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**PUBLIC POLICY MASTER THESIS**

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April 2021

**The Chinese political regime's discourse  
on democracy (from 1989 to 2021)**

**The discursive battle at the heart of a model war**

Paul Louédin

Master's Thesis supervised by Stéphanie Balme

Second member of the Jury: Gil Delannoï

Master in Public Affairs

Public administration

## **Acknowledgements.**

First of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Dean Stéphanie Balme. Throughout this year I have appreciated at the same time her academic demandingness, her patience, and her unfailing pedagogical commitment. In spite of all kinds of difficulties, she continuously encouraged me in this undertaking. Being supervised by her and working alongside her has been truly inspirational. And I thank her for having contributed to make this last year of the Master's programme the richest one on the intellectual level.

I would also like to thank the sinologist Roger Darrobers for his time and valuable insights into the origins of the liberal current in China and the influence of *guoxue* in contemporary Chinese academia.

I am also in debt to Ms. Alessia Lo-porto Lefébure for her critical review of some pages of this thesis. Her comments have enabled me to improve these points.

For having accepted to be my co-jury, I would also like to thank Professor Gil Delannoi.

I would like to pay my special regards to my friend and classmate Charles Pecheux for his interested and friendly proofreading of this entire work. His support was the final push that helped me complete this thesis. I also thank Côme Lefébure for his ultimate contribution.

As this work is the achievement of five years of learning in this institution, I finally wish to express my warm thanks to my parents for allowing me to undertake these studies.

## **Foreword.**

During my academic exchange at Tsinghua University in Beijing, the Dean of the School of International Affairs once stated that the relevance of a political regime was not assessed according to procedural criteria but according to outcome criteria. This sentence profoundly challenged both my beliefs and knowledge in political science, for the most part coming from my first-year comparative constitutional law course at Sciences Po. The Tsinghua professor's explicit, yet intriguing, discourse undermining democracy, is the starting point of this research.

As a graduate of Sciences Po's Europe-Asia campus' Bachelor's degree, of Sciences Po's Master of Public Affairs, where I specialized in public administration, and after a professional experience in public affairs, I believe that this subject lies at the crossroads of several of my interests, namely politics, public administration, ideology, communication/propaganda, discourse and Chinese politics.

### **Why should I read this research?**

This study maps the Chinese political regime's discourse on 'democracy' since 1989. Drawing on discursive analysis of speeches by Chinese government officials, official reports and articles by intellectuals or academics directly linked to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), it sets out a typology of this discourse into three categories: Marxist-Leninist, culturalist and technocratic. For each of these categories, criticisms of liberal democracy and the promotion of what the Chinese political regime considers to be its 'democratic' characteristics are identified, contextualized, and decoded.

By investigating the discursive use of the term 'democracy' and associated key notions such as 'rule of law' or 'human rights' by the Chinese political regime, this study offers some keys to comprehend its propaganda. It also sheds light on how an authoritarian regime conceives its legitimacy and discusses the dispute over universalism. Above all, by addressing the self-perception of the Chinese regime, this study provides a better understanding of the nature of the "Chinese model" and its projection in the global context of competition between democracies and authoritarianisms.

### **Key words**

Democracy, authoritarianism, ideology, propaganda, discourse/discursive power

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# I. Introduction

## 1. 1. Research background

As an exchange student in China in 2017, I had the opportunity to visit the Binhai Library in Tianjin, a coastal city near Beijing. Inside the futuristic and grandiose architecture of this library, white shelves spiral up to the top of a huge atrium. Smartphones abound in this space dedicated to reading, taking selfies against the backdrop of book covers. But upon closer inspection, one realizes that these covers are in fact a sham. All the books are stored in other rooms that the uninitiated visitor does not know about.

The Binhai Library can be interpreted as a symbol of the Chinese model promoted by the Chinese leadership, impressive and seductive in its appearance, but potentially deceiving on closer inspection. The Chinese government, through propaganda, seeks above all to exert the same capacity of fascination as that exerted on Chinese visitors to this library.

It is precisely this manufacturing of illusions that fascinates me. As a theatre lover, I am particularly interested in the manufacturing of narrative and its staging. In a world where authorities' structures are delegitimized and fake news is rife, the concept of truth is central to the contemporary political world.

This quest for truth requires us to uncover the arguments of the discourses, to contextualize the representations and to examine their ideological background. The present study is intended to contribute to this genealogy process.

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*“China's socialist democracy is the broadest, most genuine, and most effective democracy to safeguard the fundamental interests of the people.”*

Xi Jinping, 19<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress, 2017

With this statement made at the opening session of the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Chinese President Xi Jinping not only claims the democratic essence of the current Chinese political system, but goes even further by asserting that this political system is the most democratic. This claim of superiority is expressed in relation to liberal democracy. What is the Chinese political regime talking about when it speaks of democracy?

In the United States' public opinion, the first ideas associated with China concern the nature of its political system (Pew Research Center, 2021). In most American's people minds, China is a “dictatorship”, characterized by its “lack of freedoms” and its “infringement of human rights” (ibid.). Europeans seem to have the most negative opinion of China's action regarding respect of individual liberties and consider that China has a negative effect on democracy in other countries (Pew Research Center, 2020). China's claim to be democratic seems at best incomprehensible, at worst ridiculous to most Western public opinion.

The most common representation of two political systems, democracy and authoritarianism, whose ideal-typical representations in the Weberian sense, would be as follows: democracy

where the power would be the emanation of the general will and authoritarianism where the government would maintain its authority over the people by oppression and whose respective connotations would be conversely positive, still dominate the Western perspective. By claiming to be democratic while attacking other democracies, the Chinese government undermines this representation of two antagonistic systems encapsulated in the "democracy versus authoritarianism" phrase.

Recently, the news offered concrete examples of the Chinese struggle for ideological competition with liberal democracies. One can think of the Chinese government's disinformation campaign led in Europe during the Covid-19 crisis as outlined by the European External Action Service (EEAS) report (EEAS, 2020), or latest debates surrounding the licensing of the Chinese international news channel CGTN in Europe, which illustrate well the acceleration of the Chinese government's investment in worldwide media battlefield since the creation of China Global Television Network (CGTN) in 2016. Information warfare is an essential component of a more global Chinese strategy consisting in strengthening its discursive power to assert its narrative on the international stage. The dominant theme of the Chinese narrative concerns the promotion of its development model, of which the core is its political system. Therefore, the study of the Chinese political regime's claim to democracy becomes all the more crucial as it carries a major geopolitical stake for the shaping of world politics in the years to come.

The aim of this study is to map and understand the current Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy. It intends to study the usage of the word and uncover the Party's understanding of it. In doing so, it aims to provide a semantic decoding grid of all the Chinese political propaganda material. By focusing solely on the Chinese political regime standpoint, this study aims to shift the perspective on how democracy is assessed in order to better understand the assaults it faces on a global scale.

The discourse issuer is the Chinese political regime understood in a broad sense as its leaders, state agencies and intellectuals directly affiliated to the Party. Public, official and intellectual discourses are accordingly mobilized. More specifically, this study conducts a descriptive analysis of opinion pieces by party cadres or affiliated scholars published in *Qiushi*, the Journal of the Party, official documents from the State Council such as white papers, speeches by Chinese presidents at CCP national congresses since 1989, and speeches by the current General Secretary President Xi Jinping. The recipient of this discourse is understood in a broad sense as the whole world since the discursive contexts of each discourse studied are not considered and the Chinese political regime's discourse has a consistency whether it is intended for internal or external use. The theoretical framework (II.) and methodological choices (IV.) will be further explained. To better comprehend the current discourse of the Chinese political regime, this study takes as its starting point the Tiananmen demonstrations in June 1989, which led the CCP to undertake a change in status from a "revolutionary Party" to a "Party in power" (Brady, 2008). Over the last three decades, the Chinese political system has undergone deep changes that have consequently changed the way it represents itself. This chronological perspective will provide a better contextualization of the current discourse of the China.

## 1.2 Practical and theoretical relevance of this study

The significance of this research is twofold. From a policy perspective, this study can help to better comprehend the global rising critical discourse contesting democracy and its universal values.

This study can provide a better picture of the global critical discourse contending with democracy and its universal values. This recourse to discursive power by anti-democratic forces undermines the dominant narrative of democracy hitherto espoused by the West. The development of Russia Today in Europe is a good example of such ambition. The performative power of discourse is discussed more in depth in the Theoretical framework (II.).

The Chinese political regime similarly developed its discourse dissemination capabilities. In the media field, the Chinese leadership created a state-owned global broadcasting group called CGTN in 2016. CGTN's expansion, together with the investment in the international intellectual and media sphere by Chinese intellectuals directly affiliated with the Party or supporting the regime, through conferences at world-class universities, debates in the international media, or the translation of their publications, is in line with the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s political agenda to extend its influence over information in a global scope. The case of Zhang Weiwei, professor of international relations at Fudan University, is emblematic (IV. Research design). This study can therefore contribute to expand knowledge in the field of Chinese disinformation.

In this respect, it can humbly serve the work of the services working on the danger of information manipulation for democracies, namely the Policy Planning Staff (Centre d'analyse, de prévision et de stratégie), known as CAPS, or the Institute for Strategic Research (Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École militaire), known as IRSEM. As the investment of the discursive field by powers hostile to Western democracies does not only concern France, this study is particularly relevant in the context of the European fight against disinformation. As such, the EEAS Strategic Communication Department might find it of interest. Understanding the counter-narrative carried by the PRC with the core issue of the nature of the political regime, appears even more strategic as European democracies are facing a crisis of internal mistrust with the development of populism.

From a theoretical point of view, this study covers four different issues.

First, it raises the issue of representation in politics. The comparison between liberal democracy and socialist democracy will reflect the conventional understanding of Marxist democracy. The evolution of the institutional arrangements of the CCP should especially allow us to study how the Chinese political regime updates the traditional Marxist conception of democracy and translates it into concrete terms.

Then, it addresses the dispute over universalism and the related issues of what constitutes modernity. The Chinese political regime is asserting itself as the spearhead of the contestation of universal values promoted by Western democracies. Studying its discourse should allow a better understanding of the argumentation underpinning the discontent of universalism. In contrast, it should reveal the narrative developed by the PRC on its alternative development to Western modernization.

This study should also help to contextualize the issues of political power legitimacy in the context of an authoritarian regime. It should provide a better understanding of how authoritarian power conceives its legitimacy beyond the traditional conception of authoritarianism based solely on the use of force.

In this regard, this research also engages with the performative dimension of discourse as it uncovers the articulation of a narrative that serves the legitimization of a political authority, i.e. the CCP. It casts light on the articulation of a narrative in the service of the legitimization of a political power on the domestic level with the CCP, and on the international scene, with the projection of the Chinese model.

The theoretical contribution of this study will be further detailed in the Literature review (III.).

This study will cover the period from 1989 to the present days. The Tiananmen square's protests (April-June 1989) constitutes a turning point in the way the party projects itself.

From being a revolutionary party, it now sees itself as a party in power (Brady, 2008). In addition, in contrast to the dominant teleological perspective, which considers the forthcoming spread of the liberal democracy model to the rest of the world as an inevitable movement after the fall of the Soviet bloc (Fukuyama, 1992), Chinese leaders have decided to continue the authoritarian path.

Between 1989 and today, the Chinese political system has undergone profound reforms and institutional adaptations that have, among other things, renewed its democratic centralism. Xi Jinping's arrival in power also coincides with an unprecedented investment in the discursive field in the service of a vision now destined for the world, the China dream.

### 1.3. Research question and sub-questions

The analysis of the Chinese leadership's discourse on democracy between 1989 and 2021 will be directed toward answering the following overarching question:

- What is the Chinese government's discourse on democracy?

In order to answer this general research question, we will have to answer the following sub-questions:

- What are the critiques addressed to liberal democracy by the Chinese political regime?
- What are the democratic characteristics that the Chinese government is putting forward?
- How has the Chinese discourse on democracy evolved since 1989?
- What do they reveal about the way the Chinese political regime conceives its 'social contract'?

## II. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Characterizing democracy in China

The Liberal Democratic Movement in China: From its Origins to the Present

Constitutionalist theories appeared at the end of the 19th century in China. The cultural and political system of China is identified by Chinese intellectuals, such as the reformist Kang Youwei, as one of the main causes of the defeat of China against Japan in 1895. According to some Chinese high civil servants, the solution was to introduce elements of Western modernity, of which constitutionalism was the symbol.

The term “democracy” (minzhu, 民主), first appeared in 1864 in the words of the translator of Henry Wheaton's *Elements of International Law* (Wei, 2018). Chinese author Liang Qichao, in translating Western political thought, introduces the concept of Western democracy. The Confucian perspective can be seen in the choice of translating “democracy” as “minzhu” (民主), literally “people” (min, 民) and “leader, ruler” (zhu, 主), i.e. “ruler of the people”. In accordance with the holistic conception of the state and society prevailing in China in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the translator retains a partial understanding of democracy, i.e. the idea that the leader can be chosen by the people.

Chinese constitutionalism does not consider individualism. The relationship between the state and the people is not one of opposition but of harmony in accordance with the heritage of Confucianism. There is no separation between society and the state. The rights of the people are the right to welfare, to subsistence; the people are made to participate in the state to make it stronger.

The May 4th 1919 people's movement, drawing inspiration from European Enlightenment ideas, introduced and defended liberal democratic ideas in China and demanded democracy as a political system. The protesters used a purely phonetic transcription of the word (demokelaxi, 德谟克拉西). Later on, the heyday of the pro-democracy liberal movement in China occurred during the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of June 1989. The previous period, the Beijing Spring (1978-1989), was a moment of relative political openness but also of self-questioning of the leaders concerning the future of the Chinese political regime (Béja, 2004). The liberal movement, although heterogeneous and exploratory (Pei, 2006), agreed on the contestation of Chinese authoritarian rule. The poster entitled “*Where is the fifth modernization?*” by Chinese political dissident Wen Jingsheng illustrates this demand for democracy.

The year 1989 marked a turning point in the Chinese liberal-democratic movement. If until then the protest camp was on the side of democracy in China, many Chinese intellectuals eventually abandoned their liberal ideas of New Enlightenment and became skeptical about the so-called Western path as a model of China (Wang, 2006). As authoritarianism strengthened in China, proponents of political liberalism were then doomed to become marginalized (Béja, 2004).

The modernity debate, which had already been raised at the time of May 4, 1919, and which was once again on the agenda after the economic opening inaugurated by Deng in 1978, was then settled by the regime. Before 1989, the debate was split between two positions: the proponents of China's “westernization”, favouring the adoption of Western values and

institutions, and the proponents of an instrumental and selective approach of modernization, aiming at emulating Western technological superiorities (Wang, 2006). The Chinese political system opts for the latter approach.

Chinese socialist democracy

The democratic claim of the current Chinese political regime is embedded in its original Marxist-Leninist ideological and institutional DNA. Already in 1940, Mao distinguished in his piece called ‘On New Democracy’, the ‘New Democracy’ from the “Old Democracy”. The “Old democracy” referred to the parliamentary system of the Western nations, which was accused of being an instrument to promote the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The new democracy, on the contrary, is to be found in centralism.

The Chinese leadership remained faithful to its Marxist-Leninist inspired institutional organisation. Democratic centralism was already the core principle of the Leninist political project (Colas, 1998). The concept is intended to ensure the implementation of the unity of will principle. This principle is called 'democratic' because the leading centre of the legal party apparatus is elected. Each higher level of the party organisation is elected by the lower level. In return, strict obedience from each lower level and unanimous implementation of decisions are expected. Military discipline is the operating condition of democratic centralism. It is not only a type of organisation but a model of relationship between the party and, according to the Marxist vulgate, the masses. The party thus replaces the state as the locus of sovereignty and political legitimacy.

According to the CCP Constitution, democratic centralism “*is both the fundamental principle of Party organization and the implementation of the mass line in Party activity*”. Article 3 of the 1982 Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) enshrines it as the Party's *modus operandi*. “Democracy” has consistently been claimed as a value and goal of the CCP. In this respect, it was elevated under President Xi Jinping to the second rank of the 24-character set of “Core Socialist Values” (shehui zhuyi hexin jiazhi guan, 社会主义核心价值观) at the 18th National Congress of the CCP in 2017.

If there is no doubt about the authoritarian nature of the current Chinese political regime, how does the party understand in its own words the basis of its popular legitimacy beyond its Marxist matrix?

Defining liberal democracy in the context of this study

Highlighting the different aspects of the broad concept of liberal democracy should allow for a better understanding of the critiques of this concept aimed specifically at some of its components.

The imaginary associated with “democracy” is vast and profound (Boia, 2002). Social imaginary contributes to shape institutions (Castoriadis, 1999). Athenian democracy has played a structuring role in European collective political imaginary. Democracy distinguishes itself from other political systems to the extent that power is vested in the people, as the Greek etymology of the word indicates (*demos*, people and *kratos*, power). This ideal of popular sovereignty clashes however with the need for a governable system (Manin, 1997). It is in this

tension that representative democracy, i.e. the delegation by citizens of their power to representatives, finds its origin (Constant, 1819).

In the light of contractualist philosophy, individual sovereignty is the starting point of the liberal conception of the democratic regime (Hobbes, 1651). Separation of powers has been consequently considered as a necessary condition to prevent power's infringement on individual's freedom (Montesquieu, 1748). Freedom conceived as individual property must therefore be preserved by the government by the law, i.e. the rule of law (Locke, 1689). Constitutionalism was born out of this attempt to curb the power of the state. It is based on the supremacy given to the constitution in the hierarchy of legal norms and the law (Kelsen, 1934). The philosophical tenet lying behind the human right's concept is that individuals would have some natural rights inherent to all individuals regardless of their condition (Rousseau, 1755). The contemporary acceptance of the term constitutionalism, covers a project of fulfilling fundamental rights by legal means.

Liberal democracy is therefore a political ideology and a form of government that presupposes representative democracy, pluralism, separation of powers, the existence of rule of law, market economy, guarantee of human rights and political freedoms.

“Democracy versus authoritarianism” dichotomy

Authoritarian regimes, the Chinese political regime in the first place, refute this dichotomy asserting an intrinsic difference between the democratic regime and their regime. This contestation is grounded in the claim that their actions are approved by their population. Therefore, this dichotomy is denounced as a Western normative assumption.

The failed attempt to export democracy combined with the rise of illiberal regimes led to a paradigm shift in political science. The durability of regimes has prompted scholars in political science to question the mechanisms that underpin the legitimacy of these regimes. From the study of the establishment of democratization, we moved to the study of the conditions of stability of a regime with governance.

In *Democracy and Totalitarianism* (1968), Raymond Aron distinguishes liberal democracies, characterized by a constitutional-pluralist system, and authoritarian regimes, where one party claims the monopoly of political power. After a spreading phase at the turn of the 20th Century (Boia, 2002) and its supposed triumph following the collapse of the Eastern soviet bloc in the 1990s (Fukuyama, 1992), liberal democracies entered a defensive phase facing the growing influence of authoritarian regimes (Diamond, 2016). From the study of democratization processes, political science has today turned to the analysis of de-democratization processes. How to explain this shift?

In the 1980s, transitology, the study of the transition from one regime to another, focused on the conditions of transition from an authoritarian to a democratic regime (O'Donnell, 1986). The political context of the 1980s-1990s made democratization a universal political goal, a moral value and a central theoretical framework (Dufy, 2013). Amartya Sen' promotion of democracy is based on a consequentialist argument that considers that famines cannot occur in democracies (Sen, 1981). This normative vision has influenced the institutional reform agenda of international institutions in recent years.

The empirical failure of transitions - observed at the turn of the 2000s in many countries such as the former USSR or countries in sub-Saharan Africa - has led to a reconsideration of transitology at the theoretical level, or at least the use that has been made of it (Carothers, 2002). Faith in the ability of democracy to bring prosperity has faded, and it has been found, for example, that the establishment of simple democratic procedures can sometimes increase political violence (Collier, 2008). Several scholars therefore postulate the existence of a grey zone where many states are stuck, oscillating between two extreme types of regime, authoritarianism and democracy. Several terms have been used to characterize this type of regime, such as illiberal democracies (Zakaria, 1997), competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky, 2002), hybrid regimes (Diamond, 2002) and electoral authoritarianism (Schedler, 2006).

In the academic field, state stability studies now prevail over democratic transition studies. The sustainability of a political regime is posed in terms of rules' institutionalization and considered in a historicized perspective of "path dependency" (Stark 1998). The American political scientist Francis Fukuyama identifies three pillars of a state's stability: its modernity and strength, its obedience to the rule of law, and its accountability (Fukuyama, 2011). In parallel, the discourse of international institutions is evolving. The term 'governance' was first used in a World Bank report to describe the need for institutional reform and a better and more efficient public sector in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 1989). "Good governance" is broadly defined as the "*exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels*" (UNDP, 1997). It focuses on what makes institutions and rules more effective and efficient. "Good governance" now takes precedence over "democracy" as the political goal promoted by international institutions.

The study of authoritarian regimes through the prism of repression evolves into the study of other modes of legitimization of authoritarian regimes. Scholars try to understand how authoritarian regimes create a popular consensus. More precisely, they analyze the modalities of political regulation and the articulation state-society and state-economy in authoritarian contexts (Wintrobe, 1998) or the efforts to co-opt the opposition and solicit cooperation from society (Gandhi, 2008).

This echoes the question of the legal philosopher Carlos Nino about the legitimacy of democracy: "*Is the value of democracy instrumental or intrinsic?*" (Nino, 1996). In other words, it is the capacity of democratic regimes to meet people's aspirations that is challenged by authoritarian regimes.

## 2.2. Discursive power to change democracy's representation

The Chinese political regime's enhancement of its discursive power (3.3.) harbors a performative intent. Discourses contribute to the construction of reality from the perspective of social constructivism. In the contest for discourse on the international scene, the organization of the world social order is therefore at stake. The elaboration of a Chinese narrative about its development path is used to legitimize its political model both internally and externally. By investing in the representation of democracy, the Chinese leadership intends to transform international political standards that were previously dominated by those of liberal democracy.

The relationship between power and discourse has been emphasized by the work of postmodernist authors. Discursive power is framed within the conception of power identified

by Lukes whereby power consists of “*shaping, influencing or determining others’ beliefs and desires, thereby securing their compliance*” (Lukes, 2004).

Performative dimension of discourse can organize social order. From a constructivist perspective, the world does not exist as an objective reality. Rather, the “reality” is historically and socially constructed (Wendt, 1999). In an even more radical view of constructivism, the world itself does not exist outside the representation we have of it. The world is “a spectacle seen from within” (Latour, 1979). From this point of view, it can be argued that discourses are not simply representations of the reality but discursive activities or “speech acts”, i.e. means implemented by a speaker to act on his environment through his words (Searle, 1969; Austin, 1975) and that seek to construct the social reality.

If the world exists independently of language, our knowledge of the world's reality is inconceivable without language (Campbell, 1988). Thus, language or discourse refers to not only the articulation of ideas but also the contention of what constitutes the reality.

Speech acts are social performances that operate on social representations (Onuf, 1989). Representations govern actions “*We shall assume that what each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by himself or given to him.*” (Lippmann, 1922).

It is this performative dimension of discourse that makes it a power stake. This assumption to not only describe, but also organize the social order, associates discursive power with strategies of domination or resistance. Discursive power can legitimize or delegitimize a social order. Consequently, the production of discourse is always a locus of confrontation. In any society, the production of discourse is therefore controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures (Foucault, 1972).

Power is exercised within the discourses. Discursive power focuses not only on how to act towards a subject, but rather on how to think and talk about it. Discourses are the agents of power. As Hayden White asserts, discourse aims to “*constitute the ground whereon to decide what shall count as a fact in the matter under consideration and to determine what mode of comprehension is best suited to understanding of the facts thus constituted*” (White, 1978). Power is exercised within discourses, in that their content determines the representations of the subjects it aims to govern. They do not only express struggles or systems of domination, but also what we are fighting for, the power we are trying to seize (Foucault, 1972).

Discursive power is grounded in the possession of an institutional framework for the dissemination of discourse. The conditions for the implementation of discursive power are numerous. They depend on the capacity to produce a coherent discourse and to disseminate it. Discourse production is a contentious issue. The production of discourse is associated with institutional domination (Foucault, 1972).

The use of discursive power in international relations has developed with the strategic narratives framework. The international order or world order is about the distribution of power and authority among the political actors on the global stage (Falk, 2014). Strategic narrative provides a meta-narrative for the leading advocates of an order to shape the behavior of the actors within the international system. It thus allows to build “*a shared meaning of the past,*

*present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors*” (Roselle, 2014). In this regard, the development of master narratives is setting up “routines” and “normalize” them to “*constrain and delineate the agency of subjects*” (Damberg, 2004). Counter-narrative building does not necessarily mean a complete rejection of the main narrative but entails both complicity and countering of the main narrative (ibid.).

Therefore, the Chinese political regime's advocacy of democracy seems to reflect the counter-narrative's construction process identified by Damberg (2004). Without utterly rejecting the dominant narrative establishing democracy as a positive value (1.1.), the Chinese government invests the democratic theme in complicity and countering. By making the theme its own, the aim is to devitalize the initial meaning and give it another characterization. In this way, the Chinese political regime strives to fill the social representation of democracy. Since representations govern actions (Lippman, 1922) and its power to disseminate its narrative is global, it aims to change the norms of the international social order (Foucault, 1972).

### III. Literature review

Before focusing on the words of the Chinese political regime, a general picture of different aspects related to democracy in China was necessary to both better understand the government's discourse and to be able to keep a critical eye on it. Tracing the genealogy of the Chinese liberal movement confirmed that 1989 was the right starting point for this study. The literature on human rights highlighted that there is a discourse of rights claims in historical China that is not the same as the vision now held by the government. The debate in political science on China concerning the appropriation of rights by citizens is clearly visible in studies on the relationship between society and the state. The literature agrees that there is no autonomous civil society in China. This very negative picture of the aspects related to democracy in China made the claim of the Chinese political regime even more intriguing to me. My research is complementary to this critical work on the different aspects of democracy in China. It aims to present the Party's vision on these different elements (human rights, state/society-civil society relationship) and to understand how the Party conceives the democratic nature of its approach in these areas.

#### 3.1. China and democracy: An explosive relationship

##### Genealogy of the Chinese liberal democratic movement

Several China scholars tried to document the genesis of the Chinese liberal democratic movement. The collective work *La Chine et la démocratie* directed by Delmas-Marty carries out a historical and cultural assessment of the democratic political resources that have existed within Chinese society, and that would be in line with modern practice of political liberalism (Delmas-Marty, 2007). Jean-Philippe Béja traces the evolution of the liberal movement for democracy from the 11 May 1919 movement to the 4 June 1989 demonstrations (Béja, 2004). The Tiananmen demonstrations are largely seen as the modern tipping point for the expression of the liberal movement in China. Studies of this moment have focused on the attempts of Chinese intellectuals to influence political reform in favor of democracy (Goldman, 2005), first-hand account of the student demonstrations and crackdown in Tiananmen square (Cunningham, 2014), investigating state-society relationship in the 1980s (Zhao, 2008), or even regarding the

impact of the reforms on the relation between Chinese socialist state and society post 1989 people's movement in Beijing (Pieke, 1996).

Human Rights

Svensson traces the concept of human rights in Chinese political discourse from the late Qing dynasty through to the end of the twentieth century and argue that human rights are not an alien concept to China's (Svensson, 2002). The question of Chinese conception of human rights has also been raised with an account of the development of Chinese rights discourse reaching back to the 17th and 18th century (Angle, 2002), or in relation to the influences of Confucianism, republicanism or Marxism (Weatherley, 1999). China's engagement with the international human rights regime has also been documented (Kent, 2013). Conversely, some work has focused on identifying human rights abuses by the Chinese political regime (Austin, 2014).

The issue of human rights in China is linked to the awareness of individual rights.

“Rights consciousness” versus “rules consciousness”

Amidst the rise of protests in China, an academic debate has divided scholars studying China. The question has been whether these protests reflect a rights consciousness on the part of protesters that would demand participation in the law-making process and lead to potential rule change (O'Brien, 2006) or whether it is merely a consciousness of rules that does not imply either mistrust of the legitimacy of existing rules or a demand for participation in rule or law making (Perry, 2009). This debate has been summarized in the opposition between “rights consciousness” and “rule consciousness” (Li, 2010). The issue was to explain the rise and apparent routinization of social protests in China.

On the one hand, some scholars have argued for the emergence of a rights consciousness in China. O'Brien and Li note that peasants are mobilizing on all sorts of issues regarding their rights. They argue that there is a “rightful resistance” in China. That is, by referring to the promises of the central state, protesters would try to locate and exploit divisions within the state (O'Brien, 2006). In the same vein, *Political Rights in Post-Mao China* provides an engaging overview of political changes in China in the later decades of the twentieth century and early years of the twenty-first century, highlights the growing rights consciousness movement among China's citizens and stresses a continuity between urban intellectuals' demands for political rights disseminate to mass demonstrations held by workers or farmers (Goldman, 2007).

In contrast, some scholars defended that rule consciousness prevails in China. The routinized contentious bargaining between the government and ordinary people since the 1990s has even been analyzed as a remedy for the weaknesses of the Chinese political system (Chen, 2011). Elizabeth Perry offers a historical and cultural perspective on the notion of “rights” in China. Relying on Confucian notion of the “mandate of heaven”, she argues that the conception of “rights” in China differs from the Anglo-American meaning. In this context, rights-based demands in China's contemporary seem less politically threatening to the stability of the regime. Protests are thus seen as an integral part of the relationship between the state and Chinese society, and this capacity to absorb demands is enhancing regime adaptability (Perry, 2008).

This debate about the appropriation of rights by Chinese citizens is fundamental to the study of state-society relations in China, whether it concerns the evolution of forms of representation, the labor movement or NGOs.

The non-civil society-state

The CCP uses village elections as an argument to promote the democratic nature of the regime. Collectivization and decentralization under Deng from the 1980s onwards gave more power to local cadres. The problems of corruption and land expropriation caused by this new situation led the Party to promote a kind of village self-management with the promulgation of the “Organic Law on Village Committees” in 1998. The Chinese village elections offered a good illustration of the “right consciousness” versus “rule consciousness” debate. Some scholars stressed the empowering effect of village elections in China arguing that villagers were now able to remove unresponsive cadres leading to higher level of political efficiency (Li, 2003). Yet, others pointed out that the village leaders’ power was so restricted that village elections in China could only be qualified as procedural democracy (O’Brien, 2009). Democratization depending on the power configuration in which elected bodies are embedded, the Chinese village elections could accordingly not be considered as a clue of Chinese leadership’s inclination to political liberalization. Both sides agree that the implementation of village elections increased regime legitimacy. Far from bringing pressure on local officials and the institutional order, social stability and the quality of local governance have been translated in overall regime legitimacy (Schubert, 2007).

Social conflicts and the striving for individual rights

After the reforms of decentralization and withdrawal of the state from the economy, the policy framework of “fragmented authoritarianism” (Lieberthal, 1992), offers spaces for autonomy, gaps for negotiation on the part of policy entrepreneurs. The fragmented authoritarianism framework considers that the policy arena is governed by incremental change via bureaucratic bargaining (Lee, 2013).

The lack of a formal separation between state and society makes the status of NGOs extremely fragile. Ching Kwan Lee and Yuan Shen raise the issue of NGOs’ cooptation by the state. Chinese NGOs insist on a purely legalistic consciousness of rights preventing workers to address any substantial challenge to the order. By making NGOs auxiliaries of the party state, the Chinese state prevents the emergence of civil society (Lee, 2011). NGOs develop by being the agents of the Chinese political system. Le même phénomène est observé en ce qui concerne le mouvement ouvrier. Chris King-chi Chan et Elaine Sio-leng Hui (2014) argue that, driven by growing labor protests, the collective negotiation in China is undergoing a transition, from “collective consultation as a formality”, through a stage of “collective bargaining by riot,” and towards “party state-led collective bargaining”. In contrast to this pessimistic view, disguised collective action would exist, i.e. strategies to organize collectively and counter the atomization of collective action (Fu, 2017). Under certain conditions, some of the social actors could even act as catalysts for collective action in China (Froissart, 2014).

Ultimately, these types of revolts do not build broad solidarity that challenges the inapplicability of the law. They do not question the political system in the name of higher

principles. The entry of new actors into the legislative process has thus served to consolidate the party-state's authority. Additionally, the pluralization of the law-making process is dominated by a technocratic form of representation, depriving the broad public of their right to political participation (Froissart, 2019).

### 3.2. Since 1989: the building of a strong centralized state

Before working on the discourses of the Chinese political regime, I also drew on political science on the nature of the regime and its evolution since 1989. This work gave me several lines of thought and reading keys to approach the texts of the Chinese political regime. These readings concerned the administrative reforms undertaken by the central state, the state through law and constitutionalism, the Party and the question of resilient authoritarianism. In the same way as for the democratic elements mentioned above, my research is complementary to this literature. Indeed, it shows how the Party conceives itself in its own words, beyond the critical evaluation of these institutions. The power of words in the construction of the regime is all the more important in a social constructivist prism. In addition, although my study is not intended to take a position in the debate on the democratization or sustainability of Chinese authoritarianism, it does highlight the elements that the Party claims to invest in to ensure the sustainability of its system.

#### Central state's administrative reforms

Since Deng's opening of the economy in the 1980s, the CCP has modernized its administrative apparatus. The government has drawn inspiration from the new methods of public management at the global level. This quest for a scientific management of the administration is part of the technocratic movement characteristic of modern societies, increasing industrialization and rapid technological development called for the exercise of power by "technical experts", according to Howard Scott, the American engineer who coined the term. Although the term "technocracy" was introduced in China by the sociologist Li Cheng in the 1930s, it was not until the 1980s that the Chinese version of the term was officially established (Balme, 2004).

To implement economic reforms, the Chinese state apparatus needed to be streamlined and adapted to the requirements of the market economy. Like in most western countries, the Chinese administration characterized by Weberian bureaucracy based on legal authority and by command and control according to the Old Public Administration pattern now incorporates New Public Management (NPM) and post-NPM methods (Lee, 2001). NPM frames organizational forms in economic terms such as efficiency and effectiveness (Peters, 2003). The new management methods are incorporated in a layering process resulting in new hybrid organizational forms (Tian, 2019). This process takes place in a context of international dissemination of NPM and post-NPM approaches.

The state's managerial modernization has been based on the upgrading of the political-administrative elite (Balme, 2004). The professionalization of party-state cadres is evident in the greater technicality of training for public affairs careers. The introduction of the Harvard Kennedy School's Master of Public Administration (MPA) in China (Lo Porto-Lefébure, 2020), or within the party school itself (Tran, 2007), attest to this trend. However, if the Chinese public administration has moved up the skills ladder by drawing inspiration from American

administrative training courses, the fact remains that Western values or ideas deemed harmful by the party do not influence those who are destined for the public service. On the contrary, this group of highly educated cadres perpetuates the hegemony of the Party-State (Tran, 2007). However, if the Chinese public administration has upgraded its expertise by drawing inspiration from American administrative training courses (Lo Porto-Lefébure, 2020).

The sociologist Zang Xiaowei highlights the ability of the Chinese political technocracy to co-opt intellectuals and professionals into power circles (Zhang, 1999). The alliance of bureaucrats and technocrats makes the Chinese political regime a very stable polity (ibid.). The legitimation of the CCP is therefore partly a result of the recruitment of its elites (Lin, 2020). In supporting the transition to a market economy and making the Chinese state “more efficient, service-oriented and disciplined” (ibid.), the administrative reforms of the 1980’s and 1990’s have thus consolidated the CCP by providing it with the capacity to meet the new challenges of Chinese development (Dali, 2004).

#### Rule by law and socialist constitutionalism

The CCP has created a “legal-rational state” in which law becomes an “ultimate instrument” for legitimizing the regime (Balme, 2007). The search for economic efficiency has guided the conception of legal reforms since the 1980s (Balme, 2004), reflecting the Hayek’ statement that a market economy should be a law-based (Hayek, 1960).

The transformation of the planned economy has led to an acceleration of legal reform in the perspective of China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (Choukroune, 2007). Yet, Chinese law is becoming more internationalized in a very selective way. Some thus observe an asymmetry in the reception of Western legal norms, depending on whether they concern business law or human rights (Delmas-Marty, 2007).

The impotence of the Chinese Constitution (Zhang, 2010) prevents the advent of constitutionalism in China. Donald Clarke says that “*the Constitution does not in fact constitute*” (Clarke, 2003). The crackdown on law professors who publicly expressed their support for constitutionalism in 2013 shows that the trend is not about to be reversed (Creemers, 2015). The development of the Chinese legal system remains primarily a Weberian process of rational institutionalization that is confined to a procedural and formal rule by law (Peerenboom, 2002).

#### CCP

The CCP party-state is the cornerstone of the Chinese political system. From an historical perspective, the CCP has been referred to as an “*organization emperor*” (Zheng Yongnian, 2010). The adaptive governance of the CCP is attributable to its revolutionary origins (Heilman, 2011). Such flexibility would have allowed it to achieve an ideological transition from Marxist ideology to economic pragmatism (ibid.). Although the CCP’s ability to adapt to circumstances is acknowledged, the CCP is simultaneously suspected of atrophying (Shambaugh, 2008). Chinese leader Xi Jinping has unleashed a powerful set of political and economic reforms centralizing the power under Xi’s authority and fostering the expansion of the Communist Party’s role in Chinese political, social, and economic life (Economy, 2018) and its stance continues to be consolidated (Zheng, 2020).

The work on the CCP is underpinned by the question of the democratization or resilience of the political regime.

China's democratization is a theme widely addressed by political science on China. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and eastern European communism, the CCP was thought to not be able to sustain itself (MacFarquhar, 1991). The 1989 Tiananmen crisis has been interpreted as the result of the legitimacy crisis precipitated by the CCP trying to liberalize the economy while preventing political reforms (Ding, 1994).

The fragility of the Chinese political system (Shirk, 2007) has fuelled conjectures about the fall of the CCP and the advent of a Chinese democracy (Gilley, 2004). Several criticisms are levelled at the Chinese political system. The top down structure of the Leninist state is said to be incapable of hearing and responding to social needs and demands (Shambaugh, 2008). China is said to be in the grip of a trapped transition where the growing tensions between an increasingly pluralist society and the autocratic nature of political and administrative institutions are unsustainable (Min, 2006). An article by David Shambaugh predicting the doom of the Chinese political system has been the subject of much discussion among analysts of Chinese politics (Zheng, 2020). In this article published in the Wall Street Journal in March 2015, the American sinologist identified more broadly 5 indications of regime's vulnerability and CCP systemic witnesses: 1. China's economic elite are beginning to leave the country, 2. Political repression has intensified under Xi, regime loyalists are increasingly feigning compliance with the regime, 4. Xi's anti-corruption cannot eliminate the problem of corruption which is stubbornly rooted in the party system and 5. China's economy is stuck in a series of systemic traps.

Resilient authoritarianism

Despite the weaknesses of the Chinese political system discussed above, the resilience and stability of the political system is evident. Bruce Dickson observes that the CCP enjoys widespread popular support (Dickson, 2016).

Many works have been devoted to the understanding of the evolution of Chinese authoritarianism. Chinese economic reforms brought about the decentralization and withdrawal of the state from the economy and created space for gaps for negotiation on the part of different social actors. This "fragmented authoritarianism" (Lieberthal, 2004) would explain the policy arena as being governed by incremental change via bureaucratic bargaining (Mertha, 2009). China's extended stability in the 1990s resulted from a set of changes in China's state-society relations (Zhao, 2001).

The resilience of the Chinese political system has been the source of various interpretations. Such explanations go beyond the classical analysis of the legitimacy of authoritarianism based on coercion. The legitimization of the CCP's authority has been attributed to the renewed use of discourse by the CCP since the Tiananmen protests (Sandby-Thomas, 2011). The strength of the party-state also lies in its capacity to adapt (Laliberte, 2008), which has enabled it to overcome a number of crises from 1978 to the present (Lai, 2016). From this point of view, the Chinese model could be conceived as "pragmatic authoritarianism" (ibid.).

The CCP is updating the principle of democratic centralism qualified as “consultative Leninism” (Tsang, 2015). The introduction of deliberative or participatory democracy procedures (Charon, 2010), such as public hearings (He, 2018) or deliberative polls, does not seem to be part of China's democratization movement but rather an instrument at the service of power. This logic of politicization or apoliticisation implemented by the Chinese political regime is identified by other authors. Ching Kwan Lee and Yonghong Zhang find that the micro-foundations of the state's mechanisms of domination maintain instability on purpose (Lee, 2013). The commodified resolution of conflicts allows the Chinese state to depoliticize them. The instrumentalisation of this instability by the Chinese political regime paradoxically contributes to its stability (ibid.). The fundamental characteristic of CCP governance's modus operandi is therefore its ability to adapt to the needs and demands of society to respond pre-emptively (Teets, 2013). This consultative capacity of the regime would be the source of its resilience (Nathan, 2003).

Conceived in this way, this “new authoritarian equilibrium” (Cabestan, 2014), which is both capable of incorporating the different interests of society while maintaining processes of authoritarian domination (Lee, 2013), would pose a great challenge to liberal democracy (Perry, 2012).

### 3.3. Discourse of the Chinese political regime

Literature focuses on the discourse of the Chinese regime. Scholars agree that China has invested heavily in its discursive power since Xi Jinping came to power. The discourse on democracy has only been studied from the Chinese intellectuals' side, mainly those defending liberal democracy but also some who contributed to the development of the Party's philosophy, or more rarely from the Chinese citizens' side. By focusing on the words of the Chinese political regime and primarily of the CCP, this study aims to provide a new perspective on the subject.

The Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy is part of its developing capacity to disseminate discourse aimed at promoting the Chinese model. Therefore, the understanding and characterization of discursive power was essential to clearly situate the potential effects of this discourse in policy.

The Chinese political regime's investment in discursive power

The use of discursive power has been part of the CCP's DNA since its founding in 1921 (Zhao, 2016). In the post-Maoist period since 1978, ideology, propaganda, and political discourse of the CCP have continued to function as key elements of the political system of the PRC (Klimes, 2018). In recent decades, the Chinese political regime has increasingly invested in the projection capabilities of its narrative (Brady, 2015) aiming to globalize its propaganda (Kingsley, 2014). It is no longer possible to differentiate between the CCP's internal and external propaganda, as seemingly exclusively domestic ideational and discursive issues increasingly correlate with international phenomena (Klimes, 2018).

This desire to make China's voice heard (Tsai, 2017), or the “strengthening of its discourse power” (hua yu quan, 话语权) echoes the Chinese political regime's abandonment of the doctrine of low profile and instead striving for achievements on the world stage (Yan, 2014). The shift in diplomatic strategy from Deng's doctrine of “keeping a low profile” to the ambition

of President Xi Jinping to reappraise China's position in the current international order has spurred the use of discursive power by the Chinese political regime (Lams, 2018). In line with international relations theories regarding discourse as an important diplomatic asset, China's investment in its discourse deployment capabilities is part of its national grand strategy (d'Hooghe, 2014).

Many scholars, both Western and Chinese, have argued that the lack of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and political freedom in China constitute obstacles to China's image and soft power in the West (Shambaugh, 2010; Nye, 2012). Western ideology and values on democracy, human rights and the rule of law constitute the dominant narrative on the international stage (Zhao, 2016). As China has suffered from a communism-related negative image since the CCP came to power and has been portrayed as a dangerous country (Bernstein and Munro, 1997), Chinese discursive power aims to counterbalance this perception. This is President Xi Jinping's stated ambition "*To tell China story well*".

The China model: characterization and dissemination

The Chinese model has been built in opposition to the ideology and political system of the West, and the United States. This is what Joshua Cooper Ramo, Senior Consultant at Goldman Sachs and Adjunct Professor of Tsinghua University, suggested in the title of his report "The Beijing Consensus" about the "Washington Consensus" (Ramo, 2004).

The Chinese political regime wants to challenge the "liberal" political dimension of the international order based on the normative distinction between "liberal" and "illiberal" countries (Li, 2019). The aim is not to overthrow the existing international order but to reform the unequal distribution of power within international institutions (ibid.) and to redefine the norms of governance in different areas, be it climate, human rights or internet governance (Yang, 2020) or law and economic development (Chen, 2017). The dissemination of the "China story" abroad also contributes to legitimize CCP's rule internally (Lams, 2018).

The universalist dimension of the Western political model of liberal democracy is attacked by Chinese professors and intellectuals close to the regime (Wang, 2006). The East Asian model of political meritocracy, carried primarily by Singapore and China, is said to offer a cultural alternative political project to liberal democracy (Bell, 2013) echoing the Asian values promotion by the Lee Kwan Yew. The projection of the Chinese model should also be seen in relation to the global contestation of liberal democracy and the rise of authoritarianism (Diamond, 2016). From this standpoint, China would propose to the world a political project where respect for human rights and political freedoms would be absent. This is precisely what worries democracies about the Chinese desire to export its model (Economy, 2020).

The Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy

Democracy is an important component of the Chinese political discourse since the concept was introduced from the West to China in the mid-19th century. Yet, this theme has been little studied. The analysis of the CCP discourse over democracy is rarely mobilized in order to study the evolution of the Chinese political regime. The discourses on democracy of different Chinese intellectual streams have been studied from a historical perspective (Jie, 2014). Other researchers have tried to understand how democracy is understood by the Chinese

ordinary citizens (Peng, 1998). Furthermore, the way in which the Chinese political regime indoctrinates its people with a guardianship discourse on democracy to disguise its authoritarian nature has also been analyzed (Jie, 2014). More recently, some scholars have specifically studied the Chinese intellectual sources of the PRC's discourse on governance (Li, 2020).

### 3.4. Contribution of this study to the literature

Some studies have investigated the conception of democracy in the Chinese people collective imagination, while others have examined the various Chinese intellectual discourses on democracy.

- (1) The first contribution of this study is to look at the issue of democracy from a point of view that has so far been little explored. By situating the analysis at the level of the Chinese political system, this research should add a new contribution to the understanding of the Chinese political regime.
- (2) This study is also notable for its scope. Some works have already investigated aspects of the party's conception of democracy in a limited way. It aims to provide a comprehensive mapping of the PRC's discourse on democracy. By investigating how the Chinese political regime refers to “democracy” and affiliated terms, this research should provide a better understanding of both the Chinese leadership's conception and use of the term. The critical discourse of the Chinese political regime targeting liberal democracy as well as the Chinese regime's advocacy of his own proclaimed democratic grounds will be covered.
- (3) Another contribution should be to characterize the changes in the discourse of the Chinese political regime in the last decades. By studying CCP official speeches from 1989 to the present days, this study should highlight changes in the PRC's conception and use of the term “democracy” and affiliated notions over time.

In this way, this study should shed light on the way the Chinese government intends to invest the social imaginary of democracy regarding both procedures and values through the China model.

## IV. Research design

This study is at the crossroads of political science, political theory, sociology of institutions and international relations. A discourse analysis is necessary in order to study how democracy is presented in the discourse of the Chinese political regime. The descriptive approach combined with the analytical method of discursive analysis allows to both map the Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy and to uncover the articulation and internal logic of these discourses. For a detailed overview of the primary sources studied, please refer to the detailed list of official documents, leadership's speeches and opinion papers from cadres or academics (VIII.).

### 4.1. Data collection

The primary sources consist of a selection of official documents of the Chinese political regime, speeches by political leaders and opinion pieces by officials or scholars directly related to the Chinese political regime.

To get a full picture of the official discourse on democracy and to appreciate the evolution of this discourse since 1989, the study relies on the reports of the National Party Congress delivered by the General Secretary of the Party. This political event is symbolically the most important of the political regime, “*the holy synod of Chinese political life.*” (Cabestan, 2014). Every five years, the Congress endorses the bargaining over major policy directions and changes in leadership, while electing the members of the Central Committee. It also endorses the report of the General Secretary and can amend the Party statutes. According to sinologist Michael D. Swaine, “*Party congress work reports largely perform three concrete tasks: first, to identify the major achievements (and to a lesser extent the failures) of party work occurring since the previous party congress was convened; second, to describe the challenges and opportunities confronting the party in the years ahead; and third, to lay out the basic principles and broad policy goals that will guide the party until the next congress.*” Emphasis is usually placed on general strategic trends, features, and themes in Party work, covering all major policy arenas from internal party building, to social and economic development, to defense and foreign relations. As noted above, domestic issues and policies take center stage (Swaine, 2012).

A second primary source is the State Council, that plays a key role in the geography of Chinese institutions (Cabestan, 2014). A review of its White Papers make it possible to trace the objectives of the Chinese political regime in terms of administrative reforms, democracy, governance and the projection of its political model.

The summaries of the plenary sessions of the CCP Central Committee are also reviewed. The Central Committee is, formally, the “*party's highest organ of authority*” when the National Congress is not in a plenary session. The Committee functions as a top forum for discussion about relevant policy issues. It usually convenes at least once a year at a plenary session.

The opinions pieces of Chinese regime officials such as the former director of the Xinhua News Agency, the former vice president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the former head of propaganda were written under Xi Jinping’s presidency. Combined with the speeches of today's President-Secretary General, they should help to better characterize the current Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy and outline its future development.

The book *The China horizon* (2016) is also part of the analyzed as his author is directly related to the Party and he enjoys a wide social surface in medias both domestic to China and foreign. His author is the Chinese scholar Zhang Weiwei, professor of international relations and Director of the China Institute at Fudan University, board member of China’s National Think Tanks Council and Senior Fellow at the Chunqiu Institute. He is also the host of a digital series on the governance of modern China 'The Chinese Way' on CGTN TV, where he “*identifies merits and flaws in the Chinese system and contrasts the China model with Western equivalents*” according to CGTN. A fervent defender of the Chinese governance model, he is an outspoken critic of liberal democracy. He regularly expresses his views in various international media such as Al Jazeera, or in the Munk debates or conferences hosted by Cambridge University.

This variety of source should enable a complete mapping of the discourse of the Chinese political regime in its different formulations. For example, opinion pieces published in the party newspaper are much freer in tone than an official speech by the Chinese president at the National Party Congress. The two are therefore complementary for the analysis.

Secondary sources are the works of political scientists working on China. This contextual knowledge should allow an interpretation of the discursive material. The literature review (III.) also allows me to establish the general context of production, dissemination, organization, and the historical and social context of the Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy.

#### 4.2. Research methodology

Theoretical framework of the research's methodology

This study is based on discourse analysis. Discourses are a speech act and a social act (Fairclough, 1992). Discourse analysis is therefore “*a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use*” (Krippendorff, 2004). It enables to make sense of all these seemingly contradictory elements in a reliable and credible manner and thereby understand the underlying rationale.

Qualitative discourse analysis seeks to interpret and understand rather than merely measure words in a set of texts. It aims at uncovering the meaning of words and concepts, analyzing the relationships between them and discovering correlations and patterns to understand the purposes and intentions of the author.

This research focuses on the textual dimension of discourse analysis. It focuses on the identification of themes and patterns related to democracy in the Chinese political regime discourse. To do so, it pays attention to the recurrence of the same ideas, the repetition of the same terms or to analogy relationships. The concluding section draws up a summary typology of Chinese discourse on democracy (VIII.).

This discourse analysis adopts a descriptive approach. This is intended to provide a description of a discourse in order to gain an understanding of how it is structured and the logic of the speaker. To highlight different themes related to the representation of democracy in the discourse of the Chinese political regime, I use an analytical method. This method links the different evocations of a common theme to avoid incorrect generalizations. If the discourse of the political regime, regardless of the speaker, is highly consistent, this method can help to draw out the progression of the discourse on a theme linked to democracy.

This research will also mobilize quantitative methods at the very margin. A lexical analysis of the speeches of the National Party Congress will allow us to measure the evolution of the discourse on democracy of the Chinese political regime. In practical terms, this consists of a census of the number of occurrences of certain key words in the speeches of Chinese presidents at National Party Congresses. The formal unity of these speeches and their interval in time make them suitable for such lexical analysis.

The effects of the discourse in the social sphere are not discussed here, although they are the purpose of this study. As individuals use language to construct versions of the world (Potter, 1987), the discourse of the Chinese political regime on democracy contributes to the construction of reality from the perspective of social constructivism.

Methodology for the data collection and analyze

Chinese political regime's texts are easily accessible and translated from the CCP journal website Qiushi (“Seeking truth”), Chinese government websites, the Xinhua News

Agency, and websites of observers of the Chinese political regime (the China Copyright and Medias blog by sinologist Rogier Creemers, the Reading the China Dream blog by China historian David Ownby, and the anti-CCP website of the China Digital Times). After the first screening of texts on these blogs, I mainly selected texts translated from the blog of the sinologist and professor in Leiden, Rogier Creemers.

The speeches of the Chinese president Xi Jinping have also been compiled in a book *The governance of China*. I have used the third and so far, last volume to get his most recent speeches (2020).

I selected the texts on the websites of Qiushi, Chinese government and different other sites based first on the occurrence of the words “democracy” inside. I then made a qualitative selection of the pre-selected texts to assess whether they corresponded to the subject of the study. The final selection comprises 32 relevant texts. These discourses are listed in section VII.

To avoid missing important information and in order to have a global vision of the Chinese political regime discourse on democracy, I always read and kept in mind the entire speeches. The only exception is the speeches of the Chinese presidents at the CCP National Congresses where I only focused on the parts concerning the Chinese political system, institutions, and the discussion of reforms and the celebration of socialist democracy.

Once the speeches selection was done, the analysis has been conducted in several steps.

First, I reviewed all the speeches writing a one-paragraph summary for each. This enabled me first to have a global view of the data and a first understanding of the Chinese political regime's discourse about “democracy”. Several related sub-themes and arguments of the Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy were identified.

In a second step, all the speeches have been read again. This enabled me to attune my initial findings. I thereby identified three main categories of Chinese political regime discourse on democracy: the Marxist-Leninist, the culturalist, and the technocratic discourse. Once these major categories were identified, I sought to examine the articulation of each of these three discourses in more detail.

In a third step, sentences related respectively to the Marxist-Leninist discourse, the culturalist discourse and the technocratic discourse on democracy held by the Chinese political regime were highlighted in three different colors. This allowed me to shed light on the articulation of each of these three discourses. Within these categories, I divided my findings into two: one dedicated to the critical discourse towards liberal democracy, the other dedicated to the valuation discourse of the democratic character of the Chinese political regime.

For each of these categories, I have refined and then associated the previously identified sub-themes. For example, the theme of democratic centralism was associated with the Marxist-Leninist discourse on democracy.

I then coded each relevant extract identified for each of the three themes and organised them according to the identified sub-themes.

#### 4.4. Hypotheses

The Chinese political regime's strategy of engaging the discursive field involves investing the social imaginary of democracy, in Castoriadis' sense.

By examining and analyzing Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy closely, I want to: 1. Review the critiques addressed to liberal democracy by the Chinese political regime; 2. Review the democratic characteristics of the Chinese political regime that it is putting forward; 3. Assess the evolution of the Chinese discourse on democracy since 1989; 4. Understand the conception of the "social contract" that the Chinese political regime disseminates.

Regarding point 1:

I expect the criticisms of liberal democracy to be varied and of a different nature. They may concern the condemnation of the fictional character of "bourgeois democracy", or the rejection of a liberal model in the name of cultural inadequacy, or the instability of the democratic regime. I suppose that the Marxist lens of denunciation of liberal democracy has been marginalized.

Regarding point 2:

I expect that the discourse celebrating Chinese democracy is essentially grounded in its Marxist-Leninist ideological and institutional legacy. I believe that the ability of the Chinese political regime to bring development to its people is also an element put at the service of the Chinese government's discourse on democracy.

Regarding point 3:

On the one hand, I expect to observe a continuity in the dichotomy of the Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy, split between the Chinese critique of liberal democracy and the praise of its socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics. On the other hand, I suspect that the Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy has evolved by appropriating notions such as "human rights", "rule of law", or "governance".

Regarding point 4:

Based on the previous findings, I expect that the "social contract" proposed by the Chinese political regime promotes its governance capabilities within a stable political framework. I assume the Marxist-Leninist dimension to be absent from the advocacy of this "Chinese model".

## V. Findings

*"The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history."*

Mao Zedong, "On Coalition Government", 1945

### 5.1. Governing for the people

Democracies are corrupted

Relying on a seemingly old-fashioned Marxist rhetoric, liberal democracy is accused to

be an oppressive system where the bourgeoisie exercises class domination. Following this view, the power of money would corrupt the different democratic processes of liberal democracies.

Western democracies are dominated by capital, i.e. by the great financial groups. This would even be the source of their functioning as Wang Tianxi, former editor-in-chief of the CCP journal Qiushi (“Seeking truth”) claimed.

*“Western democracy rely for feeding on the milk of capital. In other words, the present Western democracy is democracy dominated by capital, and it is democracy controlled by great financial groups.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

Following this conception, liberal democracy is portrayed as an oligarchy dominated by generalised corruption or as the international relations’ professor Zhang Weiwei called it “*Corruption 2.0.*“ or “*moneytalkcracy*“ (2016). This system of widespread and legal corruption is concretely manifested through the “*political donations and lobbying*“ (ibid.). The democratic procedures of access to and exercise of power being manipulated by the power of money, liberal democracy would consequently be a democratic regime only in terms. The electoral system of the US rival epitomized this situation.

*“The US democracy in fact is a money democracy, it is what Einstein called the “oligarchy of private capital”, US rulers know this tacitly.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

*“The party competition in Western democracy is a sort of lawful corruption.”* (ibid.)

Accordingly, the financial crisis was reportedly portrayed by the US media as an economic problem linked to information asymmetry rather than financial corruption.

*“The financial crisis has been portrayed as moral hazards by US medias rather than financial corruption.”* (Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016).

General interest is then held hostage to the interests of minorities who would impose their political agenda on the majority.

*“What lies behind the US predicament is to a great extent the problem of American political system: democracy in the US has been largely kidnapped by the well-organised and mobilised interest groups.”* (Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016)

*“The CCP [...] ensures that the people are the masters of the state, rather than a democracy for a minority of people.”* (White paper 1 : State Council, White Paper on “China's Political Party System”, 2007)

Quoting Albert Einstein's article "Why Socialism", Wang Tianxi specifically refers to the power of influence of an oligarchic minority that the democratic system's formal procedures would be unable to regulate.

*“Private capital tends to become concentrated in few hands. [...] The result of these developments is an oligarchy of private capital the enormous power of which cannot be effectively checked even by a democratically organized political society.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

The process of electoral democracy is specifically accused of being biased by the power of money. The process of political competition is highly costly. This makes the parties dependent on those who have the money, i.e. the oligarchs. Quoting the American political scientist

Francis Fukuyama, Zhang Weiwei targets the US electoral system, where money is considered to be the trump card of election.

*“The electoral processes in Western democracies are very long, expenses are huge as well, this is sufficient to wear down political parties with limited financial means, and guarantee that the electoral process is completely monopolized in the hands of big financial oligarchs.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

*“In the American political system, money has become the trump card of election.”* (Francis Fukuyama in Zhang Weiwei, The China horizon, 2016)

As politicians are dependent on fundings to access power, they would be in debt to their donators, e.g. financial groups and their owners. This dependence between political and financial power is qualified as strong as an umbilical cord.

*“Between politicians and financial groups, there is an unseverable financial umbilical cord. Financial groups use their money to buy votes for politicians.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

Therefore law-making process supposedly promoting the public interest as defined by the expression of the majority through voting is in fact corrupted by the power of money. Laws beneficial to the interests of the big financial groups will be passed, while laws that go against the interests of these groups will be rejected. The electoral process is then only an investment process.

*“Bills benefiting large financial groups may be given preference in deliberation and passing, bills not benefiting large financial groups but benefiting the popular masses will be delayed endlessly.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

*“In terms of the large financial groups contributing to the elections, the electoral process is an investment process.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

Similarly, the institutionalized advocacy by interest groups, lobbying, interferes with the law-making process. Lobbying gives the impression that American democracy is for sale and that the rich have more power than the poor.

*“All these lobbyists create the impression that American democracy is for sale and that the rich have more power than the poor, even as lobbyists and donors insist that political expenditure is an exercise of free speech.”* (Zhang Weiwei, The China horizon, 2016)

The egalitarian ideal of the vote, granting each individual the opportunity to express his or her views on the choice of representatives, is blamed by the Chinese scholars affiliated to the CCP for being an illusion.

Freedom of expression is as well accused as being corrupted by money power. The former editor-in-chief of the CCP journal Qiushi underlines that all media are controlled by the richest in the West.

*“under existing conditions, private capitalists inevitably control, directly or indirectly, the main sources of information (press, radio, education).”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

Consequently, it would be impossible for the individual citizen to form an informed and

balanced opinion on a subject. This undermines the Enlightenment ideal of the emancipated man exercising rational political choice after having been exposed to different views. Political rights, in this case freedom of expression, would therefore be artificial. The rights granted in theory would have no real basis.

*“It is thus extremely difficult, and indeed in most cases quite impossible, for the individual citizen to come to objective conclusions and to make intelligent use of his political rights.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

This statement is consistent with the Chinese political regime's view of propaganda at work in the West. In a speech that Chinese President Xi Jinping reportedly gave at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference on 19 August 2013, he called propaganda in Western democracies *“invisible propaganda”*. In the West, propaganda would take disguised forms, without visible constraints. Yet there would be no less propaganda. The difference between Chinese propaganda and Western propaganda is that the latter is hidden. This would be the source of its superiority, it would make people walk in the desired direction, believing that this is the path they themselves have chosen.

*“In the area of propaganda, Western countries have their own way of doing things, they oppose propaganda ostensibly, but in fact, they do it with more enthusiasm, more expertise and more by hook and crook than anyone else, it is only the case that they conceal this by every way imaginable, and make it into “invisible propaganda”. Their strategy is that top-quality propaganda looks as if it was not conducted, the best propaganda must let the target of the propaganda march in the direction that you hoped, believing that it is the path he has chosen himself.”* (Speech 1 : Xi Jinping, Speech at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference, August 19th, 2013)

Constitutional democracy is a “bourgeois concept”

The guarantee of individual rights offered by constitutional democracy is described by the Chinese political regime as a “bourgeois” concept.

Document Number 9, officially entitled “Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere”, is a list of instructions issued by the Central Committee to the cadres of the Chinese Communist Party. Drafted in July 2012, it lists "seven perils" or seven topics that are not to be discussed (Qī bù jiǎng, 七不講), which would threaten the supremacy of the Communist Party. These seven topics are: Western Constitutional Democracy, “universal values”, civil society, neoliberalism, West’s idea of journalism, historical nihilism, Reform and Opening and the socialist nature of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The components of constitutional democracy, such as multi-party system or judicial independence, are deemed to be capitalist mechanisms.

*“Western Constitutional Democracy has distinct political properties and aims. Among these are the separation of powers, the multi-party system, general elections, independent judiciaries, nationalized armies, and other characteristics. These are the capitalist class’ concepts of a nation, political model, and system design.”* (Central Committee, Document 9, 2013)

Constitutionalism and its tenets such as the separation of powers or judicial independence are identified by the Party as a danger. It should not be a model for the Chinese political regime.

*“Under no circumstance should we imitate the models and practices of other countries or adopt the*

*Western models of 'constitutionalism', 'separation of power of powers', and 'judicial independence.'*” (Speech 2: Xi Jinping, Always put people first, March 20, 2018)

The civil society-state dialectic is significant in liberal political theory. The expression of individuals and organizations independent of the Government in the public space should lead to a better management of public affairs. Document 9 is explicit about the Chinese political regime's conception of civil society. For the Chinese leadership, the danger with civil society is the emphasis on individual rights that would threaten the authority and power of the Party-state.

*“It holds that in the social sphere, individual rights are paramount and ought to be immune to obstruction by the state.”* (Central Committee, Document 9, 2013)

By restricting the concept of civil society to its Western cultural and geographical origin, the Chinese political regime defends the idea that this conception of the society's organization is an alien concept to the Chinese context and therefore not importable. CCP also sees civil society as a concept manipulated by the West to undermine its authority. To the Chinese leadership, the so-called citizens' movements are in fact instigated by the West for political purposes. The advocates of the so-called civil society want to split the party from the masses.

*“Civil society is a socio-political theory that originated in the West.”* (Central Committee, Document 9, 2013)

*“Advocates of civil society want to squeeze the Party out of leadership of the masses at the local level, even setting the Party against the masses, to the point that their advocacy is becoming a serious form of political opposition.”* (ibid.)

*“Viewing civil society as a magic bullet for advancing social management at the local level, they [Western forces] have launched all kinds of so-called citizen's movements. Advocates of civil society want to squeeze the Party out of leadership of the masses at the local level, even setting the Party against the masses, to the point that their advocacy is becoming a serious form of political opposition.”* (ibid.)

The empowerment of civil society through the progressive promotion of individual rights is a dangerous Western weapon aiming to thwart Chinese political regime's authority. Besides, individual rights' promotion is a vital threat to the Chinese political system as it conceals the promotion of the constitutional democracy model.

*“For the past few years, the idea of civil society has been adopted by Western anti-China forces and used as a political tool. Additionally, some people with ulterior motives within China have begun to promote these ideas.”* (Central Committee, Document 9, 2013)

*« Promoting civil society and Western-style theories of governance, they claim that building a civil society in China is a precondition for the protection of individual rights and forms the basis for the realization of constitutional democracy. »* (ibid.)

The Chinese political regime portrays liberal democracy as a political system corrupted by the power of money. Liberal democracy is accused of being corrupted by the power of money. Of course, citizens can effectively vote, or express themselves, but the power of this expression will never equal the power of the most powerful, i.e. the wealthiest. Electoral democracy makes political power easily corruptible, since to come to power, parties are obliged to raise funds and therefore to turn to the richest. As a result, the law-making process is biased towards the

interests of the most powerful, namely big companies. Representative democracy, based on the equality of each individual's vote, is therefore only a democratic fiction.

Constitutional democracy and its promotion of political rights are thus accused of serving a capitalist political model, which is the antithesis of Chinese socialist democracy. From this point of view, the liberal conception of civil society, enshrining the separation of civil society and the state, is accused of being dangerous for the stability of the regime. In contrast, the Chinese socialist democracy serves the interests of the Chinese people.

Party's action is people-oriented

Celebration of the people is at the heart of the CCP's socialist project. There is a constant reference to the people in the leadership speeches. In Chinese democracy of Marxist-leninist inspiration, the masses have written the history of the nation and will continue to do so. This is the principle of historical materialism. The people must be the compass guiding the CCP's action. They are the basis of Chinese socialist democracy, all powers are claimed to belong to them. A relationship of equivalence between socialism and democracy is therefore affirmed. Democracy is the ontological essence of socialism.

*“Without democracy there would be no socialism or socialist modernization. The essence of socialist democracy is that the people are the masters of the country.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th CCP National Congress, 1997)

*“We must uphold the viewpoint of historical materialism that it is the people who make history.”* (Hu Jintao, 17th CCP National Congress, 2007)

*“The magnificent history of the Chinese nation has been written by the Chinese people.”* (Speech 2 : Xi Jinping, Always put people first, March 20, 2018)

In accordance with Marxist ideology, there must be a homothetic relationship between the aspirations of the party and the people; this is the prerequisite for socialist democracy to be achieved. The party and the people form a cohesive, homogeneous, harmonious unity. Popular aspirations cannot be grasped at the level of the individual or of a party organization. The spirit of the party and the spirit of the masses can only be grasped on a macro scale. Society cannot be conceived as an aggregate of different people because the spirit of the people cannot be understood at the level of an individual or even a group of people. The Party has a holistic view of society.

*“In our Party, each and every one of us must always breathe the same breath as the people, share the same future, and stay truly connected to them.”* (Xi Jinping, 19<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress, 2017)

*“The Party spirit and the people's spirit have always been consistent and united. [...] the Party spirit cannot simply be understood from one level's Party organization, a group of Party members or any single Party member, and the people's spirit can also not be simply understood from a single stratum, some groups from the masses or any concrete person.”* (Speech 1 : Xi Jinping, Speech at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference, August 19th, 2013)

In order never to be disconnected from the masses, the Party must always ensure that it gathers the ideas and knowledge that will enable it to remain in touch with the people. This is the principle of the mass line. This constant work requires the deepening of the links between party and people.

*“Persisting in self-examination in compliance with the requirements of the times [...] is the fundamental guarantee that our Party will never be divorced from the people.”* (Jiang Zemin, 16th CCP National Congress, 2002)

*“It pledges to adhere to the Mass Line of the Party by strengthening and improving the Mass Work under the new situation. It calls for drawing close the relations between the Party and the people as well as relations between officials and the ordinary people.”* (Central Committee Document 1 : CCP Ruling capacity, 2004)

Socialist democracy celebrates the people and it is the party's responsibility to respond to their aspirations. The philosophy guiding the communist party is “people-oriented”, i.e. the party claims to be serving the interests of all the people. The socialist nature of the Chinese political system makes it immune to minorities' interference. The strength of socialist democracy is to respond to the interests of the greatest number of people. It is its democratic essence. This presupposes a popular aspiration common to all Chinese people.

*“Serving the people is the fundamental purpose of the Party, and putting people first and exercising governance for the people is the ultimate yardstick for judging all the Party's performance in this regard.”* (Hu Jintao, 18th CCP National Congress, 2012)

*“It is a path prioritizing the people's interests. In the PRC, the people run the country in the real sense.”* (White Paper 2 : State Council, White Paper on “China and the World in the New Era”, 2019)

*“We must base our efforts on the interests of the people, ensure the principal status of the people, humbly learn from the people, listen to their voices, and draw from on their wisdom. We must ensure that the basic criterion of our work is whether we have the people's support, acceptance, satisfaction and approval.”* (Speech 2 : Xi Jinping, Always put the people first, March 20, 2018)

After 1989, Jiang Zemin acknowledges that the status of the CCP has shifted from being a revolutionary party to a ruling party. The party still claims to be in the vanguard. However, it gives a broader meaning to the original term. Recognizing the historical shift in the CCP's position, the Chinese leadership is now not only in the vanguard of the working class but of the whole nation. It is up to the CCP to set the course of the new project towards which Xi Jinping's China is guiding the nation.

*“Having gone through the revolution, reconstruction and reform, our Party has evolved from a party that led the people in fighting for state power to a party that has led the people in exercising the power and has long remained in power.”* (Jiang Zemin, 16th CCP National Congress, 2002)

*“Unyielding efforts will be made to ensure that our Party is forever the vanguard both of the Chinese working class and of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation.”* (ibid.)

*“We must uphold [...] ensure that the Party leads the people in governing the country effectively, so as to prevent the Chinese people from becoming aimless like a ship with nobody at the helm or divided like a heap of loose sand.”* (Speech 3 : Xi Jinping, Speech at the Ceremony Marking the 60th Anniversary National People's Congress, 2014)

Chinese Socialist democracy is grounded on the Leninist principle of democratic centralism. By making the lower echelons of the party accountable to the higher echelons, democratic centralism ensures that the minority is subject to the majority. Democratic centralism must ensure that the work of the party's almost sixty million members and its grassroots associations is consistent. This ability to impose decisions is justified by the vanguard position of the party and the organic link between the party and the people. It is the

strength of the party to have a strong core leadership capable of taking decisions and imposing them. This fundamental principle of socialist democracy must allow for the internal expression of divisions but guarantee unity of action. It has been continuously advocated by the party. In 1997, President Jiang states that opening up to the market economy should strengthen democratic centralism. The CCP Central Committee in its publication “Strengthening the Party's Governance Capability” (2004) makes democratic centralism the fundamental principle for ensuring the unity and vitality of China's governance system in the context of enhancing the Party's governance capability. Xi Jinping calls for both democracy-based centralism and democracy guided by centralism.

*“Adhere to and improve democratic centralism and enhance the Party's vitality, solidarity and unity. [...] individual Party members are subordinate to the organization, that the minority is subordinate to the majority, that lower Party organizations are subordinate to the higher ones and that all the constituent organizations and members of the Party are subordinate to its National Congress and Central Committee.”* (Jiang Zemin, 16th CCP National Congress, 2002)

*“The long-held principle of democratic centralism must continue to be adhered to for the unity and vitality of the Party. [...] Different ideas of Party members should be discussed in the Party on the equal footing to encourage all Party members to speak out what they are thinking of.”* (Central Committee Document 1: CCP Ruling capacity, 2004)

*“We must improve and implement the systems of democratic centralism, and practice both democracy-based centralism and centralism-guided democracy.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

The Party claims to work for the people. In accordance with the doctrine of mobilized Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, it celebrates the people as the basis of the Party. This implies that it must always be in tune with the aspirations of the people. It must also guide them according to the principle of vanguardism. Animated by this people-oriented philosophy and at the same time capable of knowing the deep aspirations of the people, the Party is therefore legitimate to operate on the principle of democratic centralism enshrining obedience from the lower echelons of the Party to the higher echelons.

The CCP claims to have led the people to become masters of the state. To be sustainable, this system must be able to capture the popular expression of its interests. The Party claims to have changed the forms of democratic representation from within.

China's socialist democracy is self-reinventing

The strength of socialist democracy lies in its adaptiveness. The CCP, as the flagship of the Chinese political system, has could accommodate the socio-economic context of its time. The State Council acknowledges that the CCP has taken many organizational forms over the course of its history. This ability to self-renew is highlighted as a strength of the regime by the Chinese leadership. The Chinese leadership touts its incremental ability to make its system evolve without changing the political regime. Evolutions, be they theoretical, practical, institutional or even cultural, are a necessity in a changing world. Chinese socialist democracy is therefore an exploratory process.

*“In its history, the CCP has adopted many organizational forms.”* (White Paper 3 : State Council, Building political democracy in China, 2005)

*“Making sticking to and improving the system an important component of the theory and practice of Chinese-style socialism.” (White Paper 1 : State Council, China's Political Party System, 2007)*

*“The world is changing with every second, every moment; and China, too, is changing with every second, every moment. We must ensure our theory evolves with the times, deepen our appreciation of objective laws, and advance our theoretical, practical, institutional, cultural, and other explorations.” (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)*

The connection between the people and Party is said to be ensured by the traditional institutions of socialist democracy. The Party leadership makes it an objective to deepen the role of these instruments. In the reports of the national party congresses which have been studied since the 14th CCP National Congress in 1992, a section is dedicated to the reforms of China's institutions of socialist democracy (usually part VI.). The White Paper “Building political democracy” in China (2005) issued by the State Council devotes a chapter to each of these institutions (People's congress system, multi-party cooperation, ethnic regional autonomy, grassroots democracy, consultation). The White Paper “On China's Political Party System” (2007) focuses on the multi-party cooperation system.

The multi-party cooperation system is a product of Chinese political history. It has been established and developed during the long-term practice of the Chinese revolution, construction and reform. This multiparty cooperation differs from multiparty competition in that the Party-State's dominance remains. This is a unique institutional arrangement. The role of other parties is therefore essentially consultative. Recognizing a common destiny with the other Chinese parties, the CCP wants to maintain a close link with them under the principle “sharing weal or woe”. The State Council has a leading role in the evolution of Chinese multiparty cooperation. The role is evolving into an expert advisory role. It defines the values and functions of China's multi-party cooperation system as follows: political participation, expression of interests, social integration, democratic supervision, maintenance of stability. With regard to the latter, the multi-party cooperation system is seen by the regime as a means of replacing confrontation and contention in the multi-party system with cooperation and consultation. It avoids instability and frequent regime changes resulting from discord among political parties.

*“The political party system China has adopted is multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the CCP, which is different from both the two-party or multi-party competition systems of Western countries and the one-party system practiced in some other countries.” (White Paper 1 : State Council, China's political Party System, 2007)*

*“Members of democratic parties have been invited to serve as special consultants in more and more fields.” (ibid.)*

*“In the great cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, the multi-party cooperation system established and developed by the CCP and all democratic parties, will continue to be consolidated and improved to play a more and more important role.” (ibid.)*

*“The multi-party cooperation system replaces confrontation and contention with cooperation and consultation, effectively avoiding political instability and frequent changes of regime resulting from discord among political parties, thus reducing internal frictions of the society to the maximum, and safeguarding social and political stability and solidarity. Combining the firm leadership of the CCP with the extensive participation of democratic parties, the system is able to effectively resolve various social contradictions and conflicts, and maintain political stability and social harmony.” (ibid.)*

People's congresses are also deemed by the Party to be a fundamental instrument of Chinese socialist democracy. This system ensures that the people act as the masters of the state. By allowing the people to vote for local delegates, it is a way for them to exercise their power. People's congresses are found at all levels of the Chinese political system, from the most local with the district congresses to the national with the National People's Congress (NPC). This unicameral parliamentary system, specific to the Chinese political system, is according to the Chinese constitution the highest organ of state power. This assembly exercises legislative power in the PRC's institutional system.

*“The NPC and the local people's congresses at various levels are established through democratic elections. They are responsible to the people and subject to their supervision.”* (White Paper 3 : State Council, Building of Political Democracy in China”, 2005)

*“The CCP has established the system of congress in its organizations at and above the county level. The national congress and the congresses of the provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government), cities divided into districts, autonomous prefectures, counties (banners), autonomous counties, cities not divided into districts and municipal districts are held once every five years.”* (ibid.)

*“China has adopted a unicameral parliamentary system based on its national conditions, rather than the bicameral system instituted in Western countries. The Chinese Constitution stipulates: the NPC of the PRC is the highest organ of state power. In China, all administrative, judicial and procuratorial organs of the state are created by the people's congresses to which they are responsible and by which they are supervised. All major issues of the state are decided by the people's congresses.”* (ibid.)

Party organisations such as communist youth and women's federations must also contribute to socialist democracy by maintaining a direct link with the people. Primary Party organisations are the organisational foundations of the Party. They can be found in villages, businesses, urban communities, government bodies, schools, and new social organisations. They must be a bridge between the people and the Party. The development of the people's democratic rights at the primary level must be overseen by the leadership of the Party organisations.

*“The Party will also strengthen and improve its leadership over trade unions, the Communist Youth League, women's federations and other people's organizations, supporting them to act independently according to laws and their constitutions, and giving play to their role as a bridge between the people.”* (Central Committee Document 1 : CCP Ruling capacity, 2004)

*“Develop primary -level democracy and ensure that the people enjoy democratic rights in a more extensive and practical way. We need to improve the dynamic mechanism of people's self-governance at the primary level under the leadership of primary Party organizations.”* (Hu Jintao, 17th CCP National Congress, 2007)

*“Primary Party organizations constitute the organizational foundation for the Party to play its governance role. We will implement the responsibility system for building the Party and advance all-round development of primary Party organizations in villages, enterprises, urban communities, Party and government organs, schools, new social organizations.”* (Hu Jintao, 17th CCP National Congress, 2007)

These traditional instruments of socialist democracy must enable the party to be in touch with popular aspirations. They must ensure that the party is never cut off from the masses, but rather be a bridge between the masses and the party. Such forms of representation should ensure that

the people are the master of the state.

Democracy promoted by the Chinese political regime is practiced within its institutions. The deepening of Chinese socialist democracy entails the reform of these characteristic Marxist-Leninist institutions. This incremental logic of reform corresponds to the philosophy of “intra-party democracy”.

The deepening of democracy within the party concerns the democratic rights of party members, the improvement of the party congress system, the strengthening of the importance given to the plenary sessions of the party committees, the improvement of the internal party election system and the establishment of internal party supervision mechanisms.

*“Developing Inner-Party Democracy. Promoting people's democracy by improving inner-Party democracy is an important component of the CCP's democratic rule. In recent years, the CCP has been unceasingly progressing in promoting inner-Party democracy. [...] Making efforts to establish and improve a mechanism to guarantee the democratic rights of Party members [...] Improving and perfecting the system of Party congress [...] Giving full play to the role of plenary sessions of Party committees [...] Reforming and improving the system of inner-Party elections [...] Establishing and improving the mechanism of inner-Party supervision.”* (White Paper 3 : State Council, Building of Political Democracy in China, 2005)

The development of intra-party democracy is seen as a necessity to ensure and sustain good governance within the party, as stated in the CCP Central Committee document on ruling capacity. Hu Jintao has made intra-party democracy an important theme of his presidency. Between the 16th National Party Congress of the CCP chaired by Jiang Zemin (2002) and the 17th National Party Congress of the CCP chaired by Hu Jintao (2007), the mention of the term "intra-party democracy" increases (VIII.).

The 17th Party Congress enshrines the development of intra-party democracy, already identified by the Central Committee in its document on Party Ruling Capacities, as an important task of the Party. Intra-party democracy shall be strengthened at the primary level as well as at the highest level of the CCP. It concerns the nomination of candidates and election methods. Hence, intra-party democracy building should foster party's vitality.

*“We shall promote people's democracy by promoting inner-Party democracy.”* (Central Committee Document 1 : CCP Ruling capacity, 2004)

*“We will reform the intra-Party electoral system and improve the system for nominating candidates and electoral methods. We will spread the practice in which candidates for leading positions in primary Party organizations are recommended both by Party members and the public in an open manner and by the Party organization at the next higher level, gradually extend direct election of leading members in primary Party organizations to more places, and explore various ways to expand intra-Party democracy at the primary level.”* (Hu Jintao, 17th CCP National Congress, 2007)

*“Intra-Party democracy is the life of the Party.”* (Hu Jintao, 18th CCP National Congress, 2012)

While strengthening, intra-democracy should enhance creativity within the party, it should above all reinforce its solidarity and unity. It must secure the expression of democratic discussions within the Party in a logic of harmony. As such, Hu sees it as a means to internally manage the expression of competing views within the Party. In this respect, the improvement of intra-party democracy does not contradict democratic centralism.

*“Intra-Party democracy provides an important guarantee for improving the Party's creativity and reinforcing its solidarity and unity. We will expand intra-Party democracy to develop people's democracy and increase intra-Party harmony to promote social harmony. We need to respect the principal position of Party members, guarantee their democratic rights, increase transparency in Party affairs and create favorable conditions for democratic discussions within the Party.”* (Hu Jintao, 17th CCP National Congress, 2007)

*“We should adhere to democratic centralism, improve institutions for intra-Party democracy, and promote people's democracy with intra-Party democracy.”* (Hu Jintao, 18th CCP National Congress, 2012)

The theme of the development of intra-party democracy is no longer on the agenda in Xi Jinping's speech to the 19th National Congress of the CCP (VIII.). It is only mentioned twice in his text. The Chinese president first notes the progress achieved in this regard. His predecessor's efforts to develop intra-party democracy had contributed to the improvement of socialist democracy. Secondly, he states that the development of intra-party democracy will now only concern the primary level, i.e. make Party affairs more transparent, ensure channels are open for Party members to participate in Party affairs, oversee Party organizations and officials, and submit opinions and suggestions to the Party organization at the next level up.

*“Steady progress has been made in enhancing socialist democracy; intraparty democracy has been expanded.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

*“We will expand intraparty democracy at the primary level, make Party affairs more transparent, and ensure channels are open for Party members to participate in Party affairs, oversee Party organizations and officials, and submit opinions and suggestions to the Party organization at the next level up.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

Socialist democracy needs to deepen its consultative system in order to get a better idea of the people's expectations. The expansion of the consultative system is consistent with the Party's philosophy. The two basic modes of political consultation in the Chinese political system are multi-party cooperation and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). The CPPCC, which brings together representatives of other parties, some figures in non-political spheres, representatives of minorities as well as figures of the diaspora is a major form of Chinese socialist democracy.

*“two basic modes of political consultation in the multi-party cooperation system have been formed: the CCP's consultation with democratic parties, and the CCP's consultation with democratic parties and representatives from all circles at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).”* (White Paper 1 : State Council, China's Political Party System, 2007)

*“The CPPCC, as a distinctively Chinese political institution, is a major channel for socialist consultative democracy, and its committees are specialist consultative bodies.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

At the 18th National Congress of the CCP, the development of the consultative system is no longer only associated with the political consultation of the regime's institutions. From now on, other channels of consultation have to be mobilized. These consultation mechanisms must be extensive, multilevel, and institutionalized. All sectors of society must be involved. The subjects on which the people can be consulted concern primarily economic and social development issues as well as specific problems involving their immediate interests. By

soliciting a wide range of opinions, the aim is to pool wisdom of the people, increase consensus, and build up synergy.

*“Socialist consultative democracy is an important form of people's democracy in our country. We should improve its institutions and work mechanisms and promote its extensive, multilevel, and institutionalized development.”* (Hu Jintao, 18th CCP National Congress, 2012)

*“Extensive consultations should be carried out on major issues relating to economic and social development as well as specific problems involving the people's immediate interests through organs of state power, committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, political parties, people's organizations and other channels to solicit a wide range of opinions, pool wisdom of the people, increase consensus, and build up synergy.”* (Hu Jintao, 18<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress, 2012)

Xi Jinping makes consultative democracy an important mode of management for the Chinese leadership and a singularity of China's socialist democracy model. Through consultative democracy, the President-Secretary General considers that people can discuss their own affairs and thereby acted on the essence of people's democracy. With the development of new consultation procedures, it is hoped to increase the broad, continuous and intensive involvement of the people in everyday political activities and sustain this consultative system.

*“The essence of the people's democracy is that the people get to discuss their own affairs. Consultative democracy is an important way of effecting Party leadership and a model and strength unique to China's socialist democracy.”* (Xi Jinping, 19<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress, 2017)

*“Consultative democracy is an important way for the Party to exercise its leadership. It is a unique form and distinctive strength of China's socialist democracy.”* (Speech 4 : Xi Jinping, Consolidate socialist consultative democracy, September 20, 2019)

*“We will strengthen the institutions of consultative democracy and develop complete procedures and practices to enable the people's broad, continuous, and intensive participation in day-to-day political activities.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

The origins of the consultative system lie in the Party leadership's desire to govern the country scientifically. To increase the effectiveness of its public action, the Chinese government wanted to establish a mechanism that would allow it to go deep among the people to see their conditions, in Jiang's words. The consultative system built by the Chinese political regime fulfils this ambition. By enabling the government to better understand the people' needs, it enables it to formulate a more effective policy response.

*“We shall gradually establish a mechanism that will help the decision-makers to go deep among the people to see their conditions, adequately reflect their will and pool their wisdom so that decision-making will be more scientific, democratic and efficient and will reach a higher level.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th National Congress of the CCP, 1997)

*“The wisdom of the people should be pooled through various channels and in various forms so that decisions can be made on a real scientific and democratic base.”* (Central Committee Document 1 : CCP Ruling capacity, 2004)

The Marxist-Leninist lens influences the Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy. In line with this ideological legacy, the Chinese political regime's criticism of liberal democracy targets the influence of money power. Constitutional democracy's claims to safeguard the political rights of individuals and to ensure free and rational expression are

considered a sham. By restricting political power, constitutional democracy leaves room for the power of money to exploit electoral democracy or freedom of expression. Political power is portrayed as subject to an oligarchic minority who find itself to be the real government of the country.

In contrast, the Chinese political regime paints a glowing picture of its Chinese socialist democracy. The Party claims that all its actions are entirely devoted to satisfying the aspirations of the people. The Party's identification with the people legitimizes the CCP's leadership and its mode of governance, i.e. democratic centralism. The Party emphasizes the representative nature of its own socialist institutions. Democracy is promoted by the Chinese leadership but must develop in an incremental logic, within the framework of the regime. This rationale underlies the development of intra-party democracy and as such does not contradict democratic centralism. Similarly, the development of consultative democracy promoted by the Chinese political system should enable the Party to respond more effectively to the aspirations of the people without allowing the people to participate further in the political process.

The democracy defended by the Party is rather selective, circumscribed and served to perpetuate its leadership.

*“Les possesseurs de l’histoire ont mis dans le temps un sens : une direction qui est aussi une signification.”*

Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle*, 1967

## 5.2. Universalism in debate

Liberal democracy is only suitable for the West

Political systems are the result of a socio-historical context, as the State Council states in its White Paper on “China's Political Party System”. The diversity of political systems in the world is explained by the diversity of human civilizations. According to President Xi Jinping, a country's political system is chosen by its people and is the result of a long-term process of evolution and improvement of its history, cultural traditions and economic and social development. Therefore, no political model can be judged in the abstract without regard for its social and political context, its history, and its cultural traditions. Thus, there can be no ideal political system that will suit all countries and all cultures.

*“What kind of political party system to adopt in a country is determined by the nature, national conditions and social development of that given country. The diversity of political party systems in different countries reflects the diversity of human civilizations.”* (White Paper 1: State Council, China's Political Party System, 2007)

*“No two political systems are entirely the same, and a political system cannot be judged in abstraction without regard for its social and political context, its history, and its cultural traditions. No one political system should be regarded as the only choice; and we should not just mechanically copy the political systems of other countries.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

Western democracy is itself the outcome of a historical and cultural context. Its historical and philosophical roots stem from Athenian democracy in ancient Greece. This is the essence of Western “*political civilization*”, i.e. Western democracy. By referring to this political regime

through geographical association and to its historical and cultural context, the former editor-in-chief of Qiushi Wang Tianxi, turns liberal democracy into a particularism.

*“Western democracy originates with the Athens democracy in Ancient Greece.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

*“Political civilization is not some sort of mysterious thing, but it is a social governance form. [...] The core of Western political civilization is ‘the Western democratic system’.”* (ibid.)

This original context of Western democracy makes this political model sustainable if it is circumscribed to a limited territory and population. Wang Tianxi takes up the arguments of a classic Western political scientist, Rousseau, to justify that democracy is only suitable for a country with a limited population. Popular sovereignty, the essential principle of the democratic ideal that power belongs to the people, is diminished when the population is large. Building on this argument, the former Minister of the Propaganda Department adds that the larger the country and the larger the population, the more tenuous popular sovereignty at the individual level becomes. Such an inverse proportionality relationship is considered dangerous because it increases the sense of disempowerment.

*“The French thinker Rousseau, who advocated that “sovereignty lies in the people”, analysed matters as follows in his book “On the Social Contract”: suppose that a country contained ten thousand citizens, according to the idea that sovereignty lies in the people, every citizen may enjoy one 10000th of sovereignty; if a country contained 100.000 citizens, every citizen could only enjoy one 100.000th of sovereignty.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

*“the difficulty that the larger a country is, the smaller citizen sovereignty and the worse the effects of democracy become »* (ibid.)

Wang also invokes Hayek to denounce the fetishizing of democracy in the West. In the Austrian economist's minimalist view on democracy, the latter is restricted to a set of procedures organising the accession to and execution of political power. He believes that democracy's problem is that it has become a set of absolute values. Xi likewise attacks Western dogmatism regarding the promotion of its view of democracy.

*“[Hayek] defined democracy strictly as a sort of policymaking procedure, a sort of political method, and not as a final value. He said that only people’s freedom is the final value. In his “Road to Serfdom”, Hayek wrote: “We have inadvertently create a sort of democracy fetishism.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

*“Doing dogmatism or bookism, “always mentioning Greece in speeches”, cannot be successful.”* (Xi Jinping, Speech at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference, August 19th, 2013)

Liberal democracy originating in Greece is deemed to be the outcome of the historical and cultural context of the West. This political regime has been set up as a universally good model by Westerners.

Individuals rights are deemed to be Western values. The professor of international relations Zhang Weiwei considers that the concept of absolute rights granted to everyone is one of the "three genetic defects" of Western democracies. For him, the individualization and absolutizing of the notion of rights results in a decline of individual responsibility and an impoverishment of social responsibility.

*“The presumption of ‘rights are absolute’ is also a problem, notably by the overinflated individual rights and the decline of individual responsibilities.”* (Opinion paper 2 : Zhang Weiwei, Looking at the Multiple Difficulties of “Universal Rights” from International Political Practice, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013)

For the former interpreter of Deng Xiaoping, Western democracies are promoting absolute individual rights as their political project. This exportation of values is done in the name of universalism. Individual rights are regarded as absolute and inherent to every individual regardless of his condition. Zhang points out, however, that the diversity of cultures in the world should call for a common definition of values that are considered universal. By ignoring the particularities of each culture, the West unfairly assumes a monopoly on the concept of universality. For the former editor-in-chief of Qiushi Magazine, Wang Tianxi, this claim conceals a colonialist background, where Westerners position themselves as “saviours”, i.e. sole holders of the correct method of development.

*“In fact, the world is made up of so many countries with so diverse cultures and values, shall we not come up with a procedure by which all states will have a say in determining what values are universal? Given the huge importance of the issue, is there any sense of justice in this world if a handful of Western countries alone are allowed to dictate what constitute universal values and then monopolise their definitions?”* (Opinion paper 2 : Zhang Weiwei, Looking at the Multiple Difficulties of “Universal Rights” from International Political Practice, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013)

*“in the last century, because their countries were strong, their heads inflated, and the fantasy that they were “saviours” multiplied, the rulers of these countries have embellished these social governance methods that are only suitable to a number of countries as being “universal values””* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)

The West dictates its values to the rest of the world

The export of the Western model of democracy leads to the political downfall. The State Council in its White Paper entitled “China and the World in the New Era” considers that the forced import or export of Western democracy leads at best to instability and inefficiency, at worst to chaos. The export of the Western model of democracy leads to the political downfall of the states involved. Zhang Weiwei recounts the failures of attempts to change authoritarian political regimes into democracies. Recalling the colour revolutions, the Ukrainian revolution and the Arab Spring - which he predicted to become the Arab Winter in a debate with Francis Fukuyama in 2011 - he highlights the discouraging efforts of this endeavour. In his view, two scenarios follow the West's export of democracy to foreign countries. The population either goes from "euphoria to despair" or from "euphoria to anarchy". Wang Tianxi is less nuanced and argues that the export of democracy has caused disaster and suffering to many places in the world.

*“In the recent past, many developing countries have worked hard in the hope of making themselves prosperous and strong, but few have really found the right path and achieved good development. Some countries blindly copied or were forced to adopt the Western model, but they did not achieve economic development or political stability. Instead they fell into social unrest, economic crisis, governance paralysis, and even endless civil war.”* (White Paper 2: State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

*“if a non-Western society copies the Western political system, it usually end up in two scenarios: one is « from euphoria to despair » as shown in the Philippines, Thailand, Ukraine. The either is*

*« from euphoria to anarchy » as shown in outcries like Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan.” (Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016)*

*“the export of democracy has caused disaster and suffering to many places in the world.” (Opinion paper 1: Wang Tianxi, *An embellished Western political civilisation*, 2013)*

Zhang Weiwei and Wang Tianxi jointly point out that Western democracies do not hesitate to resort to force to impose their values and ultimately their political model. This use of force is hypocritically justified by the superiority of human rights over national sovereignty. In doing so, Western democracies do not respect the democratic principle of sovereign equality between countries, enshrined in the UN Charter.

*“It’s known to all that sovereign equality is the primary principle contained in the UN Charter, on which the whole system of modern international law is based, including the principle of non-interference in the international affairs of other countries and the peaceful settlement of international disputes.” (Opinion paper 2 : Zhang Weiwei, Looking at the Multiple Difficulties of “Universal Rights” from International Political Practice, October 16th, 2013)*

*“and sold them forcibly to the entire world, they did not even hesitate to launch wars of aggression, bringing disaster and suffering to many places in the world.” (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, *An embellished Western political civilisation*, 2013)*

The political model and values promoted by Western democracy pose an existential threat to the Chinese political system. Since the importation of democracy is tantamount to chaos and/or despair in the words of Zhang Weiwei, the supposedly universal Western values pose an existential threat to the Chinese polity. The Western promotion of abstract individual rights masks a very concrete political agenda for the board member of China’s National Think Tanks Council. This political project is not only about promoting democracy as a value, but about exporting the Western democratic model. Yet, Western democracy cannot be considered as a universal value. The export of individual rights is therefore regarded by the Chinese leadership as a weapon used by the West to undermine the stability of its political regime. The aim is to win over the hearts of the people to turn them away from the Party. Promoting "universal values" is thus an attempt to weaken the theoretical foundations of the Party's leadership.

*“Some countries do have an intense interest in talking others into believing in their abstract ideas while covertly pursuing their own agendas? In this light, what we have to do is to make those abstract concepts moderately concret and then raise a few more questions.” (Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016)*

*“we can say with certainty that democracy can be a universal value, but the democratic system as practiced in the West, was not, is not and will not be a universal value.” (ibid.)*

*“Within and outside the nation, various antagonistic powers are still trying to undermine the values of our Party.” (Xi Jinping, Speech at the Central Party School, December 11th, 2015)*

*“their objective is that they want to vie with us for battlefields, for the people’s hearts and for the masses, and in the end, to overthrow the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and China’s Socialist system.” (Speech 1 : Xi Jinping, Speech at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference, August 19th, 2013)*

Accordingly, the Chinese leadership repeatedly asserts its rejection of Western democracy, which should not be a model for Chinese democracy in any way, as it is not adapted to Chinese

socio-historical conditions and would therefore lead to catastrophic consequences.

*“It is imperative that we should uphold and improve this fundamental political system, instead of copying any western models.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th CCP National Congress, 1997)

*“The Chinese people finally came to realize that mechanically copying the Western bourgeois political system and applying it to China would lead them nowhere.”* (White Paper 3 : State Council, Building of Political Democracy in China, 2005)

*“We will never copy a Western political system.”* (Hu Jintao, 18th CCP National Congress, 2012)

*“The world's development is multi-dimensional, and its history is never a linear movement. China cannot copy the political system or development model of other countries, because it would not fit us and it might even lead to catastrophic consequences.”* (Speech 10: Xi Jinping, Speech at the College of Europe, April 1st, 2014)

While the prevailing Western narrative after the collapse of the communist bloc held that liberal democracy was about to take hold in the world, history has proven this outlook wrong. To Ru Xin, former vice president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the teleological narrative of liberal democracy's dissemination has been shattered. Other development paths have proven that there were alternatives to the Western development model. The decline of the West has plunged Western values into a severe crisis, argues Wang Tianxi.

*“Looking back at more than 20 years ago, the drastic changes in Eastern Europe triggered changes in the world situation. American scholar Fukuyama put forward the “end of history”, claiming that history is over and capitalism finally defeated communism. Taking the path of Western capitalism has become the “only way” for the development of human history. History has refuted this fallacy, and now even Fukuyama himself has to revise his conclusions.”* (Opinion paper 3 : Ru Xin, The competition of two systems and two roads will determine the future of the world, 2013)

*“The US, Europe [...] use makeshift measures that compound their difficulties to preserve the “splendid” Western democratic system. As such things have come to pass, the “universal values” of Western democracy cannot only not sustain their case, but have sunk into a deep crisis.”* (Opinion paper 1 : An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013, Wang Tianxi)

In China, the Marxist ideology of the socialist democracy was shaken by the fall of the communist Eastern bloc and challenged by political scientists who considered it outmoded. While it has survived, it continues to be challenged, says Ren Jie, Associate Research Fellow at the Marxism Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Science. The decline of faith in Marxist ideology in China since 1989 has been a challenge to the CCP.

*“Brzezinski attacked Communism doctrine as “greatly simplified theory”, Daniel Bell’s “End of Ideology” and Fukuyama’s “End of History” are brazen challenges to Marxism.”* (Opinion paper 3 : Ren Jie, Six Major Challenges that Our Country’s Ideological Construction Faces at Present, 2012)

*“the changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have weakened faith in our country’s mainstream ideology.”* (ibid.)

In the context of the Western crisis of universal values and the undermining of ideologies, particularly Marxism, the challenge for the Chinese political regime is to propose a political narrative that is an alternative to that of Western democracy and that does not rely on the promotion of Marxism-Leninism.

This ideological war centered on values is embedded in the Weberian theme of modernity. The West has defined a path to modernity whose political embodiment is liberal democracy. Ren Jie, emphasizes the ideological stakes involved in the modernization question. There is no neutral path to development. The strength of the West is that it has succeeded in imposing its model as a political horizon in people's minds, as Document 9 notes. By claiming the universalist scope of its values and its political model, the West imposes its vision of how to achieve economic and social development. It is this path of modernization that the Chinese political regime refuses to take.

*“In the process of our country realizing modernization, we must fully understand the ideological nature of modernization, and avoid falling into the ‘development mirage’.”* (Opinion paper 3: Ren Jie, Six Major Challenges that Our Country’s Ideological Construction Faces at Present, 2012)

*“Seeing modernization as a movement, transformation and development process of human kind that originated in the west and expanded across the world, is in itself a sort of cultural ideology. (ibid.)*

*“[The people who espouse universal values] believe that [...] only when China accepts Western values will it have a future,” and that ‘Reform and Opening is just a process of gradually accepting universal rights’.”* (Central Committee, Document 9, 2013)

Modernization refers to the process of rationalization leading to economic and social development. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the Central Committee points out that the conversion of China to a market economy is regarded by the advocates of Western universal values as a first step towards Western development. In this logic, economic modernization is the first step towards political modernization, i.e. the adoption of Western democracy.

*[The people who espouse universal values] believe that ... only when China accepts Western values will it have a future,” and that “Reform and Opening is just a process of gradually accepting universal rights.”*” (Central Committee, Document 9, 2013)

However, for the Chinese political regime, there is no single modernity on a global scale and economic development should not be equivalent to Westernization.

*“But modernization is not equal to Westernization, and cannot be mechanically carried out or achieved through the same model.”* (White Paper 2: State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

*“Economic globalization does not equal Westernization.”* (Speech 1 : Xi Jinping, Speech at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference, August 19th, 2013)

Liberal democracy, as the outcome of a historical and cultural context, conveys harmful values for socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics. These threatening values are individual rights. The West's claim that its own values are universal serves a political agenda consisting in the exportation of the liberal democracy model. Given that all political regimes are the outcome of a socio-historical context, the import of Western democracy cannot be imported into China at the risk of causing chaos.

Once the country's economic and social development has been achieved and the Chinese government refuses to liberalize the regime, it becomes strategic for the regime to define its own vision of political modernization and propose an alternative narrative to the Western one. This is socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics.

China socialist democracy is rooted in the millenary history of China

The Chinese political regime presents Chinese socialist democracy as the legacy of a long cultural and political heritage. Xi Jinping explains the viability and dynamism of China's socialist democracy by its adequacy with the Chinese heritage. The contemporary Chinese political system is part of the continuity of China's long history. The condition for its future prosperity is to remain anchored in the Chinese soil.

*“What kind of path a country takes should be based on the experience of other countries, but more importantly on its own reality, and should be decided by its own people in accordance with its own history, cultural traditions, and level of economic and social development.”* (White Paper 2 : State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

*“The socialist political system with Chinese characteristics is viable, vibrant, and efficient precisely because it has grown out of Chinese soil, and must remain rooted in this soil so that it can continue to thrive in the future.”* (Speech 2 : Xi Jinping, Speech at the Ceremony Marking the 60th Anniversary National People's Congress, 2014)

China's current political system is particularly suited to the country's geographical and demographic conditions. In addition to the vast territory and large population, there are disparities in development between urban and rural areas and between different regions, as well as significant ethnic diversity. China's governance is rendered significantly more difficult by these national conditions. These risks of disintegration and the historical specter of chaos justify strong leadership.

*“China is a vast country with a large population. There are great disparities in terms of development between urban and rural areas, and between different regions [...] In a big country like China, with such a large population and where things are complicated, if there had not been a strong political core and if there had not been a lofty goal that can unite the people of all ethnic groups in their common struggle, the country would have disintegrated easily.”* (White Paper 3 : State Council, Building of political democracy in China, 2005)

*“Over the past 70 years, China's success boils down to the CCP's leadership. Due to China's vast territory and complicated national conditions, the governance of China is uniquely difficult. Without centralized, unified and firm leadership, China would have tended towards division and disintegration and caused widespread chaos beyond its own borders.”* (White Paper 3: China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

The strengthening of Chinese socialist democracy requires the enhancement of the national consciousness of the people. As an outcome of Chinese political civilization, Chinese socialist democracy coincides with Chinese people's ethos. Chinese democracy and nationhood are always associated by Chinese presidents in their speeches at the CCP National Congresses. The unity of the Chinese people is the cement for national prosperity. The exaltation of national sentiment therefore constitutes a party objective to bring the Chinese Dream to life.

*“The character and endowment of the Chinese people have fostered the Chinese civilisation over thousands of years. They have also exerted a far-reaching influence on the development of China and on the ethos of today's Chinese.”* (Speech 2 : Xi Jinping, Always put the people first, March 20, 2018)

*“To make the Chinese Dream come true, we must focus on heightening a sense of identity of the Chinese nation, and take the cause of ethnic unity and progress as a fundamental task.”* (Speech 6 :

Xi Jinping, Heighten a sense of Chinese Identity, September 27, 2019)

Socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics is presented as a logical expression of the course of history following a teleological outlook. It is deemed as an “Inevitable Choice in China's Social Development” by the State Council (2007). According to the Chinese president, the best criteria for judging the suitability of a political system are whether it fits to country's history, culture, and social system.

*“Each country is unique with its own history, culture and social system, and none is superior to the other. The best criteria are whether a country's history, culture and social system fit its particular situation.”* (Speech 7 : Xi Jinping, Let the Torch of Multilateralism Light up Humanity's Way Forward, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021)

*“[socialism with Chinese characteristics] is a path based on China's actual conditions.”* (White Paper 2: State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

Claiming to be suited to "Chinese conditions", i.e. encompassing the Chinese socio-historical, geographical, demographic and cultural context, the PRC responds positively to Xi's prerequisites. Based on China's actual conditions, socialism with Chinese characteristics is a stated to be a path suited for China.

Chinese socialist democracy in line with its adaptive ability assumes to draw inspiration from external political models in a selective way. The Chinese leadership finds it useful to adopt what it considers to be the best elements of foreign political systems. The Chinese leadership acknowledges having drawn inspiration from both Eastern and Western cultures, including elements of Western democracy. However, blindly copying a foreign political model, especially Western democracy, would be as dangerous for China as getting rid of the mechanisms of socialist democracy. The State Council therefore sets as a principle to remain faithful to its choice of path, i.e. to its political system, without rigidly opposing change. The institutional and ideological foundations of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics should never be lost sight of in the adoption of political elements alien to Chinese conditions. This syncretic capability of the Chinese political system also explains the uniqueness of its political model.

*“China has drawn wisdom from its own culture and learned from the strengths of other cultures, both Eastern and Western.”* (White Paper 2: State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

*“Undoubtedly, we need to draw on the achievements of other political civilizations, but we should never abandon the fundamentals of China's own political system.”* (Speech 3: Xi Jinping, Speech at the Ceremony Marking the 60th Anniversary National People's Congress, 2014)

*“In building socialist political democracy, China has always adhered to the basic principle that the Marxist theory of democracy be combined with the reality of China, borrowed from the useful achievements of the political civilization of mankind, including Western democracy, and assimilated the democratic elements of China's traditional culture and institutional civilization. Therefore, China's socialist political democracy shows distinctive Chinese characteristics.”* (White Paper 3 : State Council, Building of Political Democracy in China, 2005)

An essential condition for such appropriation is the indigenization of external elements to ensure their optimal effectiveness in the Chinese context. Xi Jinping reminds us that any theory or system must be indigenized to have real effects. This has been the key for the successful development of Marxism-Leninism in China. The Party hence applies *Sinification* to

operationalize foreign concepts or systems in Chinese reality.

*“Any scientific theory and system must be indigenized before it can have true effects. This is true for Marxism and for Socialism, the key why it could obtain victories in China was that our Party incessantly moved forward their Sinification, and operationalized them in close integration with China’s reality.”* (Speech 1 : Xi Jinping, Speech at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference, August 19th, 2013)

The Chinese political regime selectively draws on what it considers to be useful for strengthening Chinese socialist democracy. To do this, the Party indigenizes foreign theories or systems, making them compatible with Chinese conditions. This syncretism reinforces the uniqueness of the Chinese model.

The Party obeys the law of history

The Party builds its legitimacy on history. The revolutionary struggle it waged to seize power, added to the long practice of construction and reform justifies its right to rule. The CCP's leadership is therefore not only the choice of the Chinese people but also of history.

*“This system was established and has been developed during the long-term practice of the Chinese revolution, construction and reform.”* (White Paper 1 :State Council, China's Political Party System, 2007)

*“The CCP's leadership position was formed and consolidated during the long years of revolution, construction and reform, and it is the choice of history and the people.”* (ibid.)

The CCP has a historic responsibility to lead the Chinese nation to prosperity. It presents itself as the recipient of a historical mission. The path China has taken, the road to socialism with Chinese characteristics, is the logical outcome of the evolution of history. Accepting the baton of history, the Party bears the ultimate responsibility for the rise and fall of Chinese civilization.

*“our Party shoulders a lofty historical responsibility for the destiny of the Chinese nation.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th CCP National Congress, 1997)

*“realizing the Party's historical task of governance.”* (Central Committee Document 1: CCP Ruling capacity, 2004)

*“Our responsibility is to unite and lead people while [...] accepting the baton of history and continuing to work for realising the great revival of the Chinese.”* (Speech 8 : Xi Jinping, Politburo Standing Committee Members' meeting with the press, November 15th, 2012)

The CCP carries the historic mission of the all-compassing notion of national rejuvenation that would correspond to a state of prosperity in China. National rejuvenation is deemed to be the deep aspiration of the Chinese people since modern times.

*“The CCP's leadership and rule is needed for promoting so and realizing great national rejuvenation. It has been the aspiration and dream for the Chinese people to rid their country of its poor and backward outlook, and realize modernization and national rejuvenation over the past 100 years.”* (White Paper 3: State Council, Building of Political Democracy in China, 2005)

*“National rejuvenation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since modern times began. At its founding, the Communist Party of China made realizing Communism its highest ideal and its ultimate goal, and shouldered the historic mission of national rejuvenation.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

The long-term practice of the Chinese revolution, construction and reform is the basis of the

CCP's historical legitimacy to govern China. The Party's mission and path are thus part of the logic of historical finality. In this sense, the Party has a historical mission, the rejuvenation of the nation.

History is put at the service of Party's legitimacy. It promotes an historical narrative that gives ground to its right to rule. Xi Jinping instructs the propaganda bureau to emphasize the chaos of modern Chinese history, which he compares to a tidal wave. The CCP is meant to be depicted as the savior who brought China out of its difficulties and restored stability. It is the guide who led the country to a new path of national prosperity. This narrative aims to make people accept that the current political system is a logical outcome of history.

*“Propaganda elaborating Chinese characteristics must pay attention to start from the historical angle of the flows, ups and downs of our country's development since modern times, and the people's struggle that surged like a tidal wave.”* (Speech 1 : Xi Jinping, Speech at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference, August 19th, 2013)

In their speeches at the National Party Congress, Chinese leaders from Jiang to Xi all mention China's modern history. The narrative built around this period can be divided into four moments. First, the humiliation caused by imperialism is recalled. The Opium Wars mark a first tipping point as it turned China into a semi-colonized country. Xi Jinping emphasizes the consequences of this situation of subjugation for the Chinese people: division, poverty and despair.

*“After the Opium War of 1840, China was reduced to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th CCC National Congress, 1997)

*“with the Opium War of 1840, China was plunged into the darkness of domestic turmoil and foreign aggression; its people, ravaged by war, saw their homeland torn apart and lived in poverty and despair.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

The second historical moment brought forward by the Party concerns the failure of Sun Yat-sen's importation of Western-style democracy. Sun Yat-sen has an ambivalent role for the CCP. On the one hand, he is the pioneer of the national and democratic revolution in China. On the other hand, his attempt to import the bourgeois parliamentary system into China proved that Western democracy was not suitable for the Chinese context. This political system did not meet the aspirations of the Chinese people. This discrepancy can be explained by the different natures of Chinese and Western society.

While the 1911 Revolution did not change the social nature of China, it did initiate the dynamics of progress in China. The Party saw Sun Yat-sen's enterprise as a first step against reactionary power. However, his attempt to import constitutionalism failed because it was unsuited to Chinese conditions.

*“In the early 20th century, Sun Yat-sen, forerunner of China's democratic revolution, turned his eyes to the West for a road that would save China. In 1911, he led a bourgeois democratic revolution, bringing to an end the autocratic monarchical system that had been in place for several millenniums. With the founding of the Republic of China, Sun Yat-sen introduced a parliamentary and multi-party system in imitation of that in Western countries. Though historically progressive compared with the autocratic monarchy, the bourgeois political system soon collapsed under the onslaught of domestic and foreign reactionary forces and therefore failed to fulfill the Chinese people's fervent desire for independence and democracy. Mr. Sun Yat-sen later concluded that China could not simply copy European and American politics to govern its own society, as Chinese society was different from*

*that of the West.*” (White Paper 1 : State Council, China's Political Party System, 2007)

The CCP brought democracy to China. This third moment of the Chinese narrative describes the Maoist gesture that led to the establishment of the People's Republic of China, from the expedition to the North through the agrarian revolution to the war against Japanese imperialism. This emancipatory revolution is described as having been fully endorsed by the Chinese people who stood up to follow the revolutionary movement. The Maoist New Democracy puts to an end feudalism and imperialism in China. The founding of the People's Republic of China marks the beginning of people's democracy in China, where the Chinese people can enjoy their democratic rights for the first time in modern history.

*“We completed the New Democratic Revolution through 28 years of painful struggle, and founded the People’s Republic of China in 1949, thus marking China’s great transition from a millennia-old feudal autocracy to a people’s democracy.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

*“Through the Northern Expedition, the Agrarian Revolution, the War of Resistance Against Japan and the War of Liberation, we overthrew the three big mountains of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism. The Chinese people rose to their feet. Proceeding from New Democracy, they took the road to socialism and scored tremendous achievements in socialist construction.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th CCP National Congress, 1997)

*“For nearly 110 years after that [1840 and the Opium wars], the Chinese nation was plunged into the most dangerous situation, and the Chinese people had no democratic rights whatsoever.”* (White Paper 1 : State Council, China's Political Party System, 2007)

Opening to economic reforms constitutes the fourth historic shift for Chinese democracy. Initiated by Deng Xiaoping, this period revamped Chinese socialist democracy. The incorporation of reforms brought about by economic opening into economic reforms within the framework of Marxist-Leninist inspired institutions is referred to as “Chinese characteristics”. Socialism with Chinese characteristics opens a new path to modernization.

*“The third change was featured by the reform, opening up and endeavor to achieve socialist modernization. It was a new revolution initiated by the second generation of collective leadership with Deng Xiaoping at the core.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th CCP National Congress, 1997)

*“In the early days of reform and opening up, the Party made a clarion call for us to take a path of our own and build socialism with Chinese characteristics.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

The Chinese political regime has built a historical narrative that supports the legitimacy of the Party to rule. Two phases can be distinguished in this narrative starting in the modern era. At the beginning of the 20th century, China is described as poor and weak, threatened by internal conflicts and foreign aggression. In the middle of the century, the founding of the PRC in 1949, marks the beginning of a new era of national independence, liberation of the people and development. In the outlook fostered by the Party, history consecrates the contemporary system of Chinese socialist democracy as the most suitable for China's conditions.

A value-based development path

Chinese socialist democracy grounded in Chinese culture conceives and projects itself as an alternative project to Western modernity. In contrast to the Western view of modernity as a one-way street characterized by capitalism in the economy and liberal democracy in politics,

China claims to trace its own value-based path.

The former head of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee Liu Qibao argues that the question of values is central to the affirmation of one's own development path in an article published in Qiushi. Values provide meaning to history and stress the uniqueness of one's own development path.

*“Value concepts are the core of a development path. In understanding China’s path, the dimension of value cannot be overlooked.”* (Opinion paper 5 : Liu Qibao, We Are Marching on the Right Path, 2014)

*“There are no two completely identical tree leaves in the world. Similarly, there are no completely identical paths for the development of countries.”* (ibid.)

By inscribing socialist democracy in the essence of Chinese culture, the CCP claims the uniqueness of the Chinese political system. This is what President Xi Jinping emphasizes when he says that the uniqueness of China's cultural tradition, history and circumstances have prevailed in China's development path. For Liu Qibao, this anchoring of the political project led by CCP in the roots of the Chinese nation should give confidence to the Chinese leaders in their political model. Consequently, the Chinese government must invest in the celebration of Chinese culture. This reciprocal relationship between Chinese culture and socialist democracy must be the cement of the Chinese model to assert itself as a political project alternative to Western modernity.

*“But since modernity, some people have come to believe that the reason China fell back was not only because it was inferior in skills or systems, but because it was inferior in culture, it lost confidence in its national culture, and even put forward the viewpoint of ‘wholesale Westernization’.”* (Opinion paper 5 : Liu Qibao, We Are Marching on the Right Path, 2014)

*“Now, a ‘Chinese culture craze’ continue to rise in temperature [...] Chinese culture has greatly strengthened, and the long-standing and well-established Chinese culture is marching towards new glories.”* (Opinion paper 5 : Liu Qibao, We Are Marching on the Right Path, 2014)

Therefore, it is up to the Party to give its own definition of the values considered by the West as universal.

*“how to view the scientific connotations of freedom, democracy, and equality in practice, how to treat the so-called “universal value” in the West requires a key answer.”* (Speech 5 : Xi Jinping, Speech at the National Party School Work Conference, December 11th, 2015)

The Chinese leadership refuses to evaluate its own society per the yardstick of Western society, culture and values. Instead, the Party mobilizes Chinese culture to provide a meaning and a direction to the regime's development path. This reliance on culture enables the Chinese government to provide and justify its own understanding of the so-called universal values.

Drawing on Chinese culture, Chinese socialist democracy claims its own conception of universal values. The Chinese political system recognizes the existence of universal values. First, it recognizes democracy as a common value of humanity. It sets as a goal the respect of democracy in the international arena.

*“We should uphold the common values of humanity, i.e. peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom.”* (Speech 7 : Xi Jinping, Let the Torch of Multilateralism Light up Humanity's Way Forward, January 25th, 2021)

However, China's promotion of democracy in international relations is only restricted to respecting the sovereignty of countries. Every country should be considered on an equal footing regardless of its development model, as Jiang and Hu jointly assert. Asserting its aim to take a lead in reforming and developing the global governance system, the Chinese leadership associate democracy with a rebalancing of power in the international institutional architecture. China's promotion of democracy in international relations is therefore simply a demand for a fair redistribution of power in international institutions.

*“Politically, all countries should respect each other and conduct consultations on an equal footing in a common endeavor to promote democracy in international relations.”* (Hu Jintao, 17<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress, 2007)

*“Taking a lead in reforming and developing the global governance system. What kind of international order and governance system best suits the world, and best suits the peoples of all countries? China advocates that it should be decided by all countries through consultation, and not by a single country or a small minority of countries. We will play an active role [in] making the global governance system better reflect changes to the international architecture and the will of the international community in a more balanced way.”* (White Paper 2: State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

Human rights are among the universal values that the Chinese political regime upholds and promotes. China's leaders, led by Hu Jintao, declare that human rights are a matter of concern for the Party. Chinese government sets itself the task of protecting them. To this end, the Chinese leadership amended the PRC constitution in March 2004 to include a commitment stating that *“the State respects and safeguards human rights”*. The State Council claims that human rights protection has become a core goal of national development in its White Paper entitled *“Progress in Human Rights over the 40 Years of Reform and Opening Up in China”*.

*“The cause of human rights witnessed sound development.”* (Hu Jintao, 17<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress, 2007)

*“March 2004, an Amendment to the Constitution was adopted by the Second Session of the Tenth National People's Congress, which included the statement “the State respects and safeguards human rights” in the Constitution, thus ushering in a new chapter in the progress of China's human rights undertakings.”* (White Paper 3: State Council, Building of Political Democracy in China, 2005)

*“It has become a core goal of national development to respect and protect human rights.”* (White Paper 4 : State Council, Progress in Human Rights over the 40 Years of Reform and Opening Up in China, 2018)

This commitment to human rights is also expressed at the international level through the ratification of international treaties and conventions protecting human rights. By 2005, China had already joined 21 international human rights conventions. Xi Jinping praises the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the advancement of human progress in the world and recalls China's commitment to the defense and protection of human rights. China is also committed promote a fairer, more equitable and more inclusive global human rights governance. This reflects the Chinese leadership's willingness to challenge the Western monopoly on human rights.

*“To date, China has joined 21 international conventions on human rights, and has adopted a series of measures to fulfill its obligations as specified in those conventions. In October 1997, the Chinese*

*government signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which was approved by the Standing Committee of the NPC in February 2001. The Chinese government submitted its first report on the implementation of the Covenant to the United Nations in 2003 as scheduled, and accepted the consideration and examination of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations in April 2005. The Chinese government also signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in October 1998.”* (White paper 3: State Council, Building of Political Democracy in China, 2005)

*“The Universal Declaration of Human rights is a significant document in the history of humanity, which has profoundly impacted progress in human rights around the world. Together with the peoples of others countries, and based on the common values of humanity - peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom - China is committed to safeguarding human dignity and rights, and promoting fairer, more equitable and inclusive global governance of human rights.”* (Speech 9 : Xi Jinping, Protect and promote HR in the Chinese Context, 2018)

But the Chinese political regime upholds a different definition of human rights than the West. The Chinese conception of universal values is said by the Party to be rooted in its culture. Xi Jinping draws on China's civilizational legacy to justify a Chinese conception of universal values. The Chinese value system, unique in the world, is based on a rich philosophical heritage, the Secretary-General of the Party said. Over the centuries, Chinese thinkers contributed to delineate a distinctively Chinese conception of such diverse notions as filial piety, ownership, and charity. These values and teachings still underpin the unique value system in the Chinese outlook of the world, of society and of life itself. Such cultural relativism allows the Chinese political regime, in a double movement, to propose its definition of human rights and to reject the Western conception of human rights.

*“Of the world's ancient civilizations, the Chinese civilization has continued uninterrupted to this day. [...] Great thinkers [...] covered many important ideas, such as the moral injunction of fidelity to one's parents and brothers and to the monarch and friends [...] These values and teachings still carry a profound impact on Chinese people's way of life today, underpinning the unique value system in the Chinese outlook of the world, of society and of life itself. And this unique and time-honored intellectual legacy has instilled a strong sense of national confidence in the Chinese people and nurtured a national spirit with patriotism at the very core.”* (Speech 10 : Xi Jinping, Speech at the College of Europe, April 1st, 2014)

The Chinese political system establishes and equates human rights with development. In its White Paper entitled "Progress in Human Rights over the 40 Years of Reform and Opening Up in China", the State Council asserts that the opening up of economic reforms has ushered a new chapter in the defense of human rights in China. In line with the party's people-centered philosophy, Xi Jinping states that the rights to subsistence and development are basic human rights as they prioritize livelihood. Alongside economic and social rights, Xi adds environmental rights. These second-and third-generation rights should, in the words of the Chinese President, ensure the ultimate human right that people can live a happy life.

*“Reform and opening up [...] have opened up a path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and ushered in a new chapter in the development of human rights.”* (State Council, Progress in Human Rights over the 40 Years of Reform and Opening Up in China, 2018)

*“Adhering to a people-centered vision, China takes the rights to subsistence and development as the primary and basic human rights, work for coordinated progress in economic, political, social, cultural and environmental rights, defends social fairness and justice, and promotes the rights to*

*all-round development.*” (White paper 4 : Protect and promote HR in the Chinese Context, December 10th, 2018)

*“The ultimate human right is that people can lead a happy life. Since the first day of its founding in 1921, the CCP has fully committed itself to the wellbeing of the Chinese people and human development.”* (ibid.)

This restrictive conception of human rights does not encompass civil and political rights. The Party regards these rights as a reflection of Western particularism and as dangerous to the stability of the regime. Instead of rejecting human rights, the Chinese political regime seeks to impose its own conception of them by engaging more deeply in human rights governance.

The Chinese political regime regards the so-called 'universal values' promoted by the West as being disguised particularism. The West uses individual rights advocacy to further its political agenda, namely liberal democracy export. Yet this regime is deemed by the Chinese leadership to be the product of Western socio-historical and cultural conditions. In the view of the PRC, a political regime cannot be judged in the abstract as it is the outcome of a specific environment. Evidence of this can be seen in the failed attempts to export or import liberal democracy. This view echoes the “path dependency” theory.

Contending with the universalist dimension of Western democracy and its values, the Chinese political regime claims that the model of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics is perfectly suited to "Chinese conditions". These Chinese conditions include, in the broadest sense, Chinese territorial, demographic, sociological, historical and cultural characteristics. Adopting a teleological perspective, the Party presents socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics as a logical outcome of Chinese history. After a troubled period in early modern history, the CCP's rise to power marks national liberation and the beginning of prosperity. The Party's legitimacy to rule is therefore grounded in history. The CCP presents itself as the laws of history's upholder. It carries the historic mission of national rejuvenation.

Chinese culture must be put at the service of this political project. While China has embraced economic modernization, it rejected the political project of Western modernization. Instead, it claims to have developed a unique modern nation-state rooted in Chinese culture. Drawing on the distinctly Chinese values of its socialist democracy, the CCP claims to have carved out a singular path for development. Equally, the PRC asserts its own conception of universal values based on Chinese culture. Its promotion of democracy in international relations merely concerns a redistribution of power in international institutions. As for human rights, which have been adopted as an agenda of the Party and of China's international engagement, they are only understood in the restrictive dimension of the right to development.

*“Trust in government means that a government can fulfill its basic pledge to govern the people.”*

Wang Huning, "Five Diaries of Wang Huning" (“王沪宁日记五则”), end of 1994

### 5.3. Cult of performance

Liberal democracy is hampered by procedures

Electoral democracy is charged with fueling demagoguery. The election process encourages politicians to make the best promises to attract as many voters as possible, says Wang Tianxi, former editor-in-chief of the party journal *Qiushi*. Zhang Weiwei, professor of international relations at Fudan University, quotes Deng Xiaoping, for whom he was a translator, to express the same observation about the American political system. Deng explains that once in power, American politicians change their rhetoric and that the cycle of elections never stops. Wang concurs with this assessment when he describes electoral appetites that are never satiated.

*“In order to wangle votes, politicians’ phony promises are constantly changing, to continuously raise electors’ appetites.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, *An embellished Western political civilisation*, 2013)

*“Deng Xiaoping’s comment in 1983 on the American political system: “The US brags about its political system. But politicians there say one thing during a presidential election, another after taking office, another at midterm elections and still another with the approach of the next presidential election.”* (Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016)

In contrast, the Chinese political regime professes to want to fight demagoguery and not make wild promises that it would be unable to keep later. Chinese policy-making thus appears to be more stable than that of the US.

*“To avoid the phenomenon of politicians making wild promises in the elections process that are unable to deliver later on.”* (Speech 8 : Xi Jinping, *Speech at the Ceremony Marking the 60th Anniversary National People’s Congress*, 2014)

*“Yet the US says that our policies lack stability. Compared with its policies, ours are very stable indeed.”* » (Deng Xiaoping in Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016)

Democracy is also blamed for driving populism. Wang Tianxi endorses the arguments of the classical authors of political science. He draws on the arguments of Socrates and Plato, who had already discussed the possible degeneration of democracy into a crowd-driven regime.

*“Socrates’ student, Plato, was extremely resentful of this, and strongly censured the Athenian democracy for being ‘mob rule politics’.”* (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, *An embellished Western political civilisation*, 2013)

Populism thrives on human irrationality. Zhang Weiwei considers that one of the congenital shortcomings of democracy is to consider human beings as rational. This idea, inherited from the Enlightenment, is that human beings can make rational and just decisions using reason. For Zhang, the absolute belief in human reason is nonsense in the light of scientific work. Worse, it is dangerous when it is the cornerstone of the democratic pact. Politicians exploit this voters' irrationality to get more votes. Social media accentuate this phenomenon by playing on the irrationality of voters.

*“What are the three ‘genetic defects’ of the Western political system? [...] (1) human beings are irrational.”* (Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016)

*“So far all social studies have proven that human can be both rational and irrational, and even ultra-irrational. With the rise of the new media, the irrational side of human may well be played up more easily. So many politicians tend to take advantage of voters’ irrationality, playing the populist card*

*in order to win votes and personal gains.” (ibid.)*

Zhang endorses the work of the American political scientist Bryan Caplan. The latter considers that the "rational voting bias" is exploited by populist politicians. The "rational joke", which consists of thinking that voters would make their political choices out of reason, is the cause of the failure of democracy. Zhang adds that these irrational choices are guided by short-termism.

*“American political scientist Bryan Caplan, in his book ‘The myth of the rational voter: why democracies choose bad politics’ pinpoints the problems with the rational human being assumption. He notes that ‘rational voter bias’ allow their votes to be exploited by various interest groups and populist politicians. [...] Caplan believes that the failure of democracy can be ascribed largely to the ‘rational farce’ of the voters.” (Zhang Weiwei, The China horizon, 2016)*

*“The irrational choices made by voters are marked by the spread of short sighted populism in the West and elsewhere.” (ibid.)*

Another factor contributes to the devaluation of political competence in Western democracies: the growing importance of communication. The dominance of image has become even more important in the functioning of Western democracies as they are guided by electoral imperatives. Multiparty competition has degenerated into marketing competition for Zhang. Thus, the Western world lacks competent leaders with strategic visions.

*“Western world today suffers from a lack of competent leaders with strategic visions. Multi party democracy has become increasingly a kind of « showbiz democracy », i.e; more about showmanship than leadership, and democracy has degenerated into elections, elections into marketing, marketing into competing for money, resources, public relations, for tricks and ruses, for shows and images.” (Zhang Weiwei, The China horizon, 2016)*

The structure of power in contemporary constitutional democracies contributes to the inhibition of public action. Wang Tianxi, considers that the checks, balances and supervision mechanisms of American democracy are too numerous and complex.

*“Checks, balances and supervision in themselves are necessary conditions for democracy, but the US checks and balances on power are numerous and complex.” (Opinion paper 1 : Wang Tianxi, An embellished Western political civilisation, 2013)*

*“The three branches of government are designed to deliver through check and balances but they have become a gridlock.” (Zhang Weiwei, The China horizon, 2016)*

The omnipotence of procedures is also targeted. Drawing on the work of Oxford University political theorist Stein Ringen, Zhang criticizes the sacrosanct belief in processes characterizing constitutional democracies. This belief in procedure devalues political power as it curtails the leader's leeway. Echoing Stein Ringen's analysis of the rule of law in the West, Zhang argues that rule of law has become a prisoner of procedure in the West. Procedural justice, whose central idea is that fair and transparent processes ensure justice, in fact hinders public action from proceeding. According to Zhang, the result of this procedure worshiping can even lead to injustices.

*“in real practice of Western democracy, the procedures are often viewed as sacred and omnipotent. Western democracy has thus evolved into a procedural democracy, and once the procedure is deemed right, it does not matter whoever comes into power.” (Zhang Weiwei, The China horizon, 2016)*

*“Rule of law has been jeopardised by its rigid procedures, and procedural justice has thus become an effective weapon to prevent reforms and protect vested interests, rather than a new instrument to encourage reforms and promote innovations. Once the procedural justice has been taken as justice itself and made absolute, the consequence is often injustice.” (ibid.)*

Zhang points out that power is fragmented in constitutional democracies, divided among several actors such as political action committees (specific to the US), think tanks, media and lobbying organizations. Under such conditions, he shares the analysis of the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama which states that the system of checks and balances favors the blocking of public action by minorities. For the promoter of the "end of history" theory, the American political system is more likely to prevent things from happening than to allow pro-active decisions. He refers to this situation as “vetocracy”, and sees this governmental paralysis as a sign of the decline of the American political system.

*“power has been sucked out of the constitutional system and usurped by actors such as political action committees, think tanks, media and lobbying organizations.” (Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016)*

*“the much admired American system of checks and balances can lessen as a ‘vetocracy’: it empowers a wide variety of political players representing minority positions to block action by the majority and prevent the government from doing anything. [...] our political system makes it easier to prevent things from getting done than to make a proactive decision. » (Francis Fukuyama in Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016)*

This diagnosis of dysfunctional constitutional democracies drawn by Western political scientists reinforces the Chinese leadership's belief in the relevance of their political model. The former head of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CCP, relied on Western scholars' analysis to state that constitutional democracies have degenerated into a system where democratic mechanisms foster impediments of power.

*“In comparison, Western democracies characterized by multi-party systems and tripartite separations of power, reveal their abuses and limitations more and more every day. A number of Western scholars recognize that in recent years, Western democracy has faced a profound crisis, checks and balances in democratic systems have evolved into impediments of power.” (Liu Qibao, *We Are Marching on the Right Path*, October 13th, 2014)*

Western democracy in decay

The flaws of electoral democracy (demagoguery, short-termism and populism) and constitutional democracy (deadlock) are the root cause of the decline of Western democracies, in the words of the advocates of the Chinese political system.

Zhang Weiwei, opens his book *The China horizon* with his personal insights on Western decadence. Provocatively, he states that going overseas is more effective than a party-political education to enhance patriotism. He turns the insecurity in the American neighborhoods or French suburbs into a symbol of the political incapacity of Western democracies' political incapacity.

*“Going abroad often makes one more patriotic. This is far more effective than the Party’s political education.” (Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016)*

*“In virtually all major American cities they are large pockets of third world areas where no outsiders dare to enter. The same is true for the peripheries of many large and medium-sized cities in France*

*and many districts in Marseille as well as many Italian cities.” (ibid.)*

The triggering event that highlighted the vulnerability of the American model was the financial crisis of 2008. The collapse of the American banking system accentuated the feeling among Chinese intellectuals of the Western world's decay. The former vice president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences considers that this event accelerated the multipolarization of the world. As evidence of this turnaround in the international system, Zhang Weiwei testifies that he advised Greek scholars to call on Chinese expertise in governance to handle their sovereign debt crisis.

*“The international financial crisis triggered by the US subprime mortgage crisis that broke out in 2008 severely hit Western capitalist countries and weakened the ability of international monopoly capital to influence world economic development. The international balance of power further developed in the direction of world multipolarization.”* (Opinion paper 3 : Ru Xin, The competition of two systems and two roads will determine the future of the world, 2013)

*“I myself also told some Greek scholars that the Greek government’s competence in governance was far from satisfactory. I counselled them that some professional assistance from China might be helpful.”* (Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016)

Western democracies' troubles are well understood by the Chinese political regime. The State Council highlights the rising ungovernability and instability of Western democracies challenged by populism. This leads Zhang to suggest that the American political system should reform itself by drawing inspiration from political models that work. The reference to the Chinese model is hardly concealed.

*“The world is undergoing the greatest changes in a century. Some Western countries are facing serious difficulties in governance, populism is widespread, and attacks on globalization are intensifying.”* (White Paper 2: State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

*“This brings about a broader question concerning the American political system. Indeed, it would be much better for the United States to pause a bit and reflect on the predicament faced by its political system and imitate necessary political reforms, rather than keeping on lecturing others.”* (Zhang Weiwei, *The China horizon*, 2016)

The Chinese political regime and its proponents consider that liberal democracy has turned dysfunctional. On the one hand, electoral democracy fosters demagoguery and populism by creating a competition between political leaders to make the most appealing electoral promises. The electoral cycle also prevents the development of a strategic vision to the benefit of short-term management. On the other hand, the institutional mechanisms of constitutional democracy, i.e. balance of powers and devotion to procedures, have resulted in the deadlock of public action. In contrast to the instability and ungovernability of liberal democracies, the Chinese political system projects itself as a stable and effective system of governance in the conduct of public affairs over the long term.

The efficiency of authoritarian governance

The PRC's social contract: democracy is development. Economic development has been the central mission of the CCP since the period of economic reforms inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping at the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Party Congress. This is also endorsed by the Central Committee in its decision on "Strengthening the Party's Governance Capability". It holds that

development must be the top priority of the Party in governing the country, as well as the key to the resolution of all problems in China.

*“Since the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Party Congress, our Party has consistently persisted in putting economic construction at the centre.”* (Speech 1 : Xi Jinping, Speech at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference, August 19th, 2013)

*“CCP must always regard development as its top priority in governing the country, as well as the key to the resolution of all problems in China.”* (Central Committee Document 1 : CCP Ruling capacity, 2004)

*“We have committed to a people-centered approach and given top priority to development.”* (White Paper 2: State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

CCP encompasses the aspirations of the people in development. Jiang Zemin states that the Party's economic development task has been formulated in accordance with people's aspirations. After recalling that the Party is committed to the people, Hu Jintao enjoins its cadres to promote all-round development and therefore ensure that development is for the people, by the people and with the people sharing in its fruits.

*“The theme [economic development] has been defined in the light of the requirements of the times and the aspirations of the people.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th CCP National Congress, 1997)

*“We must always make sure that the aim and outcome of all the work of the Party and the state is to realize, safeguard and expand the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. We must [...] take the path of prosperity for all and promote their all-round development, to ensure that development is for the people, by the people and with the people sharing in its fruits.”* (Hu Jintao, 17th CCP National Congress, 2007)

The reason for the Party's domestic endorsement lies in its ability to fulfill the aspirations of the people. The CCP strives to fulfil its ontological commitment to the people. State-Council recalls that it should bring happiness to the people, realize the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation rather than seeking its own interests. Consequently, the people-oriented philosophy of the Party is acted on to content the people. The former propaganda chief, Liu Qibao, identifies the people as the only ones capable of judging the relevance of the Chinese development path. The improvement of material living conditions, visible in the transformation in the look of the country, means that the Chinese people can be regarded as having embraced this path in their hearts in his opinion. This ability to respond to the interests of the people is alleged to make the Chinese political system the most effective democracy.

*“The CCP is China's core leadership, ruling the country for long and supported by the people. The reason lies in its founding mission of pursuing happiness for the people, realizing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, rather than seeking its own interests.”* (White Paper 2: State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

*“Our vision of making development people-centered has been acted on, a whole raft of initiatives to benefit the people has seen implementation.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

*“On whether or not the path is good, the people who are on this path have the greatest right to speak. The Chinese people have personally felt the correctness of the Chinese path, through the sustained improvement in material living conditions, through the huge changes in the look of the country, and through their full hopes and desires, and have embraced this path in their hearts.”* (Opinion paper 5: Liu Qibao, We Are Marching on the Right Path, October 13th, 2014)

*“China’s socialist democracy is the broadest, most genuine, and most effective democracy to safeguard the fundamental interests of the people.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

As the aspirations of the Chinese people coincide with economic development, and as the Party successfully fulfilled its mission of economic development, the Chinese political regime's democratic claim is further enhanced. Consequently, the Chinese political regime's “social contract” is taking shape wherein CCP's legitimacy would be derived from its ability to foster development.

The socialist democracy of China is said to have grown out of both the historical experience of striving for national independence and the Party experience in bringing prosperity to the country. Besides the history-based Party legitimacy, is added the performance-based legitimacy. Hence, it is the CCP's ability to efficiently conduct the country's affairs that underpins its popular legitimacy. Strategic planning for the long-term development of the country and competence in implementing specific policies are identified by the State Council as two important instruments of the Party's governance capacity.

*“[The socialist political democracy of China] grew out of the experience of the CCP and the Chinese people in their great practice of striving for national independence, liberation of the people and prosperity of the country.”* (White Paper 3 : State Council, Building of Political Democracy in China, 2005)

*“The CCP is China's core leadership, ruling the country for long and supported by the people. [...] The reason lies in its strategic planning for the long-term development of the country and its competence in implementing specific policies.”* (White Paper 2: State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

The CCP emphasizes its people-oriented philosophy, i.e. its work is entirely guided by the aspirations of the people. For the Party, the aspirations of the Chinese people are embedded in the framework of development. In claiming to meet this prosperity expectation, the Chinese leadership draws an equivalence between development and democracy.

The Chinese “social contract” built on the Party's ability to bring about development makes the issue of governance of critical importance for the regime. Therefore, the CCP regards the improvement of the PRC's governance capacity as a fundamental political project.

The Chinese political regime displays a new political project: governance. Following the evolution of the CCP from a revolutionary party to a party in power, the focus of the political process has gradually changed from government to governance. A lexical analysis of the speeches at the National Congress of the CCP enables us to situate the appearance of the theme of governance in the official discourse (VIII.). The term was introduced for the first time at a national party congress by Jiang Zemin in 2002. Since then, the use of the word has significantly grown in National CCP Congresses' speeches. The enhancement of Party's capabilities for governance turned out to be a crucial agenda for the CCP.

The Central Committee sets the topic of “Strengthening the Party's Governance Capability” as the subject of the Fourth Plenum of the 16th CCP Central Committee. In its resolution, it establishes that the constant improvement of leading skills and ways of governance must be a target for the Party. Scientific, democratic and law-abiding principles must frame the Party's efforts to improve governance.

*“The Party must always exercise its governing power in a scientific, democratic and law-abiding manner, and constantly improve its leading skills and ways of governance.”* (Central Committee Document 1, CCP Ruling capacity, 2004)

Governance is above all a technocratic project claiming a scientific management of public affairs. This scientific prism applied to political management was already claimed by the party before the real emergence of the governance theme. At the 14<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress, Jiang declared that scientific decision-making is essential in building socialist democracy. Leading organs and leading cadres must seek advice from experts in different fields and from research and consultancy institutions, in line with the development of the Party's consultative system previously discussed. It is also a principle that should guide the Scientific Outlook on Development promoted by Hu Jintao. According to the former President, the decision-making process must be scientific and put at the service of the Chinese development project. Hu Jintao urges that the spirit of economic reform infuse all areas of governance. This causal link recalls the connection of the concept of governance with economic liberalism.

*“Scientific and democratic decision-making is essential to democratic centralism and to the building of socialist democracy. Leading organs and leading cadres must listen attentively to the opinions of the people, seek advice from experts in different fields and from research and consultancy institutions and establish a system of democratic and scientific decision-making as soon as possible.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th CCP National Congress, 1997)

*“To thoroughly apply the Scientific Outlook on Development, we must continue to deepen reform and opening up. We need to incorporate the spirit of reform and innovation into all links of governance, unswervingly adhere to the orientation of reform, and have more scientific decision-making and better coordinated measures for reform.”* (Hu Jintao, 17th CCP National Congress, 2007)

This new managerial philosophy is consistent with the background of scientific socialism based on scientific analysis of economic, social and historical realities. Dedicated to advancing the modernization of China's system and capacity for governance, the 19th plenary session of CCP Central Committee emphasizes the scientific nature of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In acknowledging China's enrichment over the past decade, Xi Jinping celebrates the vitality of scientific socialism guiding and justifying the CCP's technocratic management.

*“The Chinese nation, which since modern times began had endured so much for so long, has achieved a tremendous transformation: it has stood up, grown rich, and is becoming strong; it has come to embrace the brilliant prospects of rejuvenation. It means that scientific socialism is full of vitality in 21st century China, and that the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics is now flying high and proud for all to see.”* (Xi Jinping, 19<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress, 2017)

*“The system of socialism with Chinese characteristics is a scientific system developed by the Party and the people through their long-term practices and explorations.”* (Central Committee Decision 2: Advance the modernization of China's system and capacity for governance, 2019)

The Chinese leadership's adoption of the governance concept redefines its relationship with the people. According to the notion of "service-oriented government", the Party is now engaged in a service relationship. Its goal consists in building a service-oriented government that has scientifically defined functions and satisfies the people in accordance with the Marxist-Leninist philosophy that makes the people the core mission of the Party. Concretely, the government must better perform its functions of creating a favorable environment for

development, providing quality public services, and maintaining social fairness and justice. This promotion of service-oriented government puts forward a scientific and market-oriented management of politics that would strive to match the Chinese government's offer with the demand of the Chinese people. This de-politicization of politics is in line with the Party's conception of the social democratic contract with the people. Economic and social advancement of the Chinese people's material conditions legitimizes the CCP in its leadership role.

The concrete translation of these principles carried by the Chinese governance project involves the reform of the administrative apparatus with performance as the horizon for public action. This administrative reform is part of China's more global economic reform and is considered by the regime as a necessary requirement for making the superstructure compatible with the economic base. Concretely, it involves streamlining administration, i.e. focusing on changing functions, straightening out relations, optimizing the setup and raising efficiency, bringing about a system which matches powers with responsibilities, divides work in a rational way, fosters scientific decision-making, and ensures smooth enforcement and effective oversight. Government is therefore intended to be performance-oriented. The overarching goal being to create a service-oriented government capable of satisfying the needs of the people

*“Accelerate the reform of the administrative system and build a service--oriented government. The administrative reform is an important part of the efforts to deepen China's overall reform. We must lose no time in working out a master plan for it, with the focus on changing functions, straightening out relations, optimizing the setup and raising efficiency, and bring about a system which matches powers with responsibilities, divides work in a rational way, fosters scientific decision--making, and ensures smooth enforcement and effective oversight.”* (Hu Jintao, 17th National Congress of the CCP, 2007)

*“Reform of the administrative system is a necessary requirement for making the superstructure compatible with the economic base. To reach the goal of establishing a socialist administrative system with Chinese characteristics, we should [...] build a well-structured, clean and efficient service-oriented government that has scientifically defined functions and satisfies the people. We should [...] continue to streamline administration, and make the government better perform its functions of creating a favorable environment for development, providing quality public services [...] We should exercise government administration in an innovative way, increase public trust in the government, and improve its competence so as to make the government performance-oriented.”* (Hu Jintao, 18th CCP National Congress, 2012)

*“The government needs to transform its functions, further streamline administration and delegate powers, develop new ways of regulation and supervision, and strengthen its credibility and administrative capacity, building itself into a service-oriented government able to satisfy the needs of the people.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

The leaders' desire to improve the country's governance capacities focused on two areas: a more qualitative recruitment of the Party cadres and civil-servants and the establishment of the rule of law.

The Chinese political regime promotes a performance-based personnel selection system in line with the political meritocracy principle. To this end, it has undertaken to deepen the reform of the officials and personnel selection-system.

The improvement of the officials' selection and management system is part of the Chinese agenda for better governance. The “Chinese conditions”, i.e. the size and population of the

country, require strong and competent political leadership. The upgrading of China's leadership was therefore already identified under Jiang Zemin as a strategic target for the CCP. It entails the selection and training of the best potential young cadres.

*“[The Party] deepen reform of the system for the management of officials and personnel and build a contingent of competent key officials for governance.”* (Hu Jintao, 18th CCP National Congress, 2012)

*“Strengthening every dimension of our ability for governance. To lead a large socialist country of more than 1.3 billion people, our Party must be both politically strong and highly competent.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

*“It is a strategic task to train and select a large number of excellent young cadres who can shoulder cross-century important tasks.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th CCP National Congress, 1997)

The selection and promotion process for officials shall be merit-based. Officials should be recruited on the basis of moral integrity and professional competence, regardless of background. Officials with outstanding performance and who enjoy popular support should be given priority for advancement. The best selection process is on-field evaluation. In the search for promising talent, Xi makes practical training in local communities, in work on the frontline and in areas where conditions are harsh, a necessary condition for selecting outstanding cadres. They must also undergo severe organizational inspections, democratic recommendations, competitive selections and other such procedures. The Party cadres have all had grass-root experience in many positions and obtained remarkable work achievements. Such merit-based promotion of leaders should ensure that the country is always managed by the very best people.

*“We should appoint officials on their merits without regard to their origins, select officials on the basis of both their moral integrity and their professional competence with priority given to the former, and promote officials who are outstanding in performance and enjoy popular support.”* (Hu Jintao, 18th CCP National Congress, 2012)

*“We will work harder to identify promising young officials and get them well prepared for future jobs. We will focus on their practical training in local communities, in work on the frontline, and in areas where conditions are harsh, and work to produce a constant stream of outstanding young officials who have passed the test of practice.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

*“All levels’ leading cadres have, on the journey to their leading positions, had to undergo severe organizational inspections, democratic recommendations, competitive selections and other such procedures, they have all undergone the test of time and have been tempered in practice, they all have grass-roots experience in many positions and remarkable work achievements.”* (Opinion paper 5 : Liu Qibao, We Are Marching on the Right Path, October 13th, 2014)

This meritocratic selection process is intended to be democratic. Reforming this officials and personnel selection-system aims at establishing a scientific, democratic and institutionalized system of appointment, management and supervision. This selection system is described as scientific because it is based solely on the measurement of competences. It should allow for open and therefore democratic competition among the aspirants to the highest offices of the Party-State.

*“we should focus on establishing a sound mechanism of selection, appointment, management and supervision, with a view to making it scientific, democratic and institutionalized.”* (Jiang Zemin, 16th CCP Party Congress, 2002)

*“Continue to deepen reform of the cadre and personnel system and focus on training high-caliber cadres and personnel. Adhering to the principle that the Party is in charge of cadre management, we will establish a scientific mechanism for selecting and appointing cadres on the basis of democracy, openness, competition and merit.”* (Hu Jintao, 17<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress, 2007)

In line with the requirements of the times, the Party strives to foster specialized expertise within its ranks. Talents are regarded as a strategic resource for the country to accomplish its national rejuvenation and stay ahead in international competition. The Party's investment in expertise should enable China to be a talent-strong country.

*“We will take seriously the development of specialized expertise and professionalism, and enhance Party officials’ ability to meet the requirements of developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

*“People with talent are a strategic resource for China as it endeavors to achieve national rejuvenation and stay ahead in international competition. We must [...] assemble the best minds across the land and draw fully on their expertise, and step up efforts to make China a talent-strong country.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

The CCP promotes two benefits of its cadre selection system: enhanced public management and democratic access to leadership positions in the Party-State. As such, political meritocracy should enable the Chinese political system to be a talent-strong country in international competition.

The Chinese political regime's advocacy of rule of law is part of a process of streamlining public decision making. The Chinese political regime seeks to develop law-based governance. The Chinese leadership's advocacy of the rule of law is part of its attempt to streamline the management of public affairs.

The roots of the rule of law development lie in the economic reforms process. The opening to the market economy called for the restructuring of the systems of finance, taxation, banking, foreign trade, foreign exchange, planning, investment, pricing, circulation, housing and social security systems, explains Jiang. Such reforms required a consolidation of the Chinese legal system. In a two-way influence movement, the transformation of the Chinese economy was thus carried out by law and the legal system was strengthened under the opening of the economic reforms.

*“New breakthroughs have been made in the reform and opening to the outside world. In accordance with the requirements for establishing a socialist market economy, we made big strides in reforming the systems of finance, taxation, banking, foreign trade, foreign exchange, planning, investment, pricing, circulation, housing and social security.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th CCP National Congress, 1997)

*“Significant progress was made in developing socialist democracy and improving the legal system. A series of laws and statutes commensurate with the development of a socialist market economy were enacted, and law enforcement and the judiciary work were strengthened.”* (Jiang Zemin, 15th CCP National Congress, 1997)

Building a socialist rule of law has become a major issue for the Party over time. The development of the rule of law was first mentioned at the 16th CCP National Congress in 2002. It stated that political restructuring includes the development of the legal system, leading the country by law, building a socialist state under rule of law. This objective has been increasingly present in the speeches of leaders. In the CCP Central Committee decision on “Strengthening

the Party's Governance Capability”, governing by law and improving governance by law are considered to be state policies. In 2007, Hu sets up the construction of a socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics as a fundamental principle of the Party.

*“We should promote political restructuring, develop democracy, improve the legal system, rule the country by law, build a socialist state under the rule of law and ensure that the people exercise their rights as the masters of the country.”* (Jiang Zemin, 16th CCP Party Congress, 2002)

*“We will carry out the basic state policy of governing according to law and improve the level of governance according to law.”* (Central Committee decision 2 : CCP Ruling capacity, 2004)

*“Comprehensively implement the rule of law as a fundamental principle and speed up the building of a socialist country under the rule of law.”* (Hu Jintao, 17th CCP National Congress, 2007)

The development of the rule of law is intended to provide a better regulatory and oversight framework for the exercise of power in China. Rule of law is conceived by the Party as a means to strictly enforce the laws, administer justice impartially and ensure that everyone abides by the law. All spheres of power in the government system must be involved in the development of rule of law, the governance of the country, the administration in the government and the power of the state. The Chinese rule of law must provide an overall and long-lasting institutional guarantee for China's development and should provide stability in a changing society.

*“We should make laws in a scientific way, enforce them strictly, administer justice impartially, and ensure that everyone abides by the law.”* (Hu Jintao, 18th CCP National Congress, 2012)

*“China practices the rule of law as a fundamental principle in governing the country. China pursues coordinated progress in law-based governance of the country, law-based exercise of state power and law-based administration in the government. Rule of law is a fundamental, overall and long-lasting institutional guarantee for China’s development. Rule of law ensures a vigorous and orderly society in times of profound change, and ensures lasting peace and stability.”* (White Paper 2 : China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

The rule of law promoted by the CCP is of "Chinese characteristics", i.e. the authority of the Party remains paramount. Xi Jinping praises the improvement of the Chinese socialist legal system, at the center of which is the constitution. However, this advocacy of rule of law and constitution is not a move towards constitutionalism. The Party General Secretary states that the CCP leadership must be exercised at every dimension of law-based governance. More specifically, the views of the Party must be translated into the will and laws of the state through legal procedures. While the CCP leadership must rely on socialist rule of law to govern, the rule of law is first and foremost an instrument for the Party to strengthen its leadership. It is the distinctive nature of the socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics.

*“We must exercise Party leadership at every point in the process and over every dimension of law-based governance [...] We must improve the Chinese socialist system of laws, at the heart of which is the Constitution; establish a Chinese system of socialist rule of law.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

*“We must turn the views of our Party into the will and laws of the state through legal procedures.”* (Speech 11 : Xi Jinping, Advance the rule of law under Chinese socialism, August 24, 2018)

*“Socialist rule of law must uphold CCP leadership, while CCP leadership must rely on socialist rule of law.”* (ibid.)

The CCP's conception of the rule of law is thus far removed from that of the democratic rule of law and consists more of the rule by law. For the Chinese political regime, rule of law is intended to be a means providing a coherent and stable framework for the country's public affairs management. Development of the rule of law is part of the CCP's overarching goal of achieving good governance. By indigenizing the concept and making the term its own, the Chinese political regime claims to be a modern state that makes decisions reasonably based on the law.

The Party's objective of good governance is served by the upgrading of political and administrative personnel and the streamlining of governance through administrative reforms and the rule of law. This political project carried by the Chinese leadership should enable it to fulfil its part of the "social contract" tacitly undertaken with the population, namely to ensure development in exchange for the acceptance of the CCP's authority. It is this model of a technocratic, efficient state at the service of the socio-economic and now ecological development of the country that the Chinese government aims to disseminate.

Export of a Chinese model of governance

Building on its investment in governance capabilities, the Chinese regime is promoting its political model as an alternative to liberal democracy. The Chinese political regime attributes successful development outcomes to its political model. Thanks to the resolute decisions taken by the Chinese government for economic development, it has also gained important experience in effectively defusing external economic risks and maintaining steady and robust growth. According to Hu, this ability demonstrates the superiority and vitality of China's chosen path, i.e. socialism with Chinese characteristics.

*“By making resolute decisions [...] we made China's economy the first in the world to make a turnaround, and we have gained important experience in effectively defusing external economic risks and maintaining steady and robust growth. [...] All this shows the superiority and vitality of socialism with Chinese characteristics.”* (Hu Jintao, 18th CCP National Congress, 2012)

The nature of the political system is crucial to a country's development. China has carved out its own path of modernization. This path, Socialism with Chinese characteristics, is the result of historical experience and experimentation. Its resilience to various challenges combined to its development success confirm that it is the right path for China. This is what Xi says when he says that “the right human way brings great changes”.

*“China has chosen a particular system unique to itself, which is the result of withstanding great tests.”* (Opinion paper 5 : Liu Qibao, We Are Marching on the Right Path, October 13th, 2014)

*“Since reform and opening up, we have summarized historical experience, incessantly and arduously explored, and in the end, found a correct path to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This path is Socialism with Chinese characteristics.”* (Speech 12 : Xi Jinping, The Road to Rejuvenation, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012)

*“The choice of path is critical to the successful development of a country. As a vast country with a nearly 1.4 billion population, China has no experience of modernization to borrow from in history, but has to blaze its own path. Over the past 70 years, China has achieved great success. The ultimate reason is that China has found and will continue on the right path – socialism with Chinese characteristics.”* (White Paper 2: State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

A political system should be judged by its ability to achieve results, not by its compliance with procedures. The strength of the Chinese political system lies in its capacity to implement public policies effectively according to the former propaganda chief of the CCP. This should be the only criterion for measuring the quality of a political system. Defending the idea that practice is the best judgment, comparison is the most convincing, the Chinese political regime implicitly seeks to compete with the Western model of democracy.

*“A country’s policymaking capacity and implementation efficiency are important yardsticks to measure its systemic quality.”* (Opinion paper 5; Liu Qibao, We Are Marching on the Right Path, October 13th, 2014)

*“Practice is the best judgment, comparison is the most convincing.”* (ibid.)

The Chinese political regime regards its governance system as superior to Western democracies for conducting public policies effectively. Indeed, the Chinese political system’s ability to respond ensure the development of the country, in a scientific, timely policymaking, and efficient and powerful implementation display the prominent advantage of the Chinese system.

*“This displays a prominent advantage of the Chinese system. Our system is able to focus on the overall interest of the people and the long-term development of the country, scientific and timely policymaking, and efficient and powerful implementation have effectively integrated continuation and exploration.”* (ibid.)

The concrete demonstration of Chinese political system capacities having been made through the exceptional development of China, the Chinese political system has enriched and even developed the institutional culture of human societies according to the former propaganda chief. The Chinese way, i.e. socialism with Chinese characteristics, would have given birth to an original mode of governance based on a renewed Marxist-Leninist inspired institutional organisation combined with an investment in technocratic means of governance and a strong leadership. Xi Jinping explicitly states that the path, the theory, the system, and the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics offer a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization.

*“Practice demonstrates that China’s system has huge superiorities, resilience, vitality and potential, it has enriched and developed the institutional culture of human societies.”* (Opinion paper 5: Liu Qibao, We Are Marching on the Right Path, October 13th, 2014)

*“It means that the path, the theory, the system, and the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics have kept developing, blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization. It offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.”* (Xi Jinping, 19th CCP National Congress, 2017)

Promoting the Chinese model of governance therefore becomes an objective of Chinese diplomacy. With the rise of China's international position, international society's rational knowledge of China's development path and development model is progressively deepening as president Xi observed. Consequently, the State Council aims to strengthen exchanges with other countries in state governance. This goal is made even more explicit in its White paper on "Development of International Cooperation" (2021). Chinese government explains that it will share its management experience in delegated powers, improvement of regulation, and strengthening of services through seminars and academic programmes. These programmes are

particularly targeted at developing countries. Specifically, the State Council reports having signed memoranda on the strengthening of the mechanisms for bilateral human resources development and cooperation, with 31 countries, including Rwanda, Kyrgyzstan, El Salvador, Papua New Guinea, and Trinidad and Tobago.

*“We must meticulously do foreign propaganda work well. Following our country’s economic and social development, and the rise of our international position, international society’s rational knowledge of China’s development path and development model is progressively deepening.”* (Speech 1: Xi Jinping, Speech at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference, August 19th, 2013)

*“By furthering its own experience, China will continue to explore the laws of modernization, governance and human society, strengthen exchanges with other countries in state governance, and share experience to jointly realize good governance.”* (White Paper 2: State Council, China and the World in the New Era, 2019)

*“Through seminars and academic programs, China has shared its experience in strengthening law-based governance, its reforms to streamline administration, delegate powers, improve regulation, and strengthen services, and its experience with industrial innovation and upgrading and the digital economy, to help officials in the public sector in other developing countries increase their policy-making capacity. It has also strengthened the mechanisms for bilateral human resources development and cooperation, signing memorandums on this issue with 31 countries, including Rwanda, Kyrgyzstan, El Salvador, Papua New Guinea, and Trinidad and Tobago, to provide targeted support in these countries based on their needs.”* (White Paper 5: State Council, China’s International Development Cooperation in the New Era, 2021)

The Chinese political regime is promoting its political model using its success in economic development as the best argument. By advocating a development path that is specific to the socio-historical conditions of each country, coupled with an effective mode of governance, the Chinese political regime is designing an alternative path to modernization for developing countries.

The Chinese political regime has developed a technocratic critique of liberal democracy, considering this regime as being incapable of conducting public policies efficiently and in the long term. The structural shortcomings of democracy, such as the encouragement of demagoguery caused by the electoral process or the short-termism due to the electoral cycle, are made even more salient in the context of rising populism. Faith in the rational capacity of each individual to make sound choices is pinpointed as the congenital problem of liberal democracy. The organization of power in Western democracies is also accused of inhibiting decision-making and effectiveness of public action. The disproportionate devotion to procedure is part of the same dynamic. In the eyes of the Chinese leadership, liberal democracies are in decay.

In contrast to this picture of liberal democracies' deficiencies, the Chinese political regime touts the merits of its political system in terms of governance. The opening up of economic reforms required the reform of the state apparatus. The Chinese leadership has invested in its governance capabilities by placing emphasis on the competence of its personnel and on performance in the management of public affairs. This scientific management of public affairs aligns the scientific socialism of the Chinese political system with the performance-oriented nature of the administrative reforms of liberal inspiration. The development of the rule of law is part of this objective of rationalizing the public decision-making process.

Grounded on the people-oriented principle of Marxist-Leninist inspiration, the Party's action is entirely devoted to meeting the aspirations of people. Defining the aspirations of the Chinese people as strive for overall development, the Chinese leadership has established a market-based approach to public service management, the service-oriented government. This helps the Chinese government to depoliticize public affairs. The governance capabilities of the Chinese political system enable the Party to achieve development and thus meet the aspirations of the people. Therefore, investment in the regime's governance capacity becomes a crucial issue for the CCP as it determines its hold on power. The Chinese political regime is defining a new tacit social contract with the Chinese people: effective governance for the concrete improvement of the people's living conditions in exchange for maintaining the authority of the single party.

Rejecting the one-size fits all model of modernization proposed by the West, the Chinese political regime sets its political system, based on development in tune with the country's socio-historical conditions and effective governance, as a model. The Chinese leadership argues that a political system's relevance lies not in its observance of the processes, but in its performance. By this standard, it argues that its own model is better than liberal democracy. Therefore, promoting this model to developing countries is now considered as a major geopolitical task for the regime.

## VII. Attempted conclusion

The first hypothesis was that the critiques of liberal democracy were to be varied and of a different nature. I expected them to condemn the fictional character of bourgeois democracy, or the rejection of a liberal model in the name of cultural inadequacy, or the instability of the democratic regime. I supposed that the Marxist lens of denunciation of liberal democracy has been marginalized.

In accordance with the set-out typology of the Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy, three main categories of critical discourse have been identified: a Marxist-Leninist inspired discourse, a culturalist discourse and a technocratic discourse. This confirms that the Chinese political regime's repertoire of the critical discourse towards liberal democracy is wide-ranging. I was surprised, however, both by the great diversity of criticism within each of these repertoires and, above all, by their sophistication. In the case of opinion pieces by intellectuals who are members of the Party or cadres of the regime, most of the critiques identified selectively mobilise authors of political science, both classical and contemporary, giving strength to their discourse. Each of these categories of discourse deploys numerous sub-criticisms targeting different elements of liberal democracy. From this point of view, one can say that the number has exceeded my expectations.

The assumption that the Chinese political regime is critical of the instability of liberal democracies has been found to be true. Only I identify this critique as belonging to the broader category of technocratic critical discourse of liberal democracy. In this, the critical repertoire aimed at the institutional shortcomings of democracy turned out to be much more elaborate than expected.

With regard to the Marxist-Leninist inspired critical discourse, the assumption that this

discourse is marginalised has been partially contradicted. A critique of liberal democracy borrowing from the Marxist ideological repertoire does exist, but it takes different forms depending on the context. In the discourse aimed at the regime, such as in the Party journal *Qiushi*, Marxist-Leninist rhetoric is still very much present, in contrast to the discourse aimed at the international scene, such as in the translated book by Fudan international relations professor Zhang Weiwei. In this respect, it is more a useful critical reading grid to denounce liberal democracy and justify the reminiscence of Marxist-Leninist-inspired institutions than a demonstration of an unshakeable ideological attachment. Thus, in a growing context of mistrust of representatives in democracy and increasing inequalities, liberal democracy is portrayed as a regime subject to the interests of minorities, and in the first instance of the wealthiest minorities.

The second hypothesis was that the Chinese political regime's discourse promoting democracy was essentially based on its Marxist-Leninist ideological and institutional heritage. This assumption is only partially true. The Marxist-Leninist heritage is in fact only one facet of the Chinese political regime's promotion of democracy. Another important aspect is the culturalist discourse stating that the Party's conception of governing is in line with the ethos of the Chinese people. The ability of the government to bring about development in China was also proposed as another source of democratic legitimisation promoted by the Chinese political regime. This hypothesis was confirmed.

The third hypothesis was that the Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy would present both a continuity in the dichotomy of the Chinese political regime's discourse on democracy, split between the Chinese critique of liberal democracy and the praise of its socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics, and at the same time would have evolved by embracing notions new to its rhetorical repertoire, such as human rights, the rule of law or governance. This assumption has proven to be essentially true.

There is indeed a continuum in the Marxist-Leninist inspired discourse on democracy held by the Chinese political regime. However, within this discourse, there are notable advances such as the claim of intra-party democracy or consultation under Hu Jintao.

The appropriation of and demand for human rights has progressively increased since 1989 to the point of becoming a major theme for the Party, particularly in international relations. The appropriation of the notion of the rule of law, which preceded 1989, has followed the same dynamic. The theme of governance has imposed itself more recently. The arrival in power of Xi Jinping corresponds to a strong acceleration of the Party's investment in this theme. The Chinese repertoire surrounding the topic of democracy has thus been enriched with new concepts.

The fourth hypothesis was that the "social contract" proposed by the Chinese political regime promotes its governance capabilities within a stable political framework. I assume the Marxist-Leninist dimension to be absent from the advocacy of this "Chinese model". This assumption proved to be essentially true even if it omits one dimension. The "social contract" advocated by the Chinese political regime is also based on the claim of a development path specific to the socio-historical conditions of each country. This culturalist dimension echoes the theories of path dependency. This is an important element of the Chinese model, in that

unlike attempts to export liberal democracy through the implementation of procedures, primarily voting, the Chinese political regime promotes first and foremost methods of governance aiming at stability.

Overview of the results

The results are aggregated in the following table.

## The Chinese political regime's discourse(s) on democracy

What is at stake?  
Critiques

Democratic claim of the Chinese political regime

Affiliated Themes

The Marxist-Leninist discourse on democracy	The culturalist discourse on democracy	The technocratic discourse on democracy
Representation	Universalism, Modernity	Efficiency
<p><b>Liberal democracy is subject to minority interests</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elections are a farce</b> since politicians need the money from the wealthiest to get elected, and as such become subject to this minority's interests. (Electoral democracy)</li> <li>• <b>Law-making process is flawed</b> by lobbies, who ensure the interests of the wealthiest to be secured. (Representative democracy)</li> <li>• <b>Freedom of expression doesn't really exist</b> considering that main media are also controlled by the wealthiest people. (Civil liberties)</li> <li>• <b>Individual rights</b> are consequently deemed to be « bourgeois rights ». They are only an abstraction. (<b>Individual rights</b>)</li> <li>• <b>Civil society</b>, promoting the use of individual rights, is a dangerous concept attempting to dismantle the ruling Party's social foundation. (<b>Civil society</b>)</li> <li>• <b>Constitutional democracy</b>, as a system that guarantees individual rights and therefore curbs the power of the state is dangerous. (<b>Constitutional democracy</b>)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Western democracy is only suitable for the West</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberal democracy is a <b>Western outcome and therefore only suitable there.</b></li> <li>• <b>Individual rights</b>, which claim to be universalist, <b>are in fact only Western values. (Individual rights)</b></li> <li>• <b>Fetishisation of democracy</b> led the West to export democracy everywhere, even by force.</li> <li>• <b>The failed attempts to export democracy</b> (the colour revolutions, the Arab Spring, the Ukrainian revolution) prove that the Western conception of democracy is not suitable for other socio-cultural spaces.</li> <li>• <b>The West's promotion</b> of individual rights serves as a <b>geopolitical weapon</b>. It is used to bring down adverse regimes. Movements to promote civil society expression, such as NGOs, are a subversive weapon.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Constitutional democracies' mechanisms impede efficiency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Demagogy and populism</b> are fostered by the electoral process (<b>Electoral democracy</b>)</li> <li>• <b>Electoral cycles favours short-termism policy-making (Electoral democracy)</b></li> <li>• <b>Processes' worshipping impedes decision making (Rule of law/ Constitutionalism)</b></li> <li>• <b>Western democracies are in decay</b></li> <li>• The constitutional organization of democracies, make the political power impotent. Inside the state, the check-and-balance mechanism is targeted and outside, it is the expression of civil society, i.e. organised minorities. (<b>Constitutional democracy/ civil society</b>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>The socialist democracy is serving the people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>People are the Party's base</b> and the compass of the Party's action</li> <li>• <b>Democratic centralism enables different views to be expressed while making strong political decisions</b></li> <li>• <b>Chinese socialist democracy is grounded on the democratic nature of its traditional Marxist-Leninist inspired institutions</b> (multi-party cooperation system, people's congresses, Party organizations)</li> <li>• <b>Intra-party democracy</b> should lead to an incremental improvement of democracy within the party</li> <li>• <b>The extensive and multi-layered consultation</b> should make it possible to better identify the aspirations of the population in order to better respond to them</li> </ul>	<p><b>A regime suited for China</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>China socialist democracy is rooted in the millenary history of China.</b> It is adapted to the socio-historical, demographic, geographical and cultural conditions of China.</li> <li>• <b>The Party's legitimacy to govern is based in history.</b> Its legitimacy to govern is grounded in the Maoist revolutionary history but also in the more recent history of the country's development.</li> <li>• <b>Even more, the CCP obeys the law of history.</b> Following the teleological narrative that the current political system is the logical outcome of historical evolution, the Party is the depository of the heavenly mandate to ensure China's great rejuvenation.</li> <li>• <b>Based on the uniqueness of Chinese culture, the Party defends its own interpretation of human rights and universal values.</b> Its commitment to <b>democracy in international relations</b> is a demand to rebalance the balance of power in the global governance regime. <b>Human rights</b> are all about the right to development.</li> <li>• <b>China's development path is value-based.</b> The regime attributes the distinctiveness of its development to its culture.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The secret of China's successful development lays in its political model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The PRC's social contract: democracy is development.</b> It is therefore vital for the Party to be able to respond as effectively as possible to the aspirations of the people.</li> <li>• <b>As such, CCP has made governance a major political project.</b> With Xi Jinping this ambition has been strengthened.</li> <li>• <b>Chinese political regime is an effective system of governance that allows open and democratic competition for power</b> (Political meritocracy) and which rationalizes the process of decision-making by law (rule by law).</li> <li>• <b>CCP offers a different path to modernity based on path dependency and efficient governance.</b> It ensures its dissemination notably by developing its public affairs training partnerships with officials from developing countries.</li> </ul>
People, Intra/inner-party democracy, Consultation	Chinese conditions, Human rights	Governance, Selection system, Rule of law

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## Annex

This table lists occurrences of some democracy-related themes in the speeches of leaders at the CCP National Congresses.

	<b>14th Congress 1992</b>	<b>15th Congress 1997</b>	<b>16th Congress 2002</b>	<b>17th Congress 2007</b>	<b>18th Congress 2012</b>	<b>19th Congress 2017</b>
Dictatorship	5	4	2	0	0	1
Democracy/Democratic	35	50	58	69	61	56
Inner-party/intra-party democracy	4	3	3	9	9	2
Consultative democracy	0	0	0	0	6	8
Human rights	0	0	1	2	2	1
Governance	0	0	17	22	30	81
Rule of law	0	0	3	13	9	26