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Remaking the CCP's Ideology: Determinants, Progress, and Limits under Hu Jintao

Heike Holbig

Abstract: Two decades after the predicted "end of ideology", we are observing a re-emphasis on party ideology under Hu Jintao. The paper looks into the reasons for and the factors shaping the re-formulation of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) ideology since 2002 and assesses the progress and limits of this process. Based on the analysis of recent elite debates, it is argued that the remaking of ideology has been the consequence of perceived challenges to the legitimacy of CCP rule. Contrary to many Western commentators, who see China's successful economic performance as the most important if not the only source of regime legitimacy, Chinese party theorists and scholars have come to regard Deng Xiaoping's formula of performance-based legitimacy as increasingly precarious. In order to tackle the perceived "performance dilemma" of party rule, the adaptation and innovation of party ideology is regarded as a crucial measure to relegitimize CCP rule.

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Ideology Is Dead, Long Live Ideology

> The Chinese Communist Party can't do without its forefather, but simply reeling off the forefather's words all the time won't do either (Huang 2002: 16).

In the eyes of most contemporary witnesses, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union signalled the end of ideology in general, and of socialism and Marxism in particular.[1] Almost two decades later, those communist one-party regimes that managed to survive at that time still exist. Particularly in China, increasingly perceived in the West as a strategic competitor due to its economic success and its rise as a new "authoritarian great power" (Gat 2007), we can observe a renaissance of socialism and Marxism, accompanied by a renewed debate on the role of ideology. While Hu Jintao's leadership since he took over as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in November 2002 has been labelled "populist" – a term normally used to describe politicians' tactical behaviour in election campaigns – it may be more adequately characterized as demonstrating a re-emphasis on ideology.

Hu Jintao's early pilgrimages to Xibaipo and other historical sites of the Communist Revolution, his handshakes with members of the working masses, and his televised reproduction of memorized Marxist and Maoist tenets were designed to evoke core elements of party ideology. A watershed resolution entitled *Strengthening the Construction of the Party's Governing Capacity*, approved by the Central Committee of the CCP in September 2004, demanded that Marxism take on the "guiding status" (*zhudao diwei*) in the ideological sphere (*Renmin Ribao* 2004d). In late 2005 the CCP launched a new Academy of Marxism under the auspices of the prestigious Chinese Academy of Social Science and bestowed it with the mission of modernizing Marxist theory. Hundreds of millions of CNY have been earmarked by the Politburo to fund research projects in the field of theoretical innovation of Marxist theory as well the compilation of new Marxist textbooks. With a "modern Marxist theory", the party hopes to achieve a new ideological framework which can be used to

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Asia Centre's annual seminar on Chinese contemporary politics on June 27, 2008, in Paris. The author wants to thank the participants of the Paris seminar and three anonymous referees for their valuable comments.

integrate an increasingly complex society at home and even to play an pioneering international role in adapting Marxism to modern market economies (Holbig 2006a). Another example of the re-emphasis on ideology under Hu Jintao is the campaign to "preserve the party's progressive nature" (*baochi dang de xianjinxing*) launched by the CCP in early 2005, which is in fact the broadest and most systematic inner-party education campaign since the start of economic reforms. In the course of 18 months, all 70 million party members were supposed to prove their loyal commitment to the party's cause by informing themselves on the most recent developments of Sinicized Marxism and socialist party theory (*Renmin Ribao* 2005a, 2005b).

How can we explain this re-emphasis on party ideology, more than two decades after the predicted "end of ideology" and despite a track record of economic success and the satisfaction of material needs, both of which were supposed to render ideology fully obsolete? To answer this question, we will look into the reasons for and the factors shaping the remaking of party ideology under Hu Jintao, and we will assess the progress and limits of this process. After a theoretical discussion of the role of ideology, we will analyse in detail the (re)formulation of the "mainstream ideology" since 2002. In addition to looking at party documents, top leaders' speeches, promulgations and other evidence found at the "surface" of official discourse, it is important to take into account relevant debates which have been held among intellectual and party elites over recent years in order to better understand the motives, reflections and sometimes conflicts behind the remaking of the CCP ideology. Based on the analysis of elite debates,[2] it will be argued here that the re-emphasis on ideology has been the consequence of perceived challenges to the legitimacy of CCP rule. While the doomsday narrative of some Chinese scholars, who warn of an outright "legitimacy crisis" (*befaxing weiji*) of the party regime, may not represent the perceptions of the broader public, it does hint at some uneasiness on the part of political and intellectual elites about the regime's stability (Gilley and Holbig 2009). Contrary to many Western commentators, who see China's successful economic performance as the most important if not the only source of regime legitimacy, Chinese party theorists and scholars have

2 Part of the evidence from Chinese elite debate used in this article was identified in an ongoing collaborative research project with Bruce Gilley, where we analysed approximately 200 Chinese articles published between 2000 and 2007 dealing with the issue of the CCP's political legitimacy; cf. Gilley and Holbig (2009).

come to regard Deng Xiaoping's formula of performance-based legitimacy as increasingly fragile and precarious. As will be demonstrated below, in order to tackle the perceived "performance dilemma" of party rule, a majority has commended the adaptation and innovation of party ideology as the main resource for relegitimizing CCP rule.

Ideology and Regime Legitimacy

In recent years, a considerable number of social science publications on contemporary China have been devoted to "bringing the Party back in" (cf., for example, the collection from Brødsgaard and Zheng 2004). This has been a highly commendable and productive undertaking, balancing the earlier scholarly neglect of state-centred approaches and top-down mechanisms in the wake of Chinese reform policies, the pluralization of social life, and the alleged "pragmatism" of party leaders since Deng Xiaoping. Most of these studies readdressing the party's role, however, have focused on organizational issues: how the party is organized; how its various departments at the central and local levels function and interact with state organs; how cadres are selected, promoted and trained; etc. Ideology, on the other hand, has mostly remained a blind spot in the field. This is a problem, not only in light of Schurmann's classic *Ideology and Organization in China*, which aptly demonstrated the crucial role of ideology in China's political system (Schurmann 1968). As Sun Yan, in her study *The Chinese Reassessment of Socialism, 1976-1992*, has shown more recently, ideology should not be dismissed lightly as a factor in explaining Chinese politics. On the empirical side, she finds that the power struggles and factional infighting among political elites in the post-Mao era still very often originate from ideological cleavages rather than the other way around. Whether this centrality of ideology stems, as she notes, from a cultural preoccupation with the primacy of ideas in framing political action and the "Confucian exaltation of doctrine" is debatable. In a less culturalist, yet not less convincing, way she argues with the hindsight from Soviet experience that "the change of ideology is the decisive criterion for determining the degree of empirical change" (Sun 1995: 16).

These findings support this article's proposition that it is too early to ring in the end of ideology in China, a proposition which is made here not only with respect to the specific history and nature of authoritarian party rule but also, more generally, with a view to the ongoing process of social and institutional change at large. In other words, ideol-

ogy is treated here not as a rigid and static repertoire of constant worldviews, but rather as a dynamic system for interpreting social reality (Salamun 1988). More particularly, ideology is understood here as a "unified system of meanings for which political actors claim exclusive authority" (Herrmann-Pillath 2005; cf. also Freeden 2006). Similarly, it has been defined as a "cognitive structure with legitimizing functions" (Strath 2006).

Particularly in countries which experience rapid economic and social transition – as China has over the past three decades – ideology plays a most crucial role in mediating the highly volatile social perceptions of transition. On the one hand, official ideology has to be flexible enough to adapt to changing social norms, interests and expectations in order to support the perception of a "smooth" transition. If properly designed, ideological reform that is able to mediate the subjective assessments of the costs and benefits of transition can enhance social tolerance of the pains of transition and contribute to the continuous reproduction of regime legitimacy. At the same time, however, such transition poses a difficult test to regime legitimacy, as social expectations of future change are faced with fundamental uncertainty. In this situation, ideological continuity can help to stabilize social expectations and reduce anxieties and resistance, particularly among those who find themselves among the less privileged in the transition process. In this sense, ideological reform has to strike a dynamic balance between ideological adaptability on the one hand and ideological continuity on the other. In other words, it is a path-dependent process which directly affects regime legitimacy (Holbig 2009; cf. North 1990).

It is important to note that in order for ideology to fulfil its legitimating functions, it is not necessary that it be internalized by the whole populace in the sense of deep-rooted ideological beliefs and convictions. Rather, ideology can be expected to be "effective" in the sense that it serves as a symbolic resource for the formation of public opinion and as a framework for the social construction of reality (Wohlgemuth 2002). Particularly in socialist states, the ideological hegemony claimed by Communist parties in the public sphere almost systematically tends to produce a cynical discourse.[3] Over the longest periods of socialist rule

3 James Scott has described the emergence of "hidden transcripts" behind the "public transcript" of official discourse, stating, "Whether he believes in the rules or not, only a fool would fail to appreciate the possible benefits of deploying such readily available ideological resources". Typically, the "hidden transcripts" take the form of

the widespread cynicism has actually served to vent popular grudges and thus to stabilize party hegemony in the public sphere. In a way, cynical interpretations of official discourse can therefore be seen to confirm rather than subvert the role of ideology in shaping public opinion and framing social perceptions of reality (Herrmann-Pillath 2005). Efforts to mobilize "true" ideological commitment and demonstrations of "honest belief" are typically focused on political elites, particularly on Communist Party cadres who form the rank and file of the administrative staff at all levels of the party, state and military hierarchies. The ideological commitment of this elite, aroused during repeated education campaigns, can be used as a test of political loyalty vis-à-vis the regime. Also, based on doctrines of the Communist Party as "vanguard" of the masses, this purported elite commitment can be publicized as representing the consent of the whole populace, at least symbolically.

Thus, from a theoretical point of view, it does not seem implausible that the vast resources spent on the (re)formulation and propagation of ideology may in some way "pay off". Particularly in a system that is undergoing rapid transition and thus leaves people with fundamental uncertainties concerning future institutional change, ideological reform may help to legitimize political power by stabilizing social expectations, smoothing the transition process and shaping the perception of legitimate rule. On the other hand, it is precisely the dependence on official ideology to maintain regime legitimacy which reveals the heightened vulnerability of socialist systems. According to Lance Gore, who has analysed the collapse of socialist systems in the Soviet Bloc in 1989, the dominant ideology played a critical role in both the existence and the demise of Communism. In his account, the seemingly bottom-up revolution of 1989 was not caused in the first instance by the moral indignation, widespread disappointment, and frustration of the people. Rather, it was initiated by segments of the ruling elite who, in order to cope with perennial problems such as economic stagnation, social division, corruption and abuse of power, had adopted reforms which reformulated or even renounced the sacred tenets of the ruling ideology and led to the wholesale abandonment of the communist ideal (Gorbachev's *Glasnost* being the most illustrative example). It can therefore be argued that compared to other, mostly "weaker" authoritarian systems, socialist sys-

"rumours, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, euphemisms […]", genres which share as a common characteristic the fact that they can be articulated in the public sphere and disguise their authors at the same time (Scott 1990: 95).

tems are much more easily thrown out of balance once reforms extend beyond the Communist grand tradition and the ruling ideology is unravelled (Gore 2003).

International and Domestic Challenges to Socialist Ideology and Party Legitimacy

Chinese party theorists and scholars generally agree that various international and domestic factors have put the CCP's ideology under heavy pressure. Internationally, the collapse of the Soviet Union and its hallmark socialist ideology stands out as the most striking example and has served as a reference point of the internal debate within the CCP since then. It was not until the Taiwanese Guomindang's loss of power in 2000, however, that the CCP came forward with an explicit counter-strategy intended to adapt its dominant ideology to a changing environment. In fact, the concept of Three Represents, since its very launch in early 2000, has been advertised as the core element of the ideological reconstruction of the CCP's legitimacy as ruling party.[4] Legitimacy is no longer claimed with reference to the CCP's long revolutionary history and traditional ideological dogmas, but instead with an emphasis on the innovativeness of party theory and the vitality of the CCP, which result from its ability to adapt its dominant ideology to an ever-changing environment and to reform itself from within (ibid.; Schubert 2008). Chinese commentators have claimed explicitly that by formulating the Three Represents, the party leadership has, wisely and with foresight, reacted to challenges which other formerly ruling parties worldwide – among them East European Communist parties and Taiwan's Guomindang – did not manage to tackle, thus resulting in them losing their ruling position (for example, cf. Yin 2002; confirmed in personal communications with researchers from the CCP's Central Party School in February 2008).

Economic globalization, the impact of Western culture and technology, and the Internet revolution are also seen as challenging the CCP's socialist ideology. New mentalities imported to China from

4 The precise definition of the Three Represents (*Sange daibiao*) formula is "the importance of the communist party in modernizing the nation – representing the demands for the development of advanced social productive forces, the direction of advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the greatest majority of the people". It was first formulated by the former CCP general secretary Jiang Zemin in early 2000 (Lu 2002; for a detailed analysis of the concept cf. Holbig 2009).

abroad, such as individualism, religious mysticism, pragmatism or nihilism, have led to an unknown degree of ideological pluralization. They are competing, if not clashing with, the "mainstream ideology" and the party's exclusive claim to truth that goes along with it (Lu 2005, 2006). On the domestic front, the decay of party ideology has been found to be due to the exhaustion of people's direct experience with the Communist Revolution; the discrediting experiences of Maoist campaigns, which culminated during the years of the Cultural Revolution; and, most importantly, widespread perceptions in the populace of social inequality and injustice. As various scholars have illustrated quite vividly in recent years, economic reforms have indeed produced a disturbing degree of social inequality, reflected in an alarmingly high and still increasing Gini coefficient (Zhang 2005; Long and Wang 2005). With growing income disparities between regions, between industries, between social strata, and between cities and rural areas, social contradictions are on the rise. Interest conflicts run most deeply between the urban and rural workers on the one hand and the newly rich – entrepreneurs, the urban white-collar elite, and also party and government cadres who have learned to maximize their personal profits in the socialist market economy – on the other. The prioritization of economic growth has resulted in political incentive structures for cadres which have bred corruption and abuse of power, local "palace economies", and a common disregard for social matters.

Some scholars have stressed the fact that it is particularly workers and farmers – the traditional proletarian class base of the CCP – who have found themselves the "losers" in the economic reforms, as the victims of "relative deprivation" (*xiangdui bei boduo*). They are feeling betrayed by their vanguard, and are thus loosing their faith in the socialist ideology and in the party's ability to lead them into a better future (for example, cf. Sun and Sun 2003; Lu 2005). In 2002, two authors from the Ningxia Party School published an alarming portrait of urban citizens losing their faith in the party-state. According to a survey among city dwellers in Ningxia, approximately 25 per cent did not believe in the cause of socialist construction any more, 50 per cent doubted the CCP's role as vanguard of the working class, 65 per cent felt that they were no longer the "masters in their own house" (*guojia de zhuren*), and 79 per cent had lost their close emotional ties to the party. It was high time for the party to develop an awareness of the looming peril (*youhuan yishi*) (Bu and Liu 2002).

Based on Samuel Huntington's concept of the "King's dilemma",[5] which has been translated into Chinese as "performance dilemma" (*zhengji kunju*), social scientists have in recent years denounced the mistaken belief that economic growth and rising living standards alone suffice to safeguard the CCP's legitimacy. Criticizing Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic approach to economic reform explicitly, or at least implicitly, they warn that political legitimacy derived from performance and material well-being is highly fragile because it depends on continuously high economic growth rates which cannot be guaranteed by the CCP forever. To make things worse, in the age of economic globalization and world market interdependencies, economic performance is gradually growing beyond the control of the Communist party-state. Already in 2005 – three years before the international financial crisis would strike China – Chinese scholars warned that should China's economic success falter one day, the party's performance-based legitimacy would crumble within a short time (Long and Wang 2005).

The perceived dilemma is grounded in the fear that even with sustained economic growth, the satisfaction of material needs will be followed by the emergence of immaterial needs, such as demands for political participation and for pluralized lifestyles, mentalities and beliefs. Autonomous usage of the Internet and other commercialized media and the formation of a "third realm" of associations and non-profit organizations have put increasing pressure on CCP rule and foreshadow a crisis of confidence if not an outright crisis of party legitimacy. The widespread attitude of distrust is described in one article as "taking up the bowl and fishing for the fat meat, putting down the chopsticks and cursing their mother" (ibid.). After more than two decades, two scholars from Shenzhen University have stated, economic reforms have thus arrived at a crossroads. If the social ills are not remedied in due time, they argue, Chinese society might even fall back to the level of development of the pre-reform period (Xu and Yang 2005).

Given the alarm generated by this analysis, the modernization of socialist ideology is praised by a surprisingly large number of Chinese scholars and party theorists as a panacea for tackling the attested fragility of the CCP's performance-based legitimacy. Ideology is seen to lay at the

5 According to Samuel Huntington, autocratic rulers may undermine their basis of power by adopting reforms, improving economic performance and thus breeding demands for political participation and democratic freedom, but may risk the same result if they do not do so (Huntington 1970: 177).

very heart of party legitimacy, to be its "essence", "key criterion" or the "key factor for public identification" with the party (Lu 2005; Sun and Sun 2003; Zhang 2003). To conceptualize the role of ideology, authors sometimes refer to the classics of Western social science – for example, to David Easton's concept of "ideological legitimacy", to Douglass North's theory of institutional and ideological change, or to a classical trinity of "ideology", "performance" and "rules and norms" – as sources of political legitimacy ascribed to Western scholarship (Ma 2003).

According to a scholarly article by Li Haiqing from the Central Party School published in the party's authoritative theory organ *Qiushi* (Seeking Truth) in 2005, ideology fulfils various functions crucial to political, social and economic life (the author refers to, among others, Douglass North's theory of institutional change). Ideology interprets political and social order and thus lays the foundation for citizens' identification with and support of this order; it serves to mobilize people's enthusiasm and confidence, particularly by making long-term, collective goals more attractive and generating incentives to sacrifice short-term, individual interests; and it works as political "cement", unifying cognitive, normative and behavioural standards throughout society. Besides these direct functions, ideology is ascribed some indirect functions which help to activate economic and social life – such as discouraging "free rider" mentalities, harmonizing the norms and values of different social groups, and solving the problems of the non-market allocation of economic resources by establishing common standards of what is "good and bad", "right and wrong" – thus reducing social transaction costs and lubricating economic life (Li 2005).

A more recent *Qiushi* article, written in 2008 by two scholars from the People's University in Beijing, also dwelt on the crucial functions of ideology in legitimating party rule. Referring to Max Weber, Jürgen Habermas, Michael Freeden, and Robert Dahl, among others, the authors argue that no political party can do without a distinct ideology if it wants people to trust and identify with it. Ideology, in other words, serves as the cohesive force and "political soul" of parties worldwide, being the main instrument with which to mobilize support and active commitment to the party's cause. In China, socialist ideology, which was adopted from the Soviet Union and adapted to domestic needs under the leadership of Mao Zedong, has played a crucial role in legitimizing party rule over the decades. As Deng Xiaoping himself made very clear while stressing economic construction and development, the CCP must never

abandon the Four Cardinal Principles: the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. In particular, Marxism plays a most dominant role in guiding political beliefs and behaviours, even serving as a "guiding principle for speaking and acting in daily life" (Nie and Hu 2008). Compared to past periods of "ideological frenzy", the authors reflect, Chinese people today are no longer assessing their political leaders according to the party's programme and principles, but rather according to its capacity and efficiency in solving real social problems. This trend, however, does not at all mean, as some have falsely argued, that the role of ideology has been fading (*danhua*). Rather, ideology has become more realistic (*shixianhua*). Socialist ideology, according to the authors, should not be regarded as signalling simply a remote ideal, but as a practical means to satisfy people's actual needs under the conditions of social transformation. The real challenge posed to socialist ideology is that of increasing social injustice, which could lead to an identity crisis (*rentong weiji*) or even to a legitimacy crisis in China. If the party wants to maintain its ideology-based legitimacy, therefore, it has to take stringent measures to restore social justice (ibid.).

These are just a few examples of Chinese party theorists and scholars ascribing highly positive political, social, and even economic functions to ideology. In the face of new social mentalities and pluralized ideas, values and interests, their recommendation is not to discard the claim of a dominant ideology altogether, but instead to further develop Marxist and socialist ideology in order to accommodate these new mentalities and pluralized ideas. Thus, these authors are among the large number of proponents of ideological innovation, adaptation, and modernization as one, if not *the*, prerequisite for relegitimating party rule. Given the broad agreement among political and intellectual elites about the important role of ideology in legitimating the party-state, the re-emphasis on Marxism and socialism as well as the stressing of social equality and justice observed under Hu Jintao should not be attributed solely to the growing impact of the New Left upon the CCP leadership in a narrow sense. Also, it should not be interpreted as a departure from the priorities of economic growth and efficiency, reform and opening up. Rather, the party leadership under Hu Jintao seems to have operated during the past five years on the grounds of a broader consensus that while economic performance is a crucial source of regime legitimacy, it is

not a sufficient condition, and that to maintain party legitimacy in the longer run, ideological reform and modernization are crucial.

Ideological Reform under Hu Jintao: Progress and Limits

From Three Represents towards Three for the People

When assessing the process of ideological reform undertaken under Hu Jintao since he took over as CCP general secretary in November 2002, it is important to note that he faced a difficult legacy, left to him by his predecessor. The elitist connotations of Jiang Zemin's version of the Three Represents, which officially opened the CCP's doors to the new economic elites, had met with strong resistance from inside the CCP (Lewis and Xue 2003). In summer 2000, Zhang Dejiang, former party secretary of Zhejiang province and now member of the Politburo since 2002, had accused the party leadership of "muddle-headed thinking" and warned that the recruitment of private entrepreneurs into the CCP would

> make indistinct the party's nature and its standard as vanguard fighter of the working class […] The basic masses of workers and peasants […] would be led to misunderstand the party ideologically and distance themselves from the party emotionally (Zhang 2000).

Similarly, party theorist Lin Yanzhi warned in June 2001 that if entrepreneurs were officially admitted into the CCP, it would

> create serious conceptual chaos within the party, and destroy the unified foundation of political thought of the party that is now united, and break through the baseline of what the party is able to accommodate in terms of its advanced class nature. […] Expanding opportunities for private entrepreneurs to join the party carries the important function of "sowing discord", or sowing discord between the party and its relationship with the masses of workers (Lin 2001).

Based on essentially Marxist arguments, these and other articles warned that the Three Represents as advocated by Jiang Zemin had crossed the boundaries of "proper" ideological discourse and thus had endangered the political legitimacy of CCP rule. While resistance inside the CCP could not hinder the Three Represents from entering the party constitution at the Sixteenth Party Congress in November 2002 as the legacy of

retiring CCP general-secretary Jiang Zemin, public controversy flared when the new concept, together with provisions to protect private property rights, was to be introduced into the Chinese constitution. As of late 2002 and through the following year, educated elites used the Internet to rage against what they regarded as state protection of the exploiting classes and their illegally generated incomes. A Beijing high school professor warned publicly in December 2002 of a looming "capitalist fascist dictatorship" (Kuang 2002). Other netizens followed suit, venting their anger at the "capitalists" and "exploiters" whose admission into the Communist Party foreshadowed the latter's corruptibility and degeneration. By summer 2003, the party leadership decided to ban all discussion of the issue in the media, in party organizations and in academic circles, fearing that the public articulation of collective anger could grow beyond state control (Heilmann, Schulte-Kulkmann, and Shih 2004).

The new party leadership under Hu Jintao obviously faced an ideological dilemma: while it could not openly work against Jiang Zemin's legacy, it also could not let the delegitimizing potential of such vehement articulation of dissent inside and outside the CCP continue to grow unabatedly. To solve this dilemma, it used a two-pronged strategy. For the sake of formal ideological continuity, the Three Represents remained omnipresent in official discourse as a reliable stereotype in documents emanating from the party centre and in official media coverage, from late 2002 until the present. In particular, state media repeatedly stressed the innovative and "scientific" character of the Three Represents in order to reflect the party's effort to reconstruct the CCP's legitimacy as a ruling party capable of reform and self-modernization.

> The important thinking of the "Three Represents" has for the first time […] profoundly revealed the scientific connotation of the party's progressiveness from the angle of the combined intrinsic quality and actual role of a Marxist party, and clearly answered the questions of what the party's progressiveness is and how to maintain it under new historical conditions (*Renmin Ribao* 2005d).

At the same time, however, when looking at the new authoritative exegesis of the canonical text of the Three Represents, one finds a subtle reinterpretation of the formerly elitist notion in more orthodox populist terms. One element is a shift of emphasis from the "first" term, namely, the "representation of the development of the advanced social productive forces", which had been stressed earlier in the name of the CCP's casting its lots with the beneficiaries of its economic reforms (Lewis and

Xue 2003), to the third term, namely, the "representation of the fundamental interests of the greatest majority of the people". A comparison of official booklets used over time for cadre training makes this shift of emphasis from the newly affluent to the broader masses most visible (cf. compare Lu 2002; Yue 2003). Another element is the "translation" of the Three Represents into the Three For the People (*Sange wei min*), a new slogan introduced by Hu Jintao in a speech in February 2003: "The party must exercise its power for the people, have passion for the people, and seek benefits of the people" (*quan wei min suo yong, qing wei min suo xi, li wei min suo mou*) (*Renmin Ribao* 2003a). Similarly, the essence of the Three Represents was now interpreted in official discourse as "establishing a party that is devoted to the public interest and governing for the people" (*li dang wei gong, zhizheng wei min*) (*Renmin Ribao* 2003b). As these subtle rhetorical changes reveal, by summer 2003 the Three Represents had been boiled down to an ideological formula which generally reflected a new "people-centred" mentality on the part of the fourth generation leaders. The complex theoretical edifice built under Jiang Zemin to allow for the admission of new economic elites into the CCP while upholding its role as "vanguard of the working class" had been rendered more or less obsolete.

The Scientific Outlook on Development

Hu Jintao came forth with a new theoretical concept that claimed to embody the collective wisdom of the fourth leadership generation within only a year of assuming the post of party chief. The so-called Scientific Outlook on Development (*kexue fazhan guan*) was discussed in party circles as of fall 2003, if not earlier, and was introduced to the public as a concept of "comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable development" in January 2004 (*Renmin Ribao* 2004a, 2004b). The National People's Congress adopted it as a new guideline for social and economic development in March of the same year and integrated it into the eleventh five-year programme of social and economic development (2006-2010) in 2005. In October 2007, the Seventeenth Party Congress of the CCP decided to include the Scientific Outlook on Development in its revised party constitution. While it had taken his predecessors decades to leave their imprint on party theory – alive or post-mortem – Hu Jintao managed to do so within one congress period of five years.

At first glance, the new concept was one of practical politics, reacting to long-standing criticisms of China's quantity-driven growth formula

by emphasizing the social and ecological aspects of development and adapting to the international language of "sustainable" (*kechixu*) development. In the domestic context, however, particular emphasis was given to the "scientific" (*kexue*) nature of the new concept, signifying the CCP's innovative capacities and its objective qualification to formulate and implement a strategy to tackle the widely perceived social ills of growing income disparities and inequalities. The "scientific" nature was reflected specifically in the so-called "five coordinations" (*wu ge tongchou*), which formed an integral part of the new concept. According to the party documents, these included

> overall coordination of urban and rural development, of regional development, of economic and social development, of the harmonious development of man and nature, and of domestic development and opening the country to the outside world (*Renmin Ribao* 2004c).

As Yu Quan, a veteran member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and leftist scholar, put it, not without admiration,

> An interpretation of the 'Scientific Outlook on Development' is developing the economy in a planned way and in a proportionate and coordinated way. In other words, it is a planned economy (cited from English translation in BBC 2007).

While it might entail some general nostalgia for the pre-reform period, this surprising comment also reveals the susceptibility of the Scientific Outlook on Development concept to being seen as framing a grand vision devised in a top-down manner by a benevolent party to cure the people's economic and social woes. With this grand vision of "overall balancing", the party attempted to fulfil social expectations that it would not let the trend of growing disparities go unheeded but would actively arrange for redistribution between the socio-economically privileged and the underprivileged, at least in the longer run. The party-state was rendered the only authority capable of commanding a "fair" redistribution of resources and of guaranteeing effective institutional mechanisms for compensation. In this way, the Scientific Outlook on Development not only claimed to present an innovative embodiment of the new leaders' "people-centred" outlook but also projected a specific redistributive role of the party-state in pursuing social equality and justice which, in turn, supported the normative justification of its leading position in the country's modernization process. In light of the perceived crisis in the party's

performance-based legitimacy illustrated above, the "scientific" concept, at the level of ideology, was clearly designed to tackle this crisis by reinforcing the CCP's historical claim to the monopoly on truth as well as the monopoly on power.

Harmonious Socialist Society

The Harmonious Socialist Society (*shehuizhuyi hexie shehui*) was another formula introduced under Hu Jintao to refine the party's management of the social expectations implicit in the Scientific Outlook on Development. The concept of a Harmonious Society was first mentioned in the resolution of the Sixteenth Party Congress in November 2002 and was defined at the fourth plenary session in September 2004 as a society built on "democracy and rule of law, justice and equality, trust and truthfulness, amity and vitality, order and stability, and a harmonious relation with nature" (*Renmin Ribao* 2004d). With respect to social relations, the new vision described a society "in which all the people will do their best, each individual has his proper place, and everybody will get along in harmony with each other" (ibid.). In February 2005, Hu Jintao, in a long speech that was only published four months later (obviously in the context of a new climax of social protests), expounded on the concept in person. He made the concept's relevance to the legitimacy of CCP rule very clear when he stated that the creation of a Harmonious Socialist Society was "essential for consolidating the party's social foundation to govern and achieving the party's historical governing mission" (*Renmin Ribao* 2005c). Together with the Scientific Outlook on Development, though with less rhetorical weight, the goal of building a "harmonious" country was written into the CCP's party constitution in October 2007 (cf. new paragraph 10 of the CCP's Constitution's "General Program", *Xinhua* 2007).

Besides being another manifestation of the new leaders' "people-centred" outlook, the new concept represents two remarkable innovations with respect to party ideology. Firstly, the notion of a Harmonious Socialist Society explicitly acknowledges the existence of serious social contradictions and interprets them as a "natural" consequence of social and economic transition. In his February 2005 speech, Hu Jintao named as being among the most pressing social problems "people's growing and increasingly diverse material and cultural needs", "the increasingly complex interests in different social sectors", and "the greater fluidity of personnel flows, social organization and management". He also admitted

"the appearance of all sorts of thoughts and cultures", the fact that "people's mental activities have become noticeably more independent, selective, changeable, and different", as well as "people's heightening awareness of democracy and the law and growing enthusiasm for political participation" (*Renmin Ribao* 2005c). In contrast to former party rhetoric which prioritized the need to maintain social stability through Leninist means of party-state control, we find here an outright recognition of social complexity, of diverging social interests and of pluralist tendencies translating into demands for political participation. Of course, the discourse of a Harmonious Society should not be misread as a signal that democratic reforms are to be launched. Rather, it appears to be a strategic attempt by the new leadership to rationally tackle the root causes of growing social contradictions, which are increasingly perceived as a risk to social stability and to the political legitimacy of CCP rule.

Secondly, in a highly idealized reading, the concept of a Harmonious Socialist Society can be understood to present a new mode of governance which combines elements of traditional Confucianism and of a "liberal" governance style of individual self-realization and self-responsibility. On the one hand, the term social "harmony" (*hexie*) evokes traditional values of social self-governance based on the Confucian ethics of individual self-discipline and contribution to social order and stability. The new discourse of "harmonious" social governance clearly resonates with larger efforts to revitalize Confucian values, norms and responsibilities that have been observed since the late 1980s. As Sébastien Billioud has shown, however, the relationship between the party-state and Confucianism has been a very complicated and ambiguous one, with bottom-up demands for Confucianist rituals, morality, spirituality and inspiration for children's education sometimes approved, at other times ignored, and at still other times controlled by official authorities (Billioud 2007; Billioud and Thoraval 2007, 2008).

According to Ai Jiawen's detailed analysis of Chinese intellectuals' discourse on Confucianism, three different approaches can be identified: while the socialist approach, drawing on the essence of Chinese culture and tradition, hopes to enrich and renovate Marxism, two other approaches – Confucian (*rujia*) and liberal – contain more or less subversive critiques of Marxism and the CCP, such as Kang Xiaoguang's vision of discarding Marxism, "Confucianizing" the CCP, and establishing a Chinese "Confucian authoritarian regime" (Kang 2005, 2007). In this complex situation, it is impossible to trace a homogeneous view of Con-

fucianism. Instead, Ai Jiawen recommends speaking of a "refunctioning" of Confucianism undertaken by the official party-state by lifting the tradition out of its previous context, reconceptualizing it, and investing it with new meanings (Ai 2008). In this sense, official discourse can be seen as avoiding a head-on collision with those interpretations of Confucianism that openly challenge Marxism, and instead as emphasizing those elements of a reimagined tradition which are compatible with Marxism: love of order and stability, strong leadership, and social harmony. The notion of a Harmonious Socialist Society thus manifests as the intersection of Marxism – which has been shown in turn to contain ideas of social harmony (Liu 2002) – and a "refunctioned" Confucianism compatible with upholding party rule and its dominant ideology. In the same vein, in recent years Chinese urban communities (*shequ*) have been advocated as testing grounds for creating a "harmonious society" where members of the educated and affluent middle class are co-opted by the party as "virtuous citizens" to reinforce its ruling capacity and consolidate its legitimacy (Tomba 2007).

At the same time, by projecting the ideal of a society "in which all the people will do their best and each individual has his proper place", the new concept gives rise to social expectations that it will not only satisfy people's basic material needs but will also create conditions that allow everyone a fair chance to develop his or her individual abilities to the fullest and thus to contribute to the "creative vitality of society as a whole" (*shehui de chuangzao huoli*) (*Renmin Ribao* 2005c). In a sense, one is reminded here of "liberal" governance styles in modern industrial states which guarantee their citizens equal opportunities while assigning to them the responsibility of taking the risks of individual choice. It differs from this "Western" liberal reading, however, in that Chinese citizens – or at least the urban elites addressed here – are "reponsibilized" to develop their individual potential to the fullest in order to contribute collectively to the nation's material well-being and development. In this idealized version of a Harmonious Socialist Society, the legitimacy of party rule is validated in terms of social expectations of a more symmetric distribution of rights and responsibilities between the individual and the state, of equal and just participation in national welfare, and of an individual commitment to the nation's cause. In this newly devised mode of social governance, recourse to the Confucianist tradition is woven into the fabric of a discourse of nation building – making the past serve the present, as a Chinese proverb goes.

Again, the concept of a Harmonious Socialist Society assigns to the party a central role in the dynamic process of social engineering and nation building – signified, last but not least, by the unavoidable attribute "socialist". As has been illustrated, the CCP seeks to justify its historical governing mission and ruling position by reference to a unique blend of traditional Confucianist values and seemingly liberal, yet collectively bound, norms of social governance. This example demonstrates most vividly how ideological innovation, while trying to adapt to the pressures arising from social transition, remains anchored to an orthodox set of socialist legitimacy doctrines underpinned by strategically vague links to the great tradition of Confucianism and visions of an even greater future for the Chinese nation.

Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

Party rhetoric under Hu Jintao reveals an obsession with the attribute "socialist" (*shehuizhuyi*), which has been attached to almost all new political and ideological concepts. Due to space limitations, it is not possible to analyse in detail here all the variations on the "socialist" theme formulated during recent years; "socialist political civilization" (*shehuizhuyi zhengzhi wenming*), "socialist democratic politics" (*shehuizhuyi minzhu zhengzhi*, 2002) (Holbig 2002), the "socialist new countryside" (*shehuizhuyi xin nongcun*, 2005/06) (Holbig 2006b), or the "socialist concept of honour and disgrace" (*shehuizhuyi rong ru guan*, 2006) (*Renmin Ribao* 2006a, 2006b; cf. Holbig 2006b). Suffice it to repeat here that these concepts are designed, in a more or less subtle manner, to contribute to the ideological legitimation of the CCP's leadership claim.

The legitimizing function of party rhetoric is revealed most clearly in Hu Jintao's report to the CCP's Seventeenth Party Congress in October 2007. While the preceding report to the Sixteenth Party Congress in November 2002 had given much prominence to the concept of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (*Zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi*), the 2007 report now climbed one step up on the ladder of abstraction, outlining the concept of a "theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics" (*Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi lilun tixi*). A separate chapter of the report, titled "The Great Historical Process of Reform and Opening Up", which deviated from the standard pattern of former party congress reports, insisted on continuing the course of reform and opening up while at the same time holding up the Four Cardinal Principles (see above). Drawing

a linear path from Mao Zedong Thought via Deng Xiaoping Theory and Jiang Zemin's Three Represents to the Scientific Outlook on Development and the Harmonious Socialist Society formulated under Hu Jintao, the latter two concepts were praised as the most recent innovations of the "theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics" and as essential contributions to the ongoing "Sinicization of Marxism". In accordance with this argumentation, the CCP's party constitution was amended to include the following new passage:

> The fundamental reason behind all of China's achievements and progress since the reform and opening up policy was introduced is, in the final analysis, that the Party has blazed a path of socialism with Chinese characteristics and established a system of theories of socialism with Chinese characteristics. All Party members must cherish the path and the system that the Party explored and created after going through all the hardships, keep to the path and uphold the system for a long time to come and constantly develop them (*Xinhua* 2007).

As this passage shows, the success of reform and opening up "proves" the CCP's correct decision to uphold Marxist and socialist tenets which have to be constantly adapted to the country's reality and further developed theoretically. Conversely, the ongoing Sinicization of Marxism and the theoretical development of socialism are presented as the ultimate reasons behind the past achievements of economic reforms and as the guarantors of future success. Based on this teleological argumentation, the CCP's leading position is validated in terms of the party leadership's theoretical innovativeness not only in retrospect but also with a view to the future.

Conclusion: From a Performance-based to an Ideology-based Legitimacy for CCP Rule

The re-emphasis on party ideology under Hu Jintao, which has been highlighted in this paper, should not be underestimated as a simple face-lifting measure for CCP rhetoric resulting from conservative pressure by some leftist party veterans and intellectuals. Rather, it has to be understood as a broader reaction to perceived challenges to the legitimacy of CCP rule which have been debated among party and academic elites since 2001. Among the many domestic and international factors seen as challenging party rule, the so-called "performance dilemma" features most prominently in elite discourse: while in the event of continued eco-

nomic success and rising living standards the party is anxious about the prospect of growing demands for civil rights and political participation, which could undermine the CCP's power monopoly, there is also a noticeable fear that the party could plunge headlong into a serious "legitimacy crisis" in the event of worsening economic performance. In an increasingly globalized and interdependent economy, the risks of a growth slump or even a depression are growing, and with them the risk of growing social disparities at home. Seen against this background, the recourse to and remaking of CCP ideology appears as a logical answer to the perceived fragility of performance-based legitimacy. Based on a broad consensus among Chinese party and intellectual elites, the adaptation of Marxist and socialist ideology to the needs of modern Chinese society is recommended as a panacea for tackling domestic and international challenges and for relegitimizing party rule.

As described above, the populist reinterpretation of Jiang Zemin's elitist concept of Three Represents as well as the formulation of the Scientific Outlook on Development and the Harmonious Socialist Society have been core elements of the ideological innovation and "modernization" over the recent years under Hu Jintao. At the practical level, these concepts imply a new emphasis on social equality and justice: socialist core values reflecting the traditional common interest orientation and concern for the "masses" of the party's leadership. At the theoretical level, the new concepts have been woven together to form a new "system of theories of socialism with Chinese characteristics" designed to legitimize the CCP's monopoly on power and truth. The party's claim to theoretical innovativeness is itself an important ingredient of this ideological strategy to relegitimize CCP rule.

In this process of remaking Marxist and socialist ideology, the party is walking a tightrope between ideological flexibility and continuity. Faced with the need to adapt to the ongoing evolution of social structures, interests, values and expectations on the one hand, and the obligation to uphold the "forefather's" values on the other, the CCP is following an increasingly narrow path of ideological reform. As this paper has shown, the specific process of remaking party ideology under Hu Jintao reveals a consistent attempt to reconcile both needs by blending modernized versions of Marxist and socialist tenets (with a particular emphasis on social equality and justice propagated as socialist core values), and of "Confucian" traits and other elements of Chinese tradition and culture – including appeals to national resurrection. While the space to

frame and negotiate liberal prescriptions for political reform seems to have been shrinking over the past five years, the idea that party rule can be relegitimized with a refurbished CCP ideology with nationalist underpinnings has clearly gained currency under Hu Jintao. In the eyes of party leaders, the alleged "pragmatism" of the CCP's course of reform and opening up does not signal a departure from socialist ideology, but rather its most innovative application.

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