

# Griffith Asia Institute

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## Regional Outlook

TRENDS IN CHINA'S POLITICAL REFORM  
Shanding Zhou

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# 1. Executive Summary

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Ever since China began to pursue reform and open-door policies in the late 1970s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been engaging in political reform corresponding to economic reform and rapid socioeconomic transformations. Changes in the CCP's Marxist orthodoxy, particularly the Party's repudiation of Maoist legacy and utopian policies for the sake of national economic development and modernisation in 1978, opened the door for many important political reforms.

More importantly, the CCP has reformed itself as it has evolved from a revolutionary party into a more sophisticated governing party. In recent years, as a result of its study of foreign political parties and systems and its own intensive self-examination, the Party has implemented a series of new policies and programs aimed to reinvigorate and strengthen its organisational apparatus from top to bottom, and improve the Party's governing capacity. Thanks to former General Secretary Jiang Zemin's theory of Three Represents, the CCP has transcended its class foundation, while broadening the Party's mass character, so that it is able to attract and absorb the best and brightest of all social strata in the country, and thus the Party has become a modernising force in China.

The CCP leadership had realised earlier that the rule of law is an important component of reform and modernisation, and determined to re-establish and further develop a solid legal system. Reformist leaders have worked hard to pass laws and promote the supremacy of the national Constitution in maintaining an authoritarian stability. On the other hand, the Party advocates 'rule by virtue', arguing that in the governance of a country like China, rule of law and rule by virtue are always complementary to each other and advanced mutually. Neither is dispensable and neither should be abolished. Rule of law belongs to political construction and political civilisation while rule by virtue belongs to ideological construction and spiritual civilisation.

China has also been pursuing its unique path of political development – democratisation with Chinese characteristics. The orthodox Chinese notion of democracy is not so much in terms of intrinsically valued political procedures but in terms of results; it thus seems to be more a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. The purpose of socialist democracy is not, after all, to validate individualism or pluralism, but to unify the people for the pursuit of common interests and objectives. The essence of socialist democracy is that the people are the masters of the country, and it is the system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the CCP.

Some theorists argue that the question of the theoretical possibility of party-state democracy is less simple than it might appear because essentially it is an abstract question of the compatibility of the minimum conditions of a democratic system and of the minimum conditions of the party-state. Moreover, it must be argued that modern democracy is a broader category than legislative democracy. Therefore, some China scholars believe that China is likely to have a top-down democratic transition. The US leading futurist John Naisbitt even predicts that a new 'vertical democracy', which combines bottom-up mass participation with top-down central command, is emerging in China, and is likely to become an alternative to the Western style of 'horizontal democracy'.

Changes in China's foreign relations resulting from the CCP's reform and open-door policies have been remarkable, and some trends are worth noting. China has now taken a new approach in foreign policy that demonstrates much greater moderation, engagement, and integration with the existing world order than prevailed in the past. Furthermore, with the new strategy of 'peaceful development', the Chinese leaders gave high priority to countering growing regional and international perceptions of 'China

threat' and thus provided the foundation for Chinese formulations in the twenty-first century regarding China's 'peaceful rise', China following 'the road of peace and development', and more significantly, China seeking a 'harmonious' world order.

Bearing in mind that while weaknesses and problems of China's political system have been discussed, and critical views debated, the paper is focused more on what progress the CCP's political reform has achieved, and trends of China's unique political development. It aims to deepen understanding of how the CCP has survived and further enhanced its governance. This will help to create better appreciation of the Chinese political system as a whole, contribute to debates on theories and practices of its political reforms, and highlight the necessity for new approaches in the China field as some scholars have recently proposed.

## 2. Introduction

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China's leaders recognised early in the post-Mao period the need for political reform corresponding to both economic reform and rapid changes in socioeconomic conditions. Conventional views that China reformed its economy first and its political system second are mistaken. Indeed, in many ways political reforms not only preceded but were the necessary condition for important economic reforms. Changes in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s Marxist orthodoxy, particularly the Party's repudiation of 'class struggle' as its primary objective, and decisive shift of focus to economic development and modernisation in late 1978, opened the door for many important political reforms.

The term 'political reform' was formally introduced into the modern lexicon of China's politics by the Party's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping in 1980. In August that year, Deng made an important speech at an expanded meeting of the CCP's Politburo entitled 'Reform of the Leadership System of the Party and State'.<sup>1</sup> The meeting outlined China's political reform program. It then meant reform of the leadership system, institutionalisation and rule of law. Misrule of the Cultural Revolution came up frequently in examples of the need for reforms.

Repudiation of the Maoist era was made clear in the CCP's 1981 Resolution, which criticised Mao's ideological and political mistakes after the Party's leftward turn in 1956 – a rebuke much kinder but similar to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956.<sup>2</sup> It accused the late Chairman of arrogance, impatience, bad judgment, autocracy, and being out of touch, although it said his merits exceeded his faults. More significantly, it targeted China's political system as a whole and slammed what Deng called 'bureaucracy, over-concentration of power, patriarchal methods, life tenure in leading posts, and privileges of various kinds' within the Party leadership.<sup>3</sup>

At the Thirteenth Party Congress in 1987, the CCP's General Secretary Zhao Ziyang formally put forward concrete proposals for political reform in a comprehensive manner based on Deng's 1980 speech. Chiefly, it attempted to separate the Party from the state. Under these proposals, the Party should concentrate on broad policy guidelines, ideology, propaganda and so forth, and allow state organs to be responsible for daily administrative affairs. Further, Party personnel holding functional posts should not concurrently occupy administrative positions in the state hierarchy. Within this hierarchy, some separation should be enforced between the legislative and executive branches through avoidance of leaders holding concurrent positions in both branches. But in the wake of the Tiananmen Incident of 1989, Zhao's proposals and measures were dropped because they were seen to have weakened Party leadership and control. Zhao was forced to step down and was replaced by Jiang Zemin as the Party's General Secretary. Political reforms presented in the new Party leader's report to the Fourteenth Party Congress in 1992 were limited to administrative reforms such as streamlining the organisations of the Party and the state.<sup>4</sup>

China's economic reforms began accelerating after Deng's famous Southern Tour (*Nan xun*) in early 1992, when he called for deepening reform and opening-up. Thus the Party formally adopted the Deng Xiaoping Theory. Described as the 'developmental theory of Marxism', Deng's Theory gives absolute priority to economic development – 'economic development is the centre of party work'. It explains in ideological terms the introduction of market reforms into China's economy and allowing some aspects of capitalism (such as the profit motive and private ownership of business) to be driving forces for the country's economic development.<sup>5</sup>

The theme of Deng's Theory is *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics* (*Zhongguo teshu de shehui zhuyi*). In this way the Party set a clear goal of establishing a socialist market



economy. In addition to the state lifting some control and allowing prices to float, the rapid growth of private economy, joint ventures and solely foreign-owned enterprises, and reorganisation of state-owned assets, have led to a truly 'mixed ownership economy'. Many rules forbidding certain activities were changed, and many closed areas were opened up.<sup>6</sup>

During the Fifteenth Party Congress in 1997, Jiang Zemin again emphasised the political reform agenda, including further development of democracy within the system of people's congresses and in cooperation with the democratic parties, strengthening the legal system, restructuring economic enterprises, improving the civil service system, and improving the system of democratic supervision. Jiang's important initiative to the Party's political reform is his theory of the *Three Represents* (*sange daibiao*), which he put forward in 2000.

Jiang claimed the CCP should represent the most advanced productive forces, more advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the majority of the people. What Jiang intended was to modernise Party ideology. He argued that Communism, in its industrial-age formulation, was not viable as a contemporary economic system, but the Communist Party, by representing these three powerful principles, would be modernising Marxism, advancing with the times, and securing its place at the vanguard of society.<sup>7</sup> Thus Jiang's *Three Represents* was adopted as a new framework to reconstruct the CCP's legitimacy as the ruling party capable of ideological and institutional innovation.<sup>8</sup>

When Hu Jintao took office as CCP General Secretary in 2002, he promised to enhance 'the socialist democratic system', promoting reform of the political structure, which mainly aims at implementing professional standards of cadres recruitment and management, new modes of direct political and social participation at the local level, more autonomy for the people's congresses, and intra-Party democracy, as well as strengthening rule of law, which has been transformed from a governing instrument to a fundamental goal of reform.<sup>9</sup>

More significantly, Hu put forward in February 2005 what he called *Harmonious Society* (*hexie shehui*) as his blueprint for further reforms. Hu declared that the socialist Harmonious Society the Party wanted to build should be a society featuring democracy, the rule of law, fairness, justice, sincerity, trustworthiness, amity, full vitality, stability, orderliness, and harmony between humankind and nature. Its central feature is Scientific Outlook on Development (*kexue fazhan guan*), a new model of development. Two elements emerged as the core of the concept: 'taking people as the basis' (*yiren weiben*) and 'comprehensive development' (*zonghe fazhan*). Both seem to be a deft, but substantial modification of his predecessors' priorities. Hu's theory also includes how to build a harmonious world, and take advantage of globalisation to promote peace, development and common prosperity.<sup>10</sup>

I would argue that over the last three decades, the CCP leaders have undertaken comprehensive political reforms that have remarkably facilitated China's socio-economic transformation and modernisation, as well as its opening-up to the outside world. As a result, the CCP has evolved from a 'revolutionary party' into a more modern 'governing party'. It has established solid institutions for rule of law, undertaken further democratisation with unique Chinese characteristics, and has been integrating rather successfully with the international community. It is to explore and discuss these achievements and trends in China's political reform and development that this paper devotes its attention.

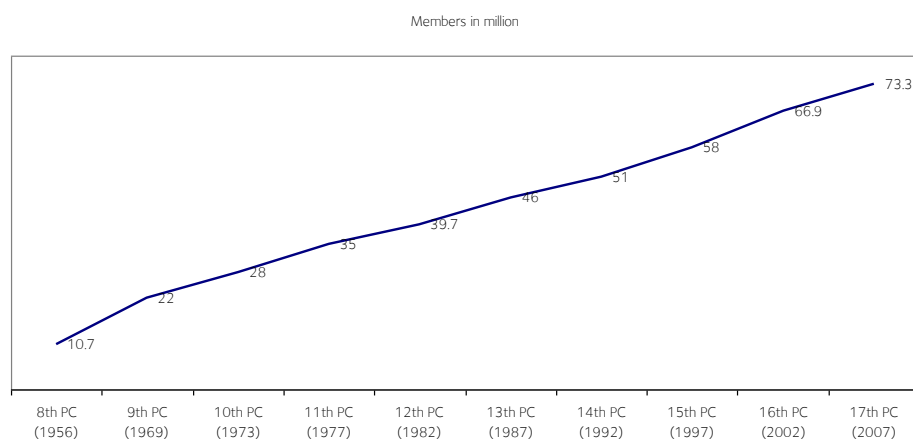
### 3. From a 'Revolutionary Party' to a More Modern 'Governing Party'

Ever since 1978 when China started pursuing reform and open-door policies, the CCP has been undergoing remarkable changes. To some extent, I agree with US scholar David Shambaugh's observation in his recent study, 'The CCP has exhibited many classic symptoms of an atrophying and decaying Leninist party – but, at the same time, it is also showing itself capable of significant adaptation and reform in a number of key areas'.<sup>11</sup>

Kjeld Brodsgaard and Zheng Yongnian noted that the CCP has been engaged in a process of renewal and reform that dates back at least to the mid-1990s. As a result, 'the Party and its governing apparatus appear better qualified and technically more competent than any other time in the post-Mao period'. Furthermore, 'the lesson from the collapse of the Soviet Union seems to have been learned. The response of the CCP leaders has been to introduce incremental reform at grassroots level while strengthening the capacity of party and state institutions at higher levels'.<sup>12</sup>

More significantly, with changes of official ideology, the CCP has reformed itself as it has evolved from a revolutionary party into a more sophisticated governing party. To maintain its relevance and legitimacy, the Party has not only restructured orthodox Marxism and redefined Mao Zedong Thought, but also developed new ideological theories, such as Deng Xiaoping's Theory, Jiang Zemin's Three Represents and Hu Jintao's Harmonious Society. Instead of declining, China's official ideology has thus been revitalised and reoriented, guiding the Party to adapt to rapid changes in socioeconomic situations, both internally and externally.

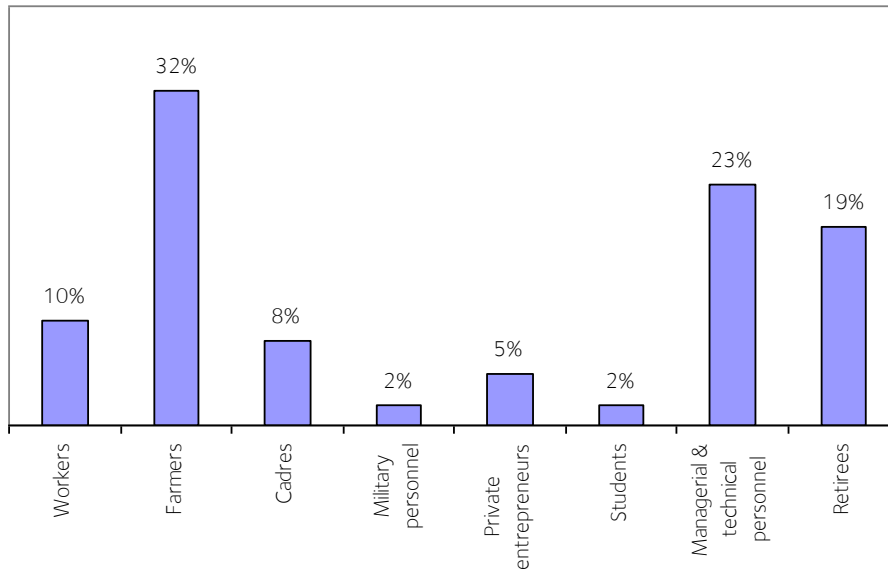
Reforms within the CCP itself have sought to strengthen the Party organisation, to remedy deficiencies in its operational procedures, and more significantly, to change the composition of both membership and leading bodies. Over the past half century, particularly in recent years, CCP membership has increased enormously, as Figure 1 shows.



*Source:* Compiled by the author based on data from <http://www.xinhuanews.net>. Accessed 4 April 2011.

**Figure 1: The Growth in Membership of the CCP's Party Congress, 1956–2007**

Also, its occupational composition has changed in dramatic ways over the past three decades. Figure 2 displays the occupational composition of CCP members in 2007. Although workers, farmers and soldiers continue to constitute the largest single group in the CCP, other categories including managerial and technical personnel, and even private entrepreneurs (a fairly recent addition), also comprise significant percentages of the CCP's membership. Thanks to Jiang's theory of Three Represents, the CCP has transcended its class foundation, while broadening the mass character of the Party. Able to attract and absorb the best and brightest of all social strata in the country, the Party has become a modernising force in China.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, this seems somehow similar to the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in the late 1960s when Gough Whitlam engineered a new Labor, which fused the ALP into a party resting upon working class and middle class votes, a necessity for survival.<sup>14</sup>



Source: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-07/01/content\\_8471350.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-07/01/content_8471350.htm). Accessed 1 July 2008.

**Figure 2: The Occupational Composition of CCP Members (2007)**

Some Western scholars seem to be unimpressed by what has emerged as a new image of the CCP; they still believe that 'the party is over', and the CCP is doomed to 'withering away'. In his article, 'The End of Communism', Arthur Waldron assumed that the CCP is 'more like a mafia or underworld organisation, bound by narrow personal interests and loyalties maintained by money and force. As such, it is less and less appealing to ordinary Chinese'.<sup>15</sup> But on the contrary, the CCP remains popular in China, and its membership seems quite attractive even to the young, college-educated population. For example, in 1990, only 1.2 per cent of college students were Party members. By the end of June 2003, the share reached 8 per cent, and 50 per cent of college students had actually filed applications for membership.<sup>16</sup> In 2005, 17 million people applied for membership nationwide, with 2.47 million granted admission as new members, of whom 2 million were aged under 35.<sup>17</sup>

The nature of the Party's values has changed as a result of reforms, justified by new ideologies as mentioned above. In the mid-1950s, for example, peasants still formed over 60 per cent of Party membership. They were recruited mostly during mass campaigns, which relied heavily on political criteria such as class background. Generally they had a low level of education and lacked specialised knowledge. In 1979 when the reforms were begun, approximately half of the CCP's then 37 million members had joined the Party during the Cultural Revolution. During those years the Party recruited from among poor peasants and urban workers and emphasised the values of class

struggle and Maoist ideology. By 1998, another 20 million Party members had been recruited from more diverse social backgrounds using decidedly different criteria that emphasised economic development, some people 'getting rich first', mixed modes of ownership, reliance on market forces and remunerative incentives.<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted that the educational level of CCP members has increased significantly in the past three decades, now that 'expertise' is much more valued than 'redness' in the recruitment process. In 1998, among the 61 million CCP members, over 11 million were college graduates (17.8 per cent), about 4.5 times more than the general population average in the 1982 census. By 2007, about 24 million members held, at minimum, a two-year college degree, constituting 32.4 per cent of the total membership. The growth in the percentage of national-level Party leaders with higher education has been particularly dramatic. For example, in 1982, none of the Politburo members had a university degree; among the 25 Politburo members selected at the Seventeenth Party Congress in 2007, 23 (92 per cent) have a university degree. Furthermore, 52 members of the Seventeenth Central Committee have a PhD degree, up from 12 in the Sixteenth and four in the Fifteenth Central Committees, respectively.<sup>19</sup>

Political reform has also improved the quality of CCP leaders. The third and fourth generations are as young as the leaders who took power in the 1950s, reversing a trend towards older leaders that characterised the 1960s and 1970s. Beginning in the early 1980s, the Party abolished the life tenure system for Party and government functionaries and China witnessed a massive replacement of old revolutionary cadres with a generation of younger and better-educated leaders. For instance, in 1983–92, more than six million cadres who joined the revolution before 1949 were retired, while more than 260,000 younger and able cadres assumed leadership positions at county level and above. The retirement age was set at 60 for vice minister, vice governor and deputy regional commander, and 65 for minister, governor and military regional commander. In recent years, the mandatory retirement system has been enforced more effectively even at the higher level, with few exceptions. Party and government officials at the level of minister or provincial governor have to either rise to a higher position or leave their position once they pass the mandatory age.<sup>20</sup>

The most important achievement is the institutionalisation of the Party's leadership succession started in Deng's later years, as discussed above. Since 1989, elite succession at the level of senior CCP leadership has been handled quite successfully. By the end of 2007, four Party congresses had produced a comprehensive turnover of leadership. The 'fifth generation' of the CCP leadership has been selected and will succeed the fourth generation at the Eighteenth Party Congress to be held in November 2012. The handing over of power may not be democratic but it is becoming structured, stable and basically predictable – indeed, much more predictable than is possible in a genuine democratic system.<sup>21</sup>

In recent years, from study of foreign political parties and systems, as well as its own intensive self-examination, the CCP has been implementing a series of new policies and programs aimed to reinvigorate and strengthen its organisational apparatus from top to bottom. At the Fourth Plenum of the Sixteenth Party Congress in 2004, the CCP Central Committee adopted an important *Decision on the Enhancement of the Party's Governing Capacity*, and subsequently the Party undertook systematic and comprehensive programs intended to 'rebuild the Party' (*dangde jianshe*), improve the 'Party's governing capacity' (*dangde zhizheng nengli*), maintain the 'Party's advanced nature' (*dangde xianjinxing*), and improve 'inner-Party democracy' (*dangnei minzhu*).<sup>22</sup>

The CCP leadership realises that to maintain its relevance and legitimacy, the Party must strengthen its ruling capacity, become more professional and efficient, and rise to the challenges of the modern world. The leadership stresses that the Party must develop a stronger sense of crisis, think of danger in times of peace, heighten their sense of hardship and governing, and earnestly strengthen the Party's ability to govern. The leadership sees that the Party must draw experience and lessons from the success and

failure of ruling parties in other countries and enhance its governance in a more earnest and conscientious manner.<sup>23</sup>

The contents of the *Governing Capacity* document reflect many years of the CCP's self-reflection and examination. Domestically, the leadership has recognised that as the result of reform and opening up, large numbers of Party members are abandoning their Party responsibilities to pursue economic opportunities. Party and government officials are leaving their posts to go into the lucrative world of private business. The non-state sector of the economy is growing so fast that most enterprises do not have Party cells within them and few new members are being recruited from their workforce. In some rural areas Party organisations are paralysed and recruitment of new members is declining. These are warning signs of disintegration, of a party unable to manage its members, or to control the society it governs. Internationally, the 'painful lesson of the loss of power' has to be learned by communist parties across the globe. The Soviet Union used to be the world's leading socialist country, but broke up virtually overnight and the power of the Soviet Communist Party, a large party with an 88-year history and 15 million members, collapsed. One important factor in this collapse was that during the Soviet communists' long time in power, the system of governing became rigid. Consequently, the party's ability to govern declined and the people who it governed became dissatisfied with the performances of party and state officials.<sup>24</sup>

After adoption of the *Decision*, a major national campaign was launched to propagate and implement the document's recommendations, which unfolded in three distinct phases over an eighteen-month period, culminating in the summer of 2006. Over the course of the campaign, 130,000 new organisations were created, while 156,000 'weak or non-functional local level Party organisations were rectified' and required to improve their work. Of those Party members who were deemed 'unqualified' for membership, 44,738 were expelled from the Party. The CCP has not only concentrated on vetting and improving its membership, it has also concentrated attention on institution building.<sup>25</sup>

Another trend in the CCP's reform is to stress combating corruption which is clearly one of the principal challenges facing the Party and Chinese society because it permeates both. Jiang stated in 1999 that the Party must regard the work of fighting corruption as a matter of utmost importance that can determine the fate of the nation, and that it must make long-lasting and unswerving efforts to combat corruption. Jiang's successor, Hu Jintao, went even further, defining anti-corruption as 'a major political task of the whole Party'. He warned that failure to combat corruption would seriously harm the flesh-and-blood ties between the Party and the people and could even deprive the Party of its ruling position and lead it to self-destruction. However, before the 1990s, the leadership relied primarily on the traditional method of political campaigns to fight against corruption. After several high-profiled anti-corruption campaigns failed to check the vice, corruption has become even more prevalent. Indeed, the problem is now so serious that the Beijing leadership has finally realised the importance of addressing the root of the problem by defining boundary issues, reducing administrative power, and strengthening the legal system.<sup>26</sup>

The Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) remains the Party's watchdog on discipline and corruption, and it now penetrates the Party apparatus from top to bottom. It practices the 'dual leadership system', whereby at each level there is a parallel discipline inspection committee or office, as well as discipline inspection officers working within ordinary Party committees. CDIC members now enjoy the simultaneous status of both being embedded within the Party committee themselves yet also enjoying autonomous supervisory powers. Thus, the Party's discipline committee has more power than before and the Party secretary no longer controls the Party discipline committee at the same level. Nowadays it is rather difficult for local officials to commit serious corruption and there are several checks against any potential evil-doer.<sup>27</sup>

At its Sixth Plenum in 2006, the CDIC reported that for the roughly 12 months from November 2004 to December 2005, it had investigated 147,539 cases of violations of Party discipline regulations. Of those, 143,391 cases were resolved – resulting in the expulsion of 24,188 members from the Party. Over the longer period between 1997 and 2002, 846,760 members nationwide were punished for breaching Party discipline, of which 137,711 were stripped of their membership. This included the high-profile Xiamen smuggling case, as well as the execution of the governor of Jiangxi Province. The Beijing mayor, Chen Xitong, and the Shanghai Party secretary, Chen Liangyu, were also removed on corruption charges. Thus, despite the difficulties of coming to grips with corruption, the CCP is not sitting by idly while corruption spreads like an infectious cancer throughout society.<sup>28</sup>

In recent years, the Party has been developing a mixed regime in which different ingredients such as traditional Mandarin rule, one-party domination, the form of people's party, functional factions representing different interest groups, and democratic elections and monitoring are combined. As He Baogang observed, the idea of the mixed regime provides a better framework for exploring new developments and examining the potential of intra-party democracy. Through mixing these ingredients, China is in the process of creating its own model of political institution in the twenty-first century.<sup>29</sup>

The CCP has undergone a decisive shift from separation discourse of the 1980s to unity discourse subsequently, advocating that all key political organisations should be unified under the Party's leadership after the Tiananmen Incident. The idea of intra-party democracy has also gained ground, which can be seen as an active response to the increasingly absolute power of the Party. Intra-party democracy is seen as enhancing political rights, ensuring that Party members can participate in Party affairs directly or indirectly on an equal basis. All Party members are equal, and enjoy the rights protected by the Party constitution. In parallel with practicing grassroots democracy, it is now advocated that the Party secretary and other members in the same Party committee should be equal and that the principle of one member, one vote should be implemented in intra-Party elections. In some places, as experiment, multiple-candidate elections have replaced single-candidate elections for Party Congress delegates. And it has been suggested that the Party General Secretary should be elected by the Central Committee or even by the Party Congress, which, in turn, should become the most important body in determining key issues. Since the Sixteenth Congress of 2002, attempts have been made to implement the system of the Standing Committee of the Party Congress (*dangdaihui changrenzhi*) at city and county levels to supervise the Party committee at these levels.<sup>30</sup>

For further checks and balances within the Party, power should be divided among Party Committees, executive committees, and Party discipline inspection commissions, with each independently responsible to Party Congresses. Thus, legislative power lies in the Party Congress; executive power should be created by converting the general Party Committee into an executive body; and judicial power should belong to the Party discipline inspection commission. Some have argued that the proposed system is a unifying force that is able to keep the different power divisions under the Party leadership, and the source of all power comes from the Party Congress. Essential to intra-party democracy is the idea of three-divisions of power within the Party. It will be interesting to see whether the three divisions of power within the Party is the first step towards creation of three divisions of power in the state.<sup>31</sup>

## 4. Rule of Law plus Rule of Virtue

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The CCP leadership in the post-Mao era realised the rule of law as an important component of reform, modernisation and 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', and determined from very early on to re-establish and build a legal system. This was a sharp break with the Cultural Revolution, when 'the law of rule' by Mao and his followers applied rather than any rule of law. Although the framework began to recover soon after the fall of the 'Gang of Four' in 1976, the Third Plenum of 1978 gave a crucial impetus to development in the direction of the rule of law, by declaring in its Communiqué that to safeguard the people's democracy, 'it is imperative to strengthen the socialist legal system so that democracy is systematised and written into law in such a way as to ensure the stability, continuity and full authority of this democratic system; there must be laws for people to follow, and these laws must be observed, their enforcement must be strict, and law breakers must be dealt with'. It also reasserted the independence of the legal system: 'Procuratorial and judicial organisations must maintain their independence as is appropriate; they must faithfully abide by the laws, rules and regulations, serve the people's interests, keep to the facts, guarantee the equality of all people before the people's laws, and deny the privilege of being above the law'.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, building a legal system, or *fazhi*, a Chinese word which means both 'rule of law' and 'rule by law', has become one of the most important aspects of political reform. Reformist leaders have worked hard to pass laws and promote the supremacy of the Constitution in maintaining an authoritarian stability.<sup>33</sup>

The PRC has been governed by four constitutions, and four amendments have been made to the current Constitution. The making and amending of the Constitution have provided not only an indication of the constitutional reform, but also a good barometer of China's political, economic and social changes. The first constitution in 1954 detailed the state structure of the new People's Republic. The second constitution, known as 'the Cultural Revolution Constitution', was written in 1975. After the inception of economic reform, the third constitution, known as the 'Four Modernisations Constitution', was adopted in 1978. The current one, known as the 'Reform and Opening-up Constitution', was passed in 1982.<sup>34</sup>

To reflect the new policy direction of post-Mao reforms, the 1982 Constitution has been amended four times – in 1988, 1993, 1999 and 2004. That it was amended, rather than replaced by new constitutions, suggests an important development in Chinese politics and a consensus among China's leaders on the fundamental goal of social and economic modernisation. The 1988 revisions enhanced the legal status of those who engage in private business and sanctioned rights for the transfer of land use. The 1993 additions to the Constitution were also related to economic reform and opening-up. The 1999 amendments gave legal protection to private enterprise, recognised the validity of multiple forms of ownership, and declared that the government must use laws to rule the country. The amendments of 2004 provided for protection of private property, which is regarded as significant for the protection of not only private entrepreneurs' property but also of the private assets of ordinary Chinese; and human rights, which is obviously a response to Western criticism of China's human rights record.<sup>35</sup>

There is disagreement among scholars over whether China will become a country with rule of law. Pessimistic ones have contended it is impossible for China to develop a system with the rule of law because of the irreconcilable clash between Chinese socialism and the rule of law. For those who advocate a fundamental change of China's legal system, the constitutionalist era will not arrive fully until the system of one-party dictatorship ends. Some have even pointed out that what Chinese leaders are trying to

achieve is actually 'rule by law' rather than 'rule of law' as it is understood in the West. In the Western perspective, 'rule by law' merely invokes the existence of law within the state's governing process, while 'rule of law' implies more progressively the supremacy of law and the curtailment of arbitrary government by law.<sup>36</sup>

In his comparative analysis of law in modern society, Roberto Unger made an important distinction between three kinds of law: customary law based on the accepted moral standards and practices of a community; bureaucratic law based on explicit rules of the government; and pluralistic law protecting various social-economic classes against each other and against the arbitrary tutelage of government. This pluralistic law is the rule of law, as the law is institutionally autonomous to the extent that its rules are applied by specialised institutions whose main task is adjudication, restraining the arbitrary action of power-holders while reflecting a delicate balance of social force. If the difference between customary law and bureaucratic law is similar to that between Confucianism and legalism in Chinese political philosophy, the difference between bureaucratic law and pluralistic law lies in the fact that the latter exists not to protect the state from unrestrained impulses of its citizens, but precisely the reverse – to protect against the predation (real or potential) of the state. Therefore, the rule of law requires a further distinction between state and society, which is complemented by a contrast within the state itself among legislative, administrative and independent adjudication.<sup>37</sup>

This is why some scholars believed that the post-Mao leadership has been trying to perfect the Chinese legal system in the line of bureaucratic law. The law should not limit the power of the Party and the State but rather serve as an instrument for State power and the Party's interests.<sup>38</sup>

However, one must appreciate that there are obstacles to the rule of law in China. Culturally, the rule of law seems so remote from the Chinese tradition. Confucianism assumes that on the one hand, rule by law is not a 'good' way to govern people, and on the other hand, political elites should not be restrained by any institutional forces like law. Confucius put much emphasis on the role of rites (*li*) in governance, and on individual virtue and public morality. Since rulers or political elites are a symbol of virtue and morality, and are superior to ordinary people from whatever perspective, people should be ready to give up their own decision making power to government officials.<sup>39</sup>

According to China's legalist discourse, laws are made for governing people, not for checking the ruler's behaviour. Also, laws must be sufficiently draconian to deter people from bad behaviour. In this view law and the state are absolute in their authority. There is no sense of a need for countervailing powers, or checks and balances, such as modern constitutionalism has most often attempted to provide. As in the CCP tradition of the Leninist interpretation of law and the state, Chinese communists have taken an instrumentalist approach to the notion. Law and the state are nothing but the coercive expression of economic power enjoyed by the ruling class. In the Chinese socialist state, as long as classes exist, law can only reflect the will of the Communist Party, the vanguard class. Even though Chinese legal circles began to shift emphasis from the class nature of law to its social nature, the mindset of law as a tool still dominates many people's way of thinking.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, optimists believe that China is developing towards the rule of law even though there are still enormous difficulties for China to overcome. Even in the post-4 June 1989 political reaction, there has been progressive development of the legal system and legal consciousness as the law has become incrementally materialised in the daily aspects of social and economic life in China.<sup>41</sup>

It is worth noting that the driving force of China's development of a legal system relates to the leadership's political legitimacy. With the passing of the old generation of revolutionaries, the new generation of leaders must create a new base of political legitimacy. Old leaders could base their political legitimacy on their revolutionary experience. But this is no longer the case for the new generation of leaders. Law



obviously can be used to consolidate and strengthen their hold on power. More broadly, if the rule of law is regarded as a process of legal development in a civilised society, we can say that China has achieved the rule of law to some degree. Legal development during the last two decades in China can be seen as manifestation of the process towards rule of law, though as an ultimate goal it has not yet been achieved. Nonetheless, a certain consensus has been reached within China that the market economy is 'a rule of law economy'. For the present and the future, rule of law seems indispensable in the process of making China prosperous and democratic. Moreover, the incorporation of 'governing the country in accordance with law' into the Chinese Constitution in 1999 was indicative of the determination of the Chinese leadership to follow the rule of law process rather than that of rule of man, as always happened in Chinese history. It is expected that China will make further persistent efforts to establish a legal system based upon the principle of the rule of law.<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, after China officially endorsed the notion of rule of law, the then Party leader Jiang Zemin put forward a new concept – 'rule by virtue' (*de Zhi*) in 2001. According to Jiang, the rule of law and rule by virtue are complementary in the governance of the country. As he said:

We should strengthen persistently the construction of a socialist legal system and govern the country according to law in the course of building socialism with Chinese characteristics and developing a socialist market economy; meanwhile we should strengthen persistently the construction of socialist ethics and govern the country by virtue. In the governance of a country, rule of law and rule by virtue are always complementary to each other and advanced mutually. Neither is dispensable or abolishable. Rule of law belongs to political construction and political civilisation while rule by virtue belongs to ideological construction and spiritual civilisation. Although in different categories, their status and functions are both very important. We should always pay regard to the close combination of legal construction with ethics construction, and to the close combination of governing the country according to law with governing the country by virtue.<sup>43</sup>

Some Chinese commentators have argued that the reason why 'rule by virtue' is needed vis-à-vis rule of law is that rule of law cannot solve all problems; too much reliance on law, such as that to protect suspects' rights, would leave some crimes unpunished; and too much reliance on rule of law would cause higher litigation costs or rule of law costs so as to discount judicial efficiency.<sup>44</sup> It is understood that there are at least two main implications of the emergence of rule by virtue in the legal context. First, it indicates that the CCP does not have enough confidence in 'rule of law' alone, and second it shows that the CCP sees rule of law as a functional vehicle for administrative governance while rule by virtue is seen as something for spiritual governance. In this sense, the Party still uses law as an instrument for its governance of the country.<sup>45</sup>

## 5. Democratisation with Chinese Characteristics

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There have been hot debates both in China and abroad on the theory and practice of socialist democracy advocated by the CCP. The orthodox Chinese notion of democracy follows an intellectual tradition that is very much confined to the ideological framework of Leninism, combined with elements of traditional culture, and that is entirely different from liberal democracy. Democracy is seen in Mao's term: the masses keeping watch over the bureaucracy under the autocratic guidance of a national leader. It is also seen as a good government 'serving the people'. Marx called democracy 'proletariat rule' and this constitutes the key concept of democracy held by the Chinese elites who sought to combine democracy with authority, dictatorship and centralism rather than protest against individual rights.<sup>46</sup>

This orthodox Leninist democracy was understood not so much in terms of intrinsically valued political procedures but in terms of results – that is, according to what class interests were served. 'Democracy' was thus seen as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. It was not a universal concept, applying to all members of society, since it excluded those whose interests or activities were inconsistent with pursuit of socialist revolutionary objectives. The emphasis was clearly inconsistent with principal aspects of liberal-democracy.<sup>47</sup>

Also, the orthodox CCP concept of 'the people' differs from the Western concept. While there is general agreement that democracy literally means 'rule by the people', there are also different definitions where the agreement between Leninism and liberalism ends. The liberal view of 'the people' is all-inclusive, referring to all members of society and viewing society as an aggregation of individuals and a plurality of diversified social groups and interests. By contrast, in the orthodox CCP view, 'the people' is both a social class concept and a collectivist or community-centred concept. The emphasis was clearly on the pursuit of collective interests, rather than being based upon, or even recognising, individual autonomy and expression of interests.<sup>48</sup>

It should be noted here that 'the people' is a collective entity – a totality with fundamental and unified interests that transcend the interests of its individual members. These interests can only be presented in a highly centralised way by the vanguard party of the proletariat. Therefore, democracy is considered to be dialectically related to centralism and is practiced under the guidance of the centre – the leadership of the Party centre. 'The people', supposedly, are pursuing collectively their common interests and exercising dictatorship over the enemy class – a minority of people in certain socioeconomic and political categories. Based on the principles of dictatorship and centralism, the orthodox democracy effectively emphasises the unity of interests both among people and between the people and the Communist Party leadership. In essence, democracy means rule by the Party centre in the interest of the people. Theoretically, the Party has no special interest of its own and acts solely on behalf of the most fundamental, unified and long-term interests of the people.<sup>49</sup>

However, beginning in the early 1980s, the emphasis of both dictatorship and centralism gradually eroded in public debates on democracy, when, in the post-Mao era, the disappearance of enemy classes triggered a series of theoretical developments. Dictatorship was no longer regarded as a primary function of the state; instead, the government should now concern itself mainly with the management of public affairs for the whole society, rather than dictatorship over class enemies. The principle of centralism also came under attack, for the highly centralised monopoly of power by the Communist Party was now viewed as a major obstacle to economic and political

reforms. But, what should be noted is that China has taken a different path toward democratisation, which is called socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics.<sup>50</sup>

Deng Xiaoping characterised very clearly the three elements of China's socialist democracy: first, the people's rule over the government, which is the main principle of democracy; second, the CCP's leadership and centralism, which are necessary for democracy; and third, collectivism, which is also the major principle for resolving the conflicts of different interests in practice. Deng argued that what China needed is socialist democracy, for this is people's democracy, and not bourgeois democracy, individual democracy. For Deng:

People's democracy is inseparable from dictatorship over the enemy and from centralism based on democracy. We practice democratic centralism, which is the integration based on democracy, with democracy under the guidance of centralism. Democratic centralism is an integral part of the socialist system. Under this system, personal interests must be subordinated to collective ones, the interests of part to those of the whole, and immediate to long-term interests.<sup>51</sup>

Apparently, the purpose of socialist democracy is not, after all, to validate individualism or pluralism, but to unify the people for the pursuit of common interests and objectives. This is the feature of Deng's Theory, which has been applied as the guideline for democratisation in China. Under this guideline, the CCP has formulated its strategy for developing a democratic system in China, as it has outlined in the White Paper, *Building of Political Democracy in China*. The essence and the core of socialist democracy is that the people are the masters of the country, and it is the system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the CCP.<sup>52</sup>

It has linked to a reform agenda that broadly contains the following objectives: rejuvenating cooperation with other 'democratic parties', rationalising decisions about labour among government agencies, developing a modern cadre management system, establishing new inspection mechanisms to oversee cadre performance, introducing grassroots self-government, and developing a modern legal system.<sup>53</sup>

According to the White Paper, China has made significant progress toward democratisation, and particularly the CCP itself has become more open, transparent and democratic as the result of its strategy for improving intra-party democracy. The 'D Word' (democracy) has more fully entered the CCP lexicon during the Hu-Wen era. While the Party spoke in the past about building 'socialist democracy', various ideas and terminology about democracy have been put forward by CCP theorists and officials after 2004.

But the discourse on democratisation inside the Party refers largely to within-system democracy, that is, enlivening intra-party norms and channels of freer discussion and collective decision-making. This is classic CCP discourse, with precedents dating back to the Yan'an era. Some argue that extension of democracy should be a two stage process – first within the Party and then outside. This kind of reasoning is a long-standing Chinese view dating back to Sun Yat-sen, based on concepts of tutelage and the elitist idea that the Chinese masses are not 'ready' for democracy. Echoes of this reasoning are heard in the notion of 'incremental democracy', which speaks of the 'three roads to democracy in China: from local to higher level; from inner-party to society; and from less competition to more competition'. It also refers to the concept of 'orderly democracy', emphasising that the 'political participation of citizens must be legalised, organised and orderly', while expanding citizen participation in decision-making.<sup>54</sup>

The strategy of democratisation of government institutions has also achieved significant progress in terms of democratic participation and supervision. To take an important example, the National People's Congress (NPC), the 'highest organ of state power' in China, has now increasingly played decisive roles in its functions of legislation,

supervision, personnel appointment and making decisions about major issues. In contrast to the former automatic unanimous endorsement of whatever was presented to it, more recent sessions of the NPC have seen vigorous debates, criticism of government actions, dissenting votes on legislation presented and nominations for government office. Its procedures have become more democratic, transparent and assertive, which have changed to some extent its old image of being a 'rubber stamp', and increased its capacity to supervise the Party as well as the government.<sup>55</sup>

More significantly, the NPC adopted the Third Amendment to the Chinese Constitution in 1999, which, for the first time in the history of the PRC, incorporated the concept of rule of law into the Constitution. Since then the term 'rule of law' has been used widely in the context of Chinese politics and governance. Just following this new legal development, the State Council issued a *Decision on Comprehensively Pushing Forward Administration in Accordance with Law* in November 1999, requesting governments at all levels to strengthen institutional building, tighten administrative law enforcement, and heighten the capacity of governance in accordance with law. It has thus officially ushered in a new era of rule of law in China. Premier Wen declared in 2007 that the 'socialist system and democratic politics are not mutually exclusive' and it is 'entirely possible for us to build a democratic country with the rule of law under socialist conditions'.<sup>56</sup>

The other major strategy for democratisation has been the institution of village self-governance through democratically elected villager's committees (VC) in rural China. It emerged in the wake of the disintegration of the inefficient people's communes when the household responsibility system was introduced in the countryside. The 1982 State Constitution called for the establishment of VC, which have been defined as 'grassroots mass organisations of self-government'. Then the Organic Law of Villager's Committees, after a decade of trial, was adopted by the NPC in 1998. This law contains more procedural details concerning VC elections and establishment of villagers' representative assemblies, as well as specifications of their respective power, which provides better legal safeguards for villagers' interests and rights. Therefore it has enfranchised and expanded the democratic rights of the largest sector of the Chinese population, villagers as they account for 70 per cent of the whole population. It also generates a system of checks and balances at the grassroots level, increasing the accountability and transparency in village governance. Chinese leaders have been pointing to this as evidence of their commitment to democracy. Western observers of this process have generally agreed that it is a positive step towards democratising China. But there are severe limitations, in terms of both democracy and autonomy.<sup>57</sup>

Most significantly, the transition from the planned to market economy has had a dramatic impact on the development of 'democracy' in China. The watershed change took place when the NPC made a remarkable amendment to the Constitution by endorsing the term 'socialist market economy' to replace the old term 'planned economy' in March 1993. To back up this constitutional change, the CCP adopted the historic *Decision on Issues Concerning the Establishment of Socialist Market Economic Structure* in November 1993. Since then, China has been rapidly marching towards the development of a market economy. The public ownership structure was modified to allow state enterprises to run their business free from the state's direct intervention. It is commonly said that a market economy is a rule of law economy, which is an essential of democracy.<sup>58</sup>

China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001 has enormously improved its economic and legal systems. As a WTO member, China had to bring its relevant laws and regulations into line with those of the WTO. Those Chinese administrative rules that were in conflict with the WTO had to be revised and/or abolished. As Premier Zhu announced in March 2003, the State Council reviewed 2,300 foreign-related regulations and policies, abolished 830 of them and revised a further 325. Also, the WTO requires its member governments to behave in accordance with its requirements including transparency and accountability.<sup>59</sup> The WTO effect therefore

appears to be fundamental to changes in Chinese governance at present and in the future.

In this light, how should we appreciate the Chinese path toward democratisation? Brantly Womack argues that from a broader perspective of world politics, the term 'socialist democracy' is somewhat ambiguous, for 'socialist' is often used to refer to public ownership of the means of production rather than to a state in which a revolutionary party has a leadership role. Therefore, he prefers the term 'party-state democracy', which highlights the chief characteristic of the political system, namely, that the Communist Party holds prerogative of political leadership and the state is the administrative organ of public affairs. Political leadership and state governance can be distinguished but not separated. However, he points out that just as we have been cautious about the term 'party-state', we need also to be cautious about the term 'democracy'.<sup>60</sup>

On the one hand, it has been argued that party-state (or socialist) democracy is fundamentally different from legislative (or parliamentary) democracy. On the other hand, it would be difficult to deny that the strategy and measures of democratisation outlined and implemented by Chinese leaders would make China more rather than less democratic. If a party-state can move in a more democratic direction, then the criteria for more and less democracy must be broader than whether or not a system is or isn't a legislative democracy. It is also necessary to define 'democracy' in terms more basic than the characteristics of legislative democracy. If the influence of the people becomes stronger and more effective in a party-state, one can say that the party-state has become more democratic. If the influence of the people seems to have contracted, then the party-state has become less democratic.<sup>61</sup>

It is worth noting predictions repeated by some experts that a single-party system cannot accommodate factional infighting, public criticism or complex reform, and that the collapse of socialist states is inevitable. The CCP's experience of democratisation contradicts this, suggesting instead that single parties may well be able to accommodate a far higher degree of disagreement and self-reform than might have been expected. China has even institutionalised channels of debate within the Party and the NPC, creating an effect similar to if there were multiple parties. While pluralisation and professionalisation within the CCP should not be confused with actual democratisation, these trends indicate a significant step away from ideologically driven rule and toward a knowledge-based, growth-oriented, and somehow pragmatic role for the Party. It appears that the CCP will be able to defend its relevance and leadership as long as it continues to deliver national economic growth and demonstrate its 'performance legitimacy'. Moreover, many CCP officials and intellectuals do not believe that the Western style of democracy is a feasible or, for that matter, desirable option for China, at least in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the CCP persists in its strategy of democratisation, which reflects in the White Paper, and increases its capacity as the 'governing Party' to deliver 'good governance' of public affairs. So regardless of whether the CCP's goal of a permanent governing party can be obtained, party-state democratisation can be considered valuable in its own right.<sup>62</sup>

The question of the theoretical possibility of party-state democracy is less simple than it might appear because essentially it is an abstract question of the compatibility of the minimum conditions of a democratic system and of the minimum conditions of the party-state. If party-state democracy is impossible in theory, then of course it should be impossible in practice. On the other hand, even if party-state democracy is possible in theory, there may be circumstances in which it cannot be realised in practice. Just as a legislative democracy may be too weak to provide effective governance, a party-state democracy might be too strong to permit the power of the people to have any real effect on the decision or behaviour of the leadership.<sup>63</sup>

Even if legislative democracy is the only stable form of democracy, the continued liberalisation of the party-state might minimise the trauma of transition, and if no

transition occurs then a soft authoritarian state could still be preferable to a less soft one. Moreover, it must be argued that modern democracy is a broader category than legislative democracy. Such an assertion contradicts the assumptions of Western democratic theory, and there is at present no broader democratic theory that can encompass both legislative and party-state democracy. To argue for the possibility of party-state democracy, one must also assert that legislative democracy is not the essence of democracy but rather one path of democracy, and that there exists the possibility of other paths.<sup>64</sup>

As Xiaoqin Guo's study shows, some China scholars now believe that China is likely to have a top-down democratic transition. They have identified a number of factors that provide China with a better chance for a transition guided by the CCP leadership, as opposed to a bottom-up transition imposed by societal forces, given its state-society configuration in which state domination over society has emerged and is likely to endure.<sup>65</sup>

Andrew Nathan, for example, observes that China's democratic transition 'is likely to take the form of an *apertura* – a political opening controlled by the reformist elite, with democratising reforms carried out from the top down'. He explains China's likelihood of a top-down transition as due to a host of statist and societal factors:

1. the CCP's high degree of self-confidence;
2. the relative strength of the reformist faction within the ruling bloc;
3. the absence of an alternative leadership;
4. a moderate political opposition;
5. a weak civil society;
6. the lack of private sector domination in the economy; and
7. habits of deference in the Chinese political culture.<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, John Naisbitt, a well-known American scholar of future studies, even predicts that a new 'vertical democracy', which combines the bottom-up mass participation with the top-down central command, is emerging in China, and is likely to become an alternative to the Western style of 'horizontal democracy'.<sup>67</sup>

## 6. Peaceful Development and a Harmonious World

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Changes in China's foreign relations resulting from the CCP's reform and open-door policies have been very well studied.<sup>68</sup> Some trends are worth noting. Under the Hu–Wen leadership, China has also taken a new approach in foreign policy, which demonstrates much greater moderation, engagement, and integration with the existing world order than prevailed in the past. Some analysts in China and abroad foresee a clear road ahead for China. They see Chinese leaders following a strategy that deals pragmatically with world conditions, conforms to international norms, and pursues international peace, development, and harmony seen in the interests of China, its neighbours, and other concerned powers, notably the United States.

The recent record of Chinese foreign policy shows ever expanding Chinese interaction with the outside world through economic exchanges in an era of globalisation and broadening Chinese involvement within international organisations dealing with security, economic, political, cultural and other matters. These demonstrate a continuing trend toward greater transparency in Chinese foreign policy decision making and policy formation. In general, CCP leaders are focused on promoting China's economic development while maintaining political and social stability in China.<sup>69</sup>

Foreign policy serves these objectives by sustaining an international environment that supports economic growth and stability in the country. Foreign direct investment, foreign aid, foreign technology, and foreign enterprise have been critically important in China's economic growth in the post-Mao period. China is the centre of a variety of intra-Asian and other international manufacturing and trading networks; it is the world's second-largest trading nation and the largest consumer of a variety of key world commodities and raw materials. China today depends fundamentally on a healthy world economy in which Chinese entrepreneurs promote economic development as an essential foundation for continued rule of the Party. At the same time, the world economy depends increasingly on China. The Chinese government exerts ever greater influence in international economic matters as a key manufacturing centre for world markets and an increasingly prominent trading nation with a positive balance of trade and large foreign exchange reserves.<sup>70</sup>

China's approach to its foreign relations became less ideological and more pragmatic as China sought friendly relations with all states on the basis of the 'five principles of peaceful coexistence' (*heping gongchu wuxiang yuanze*) – a set of principles expounded by Premier Zhou Enlai in the 1950s which called for mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. In Deng's era, China focuses its work on economic modernisation instead of on the class struggle that dominated Chinese politics in Mao's era. China's reform and open-door policy call for peace, development and cooperation with neighbouring countries and with the world as a whole. Meanwhile, various theoretical elaborations were put forward in China regarding the concepts of revolution, war, and era to justify some major foreign policy actions including China's changing approach to foreign communist parties and its efforts to promote friendly relations with ruling regimes in the developing world. In the process Mao's theory of National Democratic Revolution, the ideological justification for China's support for communist revolution in the developing world, was revised and finally discarded.<sup>71</sup>

Nor did Beijing offer much by way of tangible or rhetorical support for the Third World's goal of establishing a new international economic order. China's leaders no longer supported the thesis that world war was inevitable, though lesser conflicts were not

ruled out. In the mid-1980s, China described its foreign policy objectives as maintaining world peace, developing friendly cooperation with all countries regardless of social system, and promoting common economic prosperity. Its stance on external issues would be determined according to the merits of each case. Developed and developing countries alike were to be encouraged to contribute to the maintenance of peace, stability, and economic progress within the existing world system.<sup>72</sup>

Chinese leadership priorities regarding economic development and domestic stability also favour a foreign policy that is inclined to accept the world situation as it is and avoid disruptive and assertive initiatives in international affairs. Modern history has taught the Chinese a very clear lesson that China cannot develop well without a peaceful environment. Since Deng's 'independent peaceful foreign policy' (*heping dili wajijiao*) came into being in the early 1980s, China has followed a peaceful foreign policy. Its strategy is said to accept the prevailing global and regional balance of power and influence that is often dominated by the United States. It pursues China's advantage by working with existing regional and other international organisations and cooperating more closely with international groupings dealing with security, politics, culture, environment and other matters.<sup>73</sup>

In 2005, China issued a white paper that provided an outline of this view of Beijing's strategy in foreign affairs. Titled *China's Peaceful Development Road*, the document stressed that achieving peaceful development has been the 'unremitting pursuit' of the Chinese people and administration for almost 30 years and that China's approach will remain along these lines and compatible with Chinese and international circumstances for decades to come. It outlines the major policies China has taken to achieve the goal and its key features included striving to sustain a peaceful international environment helpful to Chinese development and the promotion of world development and peace, achieving Chinese development beneficial to China and its economic partners through growing economic interchange conforming to economic globalisation, and doing China's part to build a harmonious world with sustained peace and common prosperity featuring more democratic international decision making than that prevailing in the past. While acknowledging problems and conflicts in contemporary world affairs, the overall optimistic assessment claimed 'there are more opportunities than challenges' in the world today and the rise of China is one of the most salient international opportunities, as 'China's development will never pose a threat to anyone'.<sup>74</sup>

In recent years, however, China's rapid development has attracted worldwide attention. The implications of various aspects of China's rise, from its expanding influence and military muscle to its growing demand for energy supplies, are being debated heatedly in the international community. Facing a rising China, countries around the world and particularly the United States have registered increasing wariness, fear and suspicion. The Bush Administration was advised to adopt a new containment strategy to counterbalance the 'China Threat'.<sup>75</sup>

In response to the 'China Threat' and to US pressure, the Chinese government proposed 'peaceful development' (*heping fazhan*), which has become a new strategic thinking in Chinese foreign policy under the Hu-Wen leadership. The concept of peaceful development was officially introduced at the 2003 Bo'ao Forum in Hainan by Zheng Bijian, Chairman of China Reform Forum. In his speech he declared, 'The only choice for China under the current international situation is to rise peacefully, namely, to develop by taking advantage of the peaceful international environment, and at the same time, to maintain world peace through its development'. But at the time, there was continued disagreement on the use of the term 'peaceful rise' (*heping jueqi*) among the Chinese authorities and in academia. Originally, the concept of 'China's rise' or 'the rise of China', was used by a Chinese distinguished scholar, Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University, in his controversial book entitled *International Environment for China's Rise* published in 1998, and then in his article titled 'The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes', which appeared in *Journal of Contemporary China* (vol. 10, no. 26, 2001, pp. 33–44).



The concept was developed not only in terms of Chinese history and the international environment but also from the perspective of China's foreign policy strategies under the new generations of Chinese leadership at the present and in the future. But it caused internal debates in China, mainly about possible misinterpretation of the term 'rise' that could boost the 'China Threat'. As a result, the Chinese government under Jiang rejected this concept and the word 'rise' was forbidden to appear in official documents. Thus, at the 2004 Bao'ao Forum, Hu Jintao called instead for 'peaceful development'. Since then, 'peaceful development' has become the CCP's new ideological innovation in its foreign policy. Hu's decision is that the rise of China should be discussed freely by scholars in their writings but the term 'rise' is no longer used in government statements.<sup>76</sup>

The new foreign policy strategy is, to some extent, a continuity of Deng Xiaoping's concept of '*taoguang yanghui*' (keep a low profile and never take the lead) but a break away from Jiang Zemin's notion of '*duoji shijie*' (multi-polar world). Under Jiang, building a multi-polar world implies to 'multi-polarise' the American uni-polarity and counterbalance US hegemony. This 'peaceful development' approach is, in fact, to accept the uni-polar structure of the international system and that the US will continue to be the hegemonic power in the long term. Robert Sutter observed that looking back at the post-Cold War period, Chinese foreign policy pronouncements and actions showed that even basic goals in Chinese foreign policy had changed.<sup>77</sup>

One salient example involved Chinese opposition to 'hegemonism'. This was one of the guiding principles in Chinese foreign relations for more than 20 years, mainly in the 1980s and 1990s. It was a successor to the principle of anti-imperialism that shaped Chinese foreign relations in the Maoist era. As China sometimes grudgingly accommodated the continued strong superpower status of the United States during the George W. Bush administration, it dropped prominent treatment of anti-hegemonism as a goal in Chinese foreign relations. Chinese officials acknowledged in private that they continued to oppose hegemonism, and several indicated that Bush was the most hegemonic US president in world affairs that they had seen. However, the goal of anti-hegemonism was overshadowed by public and private Chinese efforts to persuade Americans that China's rise would not be a threat to the United States. Therefore, China tried to avoid direct confrontation with the US in order to secure a favourable external environment for its rise, although China can adopt a multilateral and bilateral diplomatic approach in the uni-polar world dominated by a single hegemony.<sup>78</sup>

More broadly, as China's interactions with the rest of the world have increased, China's view of international relations has undergone three significant changes:

1. from viewing international relations in ideological terms to viewing them in more conventional terms;
2. from viewing international relations as a zero-sum game to a win-win game; and
3. from a position of suspicion and hostility toward the international system, to one with which China identifies.

These attitudinal changes have, in turn, led to China's conceptualisation of its relations with the outside world, and its redefinition of the objectives of its foreign policy in a way that is reassuring to the international community.<sup>79</sup>

China today has joined most international organisations and their related regimes. The current international regimes are dominated by Western countries. The core values, systemic structure, standards of behaviour and decision making procedures are not necessarily consistent with China's strategic goals. Nevertheless, the Chinese leaders have realised that there is no viable alternative to participating in international regimes. Although China is under the influence and restraint of the current international systems, it will make necessary reforms and adjustments and might have some impact on the evolution of international systems. Thus, China's foreign policy became sophisticated, complex, measured, and broadly effective, especially from the mid-1990s onward. Its

strategy in the Asian Pacific regions has become more flexible and cooperative with multilateral organisations, such as ASEAN+3 and ASEAN+1, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and APEC. From another perspective, joining international regimes such as WTO will provide powerful incentives for China to deepen its domestic reforms because China will not be able to succeed under tough global competition without making its institutions compatible with international regimes.<sup>80</sup>

The 'peaceful development' strategy has also had an obvious impact on Beijing's Taiwan policy. The CCP's leadership has quietly shifted its Taiwan policy to '*budu buwu*' (no independence, no war) – aimed at maintaining the status quo and putting aside '*tongyi*' (unification) for the time being. Deng made unification one of the central tasks for the Chinese government, and Jiang pressed Taiwan for unification by declaring that the resolution of the 'Taiwan issue' would not be delayed indefinitely. However, Hu suggested in September 2005 that resolution of the Taiwan issue was complicated and would take a long time, and that '*fantaidu*' (struggle against 'Taiwan independence') would be a long fight – without setting a timetable for the unification. This is a departure from Jiang's '*jitong*' (hasty unification) to a new thinking in the Taiwan policy that seeks 'peace', 'reconciliation', 'cooperation', and a 'win-win situation' (*heping, hexie, hezuo, shuangying*) across the Taiwan Strait that could lead to a future of 'peaceful development' and 'common prosperity'.<sup>81</sup>

In 2005, The CCP invited Taiwan's top two opposition leaders, Lien Chan (Kuomintang Party, KMT) and James Soong (People First Party, PFP), to visit mainland China, accompanied by Taiwanese legislators, politicians, businesspeople and media leaders, and embarked on the first major historical dialogue and political interaction across the Taiwan Straits since 1949. They held fruitful talks and established regular communication channels. However, serious differences remain between the CCP and the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Beijing has demonstrated greater determination against Taiwan independence on the one hand and greater flexibility in exploring peaceful means to solve the Taiwan issue on the other hand.<sup>82</sup>

Apparently, Hu prefers a velvet glove to the iron fist that his predecessor showed with his 1996 military exercises. Perhaps most important in the long run, China's formidable economic power works to attract Taiwan. Its increasingly diverse and sophisticated economy has been persuading many leaders and ordinary people in Taiwan that they stand to gain from some accommodation rather than confrontation with the PRC. In 2008, the DDP lost the Presidential election to Ma Ying-jeou, the KMT candidate who ran on precisely such a platform. Soon after Ma's election, direct flights between China and Taiwan – a bellwether issue – were finally inaugurated, and a host of measures to facilitate tourism and economic cooperation were adopted. Of course cross-straits relations are bound to continue to have ups and downs. But overall China can take pride in having successfully deployed a mature, patient approach to improve its position and stabilise relations with Taiwan.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, with the new strategy, the Chinese leaders gave high priority to countering growing regional and international perceptions of an emerging threat coming from China. They did so by emphasising efforts through diplomacy and other means to reassure China's neighbours and eventually the United States and other powers that rising China was not a danger but instead a source of opportunity. This new Chinese goal provided the foundation for Chinese formulations in the twenty-first century regarding China's 'peaceful rise', China is following 'the road of peace and development', and more significantly, China is seeking a 'harmonious' world order.<sup>84</sup>

In his political report to the Seventeenth Party Congress in 2007, Hu outlined his views dealing with the realisation of a Harmonious World:

To this end, all countries should uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, observe international law and universally recognised norms of international relations, and promote democracy, harmony,

collaboration and win–win solutions in international relations. Politically, all countries should respect each other and conduct consultations on an equal footing in a common endeavour to promote democracy in international relations. Economically, they should cooperate with each other, draw on each other's strengths and work together to advance economic globalisation in the direction of balanced development, shared benefits and win–win progress. Culturally, they should learn from each other in the spirit of seeking common ground while shelving differences, respect the diversity of the world, and make joint efforts to advance human civilisation. In the area of security, they should trust each other, strengthen cooperation, settle international disputes by peaceful means rather than by war, and work together to safeguard peace and stability in the world. On environmental issues, they should assist and cooperate with each other in conservation efforts to take good care of the earth.<sup>85</sup>

As Ronald Keith points out, by promoting the notion of Harmonious World, the CCP leader now talks of Chinese-style international relations even as he avoids claims to international leadership.<sup>86</sup> Hu Jintao's strategy as it relates to the character of China's international relations is somehow new, but it also updates the notion of 'harmony' by synthesising it with Zhou Enlai's five principles of peaceful coexistence and its operational corollary, 'seeking common ground while reserving differences' (*qiutong cunyi*) together with Deng's 'independent foreign policy' towards 'peace and development'. Here we bear in mind that 'harmony' is an easier and more expressly Chinese concept to work with than 'peaceful rise'. It pays a bigger political dividend embracing peace while softening the edge off the potentially threatening connotation of 'rise'. 'Harmony' neatly separates China from the classical rise and fall of the great powers in the European balance of power and provides a positive basis for contemporary national cohesion.<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, in the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics, 'harmony' celebrated the greatness of Chinese civilisation, thus supporting a culturally progressive rather than inherently aggressive and popular Chinese nationalism. 'Harmony', in its relation to 'peaceful coexistence', cuts across the past and present to challenge the contemporary 'theory of the China threat' (*Zhongguo weixie lun*) while projecting the positive identification of Chinese nationalism with internationalism. At the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, the word *he*, used in the Chinese compound terms for 'peace' and 'harmony', was repeatedly projected in the performance on the undulating floor of the 'Bird's Nest' stadium, highlighting the theme of the game, 'One World, One Dream'. The Chinese leader's foreign policy strategy has intensely focused on the same notion of 'harmony', which calls on the peoples of different nations to join hands to establish a harmonious world with lasting peace and common prosperity.<sup>88</sup>

It should be noted that China's cultural tradition, featuring '*he er butong*' (harmony with differences) and '*he wei gu*' (priority to peace), goes a long way toward facilitating China's harmonious coexistence and sharing of prosperity with its neighbouring countries and the world at large. The CCP's notion of Harmonious World emphasises that the international community should also recognise, and show respect for, the reality of cultural and political diversity in the world.<sup>89</sup>

Diversity of civilisation in the world, according to Premier Wen, is a basic feature of human society. It is also an important driving force for world progress. The numerous differences in historical tradition, religion, culture, social system, values and levels of development, Wen argues, are what make the world colourful and fascinating. Countries should recognise and accept such a reality. 'Harmony with differences' was a great thinking put forward by the Chinese ancient philosophers.<sup>90</sup>

Harmony is for the sake of living and growing together. Differences are aimed at achieving complements. Adopting the 'harmony with differences' attitude to view and to handle problems 'is not only conducive to our warm treatment of our friendly

neighbours, but also to helping defuse contradictions in the international community'. Premier Wen reiterated this view when arguing that it was time to abandon the old Cold War mentality and develop a new way of thinking on the basis of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation. 'All countries should show greater tolerance and respect for diversity', and, the Premier emphasises, 'should learn to live in peace despite differences between and among them'.<sup>91</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

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China's leaders recognised earlier on the need for political reform corresponding to economic reform and rapid socioeconomic transformations. Changes in the Chinese Communist Party's Marxist orthodoxy, particularly, the Party's repudiation of Maoist legacy and utopian policies for the sake of economic development and modernisation in late 1978, opened the door for many important political reforms.

More importantly, the CCP has reformed itself as it has evolved from a revolutionary party into a more sophisticated governing party. Reforms within the CCP itself have sought to strengthen the Party organisation, to remedy deficiencies in its operational procedures, and more significantly, to change the composition of both membership and leading bodies. In recent years, as a result of its study of foreign political parties and systems, as well as its own intensive self-examination, the CCP has been implementing a series of new policies and programs aimed at reinvigorating and strengthening its organisational apparatus from top to bottom, and improving the Party's governing capacity.

Thanks to Jiang's theory of Three Represents, the CCP has transcended its class foundation, while broadening the mass character of the Party, able to attract and capable to absorb all the best and brightest of all social strata in the country, and thus the Party has become a modernising force in China.

The CCP leadership in the post-Mao era realised the rule of law as an important component of reform, modernisation and 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', and determined from very early on to re-establish and build a legal system. Reformist leaders have worked hard to pass laws and promote the supremacy of the Constitution in maintaining an authoritarian stability. Also, the Party advocates 'rule by virtue', as Jiang Zemin declared:

In the governance of a country, rule of law and rule by virtue are always complementary to each other and mutually advanced. Neither is dispensable or abolishable. Rule of law belongs to political construction and political civilisation while rule by virtue belongs to ideological construction and spiritual civilisation. Although being in different categories, their status and functions are both very important.

There have been hot debates both in China and abroad on the theory and practice of socialist democracy advocated by the CCP. The orthodox Chinese notion of democracy was understood not so much in terms intrinsically valued political procedures but in terms of results. Thus it was seen as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. The purpose of socialist democracy is not, after all, to validate individualism or pluralism, but to unify the people for the pursuit of common interests and objectives. The essence of socialist democracy is that the people are the masters of the country, and it is the system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the CCP.

Some theorists argue that the question of the theoretical possibility of party-state democracy is less simple than it might appear because essentially it is an abstract question of the compatibility of the minimum conditions of a democratic system and of the minimum conditions of the party-state. Moreover, it must be argued that modern democracy is a broader category than legislative democracy.

Therefore, some China scholars now believe that China is likely to have a top-down democratic transition. They have identified a number of factors that provide China with

a better chance for a transition guided by the CCP leadership, as opposed to a bottom-up transition imposed by societal forces, given its state–society configuration in which state domination over society has emerged and is likely to endure.

The US leading futurist John Naisbitt even predicts that a new 'vertical democracy', which combines the bottom-up mass participation with the top-down central command, is emerging in China, and is likely to become an alternative to the Western style of 'horizontal democracy'.

Changes in China's foreign relations as a result of the CCP's reform and open-door policies have been remarkable, and there have been some trends worth noting. Under the Hu–Wen leadership, China has also taken a new approach in foreign policy which demonstrates much greater moderation, engagement, and integration with the existing world order than prevailed in the past. Some analysts in China and abroad foresee a clear road ahead for China. They see Chinese leaders following a strategy that deals pragmatically with world conditions, conforms to international norms, and pursues international peace, development, and harmony seen in the interests of China, its neighbours, and other concerned powers, notably the United States.

Furthermore, with the new strategy of 'peaceful development', the Chinese leaders are giving high priority to countering growing regional and international perceptions of an emerging threat coming from China. They do so by emphasising efforts through diplomacy and other means to reassure China's neighbours and eventually the United States and other powers that rising China is not a danger but a source of opportunity. This new Chinese goal provides the foundation for Chinese formulations in the twenty-first century regarding China's 'peaceful rise', China following 'the road of peace and development', and more significantly, China seeking a 'harmonious' world order.

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