1  **Dilemmas of Party Adaptation:**

The CCP’s Strategies for Survival

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The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) faces a daunting dilemma: how to preserve the Leninist nature of the political system while presiding over the privatization of the economy. It seeks to maintain its monopoly on political organization – a hallmark of Leninism – even while it promotes increased competition in the market. Most observers, by contrast, believe that current conditions in China’s political and economic systems are incompatible, and expect political change of some kind will be necessary. Liberal reformers in China, and many outside observers, anticipate that economic liberalization, integration in the global economy, and rising living standards will inevitably lead to China’s democratization. The few remaining leftists within the CCP similarly warn that the party’s “reform and opening” (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) policies have created economic and social changes that will eventually lead to the party’s collapse. So far, the CCP has stymied these predictions of its demise. It has proven to be more resilient and more adaptable than most observers ever imagined.

In fact, the CCP hopes that these kinds of economic changes will bolster its popularity and legitimate its claim to be China’s ruling party, rather than trigger its demise.

The CCP’s reform policies have nonetheless exposed severe problems. Some have been generic features of the post-1949 People’s Republic, others are unique to the post-Mao era. From the early 1950s to the present, the CCP has debated the question of whom to rely upon for popular support and political and technical skills. Throughout the post-Mao period, the party has wrestled with the need to open up the economic system without also losing political control. Labor unrest, cadre corruption, and the center’s inability to monitor and enforce the local implementation of policy have also been recurrent problems, with varying degrees of intensity, long before the 21st century. In recent years, new problems caused by economic privatization, such as massive layoffs, unpaid wages, excessive taxation and fees, and rampant corruption, have triggered recurrent and widespread protests, raising questions about the stability of the country and the CCP’s ability to maintain control. But as this chapter will show, the CCP has a variety of political and practical advantages that have allowed it to survive, despite these challenges.

On the list of dilemmas facing the CCP, most people would not include ideological consistency as a cause of concern, especially at a time when pragmatism guides the party’s approach
to policy, and technocracy defines its style of leadership. But the CCP, or at least some of its leaders, continues to believe that the party requires an ideological rationale for its continued rule and the economic, political, and organizational reforms it has undertaken. During the Maoist era, when ideological issues helped determine political survival and even personal well-being, Chinese citizens and outside observers paid careful attention to ideological debates and propaganda formulations. After economic modernization replaced class struggle as the party’s top objective, and communist goals were abandoned in all but name, interest in ideology has waned, and rightfully so. Nevertheless, the party expends a great deal of effort to publicize ideological innovations, emphasizing how its reform agenda is consistent with its traditional goals and in the national interest, despite appearances to the contrary. In addition, attention to ideological debates still offers a window on basic conflicts within the party. As will be shown below, while most in the party insist that adaptation is necessary for its survival, a small but stubborn fraction insist that such changes are weakening the party and undermining its legitimate claim to rule.

The CCP finds itself confronted with competing political and economic demands. Its response varies, depending on the nature of the claims. On the one hand, the party has been tolerant of demands that are economic in nature. It has created corporatist-style organizations for various professions, particularly industry and commerce, as a way to integrate itself with individuals and groups who contribute to the economic modernization of the country. In addition to these institutional ties, it has also pursued a cooptive strategy of recruiting new members into the party. No longer simply a vanguard party of the “three revolutionary classes,” that is, peasants, workers, and soldiers, the party now claims to represent advanced productive forces, advanced culture, and the interests of the majority of the Chinese people, the so-called “three represents” (san ge daibiao 三个代表). While this effort to relegate itself is often derided as window dressing at best and hypocritical at worst, it reflects the party’s efforts to adapt itself to the changed economic and social environment in China. At the same time, the CCP continues to suppress other demands for political reform and liberalization, such as the formation of new political parties and independent labor unions that it perceives as threats to its ruling party status. For the vast majority of Chinese, the political atmosphere is more relaxed and less obtrusive than in the Maoist period, but for political activists who resist the party’s authoritarian rule and challenge restrictions on personal and political freedoms, the CCP’s hand can still be quite heavy.

In short, the party’s strategy of accommodation reflects what Kenneth Jowitt described as the phase of “inclusion” for Leninist regimes. Without surrendering its monopoly on legitimate
political organization, the party has attempted to be more inclusive, drawing in a wider range of social groups, reducing its emphasis on its traditional bases of support, and embracing the modernist paradigm while continuing to pay lip service to the goals of socialism. But it is not open to all groups and goals within Chinese society. It continues to exclude and repress those that pose a challenge to its authority and contest its claims to “benevolence, truth, and national glory,” as noted in Vivienne Shue’s contribution to this volume. As Alfred Stepan has argued, a state can pursue a combination of inclusive and exclusive policies at the same time, and that certainly has been the case for the CCP.5

This multi-faceted nature of the CCP’s relationship with Chinese society merits better understanding and appreciation. While coercion and repression remain a part of the political reality in contemporary China, it is only part of the reality. The party has abandoned its attempt to control all aspects of economic and social life, and with the liberalization of the post-Mao era has also relinquished the tools that would allow it to do so.6 In its place, it has adopted a more flexible approach, permissive in some respects but still repressive in others. The irony is that its efforts at adaptation may in fact be counter-productive. This is the dilemma that political parties and other organizations face when they contemplate reform: will the changes lead to rejuvenation or further decline?

This chapter begins with a discussion of the factors that have allowed the CCP to endure as the ruling party of China. It will then describe the evolution of the party’s relationship with society. It will look at changes in party recruitment, which reflect this evolving relationship with society, and its efforts to create new institutional links with certain sectors of society. Following from this, it will then look more closely at the “three represents” slogan, both as a reflection of the party’s strategy and a guide to its policies. Finally, it will briefly discuss areas where the party retains its traditional approach to other sectors, excluding them from the party and repressing their attempts at organized political activity.

Enduring Features of Party Rule

The CCP’s continued status as the ruling party of China is based first and foremost on its monopoly on legitimate political organization. Leninist organizational principles prohibit the formation of competing organizations that could challenge the CCP, and the party strictly enforces this prohibition. This was seen most vividly in the refusal to recognize autonomous associations for students and workers in 1989, and has been repeated in its suppression of efforts to form
autonomous labor unions, the Chinese Democracy Party, and spiritual and religious groups like the Falun Gong and house churches (see the chapter by Vivienne Shue in this volume). It also restricts the types of social organizations that are allowed to exist, controls the media to limit the dissemination of unflattering stories of corruption and governance failure, and actively monitors the Internet for politically suspect content. The inability to organize in opposition to the state and to obtain accurate and timely information significantly raises the cost of collective action and lowers the likelihood of a successful challenge.7

The party’s survival is not just a result of coercion, however. It has other assets which allow it to remain in power. First of all, the dramatic economic growth rates of the post-Mao era have raised living standards for many Chinese and created new economic opportunities that did not exist in the past. In addition, the goals of the “Reform and Opening” policies also resonate with China’s historical pursuit of wealth and power. As China’s economic and political status in the international community has risen, so have nationalist sentiments within China. Economic development is clearly one of the sources of the CCP’s popular support, but is not the only factor that legitimizes its rule.

A second factor concerns the CCP’s historic origins. Although any legitimacy derived from its victory in the 1949 revolution has largely dissipated by now,8 the CCP still has advantages that many other Leninist parties lacked. Whereas ruling communist parties in Eastern Europe were mostly imposed by the Soviet Union, and therefore lacked legitimacy in the eyes of many of the people they governed, the CCP came to power via an indigenous revolution that ousted a discredited and unpopular government. The CCP was not tainted with the image of an outside occupying force, as was the case for Eastern European parties and even the KMT on Taiwan.9 The result is that it does not have to “sink roots” into society, although it is increasingly concerned about the health and viability of its social roots. While some of the party’s policies and practices may not be popular today, it came to power with demonstrable popular support, and is currently able to draw upon different strands of historical traditions to help sustain its rule.

A third factor legitimizing CCP rule is the apparently widespread belief that it is the best and only safeguard against national disunity and political instability. These are prominent and deeply felt fears among both the state and society. Political protest and regime change inevitably entail disruption and uncertainty. The CCP can utilize the cultural preference for stability to discredit those who would challenge its monopoly on power. This is one reason why the CCP has stoked nationalistic feelings throughout society. As Richard Kraus and Stanley Rosen note elsewhere in
this volume, at a time when it no longer promotes class struggle or other communist goals, it can claim to promote nationalistic aspirations, beginning with maintaining national unity and order.

The CCP also enjoys material resources that can engender support. For instance, it is an effective patronage machine. It still controls many key jobs, not just in government but also in the financial and academic worlds as well. With the privatization of the economy, the CCP may not control as many managerial positions in enterprises as it did before, but it is still considerable. Party membership can also smooth access to important resources, such as business and investment opportunities and permission to travel abroad. This is a double edged sword: while it encourages some people to join to get their slice of the pie, it also contributes to the party’s image as a corrupt and self-serving machine with little regard for collective well-being.

Recognizing that the party is the only game in town, and that party membership is beneficial to many career goals, growing numbers of young intellectuals and private entrepreneurs are applying for party membership. This may seem surprising, because they enjoy the educational and entrepreneurial credentials to succeed on their own. While some are unwilling to join the CCP out of principle or concern that party membership would constrain their options, others are willing to join for practical reasons because membership still provides important privileges, especially for administrative careers. In recent years, the combination of higher learning or entrepreneurial acumen with a party card has tangible benefits for many professional and business careers. These kinds of people are not the traditional sources of support for the party, but the party recognizes they are necessary partners in its pursuit of economic modernization. The CCP uses the growing number of applications to join the party and the profiles of those who seek admission as evidence of the party’s continued popularity. While this may be a self-serving misreading of the data, there is no question that the party continues to grow, from almost 40 million in 1982 to almost 75 million in 2007.

In short, the CCP has remained in power because it enjoys a political monopoly, has been able to achieve remarkable economic development, can draw upon Chinese traditions and foster nationalism, can provide tangible benefits to its members, and successfully attracts new members from the modernizing sectors of Chinese society. These are not static factors, and the CCP has not been passive. As will be seen in the sections below, the CCP has been transforming its organization and its relations with society to adapt itself to the economic and social environment its reforms are bringing about. Its future prospects largely depend on the success of this transformation.
Corporatism and Cooptation: The CCP’s Policies of Inclusion

As the CCP entered the post-Mao period, it abandoned the class struggle policies and campaigns that characterized the Maoist era, particularly the Cultural Revolution, in favor of promoting economic modernization. With that shift in the basic work of the party came commensurate changes in the party’s organization and its relationship with society. Whereas party recruitment and job assignments in the Maoist era had emphasized mobilization skills and political reliability, the new focus on economic modernization put a premium on practical skills and technical know-how for party members and especially for cadres. Beneficiaries of the Cultural Revolution were removed from their posts, and even the victims of the Cultural Revolution were quickly eased into retirement to make way for younger technocrats.11

This shift in the party’s priorities for its members and key personnel had a dramatic impact. The proportion of party members with high school or higher levels of education rose from 12.8 percent in 1978 to 52.5 percent in 2002. This rise is the result of the CCP’s implicit quota in party recruitment: throughout the post-Mao era, roughly two-thirds of new members have at least a high school education. The trend is even more apparent among party elites. In 1982, none of the Politburo members had a university degree; among the 25 Politburo members selected at the 17th Party Congress in 2007, 23 (92 percent) have a university degree. In the CCP’s central committee, the percentage of those with college degrees rose from 23.8 in 1969 to 55.5 in 1982 and most recently to 97 in 2007. As the level of education among top party leaders has increased, it has also become more diverse. China’s leaders were once thought of as largely “technocrats” with education and professional experience in the hard sciences, engineering, or management. Among the Politburo members selected in 1997, 14 were technocrats and the number rose to 18 in 2002. In the Politburo selected in 2007, however, only 13 were technocrats. Technocrats on the central committee rose from only 2 percent in 1982 to 51 percent in 1997, but then declined to 36 percent in 2007. Instead, backgrounds in social sciences and humanities have become more common: 10 of the Politburo members with university degrees majored in economics, political science, or the humanities.12

The most tangible symbol of the party’s transformation is the reduction of peasant and worker members. Formerly the mainstay of the party and the basis for its popular support, they now comprise a minority of party members. Their numbers dropped from 83 percent of party members in 1956 to 63 percent in 1994 and to only 42 percent in 2007. This was a drop not only in relative terms, but in absolute numbers as well, from approximately 34 million to 31 million in the
years between 1994 and 2007. New recruitment among peasants and workers is not keeping pace with retirements and deaths among existing members. The CCP no longer gives priority to the subordinate classes for whom it fought the revolution – as Dorothy Solinger forcefully argues in her chapter on the plight of the urban poor – but instead reaches out to the technological, professional, and entrepreneurial elites that have emerged in the wake of the party’s reform and opening policies. As a consequence, the CCP has redefined its relationship with society to reflect its current priorities.

By declaring the end of class struggle at the outset of the post-Mao era, the CCP implied that its relationship with society would be more harmonious. Rather than relying on the familiar Maoist instruments of ideological mobilization and coercion, the party adopted a two-pronged strategy of adaptation: creating new institutions to link state and society and coopting new elites into the party. The party no longer views society as rife with class enemies determined to overthrow the CCP, but as the source of talent and ambition needed to modernize the economy. While it continues to suppress those it deems to be threats to the regime, the CCP seeks to cooperate with others who share its economic goals.

The first element of the CCP’s new policy of inclusion was the creation of new institutional links with society. Beginning in the 1980s, and accelerating in the 1990s, China experienced the formation of myriad types of social organizations, including chambers of commerce, professional associations, sports and hobby clubs, etc. The growing numbers of these organizations have led some observers to speculate about the potential for civil society emerging in China. However, these organizations for the most part do not enjoy the type of autonomy expected of a civil society. Instead, their relationship to the state is more akin to a corporatist perspective: they are sanctioned by the state, are granted a monopoly on the interest they represent, at least in their locality, and many even have party or government officials in their leadership. This corporatist strategy was designed not to abandon party control but to accentuate it with more flexible instruments. As the party reduced its penetration into the daily life of most of its citizens, these organizations substituted the direct and coercive control over society that characterized the Maoist era with more indirect links.

The second element of the CCP’s strategy of adaptation was coopting newly emerging social elites, in particular professional and technical elites and private entrepreneurs. Given the party’s focus on economic modernization, this was an appropriate strategy. It let the party be connected directly to the kinds of people who were primarily responsible for the growth and
modernization of the Chinese economy. The success at recruiting better educated members was noted above. Although the party banned recruiting private entrepreneurs in August 1989, local officials found ways of getting around the ban. In some cases, they claimed the entrepreneurs were managers of individual, collective, or joint stock enterprises and therefore were not, technically speaking, private entrepreneurs. In other cases, local officials simply ignored the ban, arguing that it was unfair to exclude people who were succeeding due to the party’s own policies. Because promoting economic growth was a key criterion for evaluating the work performance of local officials, many were eager to cooperate with the entrepreneurs who could provide that growth. As the private sector grew in importance, the percentage of entrepreneurs who belonged to the party grew from 13 percent in 1993 to 38 percent in 2007. Most of these “red capitalists,” however, were already in the party before going into the private sector. Many of the most prominent capitalists are former party and government officials and state-owned enterprise managers. In other words, many of the people in this supposedly new social stratum had their origins in the party and state apparatus.

After the CCP’s ban on recruiting entrepreneurs was lifted at the 16th Party Congress in November 2002, the rate of recruitment among entrepreneurs was expected to grow. That did not happen immediately, however. There was no groundswell of entrepreneurs joining the party. Many entrepreneurs were no longer interested in joining the party, due to its corrupt image and doubts about the advantages of party membership. Moreover, the CCP’s support for the private sector had become so strong that party membership was less necessary for success in business. In addition, after the party congress, the new leadership of the CCP, especially Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, subtly yet significantly shifted the party’s focus away from the new elites that Jiang courted in favor of the traditional base of the party. They made less of a priority on courting capitalists, but nevertheless continued the CCP’s commitment to the private sector, which now provides the lion’s share of economic growth, new jobs, and tax revenue.

This strategy of corporatism and cooptation served to weaken the party’s traditional emphasis on party building. It experienced declining recruitment from the “three revolutionary classes” (peasants, workers, and soldiers) and its party organizations in the cities and countryside atrophied. In the mid-1990s, the party declared that half its rural organizations were inactive. An estimated 2.5 million party members joined the “floating population” of migrant workers, further weakening the party’s presence in the countryside. Even though the party was recruiting the owners of private enterprises, it was less active at recruiting and organizing workers in the private sector.
Of the estimated 1.2 million private enterprises in 1998, less than one percent had party organizations and only 14 percent had party members among their workers.\textsuperscript{16} Over time, however, party building efforts in the private sector began to grow. By 2007, roughly 30 percent of private firms had party cells and 40 percent had workers who had joined the party in recent years.\textsuperscript{17} In short, the party’s presence was shrinking in the countryside, where roughly 70 percent of the population still live and work, and gradually increasing in the private sector, the most dynamic part of the Chinese economy. As the party shifted its attention toward new professional, technical, and entrepreneurial elites, its ties to the rest of society were allowed to weaken.

As will be seen below, however, this shift in the party’s work and especially in its recruitment priorities was contested by those in the party who opposed the abandonment of party traditions. While some in the party felt adaptation was necessary for the party’s survival and popular legitimacy, others feared that the inclusion of such diverse — and non-proletarian — interests into the party would destroy the party’s unity and ultimately lead to its dissolution.

**Who Does the Party Represent?**

As China’s economic reforms have transformed its social structure, leading to the emergence of new elites and potential rivals, the CCP has altered its relationship to society. In the past, the CCP claimed to be the vanguard of the proletariat, but this claim seems quaint amidst the rapid marketization of China’s economy and the accompanying transformation of its social structure. To remain relevant, the CCP has redefined its relationship with society with the so-called “three represents” slogan: the CCP now represents the advanced productive forces (primarily the growing urban middle class of businessmen, professionals, and high technology specialists), the promotion of advanced culture (as opposed to both “feudalism” and modern materialism), and the interests of the majority of the Chinese people. This concept was first introduced by Jiang Zemin in spring 2000, and then propagated through an extensive media campaign. Its purpose was to offer a new rationale the CCP’s legitimacy. But it was a contentious claim, met with opposition from some in the party and with indifference from much of society.

Jiang unveiled the slogan during his spring 2000 inspection tour of several key economic cities in south China. He visited joint ventures, private enterprises, township and village enterprises as well as state-owned enterprises, and investigated party building efforts in these different types of firms. In Zhejiang, he met several private entrepreneurs, all of whom reportedly expressed interest in joining the party, but were prohibited from doing so by the party’s ban. This experience
reportedly helped inspire the “three represents” slogan, because Jiang recognized the party could not represent the estimated 130 million workers in the private sector if private firms did not have party organizations in them.18

Jiang Zemin did not change the definition of the proletariat, as Deng Xiaoping had done in 1978 by adding intellectuals to the working class. Instead, he broadened the definition of the party’s mass character by incorporating new social strata whose interests were equivalent to those of the working class. The CCP replaced its claim to be the vanguard of the proletariat with a “two vanguards” thesis: it represented the interests of both the working classes (comprising workers, farmers, intellectuals, party and government officials, and those in the military) and the vast majority of the people, especially entrepreneurs, professionals, and high tech specialists. While this sleight of hand kept the party’s propaganda writers busy for years, the careful parsing of the “three represents” slogan and its implications also served to highlight the discrepancy between the ideological needs of the party and China’s dynamic society.

Jiang’s efforts to popularize his “three represents” slogan were hampered by the party’s ban on recruiting entrepreneurs into the party. This ban was enacted in August 1989 out of concern that some entrepreneurs had supported the Tiananmen demonstrators (particularly Wan Runnan, founder of the Stone Corporation) and that the presence of entrepreneurs in the party was compromising its class character. It was not hard to find an ideological rationale to support the ban. Lin Yanzhi, a member of Jilin’s provincial party committee, made a succinct argument against coopting entrepreneurs:

“If we allow private entrepreneurs [to join the party], it would create serious conceptual chaos within the party, and destroy the unified foundation of the political thought of the party that is now united, and destroy the baseline of what the party is able to accommodate in terms of its advanced class nature. . . A pluralistic political party would certainly fragment. . . The party name, the party constitution, and the party platform all would have to be changed. . . Therefore, we not only cannot permit private entrepreneurs to join the party, we must encourage those members of the Communist Party who have already become private entrepreneurs to leave.”19

While the ban on recruiting entrepreneurs made good ideological sense, it was increasingly out of step with the party’s goal of promoting economic development and also with the growing complexity of China’s society. If the party was basing its legitimacy largely on economic growth, it
made little sense to exclude the people whose success was the result of following the party’s policies. Traditional class divisions were also being broken down by economic reform, as workers moved between jobs in the state-owned, collective, and private sectors, and as former farmers, intellectuals, and party and government officials took the chance to “plunge into the sea” (下海) by opening their own business. As People’s Daily noted, the new social strata “were originally farmers, intellectuals, managerial personnel of state-owned enterprises, cadres of party and government institutions, scientific and technical personnel, and students who had returned from their studies abroad.” As a result, they were said to be different from the capitalists and exploiters of the pre-communist era. Because they were contributing to China’s development by following the party’s own policies, excluding such people was clearly not in the party’s long-term interests.

Co-opting entrepreneurs and other new social strata into the party was not only designed to benefit the party by tapping new sources of support, it was also intended to preempt a potential source of opposition. Jiang Zemin reportedly acknowledged in January 2001 that the party was considering lifting the ban on entrepreneurs, perhaps to prevent them from aligning themselves with the pro-democracy political activists. Along these same lines, Wang Changjiang of the Central Party School argued that if the party did not embrace the vast majority of the Chinese people, they would seek to organize themselves outside the political system. Inclusion was intended, at least in part, to prevent organized opposition to the party, and to maintain political stability and party leadership.

Finally, Jiang Zemin publicly recommended lifting the ban on entrepreneurs in his July 1, 2001 speech marking the 80th anniversary of the founding of the CCP. In reviewing the consequences of reform and opening policies, he noted that private entrepreneurs, free lance professionals, scientific and technical personnel employed by Chinese and foreign firms, and other new social groups had emerged. “Most of these people in the new social strata have contributed to the development of productive forces and . . . are working to build socialism with Chinese characteristics.” While claiming that the workers, farmers, intellectuals, servicemen, and cadres would remain the “basic components and backbone of the party,” Jiang claimed the party also needed “to accept those outstanding elements from other sectors of society.”

The party’s propaganda machine actively promoted Jiang’s three represents slogan and his recommendation to incorporate China’s new social strata into the party. Several themes were prominent in this campaign to square the “three represents” with the party’s traditions. First, the party claimed its class nature was not determined solely by the economic class of its members. “The
practical experience of our party shows that the structure of party membership is related to and to a certain degree influences the party’s character. However, it is not the decisive factor affecting the party’s character.”24 Historically, workers were never the majority of party members; peasants, intellectuals, soldiers, and students were. Yet they were all said to represent proletarian interests.

Second, the party claimed there was no necessary conflict between its claim to represent both the proletariat and the vast majority of the people. According to this syllogism, because the majority of Chinese are workers and farmers, if the party represents the interests of the majority of the people they thereby represent the interests of workers and farmers. One conclusion from this was that the party could maintain its proletarian class nature even if it recruited from other social strata. Even non-proletarians could allegedly have a proletarian outlook. But what if the other classes wanted to represent their own interests, or those of their professions? Membership in the party would supposedly change those interests:

“Like a big furnace, the party can melt out all sorts of non-proletarian ideas and unify its whole thinking on Marxist theory and the party’s program and line. Today, in admitting the outstanding elements from other social strata into the party, so long as we uphold the principle of building the party ideologically and require all party members to join the party ideologically, we will surely be able to preserve the ideological purity of the party members and the advanced nature of the party organizations.”25

The “three represents” slogan recognized that diverse interests now exist in China, but the rationale used to justify the slogan only legitimated proletarian interests.

A third theme of the three represents propaganda campaign was that the party’s claim to represent the interests of the majority of the Chinese people was allegedly nothing new. Numerous commentators pointed out that the party passed a resolution asserting that it was the vanguard of both the proletariat and the whole nation at the Wayabao conference in 1935. This is a very weak precedent, however, because it ignores the next 65 years of the party’s history, and also ignores the historical context of that resolution: the party’s appeal to nationalism in the face of Japanese invasion. And despite the claims that the CCP always represented the interests of most Chinese, the media also emphasized the need to conduct extensive education and training of incumbent cadres and the selection of new cadres on the basis of these claims. Apparently, this party tradition was not clear to all.26

Commentators were also careful to distinguish Jiang’s call to recruit “the outstanding
elements from all social strata into the party” from the reviled concept of a party of the whole people (quanmindang 全民党) first advanced by Nikita Khrushchev. The distinction is that not all people in each stratum deserve to join the party, just the truly outstanding ones who also meet the other criteria of party membership. Wang Changjiang of the Central Party School made this point most clearly:

“When the party expands its social foundation to various social strata and groups, it doesn’t mean that all the people in these strata and groups can join the party. . . What we want to absorb are the outstanding elements of these strata and groups. Possessing the political consciousness of the working class and willingness to fight for the party’s program constitutes the common characteristics of these outstanding elements and also the qualifications they must meet in order to join the party. . . There is no connection between this kind of party and the so-called “a party of all the people.”

In a journal for party cadres, he argued that “since the elements [i.e., party members] influence the nature of the party to some extent, we cannot just throw open the doors of the party and welcome everyone. . . Allowing entrepreneurs into the party is not the same as saying that any entrepreneur can join the party.” Other party media repeated this warning. According to People’s Daily, “We allow the worthy people in the new social strata to join the party. However, this does not mean that we keep our doors wide open in an unprincipled manner. Still less should we drag into the party all those who do not meet our requirements for party membership.” The CCP journal Qiushi (求是) advised against “using erroneous methods to measure the new criteria for party membership, such as admission based on economic strength, on the amount of donation to society, and on personal reputation.” These easily determined criteria — as opposed to the more abstract considerations of supporting the party’s program and “standing the test of time” — were undoubtedly the ones used by many local committees in recruiting from the new social strata.

The 16th Party Congress adopted the “three represents” slogan as a basic doctrine and revised the party constitution accordingly, adding it to the ideological pantheon along with Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory. This symbolized the party’s embrace of the new social strata and the party’s pro-business orientation. After the fourth generation of leaders, led by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, replaced Jiang Zemin and the other third generation leaders, the themes of the Jiang era were quietly but quickly abandoned. Whereas Jiang
placed priority on achieving a “relatively prosperous society” by courting the advanced productive forces, Hu and Wen promoted the need for a “harmonious society” that would promote the interests of the vast majority of the people. Their concern was less for the economic elites that Jiang courted and more for the people and regions of the country that had not yet benefited from the rapid growth of the 1990s. Jiang’s focus on urban and coastal China had succeeded in achieving rapid growth, but also contributed to the growing individual and regional inequality and resentment among those who felt they were being left behind. The cozy relationship between local officials and capitalists also led to corrupt deals and illegal land-grabs that further antagonized the people who were forced out of their homes and fields for the sake of new commercial and industrial developments. These tensions led to increased political instability: between 1999 and 2005, the number of protests throughout the country grew from 39,000 to 87,000. To address these popular concerns, the CCP began a new program to raise living standards in the less developed areas. It began sending income subsidies directly to rural residents and increased public investment in inland and western provinces to promote their development. In short, Hu and Wen abandoned the elitist strategy of the Jiang era for a more populist orientation.31 Nevertheless, they remained committed to the continued expansion of the private sector. They preferred a more balanced pattern of growth, but above all they favored rapid growth, and the private sector was the engine of that growth. They did not attempt to slow the pace of development, but to adopt policies that would ameliorate some of the imbalances that were the direct if unintended consequences of growth.

The Continued Exclusion of Unsanctioned Claims

As noted above, the CCP makes several claims to legitimate its continued status as China’s ruling party. Its ability to promote prosperity, raise living standards, guard against instability, and champion nationalistic aspirations are the basis of its claim to represent the common interests of most Chinese and define “truth, benevolence, and glory.” But legitimacy alone cannot preserve the CCP’s hold on power. In particular, basing its legitimacy on economic performance is risky; the inevitable economic downturn, as began in late 2008, would threaten to de-legitimate it, and its claim to rule would be jeopardized. In addition, as Adam Przeworski has noted, it is not legitimacy that keeps an authoritarian regime in power, but the absence of a preferable (and, we should add, viable) alternative.32 Following that rationale, the CCP also strives to prevent the emergence of a viable alternative, whether that be autonomous unions, an opposition party, or an organized dissident movement. The CCP’s implicit strategy is to increase the cost of collective action by
arresting political and labor activists and keeping most social organizations dependent on the state for their survival and success. In the process, it aims to prevent the emergence of a “critical realm” of civil society and prevent it from making claims on the state.33

The success of this strategy is seen in the nature of protest in China today. Rural protests are typically parochial in nature, directed against immediate grievances without demands for political change or attempts at coordination with neighboring communities.34 As the research of Kevin O’Brien and Lianjiang Li in this volume and elsewhere has shown, rural protests can be successful if they are limited to “rightful resistance,” that is, challenging the local implementation of policy, but not the propriety of the policy itself.35 Complaints against excessive taxes and fees, unpaid IOU’s for grain purchases by the state, uncompensated land seizures, improper implementation of local elections, and cadre corruption can often be successful if they are framed as violations of central policy, not simply unjust, and if they can get the attention of higher level officials or the media. But even as it addresses specific complaints, the CCP is reluctant to let its concessions in one incident become a precedent for others. It limits media coverage of local protests and their resolution, and punishes activists who spread news about successful protest tactics from one community to the next, advise protestors on their legal rights, and help them pursue their claims. The CCP will accommodate isolated protests, especially those with material as opposed to political demands, but will not tolerate organized collective action.

Those engaged in labor protests are normally careful not to be well organized, lest their leaders be identified and arrested. In most cases, protests are limited to bread and butter issues: unpaid wages, stolen pensions, harsh working conditions, and so forth. Rarely do they venture into political issues, such as demanding a change of leaders or the creation of new unions. To do so would doom them to immediate repression.36 Large scale labor unrest in spring 2002 in several industrial cities was an exception to this rule, and those who broke the rule paid a heavy price. In Liaoyang, workers called for the ouster of the city’s leader. In both Daqing and Liaoyang, workers chosen as leaders of the protest were quickly identified, isolated, and arrested. Local leaders resolved the conflicts with a combination of carrots and sticks, recognizing the legitimate nature of the economic demands but ignoring the political issues and punishing the workers who played a leadership role. While in custody, some of the labor leaders reportedly betrayed their fellow prisoners to protect themselves or their families. After their release, the solidarity that led tens of thousands of workers to protest in the streets turned to suspicion.37 As the economy began to slow in 2008, many private factories closed and their owners fled, leaving behind vast numbers of
workers who were owed back wages and inclined to protest to get what they were owed. Even though the closed firms were privately owned, local governments stepped in to pay at least a portion of what workers were owed to maintain the peace.\textsuperscript{38} From the state’s perspective, the resolution of these protests was generally positive. The protests ended with minimal violence, the costs of the settlement would likely be compensated by the central government, and as in the 2002 protests the atmosphere of mistrust among the workers would make future collective action less likely. [NOTE: There seems to be something missing in terms of this reference to the 2002 protests; I added the word “as,” but I don’t want to alter Bruce’s meaning here; he should clarify that] These episodes demonstrate the elements that make sustained social movements, as opposed to sporadic local protests, so difficult in China: the coercive power of the state, the absence of autonomous organizations, the difficulty of protestors to communicate and coordinate effectively, and low levels of interpersonal trust, especially as the stakes begin to rise.

Similarly, even activists on non-political issues are reluctant to organize themselves to engage in collective action lest they arouse the insecurities of the state and risk repression. A case in point is the environmental movement. Most people recognize that pollution of all types — air, water, land, noise, light — is a severe and growing problem in China, and yet non-governmental environmental organizations are largely limited to public education on the importance of a clean environment rather than advocacy of tighter regulations and improved implementation.\textsuperscript{39} A movement on college campuses to ban the use of disposable chopsticks faced the dilemma of how to succeed in this collective action without suffering retaliation for being too well organized. As a consequence, its actions on various campuses were largely informal and uncoordinated.\textsuperscript{40}

Conclusion

Although economic modernization has not yet changed China’s political system, it may be changing the party. The diversification of classes and the fluidity of China’s social structure is leading the party to change who it recruits and who it claims to represent. This is not quite equivalent to pluralism, because the party does not allow fully autonomous interest groups or opposition parties. The CCP still retains its political monopoly, but tries to be more inclusive and therefore more representative. But the idea that the party can represent the vast majority of the people may expose it to even greater criticism and cynicism. The notion that a single party can properly represent the diverse social forces in China is odd, especially from a Western perspective of a society made up of diverse interests. These interests need not be incompatible, but they
normally desire, even demand, their own organization to represent their interests toward the state and not grant that responsibility to a vanguard party.

One key to the party’s survival is its Leninist foundation. The CCP is neither monolithic in its relationship with society nor in its attitude toward adaptation. Instead, it has forged multi-dimensional relationships, depending on the sector of the society, how it fits into the party’s modernization strategy, and the nature of its claims. Even though the party has abandoned its efforts to monitor and control all of society, it still protects its monopoly on legitimate political organization. Not all interests are able to organize themselves, and some groups, such as farmers, are not allowed any organizations at all, not even officially sponsored mass organizations like the All-China Women’s Federation or the All-China Federation of Trade Unions.

The merits and logic of this multi-dimensional relationship have also been contested within the party. Some argue it is necessary to preserve the party’s right to rule and promote its economic program. Others argue it is a betrayal of the party’s traditions and raison d’être. Rather than bolstering the party’s legitimacy, critics allege the party’s policies of inclusion will undermine the party’s authority, both by abandoning its traditional bases of support and by admitting new members who are likely to further divert the party from its original mission and dilute its organizational coherence.

Nevertheless, the CCP is confronted with numerous challenges from an increasingly restive society. Its reform and opening policies have achieved dramatic and sustained growth rates, but for many the benefits of growth have been offset by a host of problems. The seemingly unstoppable spread of corruption de-legitimates the party. In some areas, local party and government officials are seen as in cahoots with organized crime, or indistinguishable from it. Throughout the post-Mao era, but especially in the 1990s and into the early 21st century, rapid growth has been accompanied by rising inequality. Privatization of the economy has created vast numbers of newly unemployed workers, many too old and lacking the requisite skills to find new jobs in the private sector. Laid off from their old jobs and without the benefits of a welfare system, they rightly feel betrayed by a system that formerly promised them lifetime security. Decollectivization of agriculture and the decline of incomes in the countryside have compelled tens of millions of rural workers to migrate to the cities in search of work. The spread of modern values, international influences, and the logic of the marketplace undermine the party’s ability to define the policy agenda and control the flow of information for the nation at large. The party’s limited policies of corporatism and cooptation are unlikely to meet these challenges successfully, and the “three represents” slogan is equally
unlikely to provide a suitable response.

Under the leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, the CCP has moved in a more populist direction. Rather than simply promoting rapid growth, it has attempted to distribute the benefits of growth more evenly. But even with this change in orientation, the CCP remains committed to defending its monopoly on political power. It does not tolerate organized opposition and works to limit access to the coordination goods that would make collective action more feasible. To fully understand the survivability of the CCP, its organizational adaptability, sources of popular support, and coercive powers must all be part of the equation.
Notes

1 This is a revised and updated version of an essay that was first published in The American Asian Review, vol. 21, no. 1 (Spring 2003), pp. 1-24. I would like to thank the journal’s editors for granting permission to use material in the original essay for this chapter.


12 The changing characteristics of party elites are drawn from Dickson, Democratization in China and Taiwan, pp. 135 and 147; Cheng Li, China’s Leaders: The New Generation (Lanham, MD: Rowman and
Littlefield, 2001), p. 41; and biographical data taken from China Vitae (www.chinavitae.com).

13 Lee, From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats, p. 56; Dickson, Democratization in China and Taiwan, p. 152; “Number of CPC Members Rises to 73 Million,” 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China Press Center (http://english.cpcnews.cn/92247/6279373.html).

14 The following analysis is based on my Wealth into Power: The Communist Party’s Embrace of China’s Private Sector (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).


16 Renmin ribao, September 12, 2000, p. 11.

17 Jie Chen and Bruce J. Dickson, Allies of the State: Democratic Support and Regime Support among China’s Private Entrepreneurs (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

18 You Dehai, “The Background of the Launch of the ‘Three Represents,’” Xuexi yu shijian (Wuhan), September 2000, pp. 18-20, 45; the author was president of the party school in Wuhan. See also Xinhua, February 25, 2000, in FBIS, February 29, 2000.


28 Zhongguo Dangzheng Ganbu Luntan (Beijing), January 6, 2002, in FBIS, February 4, 2002; emphasis added.


33 “Critical realm” is Yanqi Tong’s term to describe the political or dissident portion of civil society which poses a threat to the state, in contrast to the “non-critical realm” which refers to economic and professional activities that do not necessarily threaten the state and may even be welcomed and encouraged by it. White, Howell, and Shang make a similar distinction between the “political dynamic” and “market dynamic” of civil society. See Tong, “State, Society, and Political Change in China and Hungary,” and White, et al, *In Search of Civil Society*.


