out that the concept is so amorphous that it is nearly impossible to ascribe any measure of collective political agency to the group.²⁵⁵

Another theoretical approach is the political-strategic approach. This approach leaves the discourse and focuses on the populist leader's performance: how he or she gains and maintains power. At the center of this model is the populist leader and the strategies the leader employs for the maintenance of power. The approach commences with an inherent criticism of the ideational claim. The political-strategic approach does not focus on the rise of populism in terms of the nation's politics being handed to the people, but rather the creation of a populist leader who, once in authority, seeks public support for his claim to power.²⁵⁶ It is not the people and

²⁵³ Mudde, *Populism*, 19.

²⁵⁴ Mudde, *Populism*, 6.

²⁵⁵ Kaltwasser, *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 50.

²⁵⁶ Kaltwasser, *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 54.

the voice of the people, therefore, who are centrally important, but rather the individual populist leader who has claimed power for himself but who attempts then to legitimize his authority on the altar of the people's voice. Weyland argues, "By missing this fundamental inversion and not even including personalistic leadership in the definition, discursive and ideology-centered notions fail to capture the central meaning of populism. They focus on the surface and miss the very axis around which populism revolves."²⁵⁷

As a style of governance, populism embodies not only elements of the discourse touted by the ideational approach, but also those of the strategic approach that allows for populist access to legitimacy. Populism is in fact a thin-centered ideology in which a given leader, regardless of political bent and regardless of the political system in which he or she is active, adopts rhetoric and policies that directly address the populace, thereby, assuming a central role even while claiming to represent the people and their will. Weyland writes:

Viewed from this comparative perspective, populism is a political strategy that revolves around an individual politician. Specifically, populism rests on personalistic leadership, seeks to boost its autonomy and power, and contests, pushes aside, or dominates other types of actors, such as elite factions and organized political parties.²⁵⁸

In addition, the populist leader characteristically identifies an enemy or multiple enemies who form an elite or "alien" group and then advances the claim that these enemies are working against the will of the people. The amassed support from the larger populace against the putative enemy offers a pathway for the leader not only to bolster support and legitimacy for his authority, but also to mobilize the populace behind his policies.²⁵⁹ Therefore, populism as a style of governance, builds its most basic structure around a thin-centered ideology, and within that structure the populist leader, claiming the voice of the people, is driven continuously back to gain the affirmation of the people for his continued claim to power.²⁶⁰

3.3.2 Populism and Nationalism

Some scholars argue that nationalism and populism are two distinct political phenomena. However, because of its thin-centered ideology, populism often adopts important characteristics of a "host" ideology like nationalism, thus offering a broader path for its adherents. As the

²⁵⁷ Kaltwasser, *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 54.

²⁵⁸ Kaltwasser, *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 56.

²⁵⁹ Kaltwasser, *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 57.

²⁶⁰ Kaltwasser, *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 53-54.

professor of political science, Cristóbal Kaltwasser, argues, “Populism can be merged completely with nationalism, when the distinction between the people and the elite is both moral and ethnic.”²⁶¹ The nationalistic overtones in a populist movement help provide homogeneity within the group and identify the common enemy.²⁶²

Populism as a style or form of governance relies on several aspects. First, discourse and rhetoric are vital in creating the thin-covered ideology that complements the other predominant ideologies of the populist leader. Second, because of the fickleness of speech, populism must be analyzed through a political strategic approach. Through strategic and rhetorical considerations, the populist leader asserts his or her voice as that of the people and as the sole representative of their wishes. Through discourse and policy positioning, the populist leader is able to profit from a high level of legitimacy. In addition, the leader is able to identify enemies, creating in and out groups: people who belong, and people who do not, because of their dissent. Here nationalism may take a central role in mobilizing the people behind the leader and creating a homogenous group of supporters tied together by the uniting and communally elevated concepts of land, history, ethnicity, or other attributes. The populist leader is thus seen as the tip of the spear – the man or woman for the hour, leading a united front.

3.3.3 Populism in the PRC

Several elements of populism characterized Mao Zedong’s leadership. The centrality of mass campaigns directed towards political goals and targets were quickly rooted in Mao’s personal populism. His charisma stood as a tenet for mobilizing the populace along with the ideological appeal found in the goals laid out in the mass campaigns.²⁶³ However, his cult of personality mirrored that of a totalitarian despot rather than a populist leader.²⁶⁴

Currently, populist strains emerge from Xi’s utilization of nationalism as a uniting force. Rudd’s analysis of “Xi Jinping Thought” establishes three core propositions, as follows:

1. the fusion of Marxism-Leninism, Chinese tradition, and Chinese nationalism
2. the propagation of Chinese politics and economics moving to the political left, and nationalism moving to the political right

²⁶¹ Kaltwasser, *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 14.

²⁶² Jacopo Custodi, “Nationalism and Populism on the Left: The Case of Podemos,” *Nations and Nationalism* 27, no. 3 (2021): 705–20, 716.

²⁶³ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 4.

²⁶⁴ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 77.

3. legitimization of *struggle* as a means towards progress domestically and non-domestically.²⁶⁵

In addition, Xi's populist positioning to garner legitimacy can be seen in the CCP's attempts to "harness indigenous Chinese religion, philosophy, historiography, and culture to reinforce the party's ideological claim to continuing political legitimacy."²⁶⁶ Undeniably, a major cornerstone of Xi's "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" is restoring its central position on the global stage, a position the CCP claims China held previously for thousands of years.²⁶⁷ Additionally, Xi's economic worldview focuses on a populist call as he claims to stand on the side of the masses – China's working class and lower middle-class. Xi's famed ongoing campaign against income inequality and his concept of common prosperity directly addresses these masses.²⁶⁸ Rudd argues, "He [Xi] has harnessed a form of Chinese economic populism with a view to grafting it on to socialism with Chinese characteristics for his 'new era'."²⁶⁹ Further populist elements are evident in Xi's push to centralize his power and to establish himself as the core of the center. This ambition became clear in the Party Charter in September of 2020, which explicitly put Xi in a central position of power, along with the requisite demands for loyalty and the upholding of his authority.²⁷⁰ Fewsmith comments, "In other words, the work of the whole party must revolve around Xi Jinping. If it is possible to codify personalistic leadership, this document [the Party Charter] does it."²⁷¹

4. Sources of Political Legitimacy

In *The Avoidable War*, Rudd writes, "...three fundamental sources of political legitimacy remain for the CCP: Marxist-Leninist ideology, economic prosperity, and Chinese nationalism (the latter also incorporating selective extractions from the Chinese classical tradition)."²⁷² These three elements function as sources to which the CCP may appeal in order to garner an increased level of legitimacy, translated into trust granted by the populace. In this regard, the sources act as mechanisms by which the CCP may mobilize the people and purchase popular

²⁶⁵ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 313.

²⁶⁶ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 93.

²⁶⁷ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 88. See also Elizabeth J. Perry, "The Populist Dream of Chinese Democracy," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 4 (2015): 903–15, 911.

²⁶⁸ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 114 & 118.

²⁶⁹ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 119.

²⁷⁰ Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 175-176.

²⁷¹ Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 176.

²⁷² Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 328.

consent vis-à-vis specific policy directions.²⁷³ Beetham argues that in non-electoral political systems, legitimacy derives from the ability of the party to mobilize the populace politically. He writes:

...the ruling party has a correspondingly different popular function from parties in electoral systems: not to prepare leaders and policies for presentation to the electorate, but to stimulate the mass involvement on which the system depends both for the administration of policy and for its own legitimation.²⁷⁴

The CCP uses these sources to foster the involvement of the people, and where necessary, to make up for a lack of electoral participation.²⁷⁵

The emergence of these fundamental sources do not preclude other sources of legitimacy, such as institutional stability, power succession, or even social stability. In her doctoral thesis, Zeng reports having found a wider consensus among sinologists of the triad: “economic growth + social stability + nationalism,” with ideology acting as a factor outside the triad, and influencing each of the three.²⁷⁶ However, the three sources of legitimacy identified by Rudd not only function as sources of legitimacy, but also act as mechanisms in their function as mobilizers of the populace behind policy measures and leaders. According to this understanding, ideology shifts to the third source of the triad, and social stability is seen as a consequence of the triad’s proper employment.²⁷⁷

Other sinologists such as Andrew Nathan, Cheng Li, and Bo Zhiyue assert that political stability and longevity correlate with political institutionalization. Fewsmith demurs, arguing that such efforts to explain Chinese politics are “misplaced.”²⁷⁸ On the contrary, he argues for the existence of opposite developing trends. Under Xi, the CCP seems to assume an even greater position in Chinese politics.²⁷⁹ Fewsmith asserts that party balances, in which the paramount

²⁷³ Holbig, “Reclaiming Legitimacy in China,” 405 & 407. Holbig argues that both nationalism and ideology act as mobilizing mechanisms for physical and popular support for the CCP. See also Zeng, “The Chinese Communist Party’s Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion,” 71-72. See Gilley, “The Debate on Party Legitimacy in China,” 346. See Holbig, “Ideology After the End of Ideology,” 65.

²⁷⁴ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 156.

²⁷⁵ See also Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 155 & 183-185.

²⁷⁶ Zeng, “The Chinese Communist Party’s Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion,” 11.

²⁷⁷ See Kevin Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 108. Rudd explains how social stability is a consequence of, for instance, economic growth.

²⁷⁸ Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 14. See also Susan Shirk, “China in Xi’s ‘New Era’: The Return to Personalistic Rule,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 2 (2018): 22–36, 23.

²⁷⁹ Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 15.

leader will strategically place allies in particular positions within the party, help strengthen the leader's grip on the party and is conducive to party cohesion. This was particularly the case under Deng²⁸⁰ and General Secretary Jiang Zemin, who successfully navigated party factions.²⁸¹ The latest party purges under Xi may be evidence of his repudiation of balance within the party and a shift to stronger party cohesion and personal loyalty.²⁸² However, party balance is not a mechanism of legitimacy, but rather a consequence of leadership style.

Consequently, these three sources remain. As Rudd elucidates, "If all three work together seamlessly, the party's overall legitimacy will be high. But the truth is, despite the party's concerted efforts, they don't."²⁸³ As this chapter will explain, the inability to orchestrate the three sources in lockstep is rooted in the dynamics that play out on the plane of the model on which the three reside. While relating to one another, they remain at best conditionally assimilated – and at worst, antithetical – to each other. The outcome is an asymmetrical approach in which the Chinese leader capitalizes on one or at most the amalgamation of two sources to attain legitimacy while still maintaining a relationship to all three.

The asymmetry of the triad produces unique styles of governance as the relationship between the leader and each of the sources create bonds of strength, pulling the leader towards each corner of the triad. However, because of the double-edged relationships the sources establish with one another, a given leader will gravitate to one of the three sources. The leader's relationship to this primary source is evident in how he seeks to best mobilize the populace behind his leadership, in the implementation of policy measures, and in terms of overall policy behavior. If all sources would work simultaneously with one another, the leader would end up in the center of the model. Consequently, the leader's position ends up being proscriptive of his governance style. In the following sections, this thesis will briefly demonstrate how both Mao Zedong and established relationships to each source of legitimacy and how they exploited the specific source to increase their legitimacy. Because nationalism has become so central to Xi's governance, this thesis includes a brief preliminary analysis how Xi seeks to utilize nationalism to gain legitimacy.

²⁸⁰ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 128.

²⁸¹ Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 18 & 61.

²⁸² Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 308. Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 171 & 175.

²⁸³ Kevin Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 328.

4.1 Marxist-Leninist Ideology

Scholars have long debated the influence that Marxist-Leninist ideology still carries in justifying and accrediting the CCP's grip on absolute power in China.²⁸⁴ As argued in the second chapter, Marxist-Leninist ideology remains vital in understanding the CCP, its governance, and how it fulfills the three elements of Beetham's legitimacy model. While ideology is fundamental to the historical development and continued preservation of power, it also has served, and continues to serve, as a mechanism and source for attaining legitimacy through mobilizing the public.²⁸⁵

Clearly, the propaganda state of the CCP has functioned as its most vital link with the populace in the dissemination of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Propaganda became central to the ideologically-driven purge campaigns under Mao, and remains central in controlling and guiding the public sphere.²⁸⁶ The Canadian historian, Timothy Cheek, states, "Propaganda, then, is central to a system that underwrites CCP legitimacy, provides practical political feedback on current policy, and informs their cadre training and discipline system."²⁸⁷ Propaganda remains a tool used for the ideological claims of legitimacy for the CCP, a tool, which the CCP wields quite successfully in carrying its ideological claims to the Chinese people, achieving censorship and control over civil society, and disciplining the ruling elite.²⁸⁸

4.1.1 Mao Zedong

Ideology not only became fundamental for Mao's continued hold on power, but was also the predominant force in justifying and mobilizing the populace behind his policies and their implementation. This was achieved by means of mass mobilization campaigns in which party directions were translated into action, first by cadres and then by the broader Chinese citizenry, in an attempt to reach party goals.²⁸⁹ Mao's continued mass mobilization efforts attested to his ideological position of continued revolution and his commitment to establishing and realizing pure communism.²⁹⁰

Already in his first years in power, Mao quickly utilized the campaign to consolidate his power and assert his legitimacy. Over the first three years, he launched five campaigns: "suppress

²⁸⁴ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 87.

²⁸⁵ Holbig, "Ideology After the End of Ideology," 65.

²⁸⁶ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 127 & 273.

²⁸⁷ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 127.

²⁸⁸ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 160.

²⁸⁹ Strauss, *State Formation in China and Taiwan*, 22.

²⁹⁰ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 29.

counterrevolutionaries campaign” (1950-1953), the “thought reform campaign” (1951-1956), the “land reform movement” (1949-1952), the “three anti campaign” (1951-1952), and the “five anti campaign” (1952). All five were ideologically reasoned while espousing political, social, or economic goals. The campaign against counterrevolutionaries saw thousands of people arrested and executed. The “three anti’s” focused on corrupt local officials and against bureaucratism while the “five anti’s” aimed its ire at urban elites.²⁹¹ As evidenced during the Cultural Revolution, Mao also used mobilization campaigns to fight what he deemed the trend of revisionism within the party. He understood the revisionists as party elites who emerged as potential rivals because of their refusal to follow his political line. Through amassing popular support against them, he purged the party of potential rivals and consequently centralized his position of power.²⁹² Along with his other campaigns, these succeeded in increasing totalitarian power for Mao until his death.

A further primary element to Mao’s call to action was class struggle, a method argued in Marxist-Leninist ideology as being crucial for identifying and separating classes for the triumph of communism. This again translated into policy and realization in mass campaigns such as during the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution mobilized thousands of Chinese citizens to fight against private property, exploitation, and capitalism.²⁹³ With the slogan “To rebel is justified,” Mao sought to protect China from the perceived threat of revisionism.²⁹⁴ Beginning in 1966, the Cultural Revolution was marked by two years of absolute terror developing into anarchic mayhem, followed by eight more years of persecution and violence that ended only with Mao’s death in 1976. The impetus for the Cultural Revolution was steeped in Leninist-Marxist ideology. Shambaugh argues:

The movement was triggered by Mao’s own interpretation of Marxism-Leninism and particularly his belief that restoration of capitalism was a constant danger in socialist systems. If not checked and overturned, he believed that capitalism would be restored by “revisionists” – both in the Party-state apparatus but also in society at large. ... Mao further believed that communism was not some distant stage of societal development that would take an indeterminant [sic] period of time to reach – he believed that it was imminently achievable.²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 41-44.

²⁹² Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 71-73 & 78.

²⁹³ Zeng, “The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion,” 28.

²⁹⁴ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 169-170.

²⁹⁵ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 74.

The centrality of ideology remained strong throughout Mao's leadership, as he continually chose ideology over economic prosperity and nationalism.²⁹⁶

4.1.2 Deng Xiaoping

Deng's commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideology became clear with his introduction of what he called "four cardinal principles." As noted above, in chapter 2, the four are:

1. The principle of upholding the socialist path.
2. The principle of upholding the people's democratic dictatorship.
3. The principle of upholding the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.
4. The principle of upholding Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought²⁹⁷

Deng made his commitment to Marxist-Leninism as the basis for communist rule unequivocally clear, and this gave him a unique opportunity to revise the party's focus from Maoist class struggle to the economy, while also upholding the pervasive political structure and the party's political dominance.²⁹⁸ The four principles were ambiguous enough to enable economic pragmatic reforms while still signaling his commitment to the CCP's core ideology.²⁹⁹ Shambaugh writes:

Deng believed in the pragmatic flexibility of ideology as much as he did the flexibility of policies – in fact, without a flexible ideology China could not adopt flexible policies (and vice versa). One preceded the other. In short, without a wholesale jettisoning of the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist canon, what Deng did was to essentially reverse the relationship between ideology and policy –instead of deductively determining policy from ideology (as had been the case under Mao)... Ideology thus became an after-the-fact justification rather than determining policy in the first place.³⁰⁰

As clarified in the previous chapter, the malleability of Marxist-Leninist ideology is part of its core strength and makes it easier to apply to whatever political or economic trend is predominant at a given time. Even as Deng introduced economic market reforms, he had to contend with incorporating the ideological fallout of legitimacy under Mao Zedong. Further, he was compelled to stay committed to the unifying Marxist-Leninist ideology that granted him the basic authority he enjoyed as leader of the CCP. His position was tenuous. Deng understood that a complete disavowal of Mao and Mao Zedong Thought was untenable, as it put the entire existence of the CCP in jeopardy. Zeng expounds:

²⁹⁶ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 57. See also Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 6.

²⁹⁷ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 118.

²⁹⁸ Ding, *The Decline of Communism in China*, 2-3.

²⁹⁹ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 35.

³⁰⁰ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 117-118.

As mentioned, if the CCP completely purge the memories and policies of its founder Mao Zedong, the party's history and rule would be in trouble. Thus, Deng's strategy was to maintain Mao Zedong Thought as the guiding theory, but distance this from what Mao Zedong himself actually thought and what was done under the banner of his thought.³⁰¹

Further political acts such as the trial of the "Gang of Four" enabled Deng to separate the criminal excesses of the Cultural Revolution from political errors, thus allowing him the possibility of preserving Mao Zedong Thought as part of party ideology and Mao as the Great Helmsman, while convicting others of supposed crimes. However, the dilemma concerning Mao as the founder of the PRC, his legacy, and the role of Mao Zedong Thought in party ideology remained at least in part, and was only resolved with the "Resolution on Certain Questions in Our Party History" adopted in 1981.³⁰² The resolution admitted political mistakes committed by virtue of Mao's campaigns but upheld his reputation as a great leader, and Mao Zedong Thought as a guiding principle of party ideology.³⁰³

4.2 Economic Prosperity

Economic prosperity marked China's rise as a political and economic power. Sinologists describe the "unspoken social contract" in which the Chinese people offer the CCP legitimacy in exchange for economic prosperity.³⁰⁴ Although economic prosperity is most associated with the reforms started under the leadership of Deng and the successive leaderships of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, even Mao understood the importance of this source of legitimacy for his authority.

4.2.1 Mao Zedong

Although Mao's relationship to ideology and economic prosperity saw the predominance of ideology over economic prosperity,³⁰⁵ Mao himself did not reject the latter. On the contrary, he attempted to reform and industrialize the Chinese economy. However, his reforms failed due to his insistence on subordinating economic prosperity to ideology.

³⁰¹ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 32.

³⁰² Professor Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik argues that the 1981 Resolution did not resolve the dilemma of Mao's legacy especially concerning the Cultural Revolution as Deng had perhaps hoped. However, she also points out that the current position concerning party history completely negates the Cultural Revolution on the basis of the 1981 resolution. See Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "In Search of a Master Narrative for 20th-Century Chinese History," *The China Quarterly* 188 (2006): 1070–91, 1082–1083.

³⁰³ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 122–125.

³⁰⁴ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 310.

³⁰⁵ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 57.

In 1949, most Chinese lived on the margin of poverty, due to the catastrophic collapse of industry and infrastructure in the country in the aftermath of World War II, the subsequent civil war that brought the CCP to power, and the country's inability to provide enough grain for a growing population. During the first years of the PRC, food prices demanded 60-80% of a typical household budget.³⁰⁶ In terms of organizing the country, Mao largely adopted Soviet-based economic, political, and social precepts. In specific, he organized the economy in line with Marxist-Leninist principles of state ownership and the extensive central-organizing power of the state. Quotas and targets were established in five-year intervals with workers enjoying full employment. However, workers had little choice of work and had no option other than to be satisfied with government-fixed wages.³⁰⁷

Economic consequences of this policy substantiated itself in mass campaigns. One of the seminal campaigns under Mao's leadership was the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960). Shambaugh argues that the impetus to launch the Great Leap Forward came from Mao's assertion that a pure communist state could be realized under him, further pointing to his obsession with and reliance on ideology. However, the campaign's aims were also economic. The Great Leap Forward aimed at jump-starting the transition into a communist economic state by means of a quick and utter transformation through full industrialization.³⁰⁸ The campaign collectivized land and people into futuristic communist communities in which land, money, and labor were held communally. Ultimately, however, the campaign was an utter failure, culminating in the second-worst famine in human history, and leaving an approximate thirty to forty-five million citizens dead.³⁰⁹

4.2.2 Deng Xiaoping

Once in office, Deng began introducing economic reforms, causing the reversal of the relationship between ideology and economic prosperity. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) had left the economy gutted with sharply falling income rates. More than twenty-five percent of the rural population saw an annual income of 50 yuan. Chen Yun, one of Mao's close advisers, warned of social unrest if the people's economic situation did not improve.³¹⁰ Deng's

³⁰⁶ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 32.

³⁰⁷ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 40.

³⁰⁸ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 29.

See also Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 173. Cheek similarly argues the ideological driving element of the Great Leap Forward, as Mao attempted to accelerate the jump to full communism.

³⁰⁹ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 57 & 63-64.

³¹⁰ Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 25.

reversal found validation in the lack of legitimacy proffered by Mao's obsession with ideology. Zeng argues:

After Mao Zedong passed away, the party leaders felt that the CCP's legitimacy reached its lowest point. Driven by the concerns about existential crisis, the CCP was forced to change its primary task from Mao's "class struggle" to economic reconstruction – an approach that shifted the ruling basis of the communist rule from being ideology-based toward being performance based.³¹¹

The Third Plenum, a series of meetings in late 1978, solidified the move away from Maoist revolution and towards reform and economic prosperity.³¹² Deng was unequivocal about the necessity to reform. After the crises of the Maoist era, he saw ideology as being problematic and not part of the solution, even as he remained a committed Leninist.³¹³ Zeng comments, "Under pressure to generate popular support, the CCP was forced to promote market reforms for economic performance."³¹⁴ Deng's successors continued the path of reform and economic opening, causing an explosion of economic performance. The acceptance of the PRC into the WTO in 2001 provided more incentives and opportunities for economic growth and individual accumulation of wealth. The PRC's GDP per capita almost tripled within ten years.³¹⁵ Soon, the implications of the economic growth became evident. A study conducted by the Ash Center at Harvard's Kennedy School (conducted 2003-2016) reveals high levels of satisfaction with the centralized government. Even in 2003, the year in which the study begins, overall satisfaction with the government was at 86.1% and by 2009 this had grown to 95.9%.³¹⁶

4.3 Nationalism

The final primary source of legitimacy is nationalism, a mechanism lying deep within the psyche of the Chinese and seen by sinologists as an explanatory factor for securing

³¹¹ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 6.

³¹² Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 108-109.

See also Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 223.

³¹³ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 30. See also Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 35.

³¹⁴ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 39.

³¹⁵ Unprecedented economic growth is well documented with the growth of the private sector and reduced control of the centralized government. See Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 6-7.

³¹⁶ Cunningham, "Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time," 3.

legitimacy.³¹⁷ While Marxist-Leninist ideology remains important to forming narratives and arguments around economic and political development, nationalism represents a legitimacy mechanism running deep through the five thousand years of the nation's history.³¹⁸ Zeng argues that while nationalism is too amorphous to be described as its own ideology, the CCP has continued to use nationalism as a legitimating tool, while weaving it into Marxist-Leninist ideology. As the sinologist, Jean-Pierre Cabestan, has argued:

Nationalism seems today to be the most widely-shared value both in Chinese society and in the government, which is perfectly aware of this, and has repeatedly instrumentalised [sic] it with the aim of strengthening its hand in the face of its foreign partners and also of preventing any "peaceful evolution" of the regime towards democracy.³¹⁹

Because of its fluid character, it is difficult to delineate precisely the boundaries of this source of legitimacy. In addition, nationalism continues to evolve, as party elites and Chinese intellectuals weave various tropes and narratives from which new dimensions of nationalism emerge.³²⁰

It is important to note the variances in the party's understanding of the term "nationalism" from Mao to Xi. Mao, an internationalist, utilized the term "patriotism" as a positive form of nationalism. As a firm Marxist and advocate for a global communist revolution,³²¹ patriotism offered a path to garner support from nationalism as a source of legitimacy while not dealing with pejorative implications. This understanding differs substantially from Xi's utilization of the term as he emphasizes Han cultural ethnicity and the upholding of Chinese national interests, both internally and, increasingly, on the world's economic and political stage.³²²

³¹⁷ See Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 10. Zeng illustrates a wider consensus among academics who argue for the effectiveness of nationalism as being a force used by the CCP for legitimization.

³¹⁸ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 313.

³¹⁹ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "The Many Facets of Chinese Nationalism," *China Perspectives*, no. 3 (2005): §1.

³²⁰ Cabestan, "The Many Facets of Chinese Nationalism," §11.

³²¹ See Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 66 & 75-76.

³²² For further reference as to the development of nationalism throughout PRC history see Yingjie Guo, "From Marxism to Nationalism: The Chinese Communist Party's Discursive Shift in the Post-Mao Era," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 52, no. 4 (2019): 355–65. For further reference to the differences in patriotism and nationalism, see Gries et al., "Patriotism, Nationalism and China's US Policy: Structures and Consequences of Chinese National Identity," *The China Quarterly* 205 (2011): 1–17.

Nationalism is based typically on past narratives but entails a promise that directs the country toward the future. Certain elements of Chinese nationalism pervade much of the history since 1949. For instance, one element evokes deep emotion in the face of past humiliations at the hands of Western countries. Beginning with the Opium Wars (1839-1842) and later, under the spheres of influence carved out of mainland China for the economic gains of foreign countries, the so-called “century of shame and humiliation” encompasses a narrative that reminds the Chinese of the disgrace they incurred at the hands of Western imperialists. The national trauma from this time plays a fundamental role in Chinese nationalism and how the CCP is able to mobilize the Chinese people. Before the Opium Wars, the Chinese Empire sustained regional and global influence, making the above-mentioned period bitterer. However, it is the reminder of this century that still drives the Chinese commitment to seeing it reemerge at the heights of global influence it once enjoyed. Not surprisingly, Chinese nationalism is deeply xenophobic, and marked by strong anti-imperialist, anti-foreign, anti-Western, and anti-Christian sentiments.³²³

A further element in China’s nationalism is the role of the United States. The US plays an entrenched and prominent role as an object of the anti-Western sentiment found in Chinese nationalism.³²⁴ However, the China-USA cultural relationship has never been particularly simple; rather, it has developed in a cyclical form, oscillating between fascination and repugnance. In his book *Beautiful Imperialist* Shambaugh outlines the complicated “recurring cycles of amity and enmity that have characterized Sino-American relations since the late nineteenth century”.³²⁵ China’s economic boom and the attraction of modernity exerted by the American way of life resulted in a growing Chinese fascination with America.³²⁶ However, recent events, including the trade wars started under Trump’s presidency, have mitigated this and the new hostile stance towards Washington seem to propagate another, darker narrative: one of Washington’s tireless pursuit of global hegemony.³²⁷ In addition, the CCP has long regarded the US as a bastion of the liberal world order standing in direct opposition to theirs and challenging their legitimacy.³²⁸ Rudd clarifies:

³²³ Cabestan, “The Many Facets of Chinese Nationalism,” §§4-10.

³²⁴ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 92.

³²⁵ David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972-1990*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3.

³²⁶ See Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist*, 5-6.

³²⁷ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 326-327.

³²⁸ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 56.

Its hostility to the American ideal – from John Dewey’s influence on the early Chinese Republic, through Tiananmen, to the crackdown on Protestant Christianity under Xi Jinping – has been grounded in the view that the American concept of freedom represents a continuing existential threat to the political legitimacy of the party within China itself.³²⁹

A further element of Chinese nationalism argues that, “a strong national identity and patriotic nationalism must be inculcated in all Chinese.”³³⁰ Cabestan reasserts the active role the party takes by arguing for the preponderant influence of the Chinese elite in cultivating specific narratives formed from Chinese history.³³¹ In addition, through producing nationalist narratives, the CCP can divert potential complaints directed towards them, and can mobilize the Chinese people behind the national interests the CCP promotes as important.³³²

Historical political realities have always affected Chinese leaders. One of these “residual elements” from the Chinese past is the rooted belief that the “century of shame and humiliation” must never be repeated, and that the CCP will return China to its rightful position of influence in Asia and on the global stage. This promise remains a further central element to Chinese nationalism as a source of legitimacy. The historical narrative explaining Chinese exceptionalism, China’s unique and independent development, undergirds the claim of China’s current rise on the political and economic global stage. China’s previous dynastic glory days demonstrates Chinese exceptionalism and locates it as independent of Western development and Western expansionism.³³³ In addition, the CCP continues to harness patriotic pride in China’s exceptionalism and long history to reinforce the party’s legitimacy. The attendant historiography naturally examines China’s philosophical traditions and ancient civilizations in a patriotic light.³³⁴

4.3.1 Mao Zedong

A slogan that became known, under Mao – “destroy the four olds” –has long been associated with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. The four “olds” were Chinese customs, traditional culture, old habits, and old ideas. The aversion to over three thousand years of Chinese culture

³²⁹ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 56.

³³⁰ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 12.

³³¹ Cabestan, “The Many Facets of Chinese Nationalism,” §11.

See also Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 313.

³³² Zeng, “The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion,” 72-73.

³³³ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 87.

³³⁴ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 96.

See also Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 93.

and heritage sprang from Mao's insistence on building a new communist society free of the Qing dynasty's influence.³³⁵

Although Mao felt it necessary to dissociate his revolution and his leadership from the old kingdoms and emperors, he did not categorically reject nationalism as a mechanism of mobilization and legitimacy. Mao did seek to restore China's might and strength after China's fall to foreign countries in the "century of shame and humiliation".³³⁶ Thus, his address to the public in 1949 resounded with the opening line, "The Chinese people have stood up!"³³⁷ Through the revolution, Mao sought to rid China of this rooted humiliation and the hopes of the revolution promising both the restoration of lost domestic dignity and the expulsion of coercive foreign forces. In addition, Mao promised an independent China – one which could successfully stand up to foreign powers and whose government was able to represent and safeguard national interests.³³⁸ The supremacy of ideology was not toppled even in the emotive calls of nationalism. Cheek explains, "Chinese became conflated with 'Redness' in the Mao years. What was revolutionary in China was properly 'Chinese' in Maoist rhetoric. ... To be Chinese was to be revolutionary."³³⁹

Mao's nationalistic rhetoric extended to a fundamental aversion and hatred of the West. His rhetoric evoked a deeply held ant-Western xenophobia in the populace, marked by the destruction of Western items and the ransacking of the British Embassy in Beijing during the Cultural Revolution.³⁴⁰

4.3.2 Deng Xiaoping

As part of his holistic reforms of the party, national economy, and society, Deng did not repress Chinese cultural attributes and traditional religious practices. However, Cabestan argues that Deng's pervasive reforms, his swing towards performance based economic opening, and the normalization of relationships with those very countries who perpetrated the "century of shame and humiliation" were attempts to regulate the emotive force of nationalism. Fewsmith writes, "In the course of this campaign, nationalism was mobilized in the service of the party."³⁴¹ Leaning on Deng Theory and, further, on Jiang Zemin's Theory of Three Represents, the CCP

³³⁵ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 28-29.

³³⁶ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 29.

³³⁷ Quoted in Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 30.

³³⁸ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 30.

See also Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 212.

³³⁹ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 212.

³⁴⁰ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 75.

³⁴¹ Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 127.

attempted to regulate and reform nationalist traditions to justify and validate the CCP as being the “only guarantor of social consensus.” Cabestan continues:

While it is less anti-Western than previous ones, this form of nationalism seeks nonetheless to contrast the path chosen by China with that followed by the West. It is frequently instrumentalised [sic] in order to reinforce the unity of society around the political establishment, and to defend the international interests of the country.³⁴²

In the ensuing years leading to Xi’s rise to power in 2012, nationalism became an increasingly attractive for the CCP. Already in the 1990s, a new education campaign placed an emphasis on Chinese nationalism and by 2000s, in the midst of an economic boom, flourishing national confidence was apparent in slogans such as “Rising China.” It was clearly demonstrated during the 2008 Beijing Olympics as well.³⁴³

4.3.3 Xi Jinping

After taking power in 2012, Xi adopted three principal tenets: to spread populist nationalism, fight against corruption, and centralize of the party.³⁴⁴ Currently the CCP boasts over ninety-six million members, an increase of 27.4 percent from 2008-2021. However, this is still only around 7% of the total Chinese population.³⁴⁵ Consequently, nationalism evokes a distinct attractiveness for the current government. Indeed, under Xi, nationalism as a source of legitimacy has become a central tenet both for Xi’s personal claim to power and for the CCP’s maintenance of power. Nationalism offers a path not only for creating national narratives that benefit the CCP, but also for aiding the mobilization of national opinions against identified common enemies such as the USA.³⁴⁶ According to Rudd, nationalism plays a prominent role for mobilizing the Chinese people behind Xi because it “is infinitely more unifying for the 1.3 billion Chinese people who are *not* [sic] members of the CCP.”³⁴⁷ Already since the 1990s, the majority of Chinese citizens no longer see themselves as followers of Mao’s teachings. Still, the majority subscribe to China’s national narratives of uniqueness and victimhood under

³⁴² Cabestan, “The Many Facets of Chinese Nationalism,” §17.

³⁴³ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 263.

³⁴⁴ Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, 137.

³⁴⁵ Grünberg, “Who Is the CCP? China’s Communist Party in infographics,” *Merics*, 2022.

³⁴⁶ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 325-326.

See also Shambaugh, *China’s Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 21.

³⁴⁷ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 56.

imperialism. Thus, nationalism becomes increasingly more attractive for the CCP to mobilize the vast Chinese populace.³⁴⁸

Xi's use of nationalism as a central tenet to his claim to legitimacy is part of his turn from a policy position focused on economic performance to one which the party and he himself, as eminent leader, assumes increased authority under the marriage of nationalism and ideology.³⁴⁹ Rudd explains:

It's for these reasons that I have described Xi's worldview as "Marxist-Nationalist," because while his appeal to the party remains ideological (not least because ideology is the backbone of Leninist discipline), his appeal to the people is assiduously nationalist. That is why Xi Jinping Thought is not, as Xi would have us believe, a new theoretical revision of the deepest precepts of Marxism-Leninism. Rather, it is a skillfully constructed primer that brings together an emotionally appealing, focus group-tested set of precepts, axioms, and anecdotes. It is an amalgam of simplified ideology and reified nationalism, which, when combined, represent an appeal to the mind and heart, respectively, with the latter aiming to bring forward the collective consciousness of an ancient people to the politics of the present.³⁵⁰

It is interesting to note the difference in Xi's appeal to a nationalist sentiment in the populace based on aspiring to the global influence China once enjoyed, a position that Mao Zedong rejected pursuant to his internationalist position.³⁵¹ In addition, Xi's continued emphasis on a shared community translated to a cultural unity under the Han Chinese³⁵² is a position Mao had previously rejected fearing the digression back to Han chauvinism and its attendant dangers.³⁵³

4.4 Dynamic Triad

As elucidated above, each source of legitimacy represents a powerful mechanism that has been utilized by China's leaders to garner the party's legitimacy. However, each also represents a threat to the CCP if taken as the sole legitimating factor. Here the history of the PRC, in particular the governance of Mao Zedong, Deng, and now Xi, is instructive, not only in terms

³⁴⁸ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 278. See also Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 326-327.

³⁴⁹ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 326.

³⁵⁰ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 55-56.

³⁵¹ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 75-76.

³⁵² See Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "Governing Diversity in the PRC: Contemporary Policies in Historical Perspective," In *Between the People and the State: Chinese Statecraft from Early Ming to Xi Jinping*, Edited by Timothy Cheek et al. (eds.): N.p., n.p., n.d.

³⁵³ Patrick Meyer, "Could Han Chauvinism Turn the 'Chinese Dream' into a 'Chinese Nightmare'?" *The Diplomat*, June 14, 2016.

of the source's effectiveness, but also its potential for posing a grave, if not existential threat to the party's legitimacy.

Creating a dynamic triad, the bonds between the sources provide tentative alliances, but – just as easily – tentative factions. On one hand, intrinsic collaborations can provide legitimacy. On the other, since each source inherently holds antithetical elements, collaboration can have an adverse effect on the attainment of political legitimacy. An examination of specific instances in PRC governance since 1949 illustrates this.

After the death of Mao, the PRC began to undergo a political transformation with substantial consequences for politics, the economy, and society as a whole. Under the leadership of Deng and the subsequent leaders, the CCP turned from the primacy of ideology and gravitated towards economic prosperity.³⁵⁴ It was through the deficiencies of Mao Zedong's totalitarian style of ideology-based leadership that the CCP turned to economic reconstruction and collective leadership.³⁵⁵ Zeng writes, "In Mao Zedong's era, communist ideology and a cult of personality used to be the lynchpin of legitimacy in China for a couple of decades until a series of political campaigns and policy failures seriously undermined the regime legitimacy."³⁵⁶ Mao's mass campaigns resulted in years of political and societal chaos with the economy remaining stagnant, and with no course out of poverty for the vast majority. Deng identified the central contradiction (the term as used here is a Marxist derivative of dialectical materialism first implemented by Mao) as existing between the development of productive forces and the demands of the people.³⁵⁷ Consequently, these campaigns greatly undermined the CCP's legitimacy.³⁵⁸

Deng's turn to economic prosperity, however, was facilitated not by the complete rejection of ideology as a source of legitimacy, but in rewriting and revising party history and party ideology, which included loosening party control. This is evident in the introduction of the "socialist commodity economy" in party documents.³⁵⁹ Deng used the malleability of ideology

³⁵⁴ See Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 57.

³⁵⁵ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 27. Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 325.

³⁵⁶ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 6.

³⁵⁷ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 110.

³⁵⁸ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 57. See also Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 16.

³⁵⁹ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 35.

and the creation of historical narratives to validate his reforms. Zeng comments, “In this context, the CCP has constantly put forward various formal ideological discourses to provide an ex post facto way of justifying why the current political economy is not incompatible with its commitment to socialism.”³⁶⁰ By way of example, Weigelin-Schwiedrzik notes not only the adjudication of fundamental problems with the adoption of Deng’s 1981 party resolution, but also the difficulties party historiographers faced as they attempted to legitimize the CCP while simultaneously maintaining a positive interpretation of the Mao period. Ultimately, it enabled Deng to posit a more collective leadership structure, and enabled the CCP to reduce the role Mao Zedong played in failures that took place on his watch.³⁶¹ Deng’s answer to the loss of legitimacy based on ideology was therefore “to refurbish the old-fashioned image of Marxism and breathe new life into worn-out socialist tenets.”³⁶² The result was a gravitation away from ideology and towards economic prosperity; and thus was justified by pointing to the less than favorable outcomes of mass campaigns under Mao. Zeng writes:

In short, by criticizing the failure and the loss of Mao’s agenda on “class struggle”, Deng and his supporters legitimized their new agenda – a de-politicisation approach that shifted the legitimization of the communist rule from being ideology-based toward being performance-based. This de-politicisation approach allowed room to make quasi-capitalist policies for generating economic success....³⁶³

The intervening decades of market reform and economic growth provided enormous political trust and support for the CCP. Cheek comments, “Deng Xiaoping had gambled rightly; the market absorbed the anxieties and energies of China’s urban classes that had been dangerously focused on political reform.”³⁶⁴

³⁶⁰ Zeng, “The Chinese Communist Party’s Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion,” 27.

³⁶¹ Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik. “In Search of a Master Narrative for 20th-Century Chinese History,” 1076. Professor Weigelin-Schwiedrzik clearly explains the complexities the CCP faced after Mao’s death as it attempted to resolve the blatant crimes committed during the Cultural Revolution and reconcile Mao’s central role with it; especially relative to the inception of the Cultural Revolution and the reign of terror it unleashed, which ended only with his death. The solution was an obfuscation of the facts and the CCP’s capacity to lay the blame for the Cultural Revolution on the Gang of Four, absolving most others, and most importantly Mao, of the roles they played.

³⁶² Holbig, “Reclaiming Legitimacy in China,” 405.

³⁶³ Zeng, “The Chinese Communist Party’s Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion,” 32.

³⁶⁴ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 269.

However, the gravitation towards economic prosperity as a legitimizing source brought its own challenges and crises. To quote Zeng once more, "...thirty years of spectacular economic growth – a major source of legitimacy in China – is also *a major source of legitimacy crisis*."³⁶⁵ The tenuous relationship between ideology and economic prosperity spawned a fundamental dilemma, one Mao had identified years earlier. As he had noted, "A slight relaxation in our ideological and political work will lead our economic and technological work astray."³⁶⁶ As Deng introduced market reforms, transforming the centralized economy by using quasi-capitalist economic policies,³⁶⁷ this very problem reared its head. If, by definition, the CCP was granted legitimacy and power to cause the creation of a new communist society based on a central economic model, why was it assuming market-based policy, which resembled more of a capitalist, market economy? To quote Zeng:

Since the beginning of the CCP's market reforms in the late 1970s, the CCP's rule has been facing a fundamental contradiction between generating economic success by utilizing quasi-capitalist economic policies, and the fact that this is a communist party that supposedly justifies its rule by being the vehicle to deliver a communist society.³⁶⁸

As expected, under Deng's leadership and that of his successors, communist ideology experienced a distinct decline, with increased decentralized economic and political centers, and the concomitant rise of the private sector.³⁶⁹ The advancement of economic success based on private, personal prosperity of individuals became an increasing threat to CCP authority and claims to power. Undeniably, the shift to a market economy shook the CCP's monopolistic hold on power.³⁷⁰

Domestic power convulsions in the late 1980s coincided with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. As a result of multiple inquiries into the Soviet Union's collapse, the CCP began to take their weak position, especially their lack of control over the economic markets, more seriously

³⁶⁵ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 40.

³⁶⁶ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 32.

³⁶⁷ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 2.

³⁶⁸ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 2.

³⁶⁹ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 6-7.

³⁷⁰ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 6 & 28.

and to investigate the way economic growth undermined legitimacy.³⁷¹ The Soviet example, in other words, provided a dire warning to the CCP of what could happen if a communist government disregards its own ideology. Mounting challenges accompanying rapid economic growth such as pervasive corruption and economic inequality did not lessen the gravity of the CCP's losing battle as to its legitimacy.³⁷² As a result, following Deng's directives, the CPP brutally suppressed the student movements of 1989, making clear the intolerable nature of the students' challenges to CCP rule and legitimacy.³⁷³ Following the brutal suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests, Deng was unequivocal about where the problem lay: "During the last ten years, our biggest mistake was made in the field of education, primarily in ideological and political education – not just of students, but of the people in general."³⁷⁴

The trend toward prosperity that began under Deng generated a further political transformation, one that seems to be still developing under the leadership of Xi. The political turn shifted the claim of legitimacy and governance not only back to ideology, gaining for the CCP a central position in both the political and economic sphere, but also to nationalism. A vital part of this process was the domestication of the private sector under Xi, which under Deng's purview began to see fewer controls and more incentives to produce and accrue wealth. Rudd posits, "Under Xi, ideology drives policy more often than the other way around. Xi has pushed politics to the Leninist left, economics to the Marxist left, and foreign policy to the nationalist right."³⁷⁵ Interestingly, Rudd sees Xi not as returning to a Maoist-style reliance on ideology but to a marriage of ideology with nationalism to secure and maintain his legitimacy.³⁷⁶

Xi adeptly explained the necessity and legitimacy of his power by integrating Chinese national history into his vision of "the great rejuvenation". According to this conception, he ties economic prosperity to the national ambitions of the CCP and, consequently, places ideology and nationalism first while promising continued prosperity.³⁷⁷ Whether this tentative marriage between all three sources of legitimacy sufficiently upholds Xi's and the CCP's legitimacy is

³⁷¹ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 23.

³⁷² Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 7.

³⁷³ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 246-248.

³⁷⁴ Quoted in Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 38.

³⁷⁵ Rudd, "The World According to Xi Jinping."

³⁷⁶ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 325.

³⁷⁷ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 4-5.

still to be seen. Rudd, for instance, is skeptical whether prosperity will be guaranteed, given the new regime's gravitation toward ideology and nationalism. In fact, studies already indicate an economic slowdown with tighter control over the private sector.³⁷⁸

The seeming turn to nationalism and to an ideology that emphasizes the new-won centrality of the party does bring risks. Nationalism is a double-edged sword. Although posing as a powerful source of legitimacy, it can also pose as a threat, if it goes unchecked.³⁷⁹ Particularly in relation to foreign policy, using the nationalism card to garner domestic support in the face of perceived and real enemies abroad may backfire. Rudd explains:

But there is increasing resonance in that proposition on the critical question of the foreign policy consequences of the party's continued quest for domestic political legitimacy through increasingly atavistic appeals to underlying nationalist sentiment, representing a new dynamic in Chinese foreign policy formulation.³⁸⁰

Other scholars also view nationalism as a double-edged sword, one which can effectively mobilize the people, but one which can also quickly become uncontrollable and become an unmanageable force for those attempting to wield it. On the one hand, the CCP must continually regulate and steer nationalist attitudes. However, this could lead to a demonstration of the CCP's potentially weak stance on national interests both domestically and internationally. On the other hand, overt nationalism could jeopardize China's economic and political rise in the world, and end up turning other countries against it, with obvious economic consequences.³⁸¹

As noted above, each Chinese leader discussed in this paper established a relationship with each source of legitimacy, but each exploited one as a primary source in claiming legitimacy. Under Mao, it was Marxist-Leninist ideology, which he utilized to mobilize the population towards specific policy and goals by means of constant campaigns and continuous revolution. At times, the goals were economic, as in the Great Leap Forward; at other times, they were directed at purifying the party and upholding Mao's cult of personality, though the campaigns largely stemmed from a Mao's deep belief in ideology. His insistence on ideology coupled with a cult of personality sustained both his primacy in Chinese politics, and his effectiveness as a leader in mobilizing his subjects.

³⁷⁸ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 317-318.

³⁷⁹ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 326. See also Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 73.

³⁸⁰ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 328.

³⁸¹ Zeng, "The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion," 72-73. See also Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 326.

Deng, understanding the failures of ideology to deliver legitimacy, turned to a second source: economic prosperity. The exploitation of this mechanism continued under the successive Chinese leaders with greater economic gains and prosperity. During this period, China saw unprecedented growth propelling the country onto the global stage with economic and increasingly political influence. However, the antithetical elements inherent in prosperity for the CCP, perpetuated by economic reforms and the decentralization of political and economic centers, bred a plethora of problems and challenges for the legitimacy claims of the CCP.

Consequently, Xi, understanding the importance of maintaining power and seeing the increasing challenges accompanying the primacy of economic prosperity as a source of legitimacy, began to reposition himself on the model. Over ten years into his leadership and beginning his third term, Xi is now entering waters last charted by Mao Zedong. While the next chapter concerns itself with Xi's position on the model, sinologists such as Kevin Rudd and Elizabeth Economy³⁸² assert that Xi's turn is one toward nationalism and the party.³⁸³ In 2015, Cheek wrote the following concerning the attractive character of nationalism for the Chinese populace as it deflects the focus of potential critiques away from the failures of the CCP and CCP leaders.

Popular nationalism reflects one version of a popular acceptance of an identity as a citizen of China. It provides a satisfying sense of belonging and self-esteem as the nation-state racks up achievements: space launches, Olympics, a blue-water navy. The Party endorses this nationalism while trying to curb its excesses. If revolution no longer legitimizes the Party and clearly so many Party members and leaders are not paragons of virtue, then the ability of the Party to protect China from all assaults, real or imagined, will do.³⁸⁴

5. Conclusion

Since the inception of the PRC, each Chinese head of state has espoused a particular, idiosyncratic style of governance. Even while maintaining power under the same authoritarian political system, styles of governance vary greatly, depending on a plethora of competing influences. However, the divergence seems to correlate to the utilization of primary sources of legitimacy. Due to the authoritarian organizing principle of the PRC and its one-party rule, pressure is placed on each CCP leader to politically mobilize the populace behind policy

³⁸² Elizabeth C. Economy is an acclaimed American author, foreign policy analyst, and expert on China's politics and foreign policy. She has worked as an analyst on China in various capacities, including as a Senior Advisor for China to the Secretary of Commerce in the Biden administration.

³⁸³ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 326. See also Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 53.

³⁸⁴ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 317.

measures and ultimately behind their claim to power. While Mao demanded physical mass mobilization behind such policy campaigns, his successors mobilized the populace with other incentives. Mobilization under Deng did not materialize in mass movements of people. On the contrary, he distanced himself from what had become policy in the form of mass campaigns under Mao. Instead, a tacit consensus emerged in which political legitimacy was granted in exchange for increased prosperity and autonomy.³⁸⁵ This illustrates that it is not the form of mobilization the CCP adopts that is important, but simply the necessity thereof in order to maintain political legitimacy.

This chapter introduced and explained a model that attempts to analyze the dynamic relationship found between three distinct planes. The underpinning assumption, as established in the previous chapter, points to the continued imperative especially of communist, authoritarian political systems to establish and protect their political legitimacy on the basis of ideology and mass political participation or mobilization. Political legitimacy is inherent in three sources or mechanisms utilized as tools to secure legitimacy. Each leader establishes a relationship to each source as he seeks to legitimize his executive control over the party and the CCP's continued claim for absolute control. While the three sources hold the model together, they also result in the creation of a dynamic triad, as each source – at times congenially, and at other times antithetically – relate to the other two sources on the plane. Their relationship to the styles of governance below are proscriptive in the sense that leaders gravitate towards one of the sources, dependent on the established relationship with that source. While not severing ties with the other two, which also exert influence on the positioning of the leader, the leader finds a mean position on the model and thus establishes a particular mean style of governance.

As the introduction to this chapter asserted, governance styles on the second plane of the model find themselves on a spectrum as they influence each other dependent on their proximity. Mao used his cult of personality fused with Marxist-Leninist ideology to secure legitimacy. Due to the subjugation of economic prosperity under ideology accompanied by the populist appeal of his personality cult, his governance style was largely a combination of totalitarianism and populism: a populist-totalitarian governance style. Deng – faced with a legitimacy crisis because of Mao's insistence on ideology, his totalitarian control over Chinese politics, and his inability to satisfy the economic demands of the people – turned away from ideology as the primary source of legitimacy. Cognizant of Mao's failures during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, Deng legitimized his turn to the primacy of prosperity and the

³⁸⁵ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 310.

emergence of increased economic autonomy as he championed a more liberal style of governance. Sinologists identify another political turn away from the primacy of economic prosperity in Xi's first two administrative terms. Xi, fearing the grave, even existential risk that ideological dilution and party decentralization poses, seems to be turning back to Marxist-Leninist ideology. However, Xi seems to be synthesizing party ideology with nationalism, resulting in a combined force that is both uniting and mobilizing. Although the future remains unknown, the centrality of nationalism in Xi's claim to legitimacy and the concentration of power under him as leader reflects what appears to be a more populist and totalitarian style of governance. The following chapter focusses on Xi's governance style and one conclusive analysis as to Xi's position on the model.

Chapter 4: Empirical Analysis

1 Introduction

During the 18th Party Congress, Xi was appointed general secretary, and a few months later president of the country and head of the military. Despite Xi's decades of political activity within the CCP, few at the time could predict the changes his rise to power would herald, least of all the turning point that was later seen to mark the start of the Xi era.³⁸⁶ In this final chapter, this thesis turns its attention to the first ten years of Xi's leadership: from the 18th National Party Congress in 2012 to the 20th National Party Congress in 2022. Even if the preponderance of the Xi era is yet to come, the years from 2012 to 2022 will continue to be viewed as fundamental concerning the path he set for China. The following analysis will draw on three speeches from 2013, 2017, and 2022 as it tries to identify political trends and map Xi's style of governance on the model.

Speech is power and the person who controls speech holds the reins of power. The CCP continues to keep close watch over political discourse in all its nuances. Through the introduction of formal and informal structures of speech, the party closely scrutinizes and tightly monitors public political discourse.³⁸⁷ Utilizing various tools to this end, it continues to

³⁸⁶ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 2.

³⁸⁷ Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies*, China research monograph 41. Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies Institute of East Asian Studies

manipulate speech, linguistically dictating what is being said and how. As the Swedish sinologist, Michael Schoenhals argues:

In the People's Republic of China the state maintains control over the avenues of political expression by a multitude of means that range from the compulsory registration of newspapers and other publications to restrictions on the use of photocopying equipment. It also exercises direct control over political discourse by way of centralized management and manipulation of "appropriate" and "inappropriate" formulations.³⁸⁸

In 1963 Mao noted that "one single [correct] formulation, and the whole nation will flourish; one single [incorrect] formulation, and the whole nation will decline."³⁸⁹ Mao's quote delineates the importance not only what is being said, but also how it is being said. Succinctly put, within the CCP, semantics matter. Pursuant to this conception, speech turns into a carefully crafted linguistic feat – and the head of state attempts to turn this "product" into the "sole legitimate medium of political expression".³⁹⁰ Through constant formulation and regulation of set phrases and at times obscure shibboleths, the CCP accrues the power to form and shape public discourse. Lindsay Beck writes, "Each generation of China's Communist rulers have defined their leadership with slogans, from catchy to obscure, but in a political system that is closed and opaque, these are more than just catch phrases -- they define the goals of the nation."³⁹¹ These slogans manifest themselves in every medium: newspaper articles, public speeches, party speeches, policy papers and more. Because of the manicured, composed official language, which is both sanctioned by the CCP and holds a direct connection to CCP policy, analysis of texts offers a glimpse into policy creation and changes in policy positioning over time. Delury writes:

Yet this very scriptedness is the hermeneutic key to unlocking CCP discourse. Departures from established scripture are easier to identify. And because of the care with which the CCP scripts itself, changes in terminology signify shifts in power or policy with greater predictability than is the case in more anarchic linguistic environments, as in countries with less constricted media, better articulated public opinion, or more open political competition.³⁹²

The fixation with speech and correct formulation did not begin under communist rule, but finds roots in Confucian doctrine, which asserts that society will fall into social chaos unless the

University of California, (1992), 3.

³⁸⁸ Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*, 3.

³⁸⁹ quoted in Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*, 3.

³⁹⁰ Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*, 3.

³⁹¹ Lindsay Beck, "Chinese Slogans Mark Hu Era," *Reuters Media*, September 7, 2007.

³⁹² John Delury, "'Harmonious' in China." *Policy Review*, no. 148 (2008): 35–45, 36.

correct nomenclature is maintained.³⁹³ Although repudiating ancient Chinese culture, Mao upheld the Confucian doctrine of *zhengming* – “the rectification of names”. Alvaro³⁹⁴ writes, “Mao recognized the key role played by correct terminology in governing the masses and was meticulously involved not only in the political details of formulations but also in the semantic nuances.”³⁹⁵ One element of the CCP’s linguistic controls that has always been pivotal to its methodology is the use of *tifa* (“watchwords”), or what Alvaro calls “unique slogan-like formulations.”³⁹⁶ Alvaro explains:

The features of the *tifa* being introduced at the time were “condensed phrases loaded with meaning” which appear “incongruous with the general texture of prose and stand out in any piece of writing like the hard and dark knots of the bark of a tree, an alien element and disturbing factor in the language.”³⁹⁷

While Alvaro is describing the earliest years of the PRC, the use of *tifa* as a linguistic tool continues to reflect the CCP’s need to control political, public discourse and to convey policy through sanctioned formulations.³⁹⁸

The CCP meets every five years to perform three distinct and consequential functions. Drawing on a report that conclusively assesses the nation’s political and economic performance over the previous five years, the CCP convenes to establish the party’s agenda for the coming five. The new agenda, set forth in a “political report”³⁹⁹ given by the general secretary of the party, is broad in scope but “acts as a signpost indicating the direction the country will be heading in the near future, with implications for decades to come.”⁴⁰⁰ It informs all aspects of political and economic life in China and incorporates, both horizontally and vertically, the goals and aspirations of the Chinese Communist Party. Given as a speech by the General Secretary to the Party Congress, it is a decisive point of departure for the further development and political positioning of the Chinese political leaders and for the country as a whole. In addition, the

³⁹³ Alvaro, “Political Discourse in China’s English Language Press,” 148.

³⁹⁴ Joseph Alvaro holds a Ph.D. in critical discourse studies. He has taught extensively in China. His research focuses on the intersection of language, political discourse, and ideology particularly in the Chinese political context.

³⁹⁵ Alvaro, “Political Discourse in China’s English Language Press,” 149.

³⁹⁶ Alvaro, “Political Discourse in China’s English Language Press,” 149.

³⁹⁷ Alvaro, “Political Discourse in China’s English Language Press,” 149.

³⁹⁸ Alvaro, “Political Discourse in China’s English Language Press,” 150

³⁹⁹ Yu Jie, “The Chinese Communist Party Congress: An Essential Guide,” *Medium*, September 28, 2017.

⁴⁰⁰ Yu Jie, “A Guide to the Chinese Communist Party’s National Congress,” *Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank*, 21-Sep-22.

convened National Party Congress introduces constitutional reforms deemed necessary for the further functioning of the party. These either entail changes in recruitment or amend the official guiding ideology of the CCP. Finally, specific committees inside the National Party Congress select the Politburo Standing Committee, a current group of seven CCP members who assume control over the party for the next five years.⁴⁰¹

The political report given to the Party Congress by the General Secretary has great significance. Like other party documents, *tifa* are used throughout the speech. Thus, an analysis of these speeches and of the watchwords that are used throughout the speech provides valuable information as to the policy positioning of the party. The following analysis will look for the use of such *tifa* in Xi's work report in 2013, and his addresses to the Party Congresses in 2017 and 2022. Because Xi was first elected General Secretary during the 1st Plenary Session of the 18th Party Congress, he did not deliver the political report. However, during the 3rd Plenary Session of the 18th Party Congress in November of 2013, he did deliver a speech in which, as the newly appointed General Secretary, he provided a policy paper titled "Decision Of The Central Committee Of The Communist Party Of China On Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening The Reform." The analysis will investigate the use of watchwords and policy positioning of the CCP in these three speeches as a means of testing the previously established model.

2. Method

In his 2014 paper on qualitative analysis, the German professor of psychology Phillip Mayring examines various content-analytical methods used for a qualitative analysis. Based on his research, this thesis utilizes an inductive category formation for its content-analytical approach. Unlike deductive category assignments, which approaches text with preformed categories and codes, the inductive approach uses the text to create codes for further analysis. Mayring notes that unlike the summarization approach, the inductive category formation must first identify the relevant parts of the text. Accordingly, the text is reduced to the specific passages that yield codes for the necessary analysis.⁴⁰² Mayring points to seven steps in this approach after the formation of a clear research question. The analysis will use the following steps described by Mayring.

1. Category definition and level of abstraction

⁴⁰¹ Jie, "A Guide to the Chinese Communist Party's National Congress."

⁴⁰² Philipp Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis - Theoretical Foundation, Basic Procedures and Software Solution*, (Austria, 2014), 79.

In this first step, the categories are determined and defined, thus reducing the entire text to the relevant passages. Furthermore, the researcher agrees upon the level of abstraction serving as a guide “to how specific or general the categories have to be formulated.”⁴⁰³

The analysis will initially focus on the following three *tifa*: “upholding party leadership”, “Reform and Opening”, and “Democracy”. This level of abstraction is narrow in order for the initial phase of the analysis to be guided closely. Due to the length of the speeches, this first step is of immense importance as it helps the analysis direct its attention only to the necessary portions of the texts. With the use of *tifa* as an initial reduction, the necessary text passages will be identified.

2. Coding the text

In the second step, the text will be analyzed, and material will be assigned to the categories. In this stage, categories may be subsumed in other categories closely related to them.⁴⁰⁴

In this step, the speeches will be analyzed to identify *tifa*. However, the analysis will first seek expert advice from sinologists to establish the watchwords and their implications for policy positions. There is an inherent difficulty of translation because many of the *tifa* carry multiple policy implications or demonstrate variances in definitions, and a direct translation may obscure implicit or connotative meanings. Weigelin-Schwiedrzik has illustrated this problem with the term *zhonghua minzu* or “Chinese nation.” The implicit meaning does not reside in the explicit meaning of the adjective “Chinese,” but finds its full meaning in the context in which the term was first introduced.⁴⁰⁵ Utilizing the research and perspectives of sinologists who have studied the Chinese language, Chinese politics, and the CCP’s use of language in their policy positioning will be necessary for ensuring higher validity of analyses.

3. Revision

After the first perfunctory analysis, the categories will be considered in order to ascertain whether they are stable and still relate back to the research question.⁴⁰⁶

This analysis again will consult expert opinion through using the research and writings of sinologists to combine and accurately attribute the *tifa* to various policy implications. Furthermore, the first analysis using the *tifa* as codes will proffer results as to the frequency of specific *tifa*. Through the revision and with a preliminary analysis of the secondary literature,

⁴⁰³ Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis*, 82.

⁴⁰⁴ Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis*, 82.

⁴⁰⁵ Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Governing diversity in the PRC: Contemporary policies in historical perspective,” 2.

⁴⁰⁶ Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis*, 82-83.

the analysis will identify three main *tifa*, which will form the basis of the final analysis. Due to the limits of a master's thesis, this thesis will restrict its analysis to three main ones. However, the selection of the three follows a two-step process. First, the reference frequency of each must be higher, relative to the others. Second, with assistance from sinologists, the concepts underlying the *tifa* must distinctly allocate themselves to one of the three sources of legitimacy. For instance, while Xi references the *tifa* "socialism with Chinese characteristics" eighty-three times throughout the three speeches, the sinologist Shambaugh notes that this *tifa* is not static in meaning but has evolved over the decades.⁴⁰⁷ Therefore, while meeting the first criterion, this *tifa* does not adequately meet the second, due to its ambiguity and opaque definitions. Additionally, Xi's new *tifa* "The Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" continually appears alongside the *tifa* the "China Dream." Both span multiple policy areas. Among sinologists there are discrepancies as to the exact policy implications of the "China Dream." Rudd points to the centrality of the economy in Xi's aspirations regarding the "China Dream" while sinologist Elizabeth Economy focuses not only on prosperity, but also on ideology as part of the "China Dream."⁴⁰⁸ In addition, calls for "The Great Rejuvenation" are unreservedly nationalistic while still asserting the primacy of the party in order to achieve the goals.⁴⁰⁹ Such *tifa* clearly remain broadly ambiguous in their implications and scope. However, the *tifa* "upholding party leadership" is accurately portrayed as central to the ideology of the party and its bid for legitimacy.

4. Final coding

In a fourth step, the text will be methodically read and coded.⁴¹⁰

The analysis will then comb the three documents for examples of three primary *tifa* and close derivatives. By way of illustration: the *tifa* "Reform and Opening" is found twenty-two times, but close derivatives like "China's opening", "All-round opening" cover for the margin of error found in translating.⁴¹¹

5. Main categories

In a fifth step, the categories will be analyzed and categories grouped, creating larger main categories.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁷ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 22.

⁴⁰⁸ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 89.

See also Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 4.

⁴⁰⁹ see Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 4.

⁴¹⁰ Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis*, 83.

⁴¹¹ See Appendix 1.

⁴¹² Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis*, 83.

After the three *tifa* are identified, the analysis will take on a more distant level of abstraction as it seeks to identify the broader concept relating to them. For example, the *tifa* “upholding party leadership” implicates the continued centrality of the party and the subsequent obedience to party leadership. This will be necessary to bolster the validity of the analysis. The *tifa* “upholding party leadership” is referenced thirty-six times, while the abstraction of the *tifa* under the category “centrality of party” enjoys more than twice as many references. The formation of the broader categories derive from the *tifa*; prior to this, their exact delineation is established in a table.⁴¹³ The analysis will investigate the *tifa* as well as the broader category so as to better validate a discussion about potential policy trends under Xi.

6. Intra-/intercoder check

In the sixth step, the text will once again be analyzed and coded so as to ensure high reliability concerning the research involved.⁴¹⁴

7. Results

The results of the content analysis will be examined and validated.⁴¹⁵

3. Analysis

3.1 Marxist-Leninist Ideology

As clarified in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Marxism-Leninism ideology remains vital for the CCP’s claim for legitimacy. Even as it continues to act as the central and dominant political player, the CCP must defend the one-party system. While under Deng, the role of the party diminished, under Xi, it has regained a more central role. Rudd comments:

He [Xi] realized that if the party was taken out of the country’s most important policy decision-making processes, it would lose its relevance altogether and, in time, fade away. ... Under his leadership, we have seen the return of the party to the epicenter of the Chinese political and economic policy-making process.⁴¹⁶

Xi clearly understands the Party’s predominant importance for the maintenance of power.⁴¹⁷ In his speech to the 20th Party Congress, he asserts, “We must never waver in upholding the basic tenets of Marxism, the overall leadership of the Party, and socialism with Chinese

⁴¹³ See Appendix 1.

⁴¹⁴ Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis*, 83.

⁴¹⁵ Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis*, 83.

⁴¹⁶ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 86.

⁴¹⁷ see Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 161 & 283.

characteristics.”⁴¹⁸ However, Xi also perceives the reciprocity of the CCP’s relationship with the populace, couching his call to uphold the party leadership in his policy area of party building. The policy area is immense and includes incorporating governance reforms, higher ethical standards for party leaders, and party cohesion among other elements.⁴¹⁹ In 2017 Xi stated,

...the greatest strength of the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Communist Party of China; the Party is the highest force for political leadership. It sets forth the general requirements for Party building in the new era and underlines the importance of political work in Party building.⁴²⁰

Nonetheless, fundamental to this policy area is the increased centrality of the party predicated on the prerequisite of party cohesion and party leadership. At the basis of Xi’s argument lies the unequivocal call to sustain a new centrality for the CCP by associating the Chinese success story with the party. In 2017 Xi asserted:

We have solved many tough problems that were long on the agenda but never resolved, and accomplished many things that were wanted but never got done. With this, we have prompted historic shifts in the cause of the Party and the country. These historic changes will have a powerful and far-reaching effect on the development of this cause.⁴²¹

Thus, Xi argues that, given its prior performance, the country’s ongoing success will come about only through its continued leadership; since the party attained success in the past, it will continue to do so in the future.⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ Xi, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects,” 16.

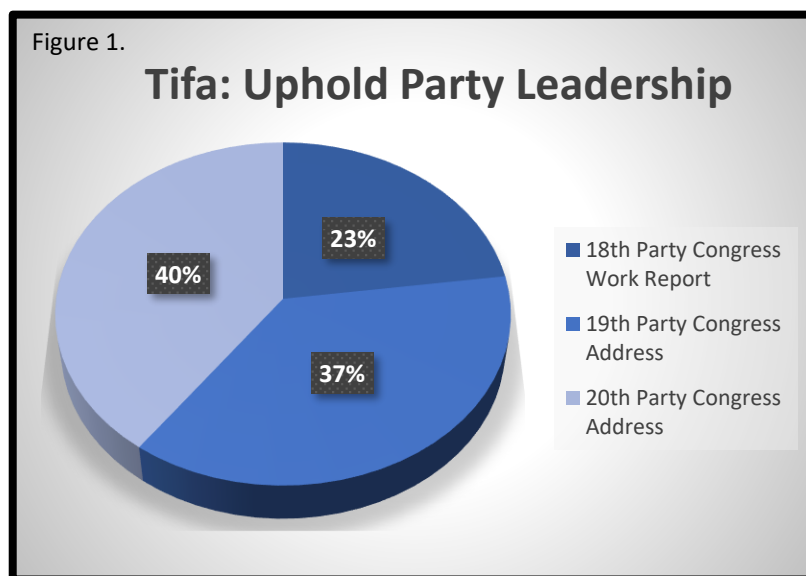
⁴¹⁹ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, (Beijing, October 18, 2017) 6. One tenet of party building continues to be ensuring stricter governance over the party. This includes corruption, party cohesion, party compliance, and higher ethical standards. The “Three Stricts and Three Earnest” encapsulates the emphasis placed on party building. They are, “to be strict with oneself in practicing self-cultivation, using power, and exercising self-discipline; and to be earnest in one’s thinking, work, and behavior. see Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” 6.

⁴²⁰ Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” 17.

⁴²¹ Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” 7.

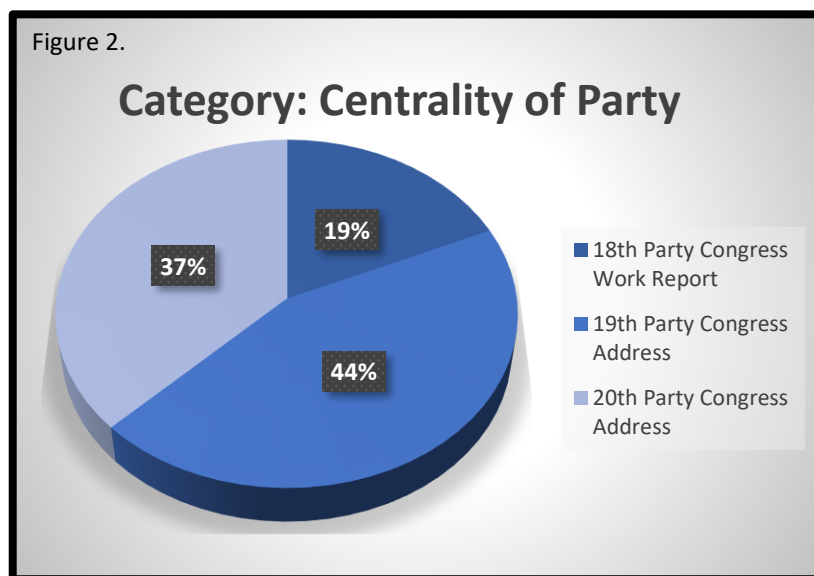
⁴²² Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” 12.

In his three speeches, Xi uses the *tifa* “upholding party leadership”, or very close derivatives thereof, thirty-six times. In 2013, Xi referenced the *tifa* eight times while in 2017, he referenced it 13 times and in 2022, fifteen times. That marks almost a one hundred percent increase during Xi’s leadership. The



higher level of abstraction relating to the centrality of the party sees a similar trend but shows a more distinct rise from 2013 to 2017. Interestingly, the category spikes during the Address to the 19th Party Congress before it slightly decreases in frequency during the Address to the 20th Party Congress.

In the work report Xi gave during the 18th Party Congress in 2013, he also demonstrated a certain commitment to relaxing party control, continuing the decreased role the party was assigned under his predecessors. An entire section in the report was specified as “relaxing control over invest-



ment access”.⁴²³ In addition, Xi stated, “We will cancel all administrative approval procedures for economic activities under the effective regulation of the market mechanism.”⁴²⁴ However, ten years later Xi positioned himself behind a different policy; one which saw the increased

⁴²³ Xi, “Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform,” 13.

⁴²⁴ Xi, “Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform,” 9.

centrality of the party in political and economic life under the assumption that the Chinese goals will only be met through the leadership of the party. Xi stated in 2022:

We must resolutely uphold the Party Central Committee's authority and its centralized, unified leadership and see that Party leadership is exercised in all aspects and every stage of the endeavors of the Party and the country. This will ensure that our Party always remains the pillar that the Chinese people can lean on in times of difficulty, that our socialist modernization advances along the right path, and that we have the political cohesion and confidence in our development to inspire the people to strive in unity. It will see us forming a mighty force to overcome all difficulties with one heart and one mind.⁴²⁵

3.2 Economic Prosperity

As explained above, prosperity is a key factor in the CCP's maintenance of its monopolistic grip on power. It forms part of what Rudd names as "the unspoken social contract between party and people" as the people relinquish a level of political autonomy in exchange for economic prosperity.⁴²⁶ So long the contract is guaranteed, prosperity will continue to provide a source of legitimacy. Rudd notes, "While Xi is not an economist and appears to have surprisingly limited feel for how the market economies actually function ... he understands the axial link between continued public prosperity and the security of his long-term leadership."⁴²⁷ However, several sinologists point to the reversal of the primacy of economic prosperity in Xi's bid to legitimize his rule, as manifested in his style of governance.⁴²⁸ Thus, the preliminary analysis investigates Xi's use of the *tifa* "Reform and Opening," a phrase first introduced into party discourse by Xi's predecessor Deng as central to his shift towards economic prosperity and away from Maoist emphasis on ideology. Through his twin policies of "reform" and

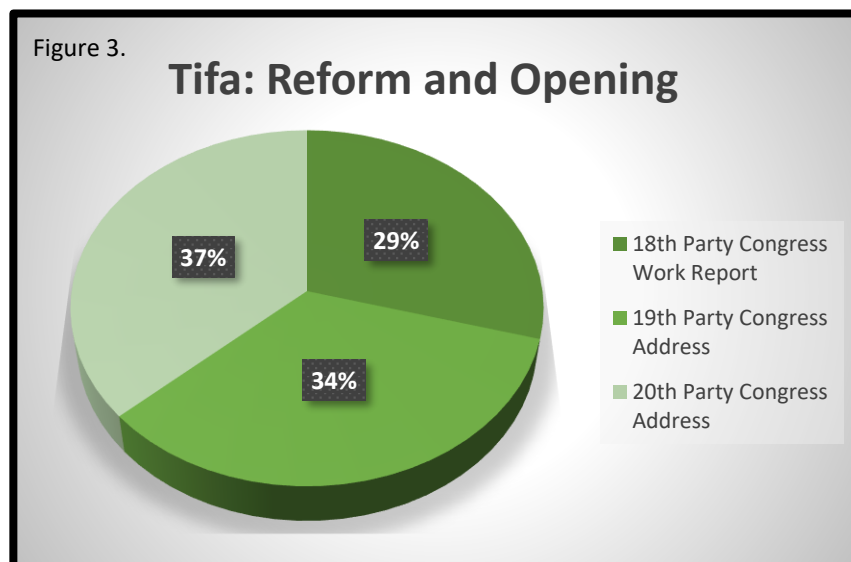
⁴²⁵ Xi. "Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects." 23.

⁴²⁶ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 103.

⁴²⁷ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 103.

⁴²⁸ Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "Rückkehr Zum Maoismus?" Symposium: Bedrohung der offenen Gesellschaft heute, Klagenfurt, May 11, 2023. See also Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 10.

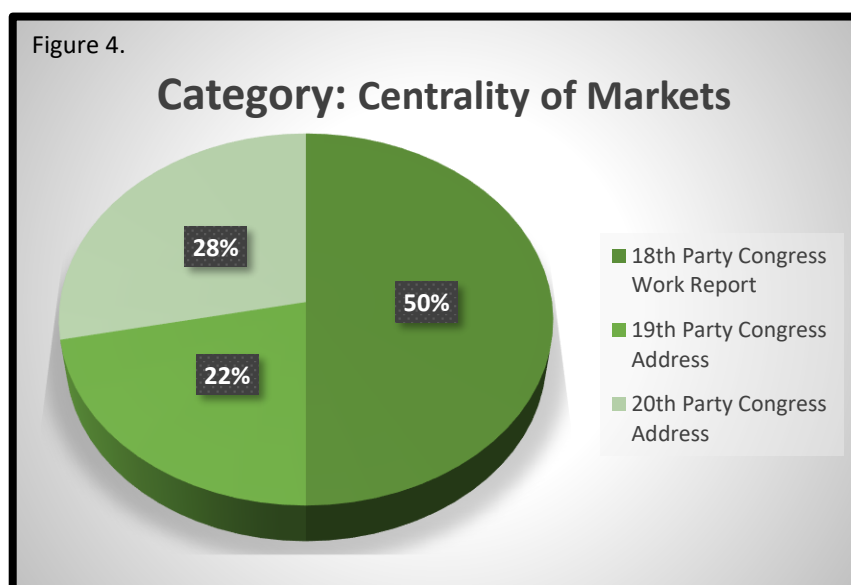
“opening,” Deng began loosening not only China’s economic borders, but also what he described as “productive forces,” accelerating the nation’s economic growth. In 1985, Deng told an American delegation:



There is no fundamental contradiction between socialism and a market economy. The problem is how to develop the productive forces more effectively.... If we combine a planned economy with a market economy, we shall be in a better position to liberate the productive forces and speed up economic growth.⁴²⁹

Because of the centrality of the economy as a source of legitimacy over the last decades, a shift in policy under Xi away from the primacy of prosperity would carry with it a number of consequential implications.

After reviewing the frequency of the *tifa*, the analysis reveals that Xi referenced the term,⁴³⁰ or close derivatives thereof, forty-one times in all three speeches. There was no considerable variation in the frequency among the three speeches, with twelve references in



2013, fourteen in 2017, and fifteen in 2022. However, one level of abstraction offered a fundamentally different picture. Instances in the “18th Party Congress Work Report” alone constituted fifty percent of the references attributed to the category “Centrality of Markets”⁴³¹ while

⁴²⁹ Quoted in Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 130.

⁴³⁰ see Appendix 1.

⁴³¹ see Appendix 1.

his references of markets and wealth generating systems dropped considerably a mere five years later. While references to this category increased slightly between 2017 and 2022, they still did not reach parity with the speech given in 2013 to the 18th Party Congress.

In 2013, Xi seemed to make his position on “Reform and Opening” clear, stating that the markets and market forces would take precedent over the state’s control on economic development. Xi stated:

Economic system reform is the focus of deepening the reform comprehensively. The underlying issue is how to strike a balance between the role of the government and that of the market, and let the market play the decisive role in allocating resources and let the government play its functions better. It is a general rule of the market economy that the market decides the allocation of resources. We have to follow this rule when we improve the socialist market economy. We should work hard to address the problems of market imperfection, too much government interference and poor oversight.⁴³²

In his report to the Party Congress in 2022, Xi still committed China’s economic development to “Reform and Opening”.⁴³³ However, Xi seemed to refrain from deliberating on the role of the markets as pertained to either concept. Instead, he remained ambiguous, stating only that the focus must be “the real economy,”⁴³⁴ and that China “must continue to pursue economic development as our central task,”⁴³⁵ This seemed to mark a shift in policy. Interestingly, immediately following this latter statement, he argues that China must “uphold the Four Cardinal Principles.” The entire sentence reads, “We must continue to pursue economic development as our central task, uphold the Four Cardinal Principles, remain committed to reform and opening up, and stay independent and self-reliant.”⁴³⁶ This is an interesting amalgamation of *tifa* and policy statements especially as the third of the Four Cardinal Principles is “upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China.”⁴³⁷ As further

⁴³² Xi Jinping, “Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform,” 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, (Beijing, 2013), 3.

⁴³³ Xi Jinping, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects,” National Congress of the Communist Party of China, (Beijing, October 16, 2022), 25.

⁴³⁴ Xi, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects,” 25.

⁴³⁵ Xi, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects,” 22.

⁴³⁶ Xi, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects,” 22.

⁴³⁷ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders - from Mao to Now*, 118.

discussion will make clear, the role of the party in Xi's policy plan seems to be increasing rather than decreasing. His commitment to reform and opening does not seem to have wavered since taking office; however, Xi's present understanding of "Reform and Opening" seems to be diverging from his commitment to open markets and less government interference purported in 2013.

3.3 Nationalism

Nationalism remains the final pillar of the dynamic triad; a source of legitimacy which Xi may call upon to secure his power and to validate the power monopoly of the CCP. Rudd writes:

However, there is another significant quiver to Xi Jinping's bow in dealing with political and social unrest around him: his ability to call on the deep reserves of Chinese nationalism to reconsolidate his political position by harnessing populist opinion to his cause. Indeed, nationalism is becoming a core pillar of both the party's and Xi's personal political legitimacy and has become a central focus of the party's vast propaganda apparatus.⁴³⁸

Because nationalism assumes various forms and offers numerous strategies to reach, inspire, and mobilize a people behind their leader's goals, it remains an attractive source of legitimacy. In his 19th Party Congress Address, Xi unequivocally asserts how the CCP has successfully united all Chinese people, "...the Party has united and led all the Chinese people in a tireless struggle, propelling China into a leading position in terms of economic and technological strength, defense capabilities, and composite national strength."⁴³⁹ These words point to the center of Xi's nationalistic populist appeal: his assertion that he, as the great leader, and the CCP as the only party, will hear, understand, represent, and fulfill the primary demands of the biggest populace in the world. In his 19th Congress Party Address, Xi asserts, "We must put the people's interests above all else...."⁴⁴⁰ This commitment to a people first governance policy echoes throughout his 20th Congress Party Address as well. In fact, Xi clearly understands and explains the inherent relationship between the party's commitment to addressing the populace's demands and interests and the CCP's continued power. In 2022 Xi states:

A great cause calls for leadership of a strong party. As long as our Party keeps itself competent and strong, always remains true to the people's aspiration and works in

⁴³⁸ Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 325.

⁴³⁹ Xi, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," 9.

⁴⁴⁰ Xi, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," 40.

concert with the people, we can and will navigate the great ship bearing the great dream of the Chinese people to conquer the waves and reach our destination.⁴⁴¹

The previous chapter outlined certain components of nationalism and a nationalistic-populist governance style in the PRC. One element used throughout the CCP history, seems to play a role in calling the people to stand for their interest against the backdrop of “the century of shame and humiliation.” In this regard, Xi has continually referenced the *tifa* “the great national rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,” promising to restore China to its preeminent role in the region as well as on the global stage.⁴⁴² Xi’s populist calls extend into the economic sphere as well, with his prominent anti-corruption campaign. In 2022 he said, “We have waged a battle against corruption on a scale unprecedented in our history. Driven by a strong sense of mission, we have resolved to ‘offend a few thousand rather than fail 1.4 billion’ and to clear our Party of all its ills.”⁴⁴³ With his reference to the entire populace, Xi clearly attempts to position himself on the side of the people, as a leader who understands and fights for them.

A further component to Xi’s people-first policy is his promise to nurture a higher degree of political participation and his assertion that the people lead the country through the party. “The Chinese people won the right to be masters of the state only after many years of arduous struggle under the leadership of the CPC.”⁴⁴⁴ Central to this call is the term “democracy”, an old term used in Chinese political discourse since the turn of the 20th century.⁴⁴⁵ Cheek, in his book *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, identifies the term “democracy” or *minzhu* and the term “the people” as abiding ideas throughout the last century; terms which remain central to the political discourse.⁴⁴⁶ Clearly, “democracy” in the Chinese context is not synonymous with the concept as it is practiced in the liberal West. To be clear, the CCP unequivocally positions themselves as an alternative to Western democracies in which the people truly have political

⁴⁴¹ Xi, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects,” 63.

⁴⁴² Rudd, *The Avoidable War*, 88.

See also Perry, “The Populist Dream of Chinese Democracy,” 911.

⁴⁴³ Xi, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects,” 11.

⁴⁴⁴ State Council Information Office, “White Paper: Building of Political Democracy in China,” (State Council Information Office (SCIO) Publishing House, 2005).

⁴⁴⁵ Heike Holbig, “Official Visions of Democracy in Xi Jinping’s China,” In *Securitization and Democracy in Eurasia*. Edited by Anja Mihr, Paolo Sorbello and Brigitte Weiffen, 267–77. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 269.

⁴⁴⁶ Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 12-13.

agency.⁴⁴⁷ A 2005 White Paper succinctly laid out the Chinese understanding of the term as being something that existed only under the leadership of the CCP – clearly, a very different form of democracy from that found in the West.⁴⁴⁸ The paper expounds, “The establishment of New China marked a great leap from the 2,000-year-old autocratic feudal political system and the unsuccessful trials in contemporary China imitating the mode of Western democratic political systems to the new people's democratic political system.”⁴⁴⁹

Emphasized in the Chinese notion of democracy is the realization of the will of the people and that of self-governance. In his speech to the 19th Party Congress, Xi notes:

China's socialist democracy is the broadest, most genuine, and most effective democracy to safeguard the fundamental interests of the people. The very purpose of developing socialist democracy is to give full expression to the will of the people, protect their rights and interests, spark their creativity, and provide systemic and institutional guarantees to ensure the people run the country.⁴⁵⁰

It is on the basis of this understanding that Xi is able to create his populist appeal explaining that the will of the people only finds its true expression in China's democracy at the center of which lies the CCP and ultimately his leadership.⁴⁵¹ The *tifa* “democracy”, along with its many forms mostly including various adjectives, is perhaps less directly bound to nationalism as other *tifa*. However, a preliminary search through the three speeches exhibited a high frequency in references of the *tifa*. Additionally, due to the Chinese notion of democracy as one being directly contingent on the people and the will of the people found in the Chinese expression of democracy, a shift in Xi's usage would mark a potential shift in his overall policy and a shift in his appeal to the populace for legitimacy.

⁴⁴⁷ Holbig, “Official Visions of Democracy in Xi Jinping's China,” 270.

⁴⁴⁸ Holbig, “Official Visions of Democracy in Xi Jinping's China,” 270.

⁴⁴⁹ State Council Information Office, “White Paper: Building of Political Democracy in China.”

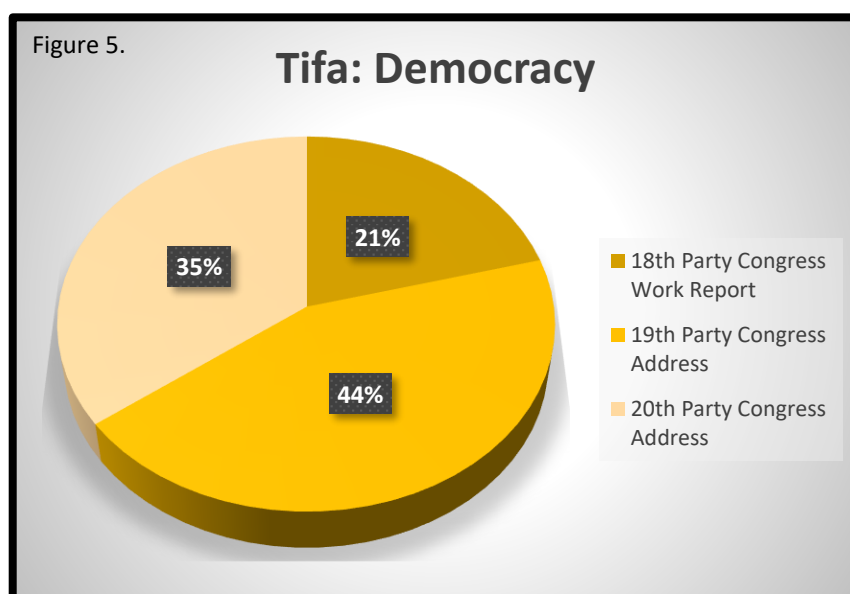
⁴⁵⁰ Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” 32.

⁴⁵¹ For a more detailed discussion concerning China's democracy and how it binds the people to the CCP, see: State Council Information Office, “White Paper: Building of Political Democracy in China.”

A preliminary analysis of the *tifa* “democracy” in the three documents resulted in interesting observations. First, Xi’s use of the term significantly increased between 2013 and 2017 and then slightly decreased between 2017 and 2022. However, while the quantitative analysis may be interesting, a brief qualitative analysis showed a continued and varied use of adjectives before the term. The *tifa* appeared in ten different variations from “democracy” to “socialist consultative democracy”.⁴⁵² The analysis showed a shift from Xi’s use of “consultative democracy” to a greater emphasis on “socialist democracy” in 2017, leading to another shift, towards “people’s democracy,” in 2022. The shift from 2013, culminating in the emphasis of a “people’s democracy,” first established itself in 2017 and found firmer footing in 2022. It is clearly reflected in Xi’s 2022 Party Congress Address, in the sixth section, titled, “Advancing Whole-Process People’s Democracy and Ensuring that the People Run the Country.”⁴⁵³ Xi opens this section as follows:

China is a socialist country of people’s democratic dictatorship under the leadership of the working class based on an alliance of workers and farmers; all power of the state in China belongs to the people. China’s socialist democracy is the broadest, most genuine, and most effective democracy to safeguard the fundamental interests of the people.⁴⁵⁴

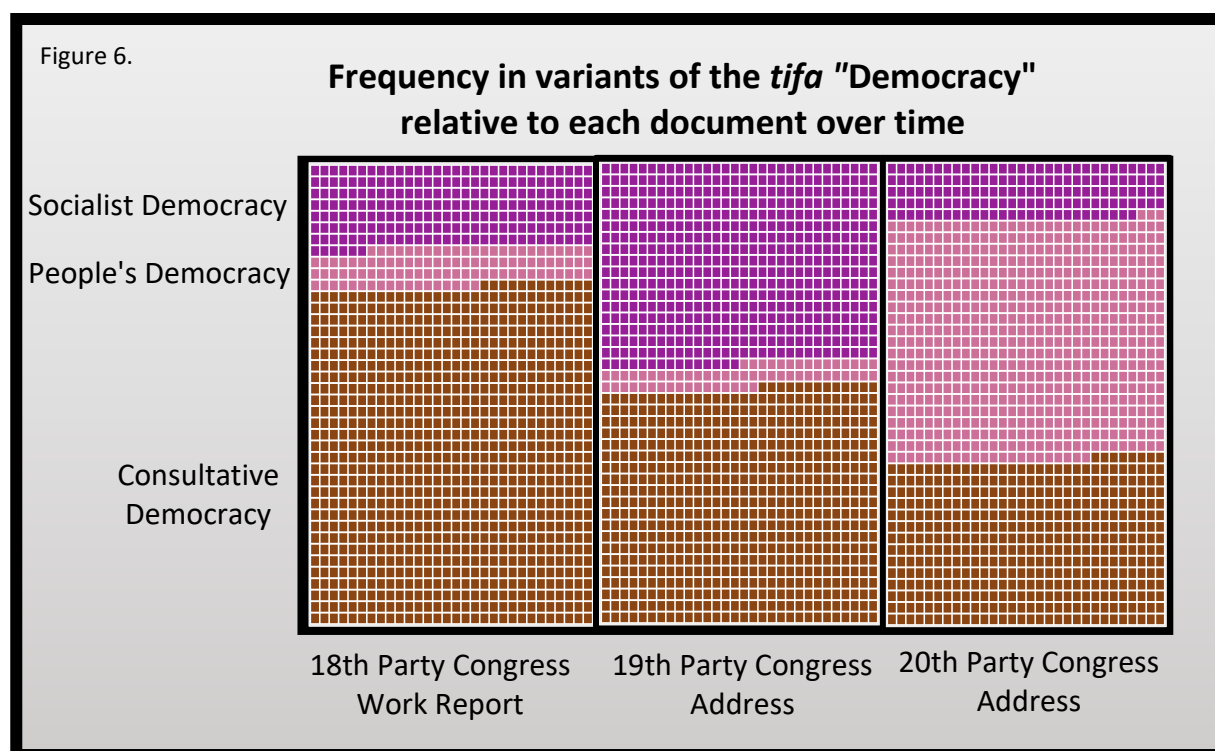
Although these sentences were used five years earlier as well, Xi’s continual use of “people’s democracy” provides ample evidence of this distinct shift. Holbig points out that consultative democracy, a term introduced by Habermas and accepted into the Chinese political discourse, takes Habermas’ conception of a horizontal consultation and discussion and creates a vertical line of consultation. This reinterpretation of Habermas placed the party at the center of the



⁴⁵² See Appendix 1.

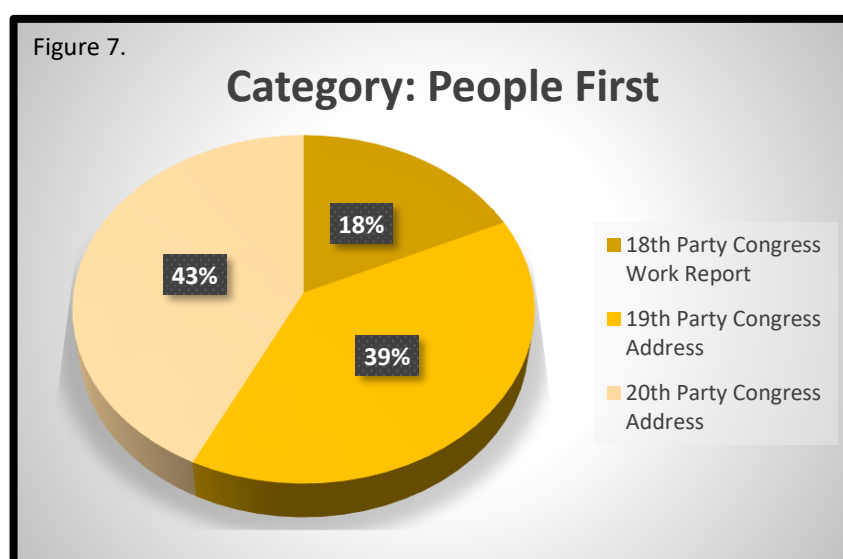
⁴⁵³ Xi, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects” 31.

⁴⁵⁴ Xi, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects,” 31.



consultative democracy.⁴⁵⁵ Xi's new emphasis on a "People's Democracy" belies a shift in which Xi returns the Chinese people to the center as he seeks to re-conceptualize democracy. Whether this shift actually takes place remains a rhetorical device or an abstract ideal will be apparent in time.

Although the *tifa* "democracy" seems to trend slightly down in terms of frequency between 2017 and 2022, one level of abstraction shows that while Xi referenced the *tifa* less, he spent more time speaking about a "people first" posture in 2022 than in

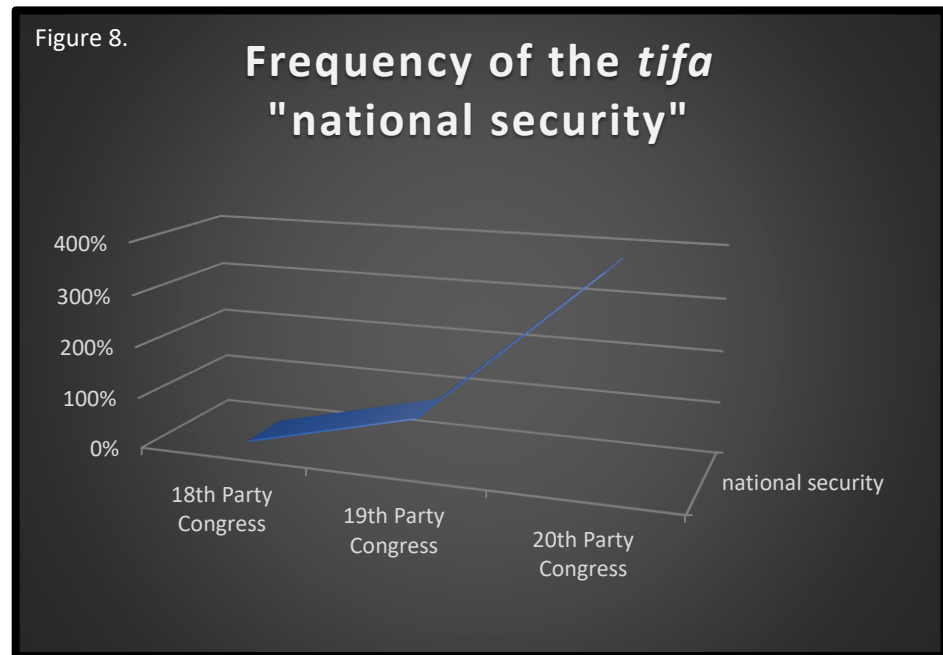


2013 or in 2017. In conclusion, the analysis of Xi's policy behavior concerning governance unequivocally portrays a shift towards a nationalistic, populist position; one in which Xi seeks primarily to emphasize the Chinese people. Although other *tifa* and other frequently mentioned

⁴⁵⁵ Holbig, "Official Visions of Democracy in Xi Jinping's China," 271.

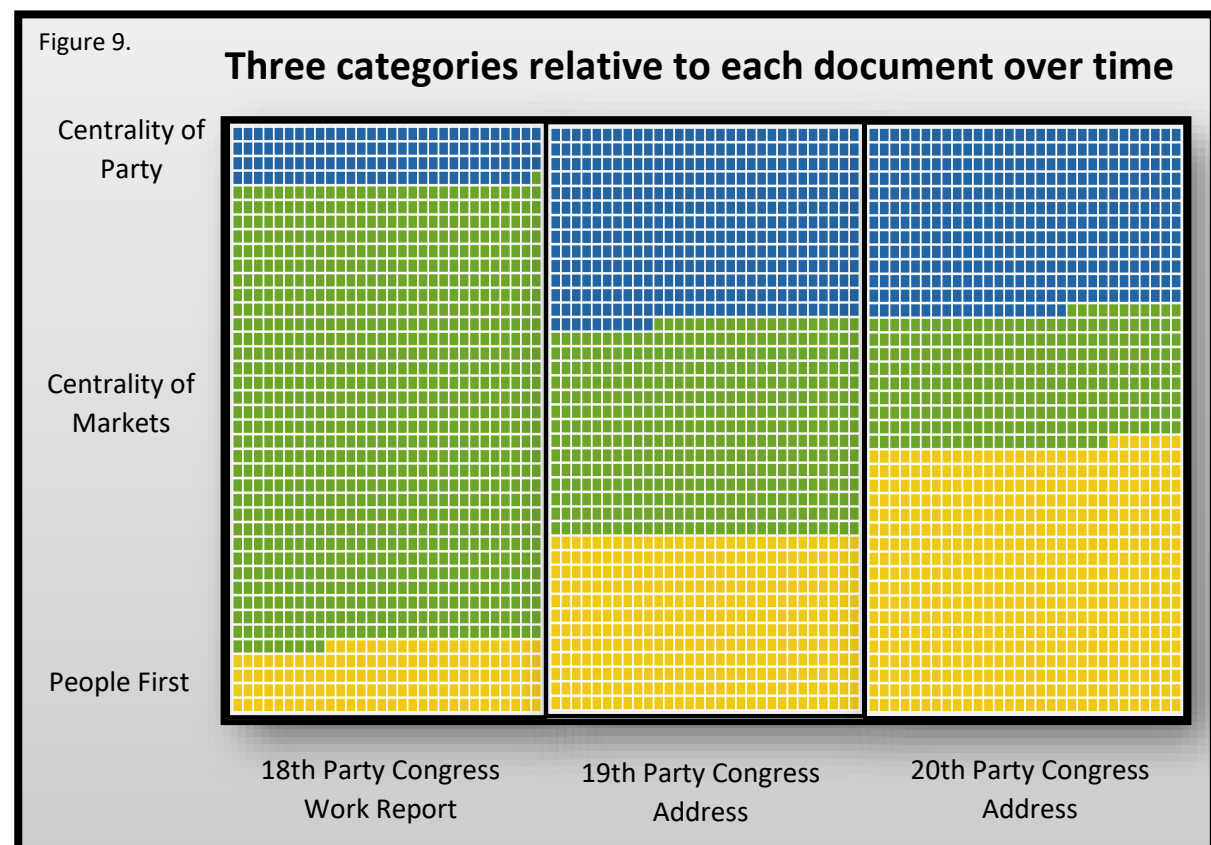
policy areas such as national security were not thoroughly investigated, even a cursory analysis of other *tifa* closely associated with nationalism shows this trend as being part of a broader shift towards a na-

tionalistic populist policy position. Between 2013 and 2022, the term national security saw almost a four-hundred percent frequency increase.



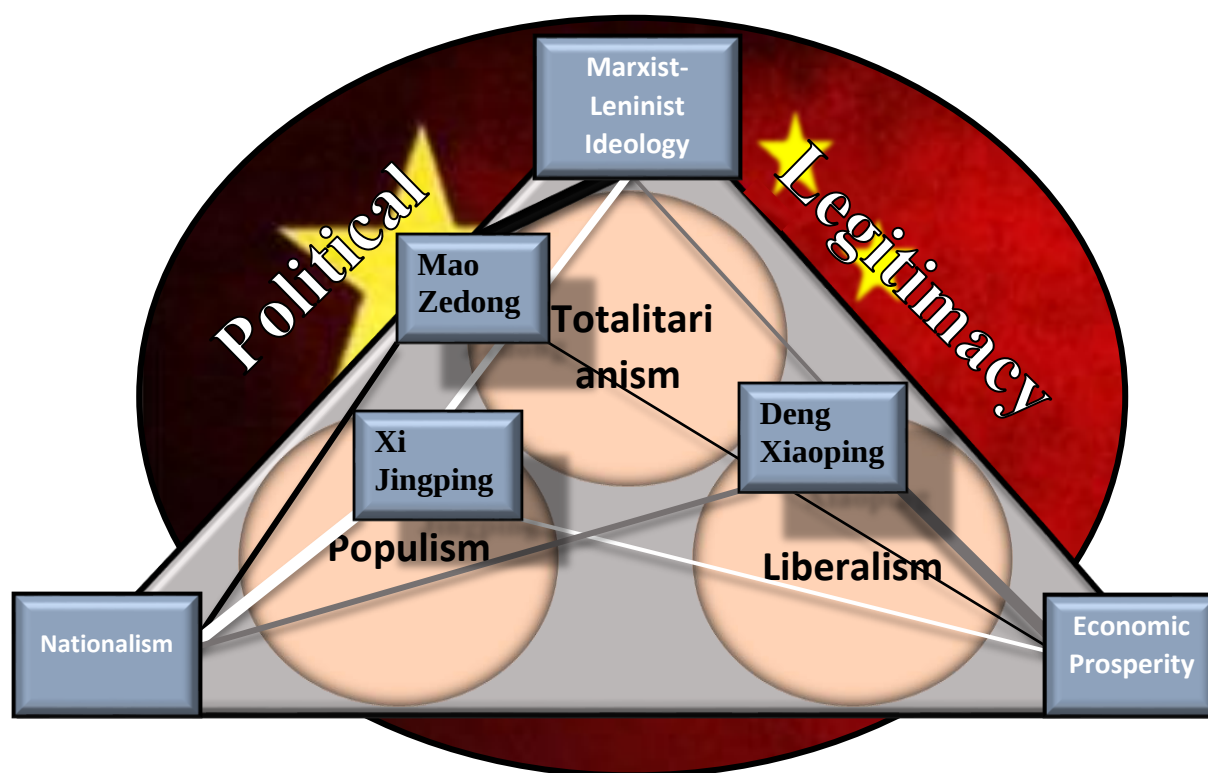
4. Conclusion

The above analyses portray an important trend in a relative analysis within each category. However, it is that comparison of categories relative to each document, in relation to each other, and over time, that is of greater importance. The trend, identified in the previous analyses, seems



to be validated. Xi appears to be moving away from the primacy of economics and open markets and leaning towards not only a centralization of the party, but also an increased nationalistic call to the broader populace so as to maintain his power. Interestingly while the centrality of the party under the source of Marxist-Leninist ideology saw a very slight decrease between 2017 and 2022, Xi's governance position to put the people first continued to see an increase.

In view of the model proposed in the previous chapter, Xi's positioning becomes clearer with this final analysis. When he first became Party Secretary, Xi inherited a policy position which was largely centered on economic prosperity; a more liberal position based on markets and on the *tifa* and policy "reform and opening". However, his Address to the 19th Party Congress clearly portrays the monumental policy shift Xi adopted in the intervening five years and the direction in which Xi sought to position himself for the future. His position on the model in 2017 became more centralized, an approach to appease the various factions within the party and within the wider populace. However, Xi's Address to the 20th Party Congress substantiates the suspicion that he has become emboldened, as for example in his appeals to Chinese nationalism and in his plan to make it a central tenet of his leadership. The result is undeniably evident in the last panel of Figure 9. Xi has cultivated a strong relationship to nationalism and increased his bond to Marxist-Leninist ideology, which weakens his bond to economic prosperity. In conclusion, it appears that Xi's policy behavior positions him between Marxist-Leninist ideology and nationalism although slightly closer to the latter.



Summary and Conclusion

The great Athenian historian Thucydides, writing in the fifth century BCE, posited the inevitable force catalyzing the Peloponnesian Wars by saying, “It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this inspired in Sparta that made war inevitable.”⁴⁵⁶ Although two millennia have receded into the history books, the warnings and risks encapsulated in this one sentence – it later became known as the Thucydides’ trap – seem to pervade geopolitical discourse, especially between Washington and Beijing. Sinologists, China experts, and even Xi himself all seem to warn of the dangers to be learned from Thucydides’ narration of the Peloponnesian Wars; the relevance of the analogy seems to resound within the discourse on many levels. Many fear that if a hot war between China and the United States were to break out, it would do so following similar fears, which provoked Sparta to begin its bloody campaigns against Athens.⁴⁵⁷ Whether or not the analogy is apt misses the seriousness of the potentiality of war. War is always disastrous, but Sparta and Athens were not contending with atomic bombs and the possibility of exponential death and destruction. Furthermore, Thucydides’ narration seems to assure us of war’s inevitability, leaving us victim of our own analogy and unable to rethink the possibilities and the consequences of acquiescence. The great military strategist and Chinese general Sun Tzu offers a way out of the rhetoric quagmire:

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.⁴⁵⁸

Although the general may be proffering advice for war strategists, his advice may well be headed to avert war. The onus lies heavy on each side. If Washington and Beijing better understand their perceived opponent and rival, they will find themselves in a better strategic position to understand policy shifts, military positioning, and societal changes against the larger backdrop of the age. This obligation lies at the heart of this thesis.

⁴⁵⁶ Thucydides, Martin Hammond, and P. J. Rhodes, *The Peloponnesian War*, Oxford world's classics, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13.

⁴⁵⁷ Leon Whyte, “The Real Thucydides’ Trap: The Popular Expression Only Captures Half of the True Meaning of Thucydides’ Work.” *The Diplomat*, May 6, 2015.

⁴⁵⁸ R. L. Wing, *The Art of Strategy: A New Translation of Sun Tzu's Classic, the Art of War*, 1st Broadway books trade pbk. ed. (New York: Doubleday), Chapter 3 Paragraph 18,

At the outset, this thesis resolved to create an explanatory model addressing political legitimacy and how it intersects with governance. More narrowly, it sought to help explain the variances in the governance styles of Chinese leaders, and whether the variances correlate to the pursuit of political legitimacy. Thus, this thesis began with the hypothesis:

The intrinsic imperative placed on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for **political legitimacy** inevitably leads to preferences in the utilization of **political legitimacy mechanisms**, which largely dictate **styles of governance**.

Political legitimacy continues to intertwine itself into the fabric of human civilization as leaders continue to contend with its demands to establish their own governance. Given the universality of its demand and intrinsic imperative to establish itself as a prerequisite for the success of each instance of authority, the maintenance of power resides squarely on the shoulders of political legitimacy.

Because of their unique one-party system, there is a particular imperative placed on Chinese communist leaders, one that remains constant throughout their tenure. As the second chapter explained, retraction of support and legitimacy in the centralized monopolistic power of the CCP quickly becomes existential.⁴⁵⁹ While historically, tools of coercion play a role, the CCP ultimately continues to find respite from the legitimation demand through three main sources or mechanisms of political legitimacy. The model laid out in chapter three placed these sources on the third plane, creating a dynamic triad in which the sources remain at times conditionally assimilate (and at worst, antithetical) to each other. Each Chinese leader establishes and maintains a relational bond to each source, as the sources themselves seem to create their own relational bond to a style of governance on the plane below.

As this thesis shows, the dynamic intersection between political legitimacy and governance is crucially important in understanding Chinese politics. Clearly, the governance of Mao Zedong, Deng, and now Xi provides evidence of dissimilarities that extend past the personality types. As this thesis demonstrated, their governances provide a strong argument validating the hypothesis that their governance styles strongly correlate with the three leaders' utilization of the three main sources of political legitimacy. Mao established Marxist-Leninist ideology as the predominant source while Deng successfully inverted the relational dynamic triad, giving precedence to economic prosperity while still maintaining a relational bond to the other two. Consequently, Mao courted a style of governance closer to totalitarianism and populism while Deng, espousing elements of the other two, flirted closer to a liberal governance style. As the

⁴⁵⁹ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 36.

final chapter asserts, based on its own analysis, Xi seems to reject a liberal governance style as he turns to nationalism and ideology to secure his legitimacy as leader.

The proposed model remains just that, a model – a simplification of a complex political phenomenon manifesting itself throughout PRC history. Although a beginning, this model retains the potential to further its explanatory power. For instance, this model does not sufficiently address foreign policy, an increasing influential element in the current Chinese policy landscape. Further analysis could include Chinese foreign policy and Chinese foreign interests as a perpendicular plane intersecting the third and second planes of the model and influencing both the sources utilized to secure domestic political legitimacy and the corresponding governance styles situated on the plane below. Furthermore, the content analysis performed in the fourth chapter also retains the possibility of expansion. This thesis only analyzed the use of three *tifa* in three speeches of Xi. A broader comprehensive analysis could expand the discussion and offer more nuanced views of the governance not only of Xi, but also of the other Chinese leaders. For instance, the speeches of Mao, Deng, and Xi could be analyzed comprehensively not only to better establish the governance style of each leader, but also to comparatively establish the individual leaders on the model relative to one another. This would assist in a more comprehensive understanding concerning the governance of Xi and possible further policy positioning in the coming years.

Nonetheless, this model does explain the complexities concerning the convergence of political legitimacy and governance and the divergence of governance styles in the historical and current Chinese political context. Whether the future bends to the apparent inevitability of a hot war between China and the United States, or whether cooler heads prevail, will be left up to the tides of time. Nonetheless, as Xi, continues to contend with legitimacy for his leadership and for the survival of the CCP, he will remain a central figure, most likely for years and decades to come. This thesis' conclusion of Xi's political turn to ideology and nationalism in order to forge the Chinese populace behind his governance is crucial for deciphering his future propensities both domestically and internationally.

As history makes clear, war and conflict, although recurring with seeming inevitability, are only unavoidable if we refuse to consider our opponent. Geopolitics is both messy and complex. However, this does not relieve Beijing and Washington of their duties as global players to comprehend the global context and the consequences of their decisions. Understanding the opposing side's governance and the forces influencing and shaping policy remains fundamental

to this end. Failure to pursue this end could be disastrous. Over two thousand years ago, Thucydides eloquently described this consequence:

Think, too, of the great part that is played by the unpredictable in war: think of it now, before you are actually committed to war. The longer a war lasts, the more things tend to depend on accidents. Neither you nor we can see into them: we have to abide their outcome in the dark. And when people are entering upon a war they do things the wrong way round. Action comes first, and it is only when they have already suffered that they begin to think.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁶⁰ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 39.

Appendix 1: Codes and Categories

Attributed source of legitimacy	Marxist-Leninist Ideology	Economic Prosperity	Nationalism
Second abstraction level: Category	<i>Centrality of Party</i>	<i>Centrality of Markets</i>	<i>People First</i>
	Adherence to principle of party officials	Economic development	People run the country
	Party is central to achieving goals	Economic system/reform	Community-level self-governance
	Under the leadership of the party	Economic system/growth model	Expand political participation
	Strengthen/enhance/improve leadership	Market-oriented/market reform	People are masters of the country
	Party building	Productive forces/wealth creating	Stay connected
	Government control	Private/public sector	People's rights and interests
First abstraction level: Tifa	<i>Upholding party leadership</i>	<i>Reform and opening</i>	<i>Democracy/ People's Interest</i>
	Maintain the Party's absolute leadership	China's opening up	Democracy-based centralism
	Upholding leadership of the party	Opening up on all fronts	Centralism-guided democracy
	Getting behind party leadership	All-round opening	Intraparty democracy
	Follow the leadership core		People's democratic dictatorship
			Socialist consultative democracy
			Direct democracy
			Socialist democracy
			People's democracy
			Primary-level democracy

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Abstract

English

This master’s thesis seeks to explain the complexities of the dynamic relationship between the imperative of political legitimacy and the divergence of governance styles in the People’s Republic of China. This thesis analyzes how leaders, throughout the PRC history, secured and maintained political legitimacy for their instance of authority. Additionally this thesis proposes an analytical model, which examines and explains how political legitimacy mechanisms intersect and explain the divergence in governance styles throughout PRC history. The paper’s ultimate goal is three fold. First, this paper will discuss and analyze the complexities and historical development of political legitimacy theory as well as in the context of a communist political system. Second, this paper introduces an analytical model to understand more comprehensively the dynamic forces influencing Chinese governance. Specifically, this model seeks to analyze the various power dynamics of governance as they interplay with the imperative placed on every PRC leader to secure and maintain political legitimacy. Finally, the paper will test the model through an analysis of political legitimacy mechanisms utilized under Xi Jinping in hopes to provide a new approach to understanding the nature of Xi Jinping’s governance. Three pivotal speeches of Xi Jinping given to National Party Congresses in 2013, 2017, and 2022 form the basis of the analysis. The analysis seeks to position Xi Jinping on the model as it identifies his past policy positions and tentatively attempts to identify potential future policy propensities. Thus, this model holds the possibility of a prognosis predicated on an analytical function.

German

In dieser Masterarbeit wird versucht, die Komplexität der dynamischen Beziehung zwischen dem Gebot der politischen Legitimität und der Divergenz der Regierungsstile in der Volksrepublik China zu erklären. Diese Arbeit analysiert, wie die politischen Machthaber im Laufe der Geschichte der VR China die politische Legitimität ihrer Herrschaftsinstanz gesichert und aufrechterhalten haben. Darüber hinaus wird ein analytisches Modell vorgeschlagen, das untersucht und erklärt, wie politische Legitimitätsmechanismen sich überschneiden und die Divergenz der Regierungsstile in der Geschichte der VR China erklären. Die Arbeit verfolgt letztlich ein dreifaches Ziel. Erstens werden die Komplexität und die historische Entwicklung der politischen Legitimitätstheorie sowie der Kontext eines kommunistischen politischen Systems erörtert und analysiert. Zweitens wird ein analytisches Modell vorgestellt, um die dynamischen Kräfte, die die chinesische Staatsführung beeinflussen, besser zu verstehen. Dieses Modell zielt insbesondere darauf ab, die verschiedenen Machtdynamiken des Regierens in ihrem Zusammenspiel mit dem Imperativ zu analysieren, der jedem Führer der VR China auferlegt wird, politische Legitimität zu sichern und zu erhalten. Schließlich wird das Modell durch eine Analyse der politischen Legitimitätsmechanismen unter Xi Jinping getestet, um einen neuen Ansatz zum Verständnis der Art von Xi Jinpings Regierungsführung zu liefern. Drei zentrale Reden Xi Jinpings vor den Nationalen Parteitag in den Jahren 2013, 2017 und 2022 bilden die Grundlage für die Analyse. Die Analyse zielt darauf ab, Xi Jinping im Modell zu positionieren, indem sie seine vergangenen politischen Positionen identifiziert und versucht, mögliche zukünftige politische Neigungen zu identifizieren. Somit bietet dieses Modell die Möglichkeit einer Prognose, die auf einer analytischen Funktion beruht.