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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Since the beginning of human civilization, humanity has been looking for the best form of government. For thousands of years, our political systems constantly evolved with the changing political values and the progress of human civilizations, until the late 1980s – when it was claimed that this evolution had met an end. The collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union appeared to both mark the death knell of communism and suggest the superiority of Western liberal democracy. Since then, Western liberal democracy has been claimed as “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” and “the final form of human government” (Fukuyama, 1989). It seemed that, sooner or later, Western liberal democracy – the so-called “best” political system and the “ultimate” achievement of humanity – would defeat all other forms of political systems (of inferior quality) and become the only form of government in the world.

Yet authoritarianism has not been eliminated, as many expected it would. On the contrary, its resilience has been posing unprecedented challenges to the overwhelming dominance of Western democracy. Now, nearly thirty years after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the communist party in China has posed a strong challenge to Western liberal democracy. Instead of collapsing, as many have expected for decades, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has delivered a remarkable economic miracle. In 2011, China officially overtook Japan to become the second largest economy in the world. With an annual GDP growth rate over 7%, China is widely expected to become the largest world economy within a decade. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), China had, in 2014, already
replaced the United States to become the world’s largest economy (IMF, 2014). Now, more than ever before, the world has been wondering whether or even when China – a country governed by an authoritarian regime – will lead the world.

Why did the CCP not follow the failure of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union? The present book examines this question by studying two crucial strategies the CCP feels it needs to put in place for staying in power – ideological adaptation and the institutionalization of leadership succession. It argues that ideology and leadership succession play crucial roles in the CCP’s survival, although these strategies have not received sufficient attention in the relevant literature. In analyzing the continuation of one-party rule in China, conventional wisdom focuses on economic performance. Thirty years of spectacular economic growth led by China’s market reforms have prompted a sizeable quantity of economics and political science literature to link this growth with the CCP’s rule (Krugman, 2013; Laliberté and Lanteigne, 2008b; Perry, 2008; Shambaugh, 2001; Wang, 2005a; 2005b; Zhao, 2009). While economic success is undoubtedly important, this alone is not enough to explain the entire legitimation of the CCP – and China’s economic miracle has created many problems of legitimacy.

More importantly, while the CCP created the economic miracle, it also put its own existence into a fundamental dilemma. According to the CCP constitution, its “highest ideal and the ultimate goal,” and theoretically the only reason for its existence, is to achieve communism (CCP, 2013). If a communist party is not to deliver communism and class victory, why is it there at all? It seems even stranger that a communist party now plans to establish a capitalist society – and, indeed, the mainstream literature misguidedly suggests that the creation of a form of capitalism is a key for the CCP to stay in power. Since the beginning of the CCP’s market reforms in the late 1970s, its rule has been facing a fundamental contradiction between generating economic success by utilizing quasi-capitalist economic policies, and the fact that this is a communist party that supposedly justifies its rule by being the vehicle to deliver a communist society.

Moving away from communist ideals has inevitably led to the decline of communist beliefs in China and the creation of a huge ideological vacuum. In the late 1980s, this vacuum made the CCP’s ideological basis vulnerable when confronted by liberal social values, which gave rise to waves of popular pro-democracy protests across the country. In addition, this decline not only shook the CCP’s ideological basis but also split the party from the inside. From 1979 to 1992, the fundamental
contradiction between quasi-capitalist economic policies and the CCP’s commitment to socialism generated endless ideological battles among the ruling elites over whether it was right for a communist party to introduce elements of a capitalist system. Those reform-minded ruling elites (who considered the quasi-capitalist economic policies essential to promote growth) were attacked by other groups who were less reform-minded. This division within the CCP led to a series of serious, negative consequences – notably, inhibiting the decision-making of the party when dealing with popular protests in 1989, a crisis that brought the party almost to the brink of death.

Since official recognition of the market economy in 1992, the cleavage within the party gradually evolved to the issues of how far towards capitalism the CCP should or could go and how to deal with the negative consequences of rapid economic growth, such as corruption and socioeconomic inequality. The “New Left” elites – who are critical of capitalism and prefer a new form of nationalist socialism – favor a larger role for the state in socioeconomic affairs, while the pro-liberal elites, who embrace universal values, have attempted to put forward liberal reforms, not only in socioeconomic affairs but also in the political system, including democratization. By holding high the banner of the New Left and ideological orthodoxy, Bo Xilai then party head of Chongqing took advantage of the ideological division within the CCP to launch democratic, election-like publicity campaigns in order to compete for power, which posed a strong challenge to the unity of the party and the legitimacy of the leadership-succession system in China. This book argues that ideology is by no mean obsolete; on the contrary, in contemporary China it still plays a crucial role in legitimizing authoritarian rule and maintaining party cohesion.

As such, ideological transitions are important not only to maintain pro-authoritarian values and thus legitimacy, but also to maintain consensus within the party and thus the unity of the CCP’s leadership. However, conventional wisdom overemphasizes government performance and pays insufficient attention to ideology. Many consider ideology to be obsolete in contemporary China (Dreyer, 2012: 330, 360; Lynch, 1999: 10; Misra, 1998; Ramo, 2004). As Holbig (2013: 61) points out, “in the political science literature on contemporary China, ideology is mostly regarded as a dogmatic straitjacket to market reforms that has been worn out over the years of economic success, an obsolete legacy of the past waiting to be cast off in the course of the country’s transition toward capitalism.” Generally speaking, the topic of ideology in contemporary China is under-researched.
In addition to ideological adaptation, the institutionalization of leadership succession is a crucial survival strategy of the CCP. As mentioned above, since the late 1970s the ideological turn of the CCP has split the party. The danger of divisions within the elite is frequently demonstrated by history: the majority of authoritarian regimes failed, not as a result of being overthrown by the masses, but owing to divisions among the elites (O’Donnell, et al., 1986; Svolik, 2012). The unity of the ruling elites is therefore crucial to regime survival, and a key threat to this unity is a succession crisis.

For an authoritarian regime, successfully transferring power at the top and preventing a leadership split during this process has always been extremely challenging. During Mao Zedong’s rule, an un-institutionalized power system caused endless, fierce power struggles within the party, which indirectly led to economic stagnation and social unrest. Afraid of elite divisions and brutal power struggles, the CCP has made great efforts to settle disputes of leadership succession through institutional channels. Thirty years of institutionalization has made leadership transitions in China more stable, transparent, predictable, and smoother now than ever before. A US congressional report called the CCP’s leadership transition in 2012 “one of the very few examples of an authoritarian state successfully engineering a peaceful, institutionalized political succession” (Dotson, 2012: 4). Dickson (2011: 212) argues that China’s “routinized process for replacing ruling elites is a remarkably rare practice among authoritarian regimes.”

Arguably, this institutional development is important not only to the internal stability of the CCP but also to its legitimacy. It is obvious important to the CCP's capacity to rule and this capacity is considered as a fundamental inner cause of its legitimacy in the CCP’s discourse, as I explain below. This book shows how the institutionalization of leadership succession helps to maintain regime stability and legitimacy. So, this book establishes that the institutionalization of leadership succession is a key for maintaining the CCP's internal stability and its ruling capacity to maintain legitimacy.

1.2 Legitimacy and party cohesion

Legitimacy, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a complex term. As Huntington (1993: 46) argues, the concept of legitimacy is “mushy” but is “essential to understanding the problems confronting authoritarian regimes in the late 19th century.” Legitimacy lies in the center of both the history of political philosophy (White, 2005: 1) and contemporary Chinese politics.
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Gilley and Holbig, 2009; 2010). It provides explanations for the failure of communism and the survival of the CCP.

Popular legitimacy is crucial; however, it is not a sufficient condition for regime survival. Regime survival does not only need the external stability of the regime – the kind of stability that is reflected in popular legitimacy – but also needs the internal stability of the regime, which is reflected in the unity of the ruling elites. The relevant literature largely focuses on popular support but pays insufficient attention to the ruling elites. Indeed, how ruling elites themselves view the regime – a kind of self-legitimation – also matters. As Rothschild (1977: 491) argues, “discussions of legitimacy and legitimation risk irrelevancy if they overlook this crucial dimension of a ruling elite’s sense of its legitimacy and focus exclusively on the other dimension of the public’s or the masses’ perception of that elite’s legitimacy.” Lewis (1984) argues that “it is elite disintegration and the failure of its internal mechanisms of authority that have engendered the more general collapse of legitimacy and the onset of political crises in communist Eastern Europe.”

Following the Weberian typology, the proponents of Weber have widely examined the crucial role of political elites in deciding legitimacy. Therborn (1980: 109) argues that “the really critical factor is a basic consensus among the ruling groups themselves, and consent to their legitimacy by members of the state apparatus.” Bialer (1982: 194) argues that “what is crucial is the legitimacy of these claims to the other centers of power and not their legitimacy among the people who must take the consequences.” The influence of elites and the government is particularly notable in China, which is in the shadow of Confucianism. The cultural traditions of low political participation and high trust in government have made the role of ruling elites more influential. In addition, many relevant quantitative studies heavily rely on the subjective opinions and values of citizens (i.e., surveys); however, how the regime produced its legitimacy claims has not been given a central place. Arguably, the regime’s legitimacy claim is a notable inner cause of popular legitimacy. Thus, the CCP’s ideological discourses that this book studies are particularly important to capturing the regime’s legitimacy claims and its survival strategies.

More importantly, the CCP’s legitimacy and its cohesion are indivisible. Arguably, legitimacy is considered by the CCP as an external manifestation of its ruling capacity. In 2004, the CCP issued a party resolution on strengthening its ruling capacity (zhizheng nengli) that explicitly attempted to gain legitimacy (CCP, 2004). As one scholar of the Central Institute of Socialism read it, legitimacy was the “unspoken word left
to the understanding of the audience” of this resolution (Gilley and Holbig, 2009: 341). This resolution stimulated an intensive debate on regime legitimacy among Chinese intellectuals. In this debate, the intellectuals propose a variety of policy suggestions to strengthen the ruling capacity of the CCP and, thereby, its legitimacy, as Chapter 4 shows. Obviously, this ruling capacity is built on the CCP’s internal cohesion. In other words, this party cohesion is a prerequisite of the CCP’s ruling capacity to maintain legitimacy – including promoting economic growth, maintaining social stability, and defending China’s national interests. Therefore, instead of focusing on the masses’ support alone, this book explores the relationship between both the external stability of the regime (i.e., popular legitimacy) and the internal stability of the regime (i.e., party cohesion).

1.3 Existential crises in China?

Nowadays, the international community has contrary views about the Chinese state. On the one hand, some are optimistic about China’s future (e.g., Jacques, 2009). After China successfully held the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and became the second-largest world economy in 2010, and following the 2008 financial crisis that undermined Western power, it seems that the world is waiting for the age of China (Jacques, 2009). According to a Pew research survey (Pew, 2013), nearly half (47%) of American respondents and over half of European respondents – including 71% Spanish, 70% French, 66% British, and 66% German – agree that China will ultimately replace (or has already replaced) the US to become the leading superpower. In this sense, as long as China can maintain economic growth, Chinese leaders should be cheering their success and should take over the world order. On the other hand, many consider CCP rule to be immoral and illegitimate because of its authoritarian nature. Some argue that the spectacular economic growth in China is at the expense of violations of human rights, environmental pollution, and a “Ponzi” economic growth model (Krugman, 2013). Others, in particular the Collapsing China School, doubt the future stability of the regime in China (Feng, 2013a; Pei, 2006; Shirk, 2007), as I discuss in Chapter 3.

In the academic community, Chinese intellectuals and Western scholars have very different views on the CCP’s legitimacy. On the one hand, many experts outside mainland China argue that the CCP enjoys strong legitimacy (Chen, et al., 1997; Fewsmith, 2007; Gilley, 2009; Shi, 2001; Shi, 2008; Tang, 2001; Tong, 2011). This view is robustly supported
by various cross-national surveys, including the Asian barometer and the World Values Survey (Chen, 2004; Gilley, 2006; Gilley, 2008; Lewis-Beck, et al., 2013; Li, 2004b; Munro, et al., 2013; Shi, 2001; Tang, 2005; Yang and Tang, 2013). For example, the 2008 Asian Barometer Survey finds that 74% of Chinese respondents responded positively to the statement that “whatever its faults may be, our current system of government is still the best for the country” (Chu, 2013: 5). According to a professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Wang Shaoguang (2010b: 139; 2012b), and a professor at the National Taiwan University, Chu Yunhan (2013: 4), the CCP’s strong legitimacy is a “consensus” of “scholars familiar with the field.” On the other hand, Chinese intellectuals are much more pessimistic than this “consensus.” Of 125 Chinese articles on the subject of political legitimacy published in party school journals, university journals, and public policy journals that I studied, over 40% of Chinese intellectuals writing on the subject of legitimacy argue that the regime is in certain forms of legitimacy crises or challenges, while only 1% of these intellectuals consider legitimacy in China to be high (Zeng, 2014c).

Indeed, not only Chinese intellectuals but also Chinese leaders have been seriously concerned about the CCP’s rule. As Chapter 2 shows, the existential crisis has been a constant concern of Chinese leaders. Why are they so pessimistic? What are they worrying about? Why does the CCP think reclaiming legitimacy is essential for them? Arguably, this concern is mainly generated by communist ideology, by the political legacy of Mao Zedong, and by problems caused by rapid economic growth. In Mao Zedong’s era, communist ideology and a cult of personality was the lynchpin of legitimacy in China for a couple of decades until a series of political campaigns and policy failures seriously undermined the regime legitimacy. After Mao Zedong passed away, the party leaders felt that the CCP’s legitimacy had reached its lowest point. Driven by the concerns about existential crisis, the CCP was forced to change its primary task from Mao’s “class struggle” to economic reconstruction – an approach that shifted CCP’s rule from being ideology-based and toward being performance-based. However, such a fundamental transition was destined to be challenging because it was more or less an attempt to cast off everything the party had been previously doing to build revolutionary legitimacy – in particular the communist ideology and Mao Zedong.

Unlike the Soviet Union, which could take a de-Stalinization approach but still adhere to Leninism as the party ideology, the CCP cannot completely escape from its past and negate the influence of its founder,
The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule

Mao Zedong; otherwise, the party's history and rule would be put into the dilemma of illegitimacy. As Xi Jinping clearly pointed out, “if we completely negate comrade Mao Zedong, is our party tenable? Is our socialist system tenable? It is not tenable. If it is not tenable, there will be great disorder in China” (Qi, 2013). Thus, on the one hand, the CCP continues to identify Mao Zedong Thought as its guiding theory. On the other hand, the CCP reinterprets a usable version that departs from Mao's literal words.

More importantly, moving away from revolutionary idealism did help the government to improve its performance and deliver economic benefits to the people; however, it lost the very basis of the communist monopoly on power. As already noted, there is a potential contradiction between the CCP's quasi-capitalist economic policies and the ultimate goal of a communist party – to establish a communist society. This contradiction did not only threaten popular legitimacy but also split the party from the inside. The economic plans of reformists were frequently attacked by other groups of ruling elites as products of capitalism. As mentioned, this elite division almost led to the collapse of the CCP in 1989.

In the early 1990s, after the failure of the Soviet Union, the party conducted a large number of systematic studies on the failure of communist regimes through its various party organs and think tanks – especially the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS). The CASS analysts summarized the failure of Eastern European communist regimes in three reasons (Zhou and Guan, 2000: 119–120):

1. Democratization within the ruling party led to divisions among the ruling elites.
2. The increasing discontent of the masses was utilized by opposition forces.
3. Western countries' “peaceful evolution” campaign undermined popular support for one-party rule.

In other words, the lesson the party learned from the failure of those communist regimes is to strengthen the unity of party leaders, build popular legitimacy, and resist the “invasion” of liberal political values. In this context, ideological changes and the institutionalization of leadership succession are, on the one hand, crucial to maintaining party cohesion and to building popular legitimacy on the other hand.

Although the CCP has led China to become the world's second-largest economy and helped over 600 million people out of poverty, its present concerns about existential crisis because of problems caused by rapid
economic growth do not lessen. Now, more than ever before, the CCP is concerned that economic performance might not be enough to provide sufficient legitimacy (as this book explores). Rampant corruption, for example, has been threatening the party’s rule. As Jiang Zemin (1997b) clearly pointed out at the 15th Party Congress:

[T]he fight against corruption is a grave political struggle vital to the very existence of the party and the state. Our party can never be daunted and vanquished by any enemy. But the easiest way to capture a fortress is from within, so in no way should we destroy ourselves. If corruption cannot be punished effectively, our Party will lose the confidence and support of the people.

In addition to corruption, the further deterioration of socioeconomic inequality and changing values have provided a widening ground for power struggles under the cover of ideology (i.e., ideological battles, also termed line struggles). As mentioned, Bo Xilai held high the flag of the New Left for winning a seat in the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC). The orthodox doctrines of Marxism and Maoism were again used as a potent weapon for power struggles. Although at that time the leadership transitions in China were institutionalized to a certain level, Bo Xilai’s way of competing for the top power – through democratic, election-like publicity campaigns involving a distinct policy agenda and a strong appeal to the masses – posed a strong challenge to the unity of the party and the legitimacy of the leadership-succession system. Facing the increasing threats of corruption, socioeconomic inequality and changing values, Xi Jinping clearly warned the party that “popular support decides the survival or death of the party” (Xu and Zhou, 2013).

Above all, driven by those concerns of existential crisis that were generated from communist ideology, Mao Zedong, and problems caused by rapid economic growth, contemporary Chinese leaders have a delicate task built on four things:

1. Continuing to stress the importance of economic development.
2. But explaining why China still needs a communist party to hold a monopoly on power.
3. Fending off potential internal attacks from within the party itself and from people who might criticize the ideological turn – either from real conviction or from more pragmatic power motivation,
4. And also dealing with the negative social consequences of rapid economic development.
In this context, the CCP has continually promoted economic reforms (e.g., market reforms for economic performance), political reforms (e.g., the institutionalization of leadership succession for undermining the negative effects of power struggles), and ideological reforms (i.e., justifying the CCP’s rule, not only to society at large, but also to the party itself).

1.4 Understanding popular legitimacy in China

In the understanding of popular legitimacy in China, this book reveals a wide gulf between Western and Chinese scholarship. In this book, the term “Chinese intellectuals” refers to those who are based in mainland China. They more or less work within the Chinese political system (ti zhi nei). Thus, Zhao Dingxin, a sociology professor at the University of Chicago, and Wang Shaoguang, a political science professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, are not considered to be typical Chinese intellectuals because of their educational and institutional backgrounds.

In explaining legitimacy in China, the literature in English concentrates on performance legitimacy. In this book, performance legitimacy refers to the idea that a state’s right to rule is justified by the performance of all government functions. Pragmatism and market reform have gradually shifted the legitimacy of the CCP from ideology to performance (Zhao, 2009). On the one hand, many consider the communist ideology obsolete under market reforms nowadays. In this sense, with the decline of communist beliefs, the CCP has little ideological legitimacy left in contemporary China. On the other hand, modern history has proved the ultimate failure of communist rule, and classic theories have frequently pointed out the fatal weaknesses of authoritarianism. According to many, the authoritarian system does not have as much rational-legal legitimacy as do democratic systems (Zhao, 2009). It seems that performance legitimacy is the last straw for the CCP’s rule. As Zhao Dingxin argues (2009: 428), “government performance stands alone as the sole source of legitimacy in China.”

Economic performance is the most frequently mentioned element of performance legitimacy. The conventional wisdom of Western scholarship holds that economic achievement is a principal (if not the sole) pillar of legitimacy in contemporary China (Krugman, 2013; Laliberté and Lanteigne, 2008b; Perry, 2008; Shambaugh, 2001; Wang, 2005a; Wang, 2005b; Zhao, 2009; Yang and Zhao, 2014). In a major textbook on
Chinese politics, Tony Saich (2004: 347) argues that “[CCP] legitimacy is currently based on the capacity to deliver the economic goods.”

Economic performance is absolutely important. However, empirical studies show that while economic performance matters, there is no strong evidence to prove that it is the sole, let alone the principal, pillar of legitimacy (Chu, 2013; Lewis-Beck, et al., 2013; Munro, et al., 2013; Yang and Tang, 2013). In addition, if economic prosperity leads to high levels of popular support for the government, why do not other countries that enjoy economic prosperity – such as India and Brazil – also have high levels of support, as China does (Tang, et al., 2013)? Based on a 2010 national survey in China, Dickson (2013) finds a negative relationship between economic development and popular support.

In addition to economic performance, social stability is another essential element of government performance, and it has also been widely accepted as a fundamental pillar of the CCP’s legitimacy (Breslin, 2009; Dickson, 2011; Laliberté and Lanteigne, 2008b; Shue, 2004; Sandby-Thomas, 2011). Shue (2004), for example, argues that the CCP “stakes” its legitimacy on its ability to maintain social stability. Needless to say, social stability and economic growth are interdependent. Without a stable social order, the economy cannot grow rapidly; conversely the welfare materials delivered by economic growth might help to enhance social stability. This interdependence suggests that the rules of modern states are based on different combinations of legitimacy sources rather than on any one pillar.

Legitimacy by nature has many dimensions, and its sources are often interrelated. Ideology in particular plays a crucial role in influencing other sources of legitimacy. Arguably, a fatal weakness of the performance legitimacy approach is its insufficient attention to ideological factors. As mentioned, the mainstream approach overemphasizes economic growth, and many assume that market reform has also rendered ideology obsolete. This misguided view has underestimated the role of ideology in contemporary China.

Legitimacy generated from government performance is not directly through government performance per se but from citizens’ subjective perceptions of this performance. Ideological factors play a crucial role in shaping those perceptions. Thus, economic performance – crisis or growth – is not directly reflected in legitimacy (Gilley and Holbig, 2010); the performance will be framed by ideological factors and transformed by conductive ways into people’s subjective perceptions of economic performance. If economic performance became the sole legitimacy
pillar in China, then economic deterioration would unavoidably lead to political crisis. However, the financial crisis of 2008 enhanced rather than weakened the CCP’s rule (Holbig, 2011). By using the Chinese media to highlight the good performance in coping with the financial crisis domestically and the disaster this crisis caused in other countries, the CCP managed to manipulate this debacle as an opportunity to gain legitimacy and achieve its political purposes – such as marketing its then-official ideology, the “Scientific Outlook of Development” (Holbig, 2011).

My study on Wenzhou’s financial reform also shows how the Chinese government could manipulate the idea of “reform” – as a political symbol – to maintain the status quo when facing the regional debt crisis (Zeng, 2015). By using reform ideas as substitutes for actual practices, the Chinese government managed to solve the Wenzhou debt crisis without really tackling the core problem. This symbolic financial reform helped the CCP to maintain socioeconomic stability during the leadership succession at the 18th Party Congress. The case of the 2008 financial crisis and the Wenzhou debt crisis suggest there is a great deal of room for the government to manipulate people’s subjective perceptions of economic crisis, and thus maintain – or even strengthen – the CCP’s rule.

In addition, many legitimacy problems are caused by rapid economic growth. Now, more than ever before, the CCP is concerned that economic performance might not be enough to provide sufficient legitimacy. The three most-perceived threats to legitimacy by Chinese intellectuals – changing values, socioeconomic inequality, and corruption – are all problems caused by economic growth. Take environmental pollution that is caused by rapid economic growth as another example. When Beijing’s smog becomes more visible and undermines the quality of life, people ever more concerned about the negative effects of economic growth. This negative perception of economic growth has no doubt undermined the positive impact of growth on legitimacy. Indeed, not only this domestic perception matters but so does the international perception of China’s growth. As mentioned, on the one hand, this economic growth can be perceived as a symbol of “a rising China” and a role model for developing countries. On the other hand, it can also be described as an immoral, costly growth model that violates human rights and sacrifices the poor and the environment. These two images of China certainly have contrary impacts on regime legitimacy.

Similarly, ideology also plays a significant role in maintaining social stability. It crucially interacts with the CCP’s capability to maintain
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social stability. As seen in Chapter 5, the CCP’s (in)stability discourse – liberal democracy brings instability and the CCP is the only force capable maintaining stability – helps to generate popular support for the current political system and thus maintain stability. This stability, in return, reinforces the regime’s stability discourse – the current political system is more capable of maintaining a stable social order and protecting personal safety. In short, ideological factors are important in affecting the impacts of economic performance and social stability on legitimacy.

In addition to government performance, nationalism is another frequently mentioned explanatory factor of regime legitimacy in China. The country’s increasingly assertive foreign policy has generated enormous academic and public interest in Chinese nationalism. Many argue that nationalism plays a crucial role in legitimizing the CCP’s rule (Breslin, 2009; Darr, 2011; Fang, 1997; Lam, 2003; Li, 2001b; Lieberthal, 2004: 334–335; Lin and Hu, 2003; Ostergaard, 2004; Saich, 2004; Shambaugh, 2001; Zheng, 2004). As Peter Gries (2005: 112) argues, “lacking the procedural legitimacy accorded to democratically elected governments and facing the collapse of communist ideology, the CCP is increasingly dependent upon its nationalist credentials to rule.” Thomas Christensen (1996) also argues, “[S]ince the Chinese Communist Party is no longer communist, it must be even more Chinese.” Nationalism is no doubt important to the CCP’s rule. However, there is no empirical evidence to prove that nationalism is a superior source of legitimacy in China (Chu, 2013).

Many also argue that Chinese nationalism has gradually become the ideological foundation of the CCP by replacing the communist ideals, which have been largely marginalized and weakened (Christensen, 1996; Gries and Rosen, 2004; He, 2007; Link, 2008; Metzger and Myers, 1998; Zhao, 1997; 1998; Zhong, 1996). For example, Duke University professor Liu Kang, argues:

‘The current Chinese communist government is more a product of nationalism than a product of ideology like Marxism and Communism’...today nationalism has probably ‘become the most powerful legitimating ideology.’ (Cited from: Bajoria, 2008)

These kinds of arguments suggest that nationalism is an independent value system, that is, ideology. However, nationalism alone does not provide any source of legitimacy for certain political systems or the appointment of political actors (Beetham, 2008). In addition, as Shaun
Breslin (2009: 142) argues, Chinese nationalism “seems to lack sufficient coherence and guiding principles to be counted as an ideology as such – it is not a ‘science of ideas’.” Thus, nationalism alone is not an ideology, and so it alone cannot replace communist ideology. In the CCP’s official discourse, nationalism is a part of the “socialist core value system.” As such, the legitimizing role of nationalism is better addressed in the broader context of ideological constructions in China. This book agrees that nationalism is crucial to the CCP’s legitimacy, but it considers nationalism a part of the CCP’s broad ideological construction.

Above all, sources of legitimacy in China are a hotly debated topic. Although scholars have different emphases, the legitimacy formulation “economic growth + social stability + nationalism” is more or less a consensus view (Breslin, 2009; Dickson, 2011; Laliberté and Lanteigne, 2008b). All those factors are crucial to the CCP’s legitimacy; however, ideology plays a role in affecting all those factors. Thus, the role of ideology in China should be put into a more important position when analyzing legitimacy in contemporary China.

How do Chinese intellectuals understand regime legitimacy? In order to investigate the opinions of Chinese intellectuals, I analyzed 125 Chinese articles with “legitimacy” in the title and published between 2008 and 2012. Based on my primary database, Chapter 4 juxtaposes Chinese literature with English literature on this subject. A core finding is that, with regard to the party’s rule, there is a remarkable cleavage between international perceptions of the Chinese state and the pessimistic views among Chinese intellectuals.

In terms of the CCP’s level of legitimacy, pessimistic views commonly are found in the writing of Chinese intellectuals. As mentioned above, in the Chinese intellectual debate on legitimacy, more than 40% of party intellectuals argue that the CCP is in certain forms of legitimacy crises or challenges, while only 1% of them argue the CCP’s legitimacy is strong. In order to rescue the CCP’s rule, Chinese intellectuals propose various strategies to maintain popular legitimacy.

Moreover, Chinese intellectuals are more pessimistic about performance legitimacy than are many Western scholars. In China, it is clearly recognized that simply relying on economics is not enough – even if the economy continues to do well (and of course, there is a clear understanding that bad economic performance will harm legitimacy). Problems caused by economic growth – changing values, socioeconomic inequality, corruption – are considered nowadays to be the most-perceived legitimacy threats in China. In particular, Chinese intellectuals express their serious concern with changing values. How to
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maintain pro-authoritarian values has become an increasingly crucial, urgent challenge to the one-party rule in China.

As such, ideology has been proposed by Chinese intellectuals as a leading strategy to maintain legitimacy. Chinese intellectuals’ high emphasis on ideology is in stark contrast with many Western scholars’ insufficient attention to this issue. Indeed, not only Chinese intellectuals, but also party leaders, consider ideology to be crucial to regime legitimacy. In the past three decades, the party has invested a great deal of energy and human capital in modernizing its ideological basis.

1.5 Ideological adaptation in contemporary China: A dual ideological strategy

Is ideology obsolete in contemporary China? As mentioned, many Western scholars consider that thirty years of market reforms in China has rendered ideology meaningless. This understanding suffers from two major conceptual weaknesses: (1) considering ideology to be communism, and (2) considering ideology to be a belief system. First, conventional wisdom identifies ideology in China solely with communism. In the context of declining communist beliefs in contemporary China, this conceptualization seems to suggest, logically, that ideology becomes meaningless. This is obviously inaccurate because the CCP has put forward various formulas of party theories and ideologies – such as Jiang Zemin’s “Three Represents” and Hu Jintao’s “Scientific Outlook of Development” – to justify, if not to legitimize, its rule.

Moreover, putting aside other ideological formulas, even communism alone is still significant to the CCP’s rule. As mentioned above, theoretically, the only reason for a communist party to exist is to achieve communism. The CCP needs constantly to find some ex post facto ways of explaining why the reality of political economy is not incompatible with its commitment to socialism. This is relevant to the second conceptual weakness of the existing literature: ideology as a belief system. It suggests that the power of ideology comes from people’s faith, implying that ideology is only powerful if people believe it.

Yet, even if only very few people believe the communist doctrines, they are still powerful in influencing Chinese politics. For example, any party leader who openly supports abandoning the doctrine of Mao Zedong Thought and communism would soon find a powerful coalition within the party against him or her – whether from real conviction or more pragmatic power motivation. This is why the reform-minded leaders have carefully portrayed their reforms and policies in socialist
In order to address the above conceptual weakness, this book endorses Schull’s approach, which considers ideology to be a form of discourse (i.e., political language) that includes, but is not limited to, a belief system. As Schull argues (1992), people who have different personal beliefs can adhere to the same ideology, and the power of ideology lies not only in faith but also in respect. In public occasions, CCP leaders at least need to show respect for the communist doctrines, whether or not those leaders believe in them. This explains why communist doctrine can still constrain party elites in the context of declining communist beliefs. It is also clearly evidenced by the case of Bo Xilai, Orthodox doctrines of Marxism and Maoism and the ideological flag of the New Left were used by Bo Xilai as powerful weapons with which to compete for a PSC seat. As discussed in Chapter 2, Bo Xilai’s ideological flag was not only motivated by fundamentally different beliefs but was also an attempt to grab hold of power using ideology.

The above two approaches of ideology raise a notable distinction between regime legitimacy and regime survival. The first approach, which considers ideology a belief system, suggests that ideology is only about influencing world views and cultivating political beliefs. In this sense, ideology is only produced for legitimacy purposes. The second approach, which considers ideology to be a discourse, suggests that ideology is produced not only for influencing world views and cultivating political beliefs, but also for maintaining socialist conventions that justify CCP’s rule. In this sense, ideology is for maintaining both legitimacy and party cohesion. As discussed earlier, regime survival is decided not only by popular legitimacy (i.e., the external stability of the regime) but also by party cohesion (i.e., the internal stability of the regime). Thus, the second approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of the role of ideology in consolidating and legitimizing one-party rule. Therefore, ideology still plays a crucial role in contemporary Chinese politics.

Unlike conventional wisdom, a few keen China scholars still consider ideology to be important. Breslin (2009) argues: “[D]espite the promotion of apoliticism and the transition from revolutionary to ruling party, ideology is far from dead in contemporary China.” Among the already-limited literature in English, there are roughly two major explanations. On the one hand, some argue that ideological changes are produced for legitimizing the CCP (Bondes and Heep, 2012; 2013; Brady, 2009; Brown, 2012; Gilley and Holbig, 2010; Holbig, 2009; 2013; Sausmikat,
2006; Su, 2011; Sandby-Thomas, 2011). For example, Holbig (2013: 62) argues that “ideology still, and with a renewed emphasis since the turn of the century, plays an indispensable role in the quest to legitimize authoritarian rule in contemporary China.” In addition, the CCP’s mass persuasion is also considered to be important to the CCP’s legitimacy (Bondes and Heep, 2013; Brady, 2009).

On the other hand, many contend that ideology is a factional tool in the struggle for power (Bo, 2004; Fewsmith, 2003b; Lieber, 2013; Shih, 2008; Zheng and Lye, 2003). For example, Zheng and Lye (2003: 65) argue that “Jiang Zemin has succeeded in securing a legacy for himself with his ‘Three Represents’ theory and in putting his own men in key positions of the Party and government.” Shih (2008: 1177) argues that “ideological campaigns function as radars that allow senior leaders to discern the loyalty of faction members.”

The above cleavage lies in the primary audience and function of the CCP’s ideological discourses. If ideology is a legitimizing device to gain popular support (i.e., the first view), the people should be the primary audience. If ideology is just a tool of factional struggles (i.e., the second view), then its primary audience should be the party members (i.e., the party itself). Indeed, neither of these two views is wrong, and the major division between them lies partly in the distinction among the CCP’s ideological discourses.

This book divides the CCP’s dual ideological strategy into formal ideology and informal ideology. Formal ideology refers to those official ideological discourses that are narrowly concerned with the CCP’s discipline and with the socialist doctrines incorporated in the CCP constitution, including: Zhao Ziyang’s “primary stage of socialism”; Jiang Zemin’s “Three Represents”; and Hu Jintao’s “Scientific Outlook of Development.” Informal ideology refers to those popular ideations that are broadly concerned with the justification of the party’s rule to the entire society including the party, such as the promotion of nationalism/patriotism and the emphasis on virtue. This informal ideology supplements the formal ideological discourse. Formal ideology and informal ideology play inter-related but different roles in justifying the party’s rule.

Notably, Sandby-Thomas (2014) holds a similar view. However, Sandby-Thomas (2014) only mentions this view in a single paragraph. Moreover, his definition of informal ideology and formal ideology seem to be different from this book. For example, Sandby-Thomas considers “reform and opening up” as a formal ideology and “market liberalism” as an informal ideology, while this book does not.
The CCP’s dual ideological strategy involves two interrelated but different types of justifications: the communist rule and the authoritarian rule. The first one is to justify why China still needs a communist party with a monopoly on power. As mentioned above, while the CCP has created the economic miracle, it also put its existence into a dilemma. Since the CCP launched market reforms in the late 1970s, there has been a fundamental contradiction between the CCP’s quasi-capitalist economic policies and its socialist commitment. This contradiction has led to endless ideological battles/line struggles within the CCP, as mentioned above. In order to settle those ideological struggles and maintain party cohesion, the CCP has to put forward formal ideology to justify why the current policies are not incompatible with the socialist conventions. The second issue is to justify why China needs one-party rule rather than liberal democracy, which deals with the popular legitimacy of the authoritarian system in China.

The CCP has adopted a dual ideological strategy to deal with these two justifications. It employs formal ideology to justify its communist rule and informal ideology to justify its authoritarian rule. This book also argues that the major audience of formal ideology is the CCP itself rather than society. That is not to say formal ideologies such as Marxist-Leninist doctrines are not propagated to society, which of course they are; however, their primary goal is to settle ideological battles within the CCP by justifying why those quasi-capitalist policies have not betrayed its commitment to socialism. In other words, formal ideology is produced for the CCP in order to justify its existence to itself (i.e., a kind of self-justification). When it comes to legitimizing the CCP’s authoritarian rule as a whole, this is the arena in which the use of informal ideology takes place. In short, formal ideology is used mainly for justifying the communist rule to the party itself, while informal ideology is for justifying the authoritarian rule to the entire Chinese society, including the party. In this way, this dual ideological strategy deals with both the internal stability (party cohesion) and external stability (popular legitimacy) of the regime.

1.5.1 Formal ideology: a kind of self-justification

Formal ideology signals two primary messages: (1) an ex post facto justification of the CCP’s rule, and (2) establishing ideological orthodoxy and a leader’s credentials. As mentioned, the CCP is facing a fundamental contradiction between its quasi-capitalist economic policies and its socialist commitment. The most important function of formal ideology is to redefine what is meant by socialism at that moment in
time, and thus to provide an ex post facto justification of explaining why the current political economy is *not incompatible* with the CCP’s commitment to socialism. In short, formal ideology *justifies*, if not legitimizes, the CCP’s communist rule. Second, formal ideology also establishes ideological orthodoxy and a leader’s credentials. As formal ideology is clearly identified with specific leaders in China, it reflects the personal authority of Chinese leaders and carries a special meaning to assert their power.

Arguably, formal ideology is crucial in settling ideological battles within the party and thus maintaining party cohesion. As described in Chapter 2, there were intense debates among the CCP elites over whether it was right for the CCP to introduce elements of the capitalist system for generating economic success. In order to fend off the conservative forces’ attacks, the reformists carefully constructed various ideological discourses by portraying their economic policies in socialist terms. In this way, those discourses helped to minimize opposition from the conservative forces and thus maintain party cohesion. However, as formal ideology closely links with power, it can also cause problems: when it is a manifestation of factional positioning, it can lead to fissures in the party. As discussed in Chapter 5, Jiang Zemin’s motivation for power through “Three Represents” partly led to factionalism and thus undermined party cohesion. In this sense, the impact of formal ideology on party cohesion is decided by how formal ideology is employed.

As the major audience is the party, formal ideology is mainly constructed by communist language used by the communist elites to communicate with each other. This communist language might not be easily decoded and understood by outsiders, but it contributes to the smooth flow of relevant information within the party. For example, as seen in Chapter 2, when confronting Hua Guofeng’s “two-whatevers” argument, Deng Xiaoping launched various intra-party discussions about “the sole criterion for testing truth,” and “seek truth from facts.” In this case, when reading the relevant discourse of party documents and newspapers, the party elites who were familiar with political vocabularies could soon understand who (i.e., Deng, in this case) was going against whom (i.e., Hua) and for what (i.e., Hua’s “two-whatevers”).

On the contrary, the masses that were less educated in general and less familiar with communist vocabularies had many difficulties understanding the real meaning of those formal discourses. For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, there was intense debate within the CCP over
whether the commodity economy was compatible with the socialist planned economy. Could the masses fully understand what “socialist planned economy” and “commodity economy” were? Did they really care? In addition, the masses also had fewer channels through which to receive information about formal ideology. This was particularly true when the Internet was not yet popular. At that time, the mechanisms of ideological promotion heavily relied on party newspapers and journals, and on government meetings, which were not accessible to the masses. Indeed, the CCP’s communication with the people has usually been conducted by mass propaganda that involves populist elements such as popular slogans, as explained below.

Since the CCP was founded, it has valued the importance of mass propaganda. In the early revolutionary era, mass propaganda was heavily used by the CCP to promote the communist revolution. After the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established, such propaganda was used to mobilize the entire Chinese society to participate in mass campaigns during Mao Zedong’s rule. At that time, socioeconomic affairs were highly politicized, and ordinary people were expected to participate in those campaigns. However, mass campaigns led to long-term national chaos and economic stagnation, and thus undermined the CCP’s legitimacy. In the 1980s, after the CCP adopted Deng Xiaoping’s depoliticization approach, which emphasized economic reconstruction, mass propaganda became much less important when reform-minded leaders Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang were in charge (Brady and Wang, 2009: 771). During their leadership, there were even some kinds of open debates over whether mass propaganda should play a role in the reform era (Brady and Wang, 2009: 768, 771).

Although the popular belief in communist ideology was considered by reform-minded leaders as less critical in the 1980s, the less reform-minded leaders still stressed communist beliefs. As Chapter 2 shows, in the early 1980s, the primary cleavage within the party changed to whether it was right for a communist party to do what it was doing and introducing elements of the capitalist system. As mentioned, the reformists constantly had to portray their economic plans in socialist terms in order to fend off attacks from the conservatives. In this context, from 1979 to 1989 the CCP produced various formal discourses to justify why its quasi-capitalist economic policies were not incompatible with the socialism principle, discussed in Chapter 2. As such, the party members were the principal audience of the CCP’s ideological work. Because of insufficient knowledge and communication channels, the masses
received very limited information about the CCP’s ideological transition. At that time, the promotion of those ideological discourses relied heavily on several party newspapers, such as the *People’s Daily*, which were not for the consumption of the masses.

Yet, the CCP’s ideological strategy gradually shifted after the protests of 1989 taught the party a painful lesson about the importance of popular beliefs. Deng Xiaoping (1989) clearly pointed out that failure to maintain popular beliefs was “the biggest mistake” of his reform. Learning from the protest of 1989, and heeding Deng’s warning, the CCP leaders gradually turned the CCP’s ideological work from the party to the society, and mass propaganda became a renewed focus for the CCP. The main goal of ideological work also shifted from justifying why communist rule adopted quasi-capitalist economic policies (for maintaining party cohesion) to addressing the negative consequences of rapid growth (for popular legitimacy). This shift is reflected in two ways: the popularization of formal ideology and the increasing production of informal ideology.

Previously, formal ideology was not produced for the consumption of the masses, but nowadays it is increasingly produced for that purpose. For example, Hu Jintao’s “Scientific Outlook of Development” strongly signals to the masses where China is going and what the country will look like in the future. “Scientific Outlook of Development” includes more elements of populist language than previous ideological banners, such as the “primary stage of socialism” and “Three Represents.” This tendency is also accompanied by the development of technology and the CCP’s reforms. Nowadays, the masses can assess political information from the Internet very easily and information about the CCP also becomes more transparent. The smooth flow of information to the masses and their increasing educational qualifications led to a tendency to popularize formal ideological discourses, as Chapter 5 discusses.

More importantly, since 1989 the CCP has made further efforts in its political and ideological education for the masses. As mentioned, the danger of changing social values toward liberal democracy was clearly evidenced by the protests of 1989. The party has gradually realized that its ideological problems do not only include the justification of communist rule within itself, but also justification of its one-party rule to society. In this context, the CCP has produced various informal ideological discourses to discredit liberal democracy for justifying its one-party rule, as the following section discusses.
1.5.2 Informal ideology: legitimizing the authoritarian rule by delegitimizing alternatives

As mentioned, informal ideology justifies authoritarian rule to the entire Chinese society; thus, informal ideology is formed by populist language that is more convincing to the masses – as opposed to formal ideology that consists of communist language. Arguably, the justification of informal ideology is a sort of negative approach that attempts to delegitimize alternative political systems – especially liberal democracy, which legitimates the current political system in reverse. In this way, the ideological legitimacy of the one-party rule is enhanced by undermining the legitimacy of liberal democracy. Specifically, various informal ideological discourses focus on justifying why China does not have to follow the (purely) Western road to liberal democracy, such as why not liberalism or constitutionalism. For example, as Chapter 5 shows, the CCP's (in)stability discourse argues that liberal democracy brings instability and chaos.

This approach also entails going back to create history to emphasize Chinese difference. For example, the proponents of the “China model” and “Chinese exceptionalism” argue that China has carved out its own path to modernization without following the West, and that China’s unique cultural heritage makes it possible for the country to have its own political system rather than liberal democracy (Kang, 2004; Pan, 2003; 2009; 2011; Wang, 2012b; Yao, 2011; Zhang, 2010; Zheng, 2010). In order to strengthen its ideological persuasiveness, informal ideology has incorporated various cultural values and patriotic elements into the socialist agenda of the CCP. For example, Jiang Zemin (2001) officially proposed combining “rule by law” with “rule by virtue” as the CCP’s governing strategy for establishing a socialist ideological and ethical system. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, this anti-liberal democracy approach becomes more explicit. A goal of the national security commission, established in 2014, is to undermine the influence of Western values in order to prevent an “Arab Spring” from occurring in China (Hayashi, 2014).

Yet, unlike formal ideology that consists of a coherent value system, informal ideology is formed by a set of relatively fleeting and incoherent values. It alone cannot replace the value system to justify the party's rules – it neither provides an ideological basis for forming certain policies nor guides the establishment of a political system. Thus, informal ideology is a kind of short-term solution that has a shelf life rather than more fundamental things – it might even be used against the CCP’s
rule in the long run. For example, if the Chinese people take China’s status as a global power for granted, they will have high expectations of China’s role in dealing with international conflicts. If the CCP fails to show it is as strong as it claims to be, its own discourse of national rejuvenation and patriotic campaigns might be used to overthrow its rule. Thus, informal ideology can only discredit liberal democracy in the short term; in the long run, changing political values might still be inevitable without a widely accepted belief system in China.

Because of different audiences and goals, the mechanisms for promoting informal ideology mainly rely on mass propaganda that is embedded into every aspect of Chinese society, such as school education, popular newspapers, movies, songs, literary works, advertising slogans, big events such as the Beijing Olympic, and others. The promotion of formal ideology employs a series of institutionalized channels, amongst others, party newspapers and journals, documents, school training, study groups, and meetings. Notably, there is no clear line between formal ideology and informal ideology. As I mentioned above, with the CCP’s increasing ideological education for the masses after 1989, the boundary between these two types of ideology in terms of function, audience, and goals becomes less clear. Table 1.1 summarizes the major distinctions between formal ideology and informal ideology discussed above.

1.6 The institutionalization of leadership succession

In addition to ideological reforms, the institutionalization of leadership succession is also crucial to the CCP’s survival. In this book, the institutionalization of leadership succession/power succession refers to “the creation and perpetuation of formal and informal guidelines that stipulate how and by whom leaders are selected and removed from power” (Frantz and Stein, 2013: 2). As mentioned, ideology and power succession are inter-related. As Chapter 5 discusses, the CCP has produced various informal ideological discourses, such as political meritocracy and traditional abdication, to justify if not legitimize its leadership succession system. More importantly, ideological battle (line struggle) is essentially a kind of power struggle. During Mao Zedong’s rule, ideological battles and power struggles were inseparable elements of mass campaigns – such as anti-rights campaigns and the Cultural Revolution. After the CCP launched its market reforms, the contradiction between the tenet of market economics and the principles of communism/socialism led
<table>
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<th>Informal ideology</th>
<th>Formal ideology</th>
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<td>• (In)stability discourse</td>
<td>• Socialist Commodity Economy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• National condition discourse</td>
<td>• Primary Stage of Socialism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Discourse of national rejuvenation and the promotion of patriotism</td>
<td>• Three Represents</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• The emphasis on virtues</td>
<td>• Scientific Outlook of Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major audience</strong></td>
<td>The entire society, including the CCP members</td>
<td>The CCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composition of languages</strong></td>
<td>Purely populist language</td>
<td>• Communist/socialist language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Populist language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discourse system</strong></td>
<td>A set of relatively incoherent and fleeting values</td>
<td>A coherent value system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Function</strong></td>
<td>• Supplement formal ideological discourse</td>
<td>• It redefines what is meant by socialism at that moment in time and thus provides an ex post facto justification to make the current political economy compatible with the CCP’s ideological basis and its commitment to socialism (i.e., justifying communist rule).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Legitimize the authoritarian rule by delegitimizing alternatives – especially liberal democracy (i.e., justifying authoritarian rule).</td>
<td>• Establish ideological orthodoxy and a leader’s credentials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanism of ideological promotion</strong></td>
<td>Mass propaganda including school education, popular newspapers, movies, songs, literary works, advertising slogans, big events such as the Beijing Olympics, etc.</td>
<td>Party newspapers and journals, documents, party school training, study groups, meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Its primary role in regime survival</strong></td>
<td>Popular legitimacy</td>
<td>Party cohesion</td>
</tr>
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to wider ideological cleavages within the party. As mentioned, the elite division seriously inhibited the CCP’s decision-making when facing the protests of 1989 and put the party on the brink of collapse. In this context, the institutionalization of power succession is crucial to minimizing the negative effects of ideological battles.

The majority of authoritarian regimes failed because of divisions in the elite rather than being overthrown by the masses, as mentioned. For an authoritarian regime, how to transfer power at the top successfully and, in the process, prevent a leadership split has always been extremely challenging. Before institutionalization, power succession in China had always been a moment of crisis and chaos, which seriously delegitimized the CCP’s rule. The purge of Mao Zedong’s successors, Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao, plunged the country into chaos. During the Cultural Revolution in particular, leadership figures were dismissed in an arbitrary way. In addition to the national upheaval brought about by power struggles, the lack of institutionalized power made the general public wary of the party and the way it operated, and thus undermined regime legitimacy.

Afraid of elite divisions and brutal power struggles, the CCP has taken great efforts to institutionalize its power-succession system. It helps the regime to reduce the negative effects of elite divisions that commonly exist in authoritarian regimes. Through institutionalization, the CCP has developed a power-succession system with Chinese characteristics, one that is capable of maintaining the unity of the leadership during transitions. Thus, this book argues that in contemporary China, the institutionalization of power succession is key to maintaining the CCP’s internal stability and ruling capacity to maintain legitimacy.

This institutionalization has significantly changed contemporary Chinese elite politics. Institutional rules have become increasingly important in selecting Chinese leaders at the expense of patron–client ties (Zeng, 2013). The selection of 18th PSC members in 2012 strongly emphasized stability among top leaders.

Although there are many doubts about the hidden intense political struggles among Chinese leaders, an undeniable fact is that the CCP has managed to maintain a critical degree of internal stability in the past two decades. The fall of top officials – Chen Xitong in Jiang Zemin’s era, Chen Liangyu and Bo Xilai in Hu Jintao’s era – suggests that power struggles within the CCP remain intense; however, the removal of those officials followed certain rules, such as trials. In Mao Zedong’s era, the interrogation of Mao’s heir apparent and PRC President Liu Shaoqi and his wife had neither a formal resolution nor a formal written document.
In this regard, the removal of those top officials is much more institutionalized now than it was in Mao’s era.

More importantly, none of the power struggles or the removal of top officials has generated a considerable level of instability and crisis compared with the cruel political purges before institutionalization. This is not to say that the current level of institutionalization is sufficient to guarantee the unity of the leadership in the long run. Of course, even institutionalized bodies can be subject to manipulation, and there are many gray areas, as shown in this book. The CCP still needs to further institutionalize its leadership-transition system in order to survive. In the long run, the CCP’s destiny is in the hands of internal consensus (i.e., party cohesion) and external support (i.e., popular legitimacy).

The core arguments raised in this book are summarized in Figure 1.1

1.7 Book outline

This book is organized as follows. Chapter 2 looks into the CCP’s concerns about its rule after Mao (from 1976 to 2012). It shows that the existential crisis has been a constant concern of the party leaders. It argues that the Chinese leaders’ concerns are generated mainly from communist ideology, Mao Zedong, and the negative effects of rapid economic growth.

Chapters 3 and 4 review and juxtapose Western and Chinese understanding on the legitimacy of the Chinese government. Chapter 3 explores the Western perspective. Its first section reviews concepts and theories of legitimacy and discusses whether Western theories can be used to analyze the case of China. The second section reviews the English-language literature on the subject. Chapter 4 examines the Chinese literature and presents an empirical study of Chinese intellectuals’ debate on legitimacy by analyzing 125 Chinese-language journal articles with “legitimacy” in the title. These two chapters reveal a wide gulf between Western and Chinese scholarship in this area.

Chapter 5 studies the topic of ideology in contemporary China. It examines formal and informal ideological discourses, the mechanisms of ideological promotion, and their effectiveness. It shows how the regime has deployed both formal and informal ideology to build popular legitimacy and maintain party cohesion, respectively.

Chapter 6 studies the issue of leadership succession in China. It discusses the institutional development of power succession during the past three decades. It argues that the institutionalization of succes-
Figure 1.1: Core arguments of this book

- Popular Legitimacy
- Party Cohesion
- Ideological Adaptation
- Institutionalization of Power Succession
- Regime Survival

- External Stability
- Internal Stability
- Interaction
- Party-society relations

- Popular Legitimacy
- Formal ideology
- Informal ideology

- Institution of power succession
- Minimize the negative effects of power struggle
- Political meritocracy
- Delegitimizing liberal democracy
- Settle intra-party ideological battles

Supplement

Society

Formal ideology

Informal ideology

Core arguments of this book

System
The Chinese Communist Party’s Capacity to Rule

...tion is key to maintaining the CCP’s internal stability and capability to maintain legitimacy.

Chapter 7 summarizes the arguments and findings of this book and their implications for China’s future.

While Fukuyama (1989) predicted Western liberal democracy to be “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” and “the final form of human government,” the ideology and political system of authoritarian rule have constantly adapted in China. China provides an invaluable case for understanding the resilience of authoritarianism and testing our established political theories. In any case, the evolution of human society in particular ideological and political systems will never come to an end.
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