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## Frames We Can Believe In: Official Framing and Ideology in the CCP's Quest for Legitimacy

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Maria Bondes and Sandra Heep

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## **Frames We Can Believe In: Official Framing and Ideology in the CCP's Quest for Legitimacy**

### **Abstract**

In the debate on authoritarian resilience, the importance of persuasion to regime legitimacy has been widely acknowledged, yet a conceptual framework explaining the role of persuasion is still lacking. Against this backdrop, we argue that the framing perspective (Benford and Snow 2000) provides a useful basis for such a framework. Drawing on Beetham's (1991) model of legitimacy, we contend that the ruling elites in authoritarian regimes propagate official frames in a continuous effort to reproduce the belief of the populace in the elites' leadership qualities and their determination to serve the common interest. In the empirical part of our paper we look at the case of China, where the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has in recent years reemphasized persuasion as a means of reproducing legitimacy. We then apply our theory in an analysis of the conceptual shifts in the CCP's frames and ideology, as propagated under its secretary general, Hu Jintao.

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# **Frames We Can Believe In: Official Framing and Ideology in the CCP's Quest for Legitimacy**

**Maria Bondes and Sandra Heep**

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## **1 Introduction**

In the debate on authoritarian resilience, the importance of persuasion in securing a regime's legitimacy has been widely acknowledged in recent years (Elischer 2011; Holbig and Gilley 2010; March 2003; Schatz 2009). Various authors have thus brought ideology back into the study of authoritarianism. In this paper we argue that a framing perspective can be useful as the basis of a theoretical framework on the role of persuasion in general and ideology in particular as sources of regime legitimacy. Originally developed in social movement theory (Snow and Benford 1988), the framing perspective has been applied to the analysis of official frames promoted by state agencies in only a very limited number of cases (Cunningham and Browning 2004; Helbling et al. 2010). Additionally, little research has been conducted on offi-

cial frames in authoritarian contexts. While the literature on official frames holds that they aim to reproduce a regime's legitimacy (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 18; Noakes 2005: 104), this idea has not yet been sufficiently developed. We argue that this gap can be filled by drawing on Beetham's (1991) model of legitimacy.

In the debate on the role of persuasion for the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes, China is an interesting case for two reasons: Firstly, in contrast to most other authoritarian regimes, China's rulers have been found to enjoy overall high levels of legitimacy across the population (Chen 2004; Gilley 2006; Tang 2005; Wright 2010). Secondly, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has in recent years invested a vast amount of resources in the revamping of its extensive propaganda apparatus and the modernization of official party ideology. China is thus one of the most prominent examples contradicting the earlier claim that the end of the Cold War would also bring about an "end of ideology." In this paper we attempt to tie these two threads together.

Using a framing perspective, we begin by developing a conceptual framework that explains the role of persuasion in general and ideology in particular. We argue that China's political elites propagate both official frames and official ideologies in an attempt to reproduce the people's belief in both the ruling elites' leadership qualities and their determination to serve the common interest. In the second part of our paper we apply our overall framework to the case of China based on a review of secondary literature. In the third part we draw on official document analysis to take a closer look at the developments and conceptual shifts in official frames, and the corresponding changes in official ideology, under Hu Jintao.

## 2 Adopting a Framing Perspective

The efforts of political actors to influence how individuals interpret political issues and events have in recent years become a central focus of social science research. In order to analyze this social-psychological process, the framing perspective has been introduced; it focuses on the propagation of frames intended to organize experience and guide action. As Edelman puts it, "the social world is [...] a kaleidoscope of potential realities, any of which can be readily evoked by altering the ways in which observations are framed and categorized" (Edelman 1993: 232). In line with this, Benford and Snow define frames as "interpretative schemata that simplif[y] and condens[e] [...] the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions," thus allowing individuals "'to locate, perceive, identify and label' events within their life space or the world at large" (Snow and Benford 1992: 137).<sup>1</sup> Frames thus define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies; they offer and justify treatments for the problems and develop visions of a better future (Entman 1993: 52). The framing process deter-

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1 The term "frame" is based on Erving Goffman (1986).

mines whether people notice a problem, how they interpret and remember it, and how they evaluate and react to it by strategically placing and repeating bits of information or by connecting them with “culturally familiar symbols” (ibid. 1993: 52).

Originally developed in social movement theory, framing research has long focused on social movement organizers' attempts to mobilize people to act (Tarrow 2011; Snow and Benford 2007; Johnston and Noakes 2005; Benford and Snow 2000; Hunt et al. 1997; McAdam et al. 1996; Zuo and Benford 1995). In recent years, framing and counterframing processes in the media (e.g. Berinsky and Kinder 2006; Sieff 2003; Tierney et al. 2006) have become a further object of analysis. While scholars have acknowledged that the state also engages in the struggle for meaning and interpretative supremacy (Anderson 2006; Noakes 2005; Tarrow 2011), only a few have thus far conducted research on official frames, with most of the studies focusing on democratic political systems (Noakes 2005: 90).<sup>2</sup> However, the framing perspective is also a useful tool for analyzing the efforts of the ruling elites in authoritarian regimes to shape people's perceptions of political reality.

## 2.1 Official Framing and Legitimacy

While the literature on official frames holds that these frames are intended to reproduce a regime's legitimacy (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 18; Noakes 2005: 104), most researchers do not elaborate on their understanding of the concept and therefore fail to explain how official frames influence legitimacy. We argue that David Beetham's (1991) model fills this gap. It assigns the beliefs of the populace a critical role in the justification of a regime's exercise of power. However, unlike the social scientists of the Weberian tradition, he does not equate legitimacy with the people's belief in legitimacy. Beetham instead argues that the beliefs of the populace are critical to a regime's legitimacy insofar as they provide the normative foundation for its exercise of power. In Beetham's words, “[a] given power relationship is not legitimate because people believe in its legitimacy, but because it can be *justified in terms of* their beliefs” (1991: 11, italics in original). He postulates that regardless of the characteristics of the political system, “[p]ower can be said to be legitimate to the extent that

- 1) it conforms to established rules,
- 2) [these] rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate, and
- 3) there is evidence of consent by the subordinate to the particular power relation” (1991: 15–16).<sup>3</sup>

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2 Some authors have studied the framing processes of political parties (Helbling et al. 2010) and state agencies such as the FBI (Cunningham and Browning 2004; Noakes 2005). An exception to the focus on democratic political systems is Zuo and Benford's (1995) analysis of the 1989 democracy movement in China.

3 We consider Beetham's third criterion, evidence of consent, an indicator rather than a criterion of legitimacy. This aspect will therefore not be part of our further argumentation and analysis.

In the context of framing theory, we thus argue that a regime can be considered legitimate to the extent that the people's beliefs concerning the rightful exercise of power are in accordance with the regime's actual exercise of power according to its rules.

Beetham holds that those beliefs on the part of the populace that are crucial to a regime's legitimacy relate to two principles: "a principle of differentiation or separation" (1991: 76) and "a principle of community or common interest" (1991: 77). The principle of differentiation concerns the qualities that justify the separation of the dominant from the subordinate and the authority of the former over the latter. Judged against the backdrop of this principle, "[r]ules of power [...] are considered rightful in so far as they select the qualified and exclude the unqualified, and ensure the dominance of the superior and the subordination of the inferior" (1991: 77). The principle of community, on the other hand, concerns the common interest that the rules of power should serve. It "links dominant and subordinate, and demonstrates the advantage the latter derive along with the former from the rules of power in question" (1991: 77).

If there is no congruence between the populace's beliefs concerning these principles and the regime's rules of power, the regime suffers from a legitimacy deficit. Legitimacy deficits may result from a change in the rules of power, yet they may also arise if the rules of power stay the same when "changes in belief have deprived the rules of their supporting basis" (1991: 17) or when "changing circumstances have made existing justifications for the rules implausible" (1991: 17–18). Due to this underlying dynamic, a regime's legitimacy is not given once and for all, but rather needs to be reproduced in a continuous process of legitimation.

This is where official frames come into play. We argue that official framing is a reaction to legitimacy deficits, as these are perceived by the elites.<sup>4</sup> If the latter identify a discrepancy between the regime's rules of power and the beliefs of the populace, they reframe the rules of power in a way that realigns them with the populace's beliefs concerning the principle of differentiation and the principle of common interest. In other words, the elites react to perceived legitimacy deficits by framing their exercise of power in a way that restores the populace's belief in both the elites' leadership qualities and their determination to serve the common interest.<sup>5</sup>

We further argue that this continuous process of legitimation can be described as a permanent feedback loop linking a regime's leaders with the populace. In response to perceived

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4 In the context of China, a similar argument is made by Holbig (2009a: 37), who argues that perceived legitimacy deficits and a perceived "performance dilemma" for party rule have provided the basis for China's reemphasis on party ideology in the last few years. Based on the analysis of the Chinese elite debate on legitimacy, she contends that China's intellectual elite has "commend[ed] the adaptation and innovation of party ideology as one of the main resources for relegitimizing CCP rule" (Holbig 2009a: 37–38).

5 A further function of official framing is the regulation of public discourse, determining what can and what cannot be said. We hold that this regulation is particularly relevant with respect to cadres. A similar argument with respect to the function of ideology in the Chinese context is made by various authors (Brady 2009; Schoenhals 1992).



legitimacy deficits, newly constructed or adapted frames are disseminated to the populace. If the populace's reaction to the newly constructed frames suggests that the elites have failed to realign the rules of power with the populace's beliefs and the perceived legitimacy deficit remains – or if new legitimacy deficits are identified – the elites will resume their framing activities in an effort to produce more successful frames. Since the populace cannot be considered a monolithic entity, we argue that while some frames target the populace as a whole, other frames specifically target subgroups such as cadres, professionals or peasants.<sup>6</sup>

The state, as the articulator of official frames, is also by no means monolithic. Benford and Snow understand the framing process itself as highly “contestable and contentious” (2007: 127). We contend that official frames as propagated in state media and propaganda are the product of an internal hegemonic struggle for interpretative supremacy among the regime's intellectual and political elites. Once the ruling elites have agreed to disseminate a specific frame, it enters the struggle for interpretative supremacy between different political actors in the public sphere. Noakes and Johnston (2005: 18) attribute the state a considerable advantage in this struggle due to its authority and access to the media. This is particularly true in authoritarian regimes such as China, where the media are under strict state control and where the central party-state can rely on an extensive propaganda system to disseminate the frames.

For official frames to resonate and to succeed in impacting individuals' beliefs, however, various other factors are also important. Drawing on Benford and Snow, Noakes and Johnston (2005: 15) highlight three qualities of frames that are particularly relevant to their resonance:

- 1) Consistency: the internal consistency, completeness and thoroughness of the beliefs, ideational elements, claims and actions promoted in the frames.
- 2) Cultural compatibility: the compatibility of frames and the symbols and ideational elements therein with society's “cultural stock”, e.g., the existing cultural narrations, cultural heritage and symbols, and ideational elements of the target audience.
- 3) Relevance: the “fit between the framing and events in the world” (Snow and Benford 1988: 208) and its capacity to make sense of the target audience's everyday experiences.

We argue that these factors also apply to official frames. Due to the importance of a frame's cultural compatibility to its resonance, existing cultural narratives, symbols and ideational elements are central resources in the construction of frames.

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6 In this context, cadres have a twofold function, both as a target group and as a channel for the transmission of official frames to the broader public. In the case of China, this latter function is especially important in rural areas (e.g. Thøgersen 2008). We will return to this point in the next section. While we thus acknowledge that cadres play a particular role in the official framing process, we do not subscribe to Weber's (1980) claim that within the tripartite of chief, staff and masses, the elites' efforts to enhance their legitimacy are only targeted at the staff.

## 2.2 Official Framing and Official Ideology

Framing scholars have widely acknowledged that there is a close connection between frames and ideology (Edelman 1993; Oliver and Johnston 2000; Snow and Benford 1988, 2007; Snow 2004).<sup>7</sup> However, they have shied away from giving an account of ideology that would allow for an understanding of the relationship between official framing and ideological change. In our understanding of ideology, we therefore follow Michael Freeden (1996), who has developed a model of ideology that takes its dynamic nature into account. Freeden's definition of ideology is based on his understanding of political concepts. He claims that political concepts are "essentially contestable" (1996: 57) in the sense that they allow for a variety of different interpretations.<sup>8</sup> According to Freeden, the meanings that can be ascribed to political concepts depend on the conceptual environment. He argues that ideologies aim to determine the meanings of political concepts by placing the latter in a specific conceptual context. Ideologies are thus defined as "configurations of decontested meanings of political concepts" (1996: 76). Within these conceptual configurations, there are core concepts that are central to an ideology's identity as well as peripheral concepts that play a less prominent role (1996: 78–84). Accordingly, ideological change takes place when new concepts are incorporated into an ideology or when concepts that are part of an ideology are either amplified or sidelined so that a shift in concepts between an official ideology's core and its periphery takes place.

On the basis of Freeden's account of ideology and in accordance with our understanding of official frames, we hold that official ideologies are groupings of decontested political concepts articulated by the ruling elites in an effort to reproduce legitimacy. Even though there is no difference between official frames and official ideologies as far as articulator and objective are concerned, they differ considerably in their conceptual scope. While official frames use concepts in order to identify concrete objects, problems and situations, official ideologies are both more abstract and more comprehensive schemes that put these concepts into a broader perspective. The relationship between official frames and official ideologies can hence be characterized as one of mutual support: Official frames apply the main concepts of an official ideology to issues of everyday political life, thus demonstrating the tangible content of these lofty theoretical constructions. Official ideologies, on the other hand, serve as the theoretical underpinnings of official frames; they create a political "big picture" by establishing a connection between different frames and their main conceptual components. In the case of communist party rule, these theoretical underpinnings are particularly important due to these parties' self-image as scientific organizations whose policies are derived from a theo-

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7 One of the fundamental problems of framing literature has indeed been the differentiation between frames and ideology. On this debate see, for example, Oliver and Johnston (2000) and Snow and Benford (2005).

8 The term "essentially contested concepts" was originally coined by Walter B. Gallie (1955). In contrast to Gallie, Freeden argues that not only the norms embedded in political concepts but also their descriptive features are contestable.

retical foundation.<sup>9</sup> In societies in transition, one of the major functions of both official frames and official ideology is the construction of a conceptual framework which guides the interpretation of both the achievements and the problems of the transition process by providing a long-term vision or “big picture” that connects the country’s collective historical memory with the promise of a bright future – the realization of which lies at the heart of the leaders’ struggle to serve the common interest.<sup>10</sup>

With official ideologies pursuing the same objective as official frames in the context of legitimization efforts, we argue that both are subject to the same criteria for success: in order to resonate, they need to build on existing cultural narratives while at the same time taking into account the changing social and political context (Snow and Benford 1988: 208). Changes in official ideologies and official frames can hence be characterized as processes that alternate between adaptation and continuity. Since one of the major functions of both official ideologies and official frames is the reproduction of regime legitimacy, we hold that changes in official ideology correspond to changes in official framing. Official ideological innovations mirror the conceptual movements in official frames, which consist either of the amplification or sidelining of established concepts or the introduction of new ones.

### **3 Official Framing and Ideology in China’s Quest for Legitimacy**

We will now turn to the case of China, where the Chinese Communist Party has in recent years invested a vast amount of resources in revamping its extensive propaganda apparatus and modernizing official party ideology.

#### **3.1 In the Party We Trust: Persuasion in the CCP’s Approach to Legitimacy**

Even though authoritarian regimes have long been associated with a lack of legitimacy, there is a broad consensus among researchers that this conventional wisdom does not hold true in the case of China. According to a study by Gilley (2006), who used both attitudinal and behavioral data for the measurement of legitimacy, China maintained a high level of legitimacy from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, ranking thirteenth out of the 72 states that were considered in the study. Other quantitative studies at the aggregate level have obtained similar

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9 In the case of China, there is a ritualistic necessity for new leaders to showcase their theoretical abilities which dates back to imperial times. Since Mao, each leader has thus been eager to imprint his own theoretical innovation on the party’s ideological canon in order to legitimate his place in the line of China’s paramount leaders.

10 In the context of democratic regimes, it has been argued that democratic parties frame both their performance and their party programs in a way that embeds them in the broader framework of party history and the long-term party line. In a similar vein, Holbig (2009b: 18–19) has argued that in times of social and economic transition, one of the potentially crucial functions of ideology is the framing of economic performance and the success of the transition, and thus the construction of a collective framework that guides and stabilizes perceptions of the ongoing transition process.

results (Chen 2004; Tang 2005). However, a closer look, which takes variances in legitimacy levels in different social and geographic spaces into account, shows that the Chinese regime's legitimacy is much more fragile (Holbig and Gilley 2010; Wright 2010; Shirk 2008).

Despite the overall high level of political trust and popular support for the CCP-led political regime, since 2004 there has been a lively discussion in Chinese academic circles and among China's ruling elites about a pending legitimacy crisis (Gilley and Holbig 2009). Besides the external factors cited by party analysts – such as the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the Guomindang's loss of power in Taiwan, and the pressures resulting from China's entry into the World Trade Organization – it has mainly been the fear that economic growth, the driving factor in regime legitimacy, will decline that has been worrying China's ruling elites. This is due, on the one hand, to what Huntington has termed the "King's Dilemma": the growing political demands and shifts in social values which accompany economic development. On the other hand, decades of rapid and unsustainable growth have generated severe problems such as social inequality and environmental degradation; these have led to popular discontent, which, in the eyes of the party, poses a serious threat to regime legitimacy. At the same time, the exhaustion of the CCP's revolutionary-historical legitimacy has also been troubling the ruling elites. To the younger generation, which lacks personal ties with the party's revolutionary history, many elements of the CCP's traditional ideology are little more than specters of the past. Due to the CCP's conspicuous concern with the maintenance of legitimacy, Holbig and Gilley have argued that "[r]eclaiming legitimacy is at the center of contemporary Chinese politics" (2010: 398).

As Brady (2009) has argued, a distinction can generally be made between performance-based and persuasion-based approaches to legitimacy. The former rely on the maintenance of economic growth, and the latter on the propagation of ideas justifying a regime's exercise of power. However, Holbig and Gilley (2010: 400) have pointed out that the line between both approaches is blurred, since performance also needs to be framed in a particular way. Nevertheless, the CCP has in recent years paid increasing attention to the role of persuasion. Against the backdrop of the ideological indoctrination of the Mao period (1949–1976), the first decade of the period of reform and opening up was characterized by an approach to legitimacy almost exclusively focused on economic recovery. However, in the aftermath of the crackdown on the 1989 democracy movement, China's leadership identified the lack of attention given to mass persuasion as the cause of the political instability that had culminated in the protests. Convinced that it could not rely exclusively on economic growth to secure its grip on power, the CCP embarked on a new strategy that combined an emphasis on economic performance with a renewed focus on mass persuasion or "propaganda and thought work" (*xuanchuan yu sixiang gongzuo*) (Brady 2009).

Despite the shift in the CCP's approach to legitimacy in the wake of the Tiananmen crackdown, many scholars have maintained the view that the legitimacy of the Chinese party-state in the reform era has mainly been based on economic growth and, to a lesser extent,

the propagation of nationalism by the party. However, these contentions do not line up with the considerable resources the CCP has invested in the modernization of its ideology over the last two decades. Against the backdrop of the ideological innovations put forward by the party in recent years, other scholars have more convincingly argued that persuasion has again come to play a crucial role in the party's efforts to secure regime legitimacy. In the words of Holbig and Gilley (2010: 396), "[t]here has been a clear shift in emphasis in Chinese elites' approach to relegitimizing the post-revolutionary regime: from the economic-nationalistic approach of the early reform period to the ideological-institutional approach of recent years." This revival of the CCP's official ideology can be explained by the above-mentioned pitfalls of an approach to legitimacy that is characterized by an overemphasis on economic performance (Holbig 2009a: 37).

A major ideological innovation was introduced in 2000 when then-CCP secretary general Jiang Zemin launched his theory of Three Represents (*sange daibiao*). In an effort to strengthen the CCP's legitimacy in the face of rapid social and economic transition, Jiang justified the party's hold on power by drawing attention to its ability to adapt to a constantly changing environment. This very ability was demonstrated by Jiang's redefinition of the party's constituency, according to which the CCP no longer exclusively represented the working class but had also come to endorse the interests of the economic elites. Even though Jiang's reinterpretation of official party ideology met with strong resistance from the more left-leaning party members, who considered the invitation of private entrepreneurs into the CCP a betrayal of the working class, his thoughts were incorporated into the party's constitution when he retired as CCP secretary general in 2002 (Holbig 2009a, 2009b; Schubert 2008).

"Propaganda and thought work" have played an even more prominent role since Hu Jintao took over as CCP secretary general in the same year. Under Hu's leadership, considerable resources have been provided to fund research institutions whose mission is the adaptation of Marxism to China's economic reality (Holbig 2009a). In contrast to Jiang, whose ideological innovations focused primarily on the integration of the country's economic elite, China's new leadership has placed greater emphasis on the needs of the masses in an effort "to portray itself as the spokesman for the common people to enhance its legitimacy" (Zheng 2010: 159). Not even two years into his term, Hu presented the idea of a Scientific Outlook on Development (*kexue fazhan guan*), which propagated comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development (Xinhua online 2004). The new leadership thus highlighted its determination to replace the single-minded pursuit of rapid growth rates of the first two decades of economic reform with an approach to economic development that addresses the social and ecological problems facing an economy in transition. The idea of a Scientific Outlook on Development was later complemented by the notion of a Harmonious Socialist Society (*shehui zhuyi hexie shehui*), which Hu described as a socialist society built on "democracy and the rule of law, justice and equality, trust and truthfulness, amity and vitality, order and stability, and a harmonious relation with nature" (Renmin ribao 2005, authors' translation).

### 3.2 The Legitimacy Feedback Loop in China

We have argued that persuasion-based legitimation can be understood as a permanent feedback loop linking a regime's leaders with the populace. This holds true in the case of China. In a continuous effort to reproduce regime legitimacy, the CCP disseminates new or adjusted frames intended to realign the rules of power with the beliefs of the populace. In this section we will take a closer look at the processes and channels that constitute this permanent feedback loop.

The overall process of the CCP's persuasion-based relegitimation efforts is embedded in the structures of the party's extensive propaganda system (*xuanchuan xitong*). The propaganda system's administrative bodies, the Central Propaganda Department (CPD) and its lower level equivalents, oversee all ideological and propaganda-related work in China. As the most comprehensive and important supra-bureaucratic system (*xitong*) under CCP control, the propaganda apparatus encompasses all party and government institutions engaged with "propaganda and thought work" and with the dissemination of information to the Chinese public and officialdom, including virtually all the organs of China's media, cultural and education sectors across all levels of the Chinese party-state (Brady 2008, 2009; Shambaugh 2007, 2008; Zheng 2010). Within the structures of the propaganda system, three main processes constitute the legitimacy feedback loop: firstly, the process through which public discontent is transmitted to the party as an indicator of legitimacy deficits; secondly, the subsequent process of frame adjustment and ideological innovation on the part of China's ruling elites; and thirdly, the dissemination of newly adjusted frames and ideological innovations by means of propaganda.

Political communication between the masses and the party has been a central feature of CCP policymaking and ideology since Mao Zedong. He described the basic notion of a feedback loop linking the party with the masses in his central concept of the "mass line" (*qunzhong luxian*), which remains important in the CCP's propaganda work to this day. Under the slogan "from the masses, to the masses" (*cong qunzhong zhonglai, dao qunzhong zhongqu*), the "mass line" concept, as formulated by Mao in 1943, expects the party to collect the "ideas of the masses" for policy formulation and "correct leadership" (Mao 1967: 120). After their "concentration" by the party, the ideas are then propagated back to the masses "until the masses embrace them as their own" (Mao 1967: 120). This process continues "over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time" (1967: 120). Vertical political communication channels from the grassroots level to the center have thus been a traditional feature of the Leninist party-state system.

Given the Hu administration's more people-centered approach to politics, and a rapidly changing and increasingly diverse environment, the CCP has in recent years been keen on further expanding and adjusting its range of feedback channels (Wen 2011). In 2004 the CCP thus established a Bureau of Public Opinion under the auspices of the Central Propaganda Department; it is charged with public opinion research "to respond to issues of public con-

cern in a timely fashion" (Brady 2008: 20). In recent years the CCP has also been calling on the rapidly growing number of social organizations to serve as a "communication bridge between the people and the government" (Bondes 2011; Salmenkari 2008). Moreover, the party has been quick to capitalize on the Internet – recently on microblogs in particular – not only for propaganda purposes, but also as a valuable means of understanding public opinion and the pulse of society (Zheng 2010; Yang 2009).

These feedback channels have in recent years revealed popular discontent and "problems that cause great resentment among the masses" (Wen 2011). Because China's ruling elites perceive such discontent as a serious threat to regime legitimacy, the readjustment of official frames and the modernization of party ideology have been at the heart of the CCP's reinvigoration of persuasion-based legitimation. While the official framing processes in China have not yet been subjected to academic study and will be tackled in more detail in the next section, various authors have studied the CCP's recent ideological innovations (Holbig and Gilley 2010; Holbig 2009b; Sausmikat 2006). Further research is needed for a detailed picture of the internal official framing process and the production of ideology among China's ruling elites. However, since the Deng Xiaoping era the overall process of ideological reform and propaganda dissemination has typically followed a six-step model.<sup>11</sup> We contend that this is also the underlying model for official framing processes.

Firstly, ideological innovations in China generally draw on the research findings of party theorists and social scientists; these stem from both individual research and projects actively promoted by the CCP. As social science research in China is officially regarded as "ideological work" (Brady 2008: 28), it is centrally planned and coordinated by the CPD to guarantee that relevant theoretical and ideological questions are tackled by the country's scientists (Brady 2008: 28, 2009).<sup>12</sup> For ideological research and ideas, the nationwide system of party schools (*dangxiao xitong*) and particularly the Central Party School (CPS) in Beijing also play a central role (Zheng 2010: 151–163; Shambaugh 2008: 143–153). Secondly, select research results that have gained the attention of the leadership are considered for further elaboration and incorporated into ideological innovations. Once accepted by the political leaders, these are then, in a third step, disseminated within the party, with a particular focus on the upper levels of party cadres. In a fourth step, and following internal debate, the ideas are introduced to the broader public. After they have been incorporated into official documents such as the party statute and the Chinese constitution, the fifth step, they are ultimately disseminated to the public through nationwide propaganda campaigns.<sup>13</sup>

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11 Expert interview, Beijing, October 2010.

12 The Leading Group's administrative arm, the National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Sciences, allocates funds, approves research topics and actively promotes research themes.

13 The most intensive campaign of this kind, the "Campaign to Maintain the Advanced Nature of the Party" (*baochi dang de xianjinxing*), was launched by the CCP in 2005/06. Over the course of 18 months, China's more than 70 million party members were mobilized to renew their knowledge of official party ideology in

Recent developments such as the information revolution and globalization have eroded some of the Chinese propaganda system's power (Zheng 2010: 157–158; Lee 2009; Lynch 1999). However, with the CCP's reinvigoration of persuasion-based legitimation, the propaganda apparatus has been revitalized and thus retains its capacity to control the flow of information to the public as it sees fit (Shambaugh 2008: 106). In recent years the CCP has also discovered new media, and particularly the Internet, as an extremely effective and cost-efficient channel for propaganda work or “ideotainment” (Lagerkvist 2010; Zheng 2010: 157; Brady 2008: 136). The Chinese propaganda system thus remains an effective tool for the Party's dissemination of official frames and ideological ideas in its quest for regime legitimacy.

## 4 Official Framing and Ideological Change under Hu Jintao

Since the importance of persuasion in the CCP's approach to legitimation has reached new heights under the Hu administration, we will now take a closer look at the conceptual shifts in official frames and the corresponding changes in official ideology that have occurred since Hu came to power.

### 4.1 Data and Data Analysis

Based on the analysis of the Chinese-language government work reports presented annually from 2001 to 2011 to the National People's Congress (NPC) by the officiating premier (2001–2003: Zhu Rongji; 2004–2011: Wen Jiabao),<sup>14</sup> we have, first, identified the major frames and core concepts propagated in the framing of the government's work and performance.<sup>15</sup> Although our analysis centers on the frames and concepts disseminated under Hu Jintao, we have also included three work reports from the Jiang era to account for the dynamics and shifts in official framing and to identify those concepts that have been amplified or introduced under Hu Jintao.<sup>16</sup>

While a distinction is generally made between persuasion-based and performance-based approaches to legitimacy, we pointed out earlier in this paper that this dichotomy is hard to uphold since performance also needs to be framed in a certain way. The framing of perfor-

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mandatory study sessions and express their ideological commitment to the CCP during months of self-reflection (*fanci*) and self-criticism (*ziwo piping*) (Shambaugh 2008: 128–131).

14 Wen Jiabao took over the position of premier from Zhu Rongji at the NPC in March 2003. At the same meeting, Hu Jintao, who has held the position of CCP general secretary since 2002, took over as president. The 2003 work report, presented by Zhu Rongji and covering the period from March 2002 to February 2003, thus concerns the work of the Jiang administration.

15 Our analysis is restricted to the frames dealing with domestic issues.

16 Large sections of the work reports are copied from previous reports in order to demonstrate continuity and maintain narrative fidelity. The tone of the reports is partially fitted to the personality and style of the premier delivering the report in order to make it seem more natural and legitimate. We thank Josef Gregory Mahoney for these points.



mance lies at the center of our analysis as a central aspect of the Communist Party's legitimization efforts. While the work reports under study are not directed immediately at the populace, the public is targeted through extensive media coverage and comprehensive television broadcasting of the annual meetings, which are staged as major news events, and through the online dissemination of important NPC documents and speeches – for instance, on the website of the state news agency Xinhua.<sup>17</sup>

For the identification of the major frames disseminated under Jiang and Hu, we followed frame analytical methods (Scheufele 2003) and used open coding to identify the major concepts related to each frame, recoding the data based on the coding scheme developed (Strauss and Corbin 1998). In the second part of our analysis, we investigated the relevance and position of new or amplified concepts within the major ideological innovations under Hu Jintao. To control for the introduction of new concepts and the amplification of existing ones under Hu Jintao, we conducted a quantitative word count for all concepts identified. This was based on key words assigned to each concept (see Appendix 1) and a comparison of the number of mentions in the periods 2001–2003 (Jiang Zemin), 2004–2006 and 2009–2011 (both Hu Jintao).<sup>18</sup> We then compared the concepts that have experienced significant amplification under Hu Jintao<sup>19</sup> with the major concepts constituting his ideological innovations. We identified the latter by drawing on official definitions and summaries of Hu Jintao's ideological innovations in the state press and using the qualitative methods described above.

## 4.2 Frames We Can Believe In

As we explained in the first part of this paper, official framing in authoritarian regimes aims to reproduce regime legitimacy by restoring the belief among the populace that the leaders' rule is justified and serves the people. In line with Beetham's distinction between the principle of differentiation and the principle of common interest, we argue that official frames fall into two categories. While the first category of frames aims to restore the populace's belief in the regime's leaders, the second category aims to consolidate its belief in the regime's intention to serve the common interest.

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17 In collaboration with Xinhua News Agency, Premier Wen Jiabao has staged widely publicized online chats with Chinese Internet users during the last three NPC sessions; during these chats he has drawn on the main contents and frames propagated in his work reports. The reports are also translated into English before their delivery at the NPC, suggesting that they are additionally aimed at an international audience for the sake of international legitimization.

18 Within the Hu Jintao era we have selected two periods of equal length to the Jiang period under study (one at the beginning and one towards the end of Hu's term) in order to allow for a comparison of the number of mentions. Our list of keywords encompasses the major words and phrases central to each concept and is derived from the documents under study. The word count has to be understood as an approximation of the number of mentions of each concept in the different phases since we could not account for all words and different phrasings relevant to each concept and the prominence of their mention.

19 Defined as an increase in the mention of related keywords of 50 percent or more in at least one of the periods under Hu (2004–2006, 2009–2011) in comparison to the Jiang period (2001–2003).

We have identified three major frames in each category for the Jiang and Hu eras respectively (see Table 1). While most of these frames have persisted throughout the last decade, we have found considerable shifts in their core concepts. In their rhetorical efforts to demonstrate their dedication to the common interest, the ruling elites have drawn on a “Historic Mission” frame and a “Development as Panacea” frame. Jiang’s “Serving the Basic Interests of the People” frame has been amplified under Hu Jintao and transformed into a “People as the Top Priority” frame. In their depiction of the CCP’s leadership qualities, both Zhu and Wen have stressed the “Theoretical Foundation” of the party’s development strategy, its “Performance in the Face of Challenges” and its “Willingness to Overcome Shortcomings” in the government’s work. As we will see, the lines between the frames are blurred since all frames are interwoven and derive their meaning only from their relation to the other frames and the overall context.

**Table 1: Comparison of Major Frames and Concepts under Jiang and Hu**

Major Frames under Jiang and Hu	Core Concepts under Jiang (2001–2003)	Core Concepts under Hu (2004–2011)
<b>Common Interest</b>		
Historic Mission	Socialism with Chinese Characteristics Bright Future Nationalism	<b>Socialism with Chinese Characteristics</b> Bright Future Nationalism
Development as Panacea	Reform and Opening Up Modernization Adaptation and Innovation Comprehensive Development	<b>Reform and Opening Up</b> Modernization Adaptation and Innovation <b>Coordinated Development</b> <b>Scientific Outlook on Development</b>
Serving the People’s Basic Interests <i>emphasized under Hu as</i> People as the Top Priority	People’s Well-being Moderately Prosperous Society	<b>Government for the People</b> <b>People’s Well-being</b> <b>Moderately Prosperous Society</b> <b>People’s Happiness</b> <b>Social Justice</b> <b>Social Stability</b> <b>Social Harmony</b>
<b>Qualified Leaders</b>		
Theoretical Foundation	Socialism Deng Xiaoping Theory Three Represents Strategic Planning	<b>Socialism</b> <b>Deng Xiaoping Theory</b> <b>Three Represents</b> <b>Strategic Planning</b> <b>Scientific Outlook on Development</b>
Performance in the Face of Challenges	Correct Leadership of the Party Unity of Party and People Nationalism Successful Socialism	<b>Correct Leadership of the Party</b> <b>Unity of Party and People</b> <b>Nationalism</b> <b>Successful Socialism</b>
Willingness to Overcome Shortcomings	Self-reform Democratization Rule of Law Adaptation and Innovation	<b>Government for the People</b> <b>Self-reform</b> <b>Democratization</b> <b>Rule of Law</b> <b>Adaptation and Innovation</b>

Note: New and amplified concepts under Hu are in bold letters (compare with Appendix 1).

When we take a closer look at the concepts central to Hu Jintao's ideological innovations that have been incorporated into the corpus of official party ideology, mainly the idea of a Scientific Outlook on Development and the related notion of a Harmonious Socialist Society, we can see that these mirror the conceptual shifts in the official framing efforts under the Hu administration (see Table 2). The concepts that have been newly introduced or have experienced significant amplification under Hu are constitutive of the theories' meanings.

**Table 2: Ideological Innovations under Hu Jintao**

Major Concepts of Scientific Development	Major Concepts of Harmonious Society
	Socialism with Chinese Characteristics ( <i>zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi</i> )
Culture ( <i>shehui zhuyi wuzhi wenming, zhengzhi wenming, jingshen wenming</i> )	Culture ( <i>shehui zhuyi wuzhi wenming, zhengzhi wenming, jingshen wenming</i> )
Comprehensive Development ( <i>quanmian fazhan</i> )	Comprehensive Development ( <i>quanmian fazhan</i> )
<b>Coordinated Development</b> ( <i>xietiao fazhan, wuge tongdeng</i> )	<b>Coordinated Development</b> ( <i>xietiao fazhan, wuge tongdeng</i> )
	Democratization ( <i>minzhu fazhi, shehui zhuyi minzhu</i> )
Deng Xiaoping Theory ( <i>Deng Xiaoping lilun</i> )	Deng Xiaoping Theory ( <i>Deng Xiaoping lilun</i> )
<b>Government for the People</b> ( <i>yiren weiben</i> )	<b>Government for the People</b> ( <i>yiren weiben</i> )
	<b>Harmonious Society</b> ( <i>shehui zhuyi hexie shehui, chengxin youai</i> )
	Innovation ( <i>chuangzao huoli</i> )
	<b>Moderately Prosperous Society</b> ( <i>xiaokang shehui</i> )
	<b>People's Happiness</b> ( <i>gongtong yuanwang, renmin qunzhong anju leye, meihao shehui</i> )
<b>People's Well-being</b> ( <i>renmin qunzhong de genben liyi</i> )	<b>People's Well-being</b> ( <i>renmin qunzhong de genben liyi</i> )
	Rule by Law ( <i>yifa zhiguo</i> )
<b>Social Justice</b> ( <i>wuge tongdeng</i> )	<b>Social Justice</b> ( <i>wuge tongdeng, gongping zhengyi</i> )
	<b>Social Stability</b> ( <i>hexie wending, anding youxu, changzhi jiu'an</i> )
Sustainability ( <i>wuge tongdeng, ren yu ziran hexie</i> )	Sustainability ( <i>wuge tongdeng, ren yu ziran hexie, shengtai wenming</i> )
Three Represents ( <i>sange daibiao</i> )	

Note: New and amplified concepts under Hu are in bold letters (compare with Appendix 1).

#### 4.2.1 *Historic Mission*

As argued above, one of the major functions of both official frames and official ideology is the construction of a conceptual framework that guides the interpretation of both the achievements and the problems of transition processes by providing a long-term vision or “big picture” connecting the country’s collective historical memory with the promise of a bright future, the realization of which lies at the heart of the leaders’ struggle to serve the common interest. Both the Jiang and Hu administrations have drawn on the guiding ideology of socialism with Chinese characteristics to lay the foundation for such a cognitive framework, portraying the party as the legitimate authority to guide the Chinese nation to a bright socialist future. The overall common interest and the party’s leadership qualities are thus defined with reference to the revolutionary past and the party’s historic mission of taking the lead along the path of Chinese socialism for the benefit of the whole nation. In the words of Zhu Rongji,

[o]ur great motherland already stands at a higher historic point of departure as it sets out on a more glorious long march. No difficulties can stop the triumphant advance of the Chinese people. Looking into the future of our motherland, we see a vista of limitless promise. We firmly believe that, under the leadership of the Party Central Committee [...] the people of all ethnic groups throughout the country [...] will dedicate their hearts and souls to the cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics and achieve victory upon victory on the road of progress!<sup>20</sup>

(Zhu 2003)

In a similar vein, Wen Jiabao has stressed the CCP’s “lofty and sacred” mission with “responsibilities both arduous and glorious” (Wen 2007) in its struggle for the “great cause” of Chinese socialism.

(Wen 2011)

Looking back, we are encouraged by the achievements of the past five years. Looking ahead, we see an exciting future for China. Our great motherland has embarked upon a new historical course and the future holds even brighter prospects. Under the leadership of the [Communist Party of China] CPC Central Committee [...] let us hold high the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics [...].

(Wen 2008)

In this context, nationalism plays a crucial role and can be understood as a spin-off of the idea of common interest. By repeatedly stressing the CCP’s struggle for a bright future for the “great motherland,” the leaders underline their dedication to the common vision of both the party and the people.

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20 Unless stated otherwise, the English citations are taken from the official English translations of the work reports.

#### 4.2.2 *Theoretical Foundation*

While socialism still provides the foundation of the party's declared overall mission, both Zhu and Wen have been anxious to dispel the idea that socialism is merely a remote ideal with little relevance to China's present situation and the everyday life of the populace. Well aware of the diminishing appeal of lofty revolutionary idealism, they have been eager to present socialist modernization as a practical means for solving the everyday problems of transition and satisfying the people's immediate needs in a "down-to-earth manner" (Wen 2009). The party has highlighted its "realistic and pragmatic approach" to policymaking and vowed to "ensure that all of our policies are more suitable to conditions and can stand the test of time" (Wen 2010).

Calling to mind the practical benefits of socialism, Wen has invoked "the socialist system's advantages, which enable us to make decisions efficiently, organize effectively, and concentrate resources to accomplish large undertakings" (Wen 2010). Socialism is thus understood as the guiding theoretical foundation for concrete policy measures that take the changing environment into account:

In doing the work of the government during the past five years, we unswervingly took Deng Xiaoping Theory as the guide for government work, conscientiously implemented the important thought of Three Represents and carried out the Party's basic line and basic program in their entirety by emancipating our minds and seeking truth from facts.

(Zhu 2003)

In a similar vein, Wen has argued,

We must hold high the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, take Deng Xiaoping Theory and the important thought of Three Represents as our guide, thoroughly apply the Scientific Outlook on Development, adapt to the latest changes in the domestic and international situations, and satisfy the new expectations of the people of all ethnic groups for a better life.

(Wen 2011)

In line with the traditional self-image of communist parties as scientific organizations, both Zhu and Wen have thus portrayed the party's policies as part of a comprehensive strategic plan that is based on a scientific theory and a necessary requirement for the realization of the people's and the party's common vision and the resolution of the current problems, caused by transition. The party's scientific character and its unique ability to develop such a comprehensive and theoretically grounded development strategy against the backdrop of a concrete future vision is a central feature in framing the party as qualified to lead the country. Moreover, the party's exclusive knowledge of the overall strategic plan implies that its central and unrestricted leadership is indispensable for the strategy's implementation and thus the realization of a socialist society in full bloom. This argument has been given new promi-

nence under Hu Jintao, who explicitly refers to the party's theoretical foundation and its qualities as a scientific organization in the name of his ideological theory of a Scientific Outlook on Development.

#### 4.2.3 *Development as Panacea*

In pursuing the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics guided by the strategic planning of the party, both the Jiang and Hu administrations have followed Deng Xiaoping in portraying economic growth as a panacea that will ultimately allow the nation to resolve all its problems and realize its vision of a socialist society. In reference to a famous line from Deng Xiaoping, Zhu argued, "[d]evelopment is the fundamental principle, and the key to resolving all problems China is facing" (Zhu 2003). Wen has also contended that

[w]e have relied on development to overcome all types of severe challenges, and all our achievements and progress in every area come from development. We must therefore continue to rely on development to resolve the difficulties and problems on the road ahead. China is still in the primary stage of socialism and will remain so for a long time to come, so we must continue to take economic development as our central task and pursue scientific development.

(Wen 2011)

While development has been characterized as the overriding policy objective, modernization and the reform of the economy, as well as the country's opening up to the outside world, have been described as necessary requirements for the generation of economic growth. However, even though both Zhu and Wen have considered development a priority, they have not agreed on the specifics of the development strategy or the immediate objective that development should serve. In reaction to the social and environmental problems generated by the rapid economic growth since the beginning of reforms, Zhu called for more "comprehensive development" (*quanmian fazhan*) that balanced the transformation of economy and society. While Wen has agreed with this approach, he has gone further in promoting the more ambitious idea of "coordinated development" (*xietiao fazhan*). Faced with growing challenges to CCP legitimacy caused by public discontent as a result of social inequality and economic degradation, he has placed an even stronger focus on social justice, sustainability and regional balance, highlighting the party's dedication to solve the "issues that the masses feel strongly about" (Wen 2011).

The amplification of these concepts in the Hu administration's official frames reflect Hu's Scientific Outlook on Development (*kexue fazhan guan*), the ideological theory which he introduced as a new guideline for development and policymaking in 2004.

Persisting in taking the people as the basis means making the comprehensive development of mankind the goal; making the benefit of the masses the starting point of every development; promoting development; unceasingly satisfying the increasing ma-

terial needs of the masses; realistically safeguarding the economic, political and cultural rights and interests of the masses; and letting the fruits of development benefit the whole nation. [...] Coordinating development means comprehensively planning urban and rural development, regional development, economic and social development, the harmonious development of mankind and nature, as well as domestic development and the opening up to the outside world; promoting the coordination of the productive forces and the relations of production as well as the economic basis and the superstructure; and promoting the coordination of each link and each aspect of economic, political and cultural construction.

(Xinhua online 2004, authors' translation)

With this approach, Hu has emphasized the fact that the CCP both takes the people's problems and urgent needs seriously and is capable of developing a long-term, theory-based strategy to resolve them. This idea has become one of the major guidelines for the presentation of the government's objectives and achievements in all further work reports under the Hu administration and thus a central concept in the party's framing activities. In explicating the importance of the theory to the party's development strategy, Wen, in his 2005 work report, stressed,

We must establish and implement a scientific outlook on development. This outlook is a new development that the CPC has incorporated into its guiding ideology for the socialist modernization drive. It emphasises that development is an absolute necessity, that we should focus on economic development and improve the quality and efficiency of economic growth, and that we must put people first and stress the "five balances",<sup>21</sup> in order to achieve all-round, balanced and sustainable development of the economy and society. We must be guided by a scientific outlook on development in solving current outstanding problems in economic activities and in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and adhere to this outlook during the entire course of reform, opening up and modernization.

(Wen 2005)

The idea of coordinated development is also reflected in Hu's vision of a Socialist Harmonious Society built around the notions of social justice and sustainability. This theory is his second ideological innovation and complements his idea of a Scientific Outlook on Development.

#### 4.2.4 *People as the Top Priority*

Economic growth is not understood as an end in itself. Faced with the growing challenges to CCP rule, both leadership generations have acknowledged that the people's support for the

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21 This concerns the balance between urban and rural development, among regions, of economic and social development, of man and nature, and of domestic development and opening up to the outside world.

party can no longer be taken for granted simply on the basis of its revolutionary history, but that the people judge the government in terms of its ability to address their urgent needs and problems. In line with the principle of common interest, both the Jiang and the Hu administrations have thus highlighted the fact that the ultimate objective of economic development, and the party's sole rationale, is to satisfy the people's everyday needs and enhance their well-being.

In his work reports, Zhu focused on the more moderate objective of safeguarding the "fundamental interests of the general public" (Zhu 2001), drawing on Deng Xiaoping's stated objective of establishing a "moderately prosperous society" by substantially improving living standards and "gradually enabl[ing] people to lead a more comfortable life" (Zhu 2001). Again, the Hu administration has gone a step further, giving priority not only to solving the problems which "concern [...] the people's wellbeing, bear [...] on overall interests and affect [...] social stability" (Wen 2011), but also taking the approach that everything the government does should benefit the people to a greater degree.

We must always put the interests of the people first. We must truly protect the people's economic, political and cultural rights and interests, pay particular attention to solving acute problems affecting their vital interests [...]. The fundamental goal of our socialist modernization drive is to continually meet the growing material and cultural needs of the people.

(Wen 2005)

Only so, Wen wrote, can the party regain the people's trust, which has been shaken by the problems generated during the course of transformation.

We must always keep in mind that everything belongs to the people, do everything for their benefit, rely on them in everything we do and attribute all our successes to their efforts. Only by doing so can we enjoy the broadest and most reliable support from the people and draw from them the strength for ensuring success in all our endeavors.

(Wen 2008)

This idea is also reflected in Hu's notion of "taking people as the basis" (*yiren weiben*), one of the two major elements of his Scientific Outlook on Development.

Moreover, the Hu administration is concerned not only about the people's well-being but also about their happiness, which is said to be a major focus of the party. Hu bridges this notion with the idea of social harmony: "Everything we do is to ensure that the people live a happier life with more dignity and to make our society fairer and more harmonious" (Wen 2010). With the concept of harmony, the party integrates one of the major elements of Confucian tradition into its official frames, thereby linking socialist ideas with the country's traditional cultural stock.<sup>22</sup> In order to establish social harmony and stability (*shehui hexie wend-*

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22 On the incorporation of Confucianism and traditional culture into modern Chinese political thought see Mahoney (2008).



ing), it is considered an absolute necessity to let all people have their just share of the “fruits of development” (Wen 2011). Wen has stressed, “[w]e must always remember that developing the economy is inseparable from improving the people’s wellbeing and safeguarding social fairness and justice” (Wen 2010). The concept of social justice has thus been significantly amplified under Hu Jintao.

The concepts of well-being and happiness, social justice, stability and harmony lie at the heart of Hu’s vision of a Socialist Harmonious Society. In the media reporting following Hu’s first major exposition of the idea at the Central Party School, the party’s mouthpiece *People’s Daily* cited Hu’s description of the concept:

Realizing social harmony and establishing a happy society is ultimately a social ideal sought by all mankind [...]. According to the fundamental principles of Marxism and the practical experience of our country on its road to socialism, and according to the new requirements of our country’s economic and social development in the first part of the new century [...], the socialist society that we need to build is one of democracy and rule of law, justice and equality, trust and truthfulness, amity and vitality, order and stability and a harmonious relation between mankind and nature.

(Renmin ribao 2005, authors’ translation)

#### 4.2.5 *Performance in the Face of Challenges*

On the path of establishing a socialist society in full bloom, the party stresses, there are many obstacles that have to be surmounted. Both Zhu and Wen have pointed out that in the face of manifold threats to the country’s social and economic development, the CCP has made “tremendous achievements in economic and social development” (Zhu 2003). Neither the complex international environment, including global recessions and financial crises, nor threats such as natural disasters and epidemics have brought the progress of the Chinese nation to a halt. With almost every single year depicted as “the most difficult year for our country’s economic development since the beginning of the new century” (Wen 2010), both Zhu and Wen have emphasized in nearly every work report that the party’s achievements “did not come easily.” Its “hard-won victories over numerous difficulties” (Zhu 2001) have been attributed to correct leadership and thus used to highlight the party’s unique leadership qualities, which are claimed to have been further strengthened by the practical experiences gained with each obstacle surmounted.

We worked steadily and made solid progress, and the Chinese people have every reason to take pride in this. Our achievements did not come easily. They were made thanks to the broad vision and correct leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Hu Jintao as General Secretary.

(Wen 2011)

The party's achievements have been further attributed to the superiority of the country's socialist system, thanks to which China's economy "was the first in the world to have made a turnaround" (Wen 2010) during the global financial crisis. This again highlights the correctness of the development path chosen by the CCP.

These brilliant achievements clearly show the advantages of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the great power of reform and opening up. They greatly increased the confidence and pride of our people of all ethnic groups, strengthened the cohesiveness of the Chinese nation, and inspired us to forge ahead on our historic course.

(Wen 2011)

However, the party has not claimed such successes exclusively for itself; it has also credited the efforts of the people who have stood "in unity" with the party throughout all hardships and "surmounted difficulties, strode forward, and made significant new achievements in reform, opening up and the socialist modernization drive" (Zhu 2002). In a similar fashion, Wen has acknowledged that

[i]n these unusually difficult circumstances, the people of all our ethnic groups fortified their confidence, tackled difficulties head on, worked tenaciously, and responded calmly to the impact of the global financial crisis under the firm leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

(Wen 2010)

This alleged unity serves not only as an illustration of the people's support for the party, but also brings a nationalistic element into the performance frame, again invoking the idea of a common struggle for the "great motherland" (Wen 2007; Zhu 2003) and hence the party's devotion to the common interest.

#### 4.2.6 *Willingness to Overcome Shortcomings*

Despite the great achievements in the face of challenges, the CCP, in line with established party practice, is ready to admit shortcomings in the government's work. In this sense, Zhu conceded that the party is

clearly aware that there are still numerous problems in our economic and social life [...] The causes for these problems are rather complicated, but they are not unrelated to shortcomings and errors in our work. We must pay great attention to them and take further steps to solve them.

(Zhu 2001)

Both Zhu and Wen have highlighted the government's great willingness to self-reform in order to overcome its inadequacies, thus postulating a high degree of self-reflection as well as moral superiority that serves to demonstrate the CCP's outstanding ability to lead the Chi-

nese nation. Wen has put even greater emphasis on the government's awareness of its imperfections and its eagerness to improve.

In reviewing our work of the past year, we are clearly aware that many difficulties and problems remain on our way ahead, that there are still quite a few shortcomings in the government's work, that there remain areas our people are not satisfied with, and that it will take a long time to fundamentally eradicate longstanding and deep-seated problems.

(Wen 2004)

Moreover, Wen has identified the shortcomings in the government's work against the backdrop of its determination to serve the people by arguing that this work should be judged against the people's expectations. In line with the Hu administration's primary focus on the people, the party has vowed to establish a "service-oriented government that the people are satisfied with" (Wen 2010). In this sense, Wen has stressed that "[a]ll the government's power is entrusted by the people, and the government must therefore be responsible for the people, work to benefit them, and accept their oversight" (Wen 2011).

In working harder to reform and improve the government we must always put people first and run the government for the people, and take fulfilling, safeguarding and developing the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people as both our starting point and objective. We must proceed from China's actual conditions and fully integrate the leadership of the Party [and] the people's position as the masters of the country [...].

(Wen 2007)

In the words of Wen, this aim encompasses the development of a "socialist democracy" that "effectively safeguard[s] the democratic rights of the people [...], particularly their rights to vote and to stay informed about, participate in, express views on, and oversee government affairs" (Wen 2010), a notion already highlighted under the Jiang administration. It also includes increasing the transparency of the party's policymaking and "widen[ing] the channels for promptly reporting social conditions and popular sentiments, and ensur[ing] that government work truly reflects the people's wishes and interests" (Zhu 2002). Along with democratization, improving the legal system has also been portrayed as a "basic requirement of the socialist system" and "[t]he most important aspect of building a harmonious society" (Wen 2007).

## 5 Conclusion

Against the backdrop of various authors' calls to bring persuasion and ideology back into the study of authoritarianism, we have suggested a framework that explains the role of official framing and ideology in regime legitimacy. In their attempts to shape people's perceptions

of sociopolitical realities, the leaders of authoritarian regimes broadcast official frames intended to reproduce the belief of the populace in both the elites' leadership qualities and their determination to serve the common interest. As both more abstract and more comprehensive interpretive schemata, official ideologies function as the theoretical underpinnings of these frames, thus putting them into a broader perspective. Changes in official frames are hence mirrored in ideological innovations. In order to succeed, both need to build on existing cultural narratives while at the same time taking into account the changing social and political context.

Through the application of this framework to the case of China, our research has demonstrated that it offers a useful perspective for analyzing persuasion-based legitimation efforts. Responding to its fear of a looming legitimacy crisis, the CCP has in recent years paid increasing attention to persuasion and to the modernization of party ideology. In order to demonstrate their dedication to serving the public good, both the Jiang and Hu administrations have drawn on the guiding ideology of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In line with communist parties' traditional self-image as scientific organizations, China's leaders have portrayed the party's policies as part of a comprehensive strategic plan based on a theoretical foundation. As part of their stated aim of leading China on the road to becoming a socialist society in full bloom, both administrations have depicted the generation of economic growth as a panacea that will ultimately solve all of the country's problems. The Hu administration in particular has stressed that the ultimate objective of economic development, and the party's top priority, is to satisfy the people's everyday needs and increase their happiness. The party has further highlighted its unique leadership qualities by stressing its great achievements in the face of challenges and its willingness to overcome shortcomings.

The main shift in the frames that is observable under the Hu administration is a greater focus on the people's well-being and happiness, social justice, stability and harmony. In accordance with our model, this shift can be understood as a direct response to popular grievances stemming from decades of rapid and unsustainable growth. In line with our claim that shifts in official frames are mirrored in ideological innovations, this change in emphasis is reflected in Hu's Scientific Outlook on Development and Socialist Harmonious Society theories. However, despite the Hu administration's emphasis on ideological modernization, the CCP still draws heavily on traditional socialist ideology in the portrayal of the common interest and the party's leadership qualities, thus reflecting our argument that ideological change needs to simultaneously build on the country's cultural stock and adapt to the changing socioeconomic environment.

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## Appendix 1

### Conceptual Change from Jiang to Hu

Concepts Derived from Frames	Keywords	Jiang 2001–2003	Hu 2004–2006	Hu 2009–2011
<b>Chinese Socialism</b>	<i>zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi</i>	4 5	2 5	8 16
Comprehensive Development	<i>quanmian fazhan</i>	9	4	1
<b>Coordinated Development</b> <sup>1</sup>	<i>xietiao, fazhan</i> <i>jingji shehui fazhan</i>	17 5	34 30	25 29
Democratization	<i>minzhu</i>	32	37	30
Deng Xiaoping Theory	<i>Deng Xiaoping lilun</i>	9	8	3
<b>Government for the People</b>	<i>fuwu</i> <i>yiren weiben</i> <i>renmin</i> <i>qunzhong</i>	73 0 82 40	69 5 112 82	140 1 131 75
<b>Moderately Prosperous Society</b>	<i>xiaokang</i>	7	11	5
Modernization	<i>xiandaihua</i>	38	29	30
<b>People's Happiness</b>	<i>xingfu</i> <i>shenghuo, meihao</i>	0 0	0 1	5 4
<b>People's Well-being</b>	<i>renmin shenghuo</i> <i>liyi</i>	0 14	9 32	8 26
<b>Reform and Opening Up</b>	<i>gaige kaifang</i>	17	25	27
Rule of Law	<i>yifa</i> <i>fazhi</i>	50 29	57 12	28 9
<b>Scientific Outlook on Development</b>	<i>kexue fazhan guan</i> <i>kexue fazhan</i>	0 1	16 17	4 14
<b>Social Harmony</b>	<i>hexie</i>	0	17	24
<b>Social Justice</b>	<i>gongzheng</i> <i>gongping</i> <i>gongping zhengyi</i>	5 4 0	11 6 1	6 17 7
<b>Social Stability</b>	<i>wending</i>	56	72	84
Socialism	<i>shehui zhuyi</i>	56	50	32
Strategic Planning	<i>zhanlüe</i>	56	51	58
Three Represents	<i>sange daibiao</i>	11	9	3
Unity of Party and People	<i>dang, gezu</i>	8	8	11

Note: 1) Words on one line that are separated by commas were counted if both were mentioned in one sentence.

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