

# THE DISCURSIVE CREATION OF IDEOLOGY IN THE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE POLITICAL CONTEXT

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**Abstract** – The chapter focuses on a new ideological formulation introduced in 2018 in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China. The contribution aims at studying the discursive strategy in which the item is embedded, and through which it is promoted, by analysing Chinese political discourse in a diachronic perspective between 2013 and 2019. Using a selection parameter of intertextuality, the author has compiled a corpus of texts (in the Chinese language) through which this multifaceted discursive strategy is constructed. Drawing on the discourse-historical approach (Reisigl, Wodak 2009, p. 89; Wodak 2001, pp. 65-66) in a critical discourse analysis perspective, the paper will show how the discursive strategy performs a synergic action to disseminate the new ideology formulation by addressing two sub-topics, and, in parallel, how the texts intentionally promote two main macro-topics of Chinese political discourse.

**Keywords:** China; Constitution; political discourse; discourse-historical approach; genre repertoire.

## 1. Introduction

In March 2018, the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China went through its fifth amendment since 1982: a large majority of members of the National People’s Assembly of the People’s Republic of China voted in favour of adopting the new text. The revised constitutional text included new ideological slogans peculiar to Xi’s political discourse: an explicit mention of the leading role of the Chinese Communist Party (Article 1); the duty of public officials to swear allegiance to the Constitution (Article 27); the establishment of a national Supervision Commission entitled to supervise, inspect, and punish public officials violating the laws (a new paragraph in Chapter 3); while the two-term limit for the President of the Republic was expunged (Article 79) (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo 2018).

The 2018 amendment is consistent with the programmatic function historically attributed to the fundamental State Law in China. According to legal scholars, upholding a tradition shared with other socialist countries, in Chinese politics, the Constitution has often been considered a tool to shape

the country's future, as well as a text systematizing a patrimony of shared and stable norms (Spagnoli 2019; Zhang Qianfan 2013). For these reasons, several crucial moments in the political history of the People's Republic of China have been accompanied by constitutional amendments and broad debates on the contents and purposes of the Constitution.

The 2018 amendment is fully coherent with the tradition and was embedded in a rich discursive framework. Since the beginning of his first term in 2012, Xi Jinping had delivered multiple speeches focusing on the Constitution and its importance, while the Chinese Communist Party and a number of State organizations had published documents reaffirming the centrality of the Constitution in political life. Besides, these institutional views had fostered a flow of information disseminated by the media – which included newspaper articles, exhibitions, and web sites - and had fuelled a debate on constitutionalism amidst academics and intellectuals between the end of 2012 and 2014 (Creemers 2015; Kellogg 2016; Mottura 2018, 2019). The variety of these texts testifies to the importance of this legal accomplishment in the country's political life.

This chapter focuses on the form and content of the first article of the 2018 Constitution as an important ideological item. Defining discourse as a socially constituted and socially constitutive cluster of semiotic practices situated within a specific field of social action in a diachronic perspective (Reisigl, Wodak 2009, p. 89; Wodak 2001, pp. 65-66), the contribution aims at studying the discursive strategy in which the item is embedded and through which it is promoted, by analysing Chinese political discourse in a diachronic perspective between 2013 and 2019.

Selected in accordance with the parameter of intertextuality, the author will build a corpus of texts (in the Chinese language) in which the construction of the multifaceted discursive strategy takes place. The wide variety of legal, political, and newspaper texts collected in the corpus are identified as realizations of genres belonging to a genre repertoire (Devitt 1991, 2004).

Drawing on the discourse-historical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis, the paper will show how the discursive strategy performs a synergic action to disseminate the new ideology formulation by addressing two sub-topics, namely a renewed centrality of the Chinese Communist Party in national politics, and the promotion of ideological loyalty and cohesion within the elite group. In parallel, it will be demonstrated how the texts intentionally – but indirectly – and with a persuasive intent, promote two main 'macro-topics' (Wodak 2001, p. 66) of Chinese political discourse: the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party to govern the country, and the stability of the political system.

## 2. Research context: a new ideological shift and article 1 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China

In this Section the author analyses the text of Article 1 of the Constitution and relates the linguistic findings to the legal and historical context in order to fully appreciate the scope of the changes which occurred in 2018.

Article 1, after the amendment, reads:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) 第一条：中华人民共和国是工人阶级领导的、以工农联盟为基础的人民民主专政的社会主义国家。

社会主义制度是中华人民共和国的根本制度。中国共产党领导是中国特色社会主义最本质的特征。禁止任何组织或者个人破坏社会主义制度。

Article 1: The People's Republic of China is a socialist State under the people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants.

The socialist system is the basic system of the People's Republic of China. The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Disruption of the socialist system by any organization or individual is prohibited. (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo 2018)

The underlined clause was added in 2018, while the rest of the wording of Article 1 remained unchanged. If we analyse the structure of the sentence, clause 1, 2, and 4 revolved around the People's Republic of China, as a "State" (*guojia* 国家), as a "system" (*zhidu* 制度), and around relevant social actors and organizations. The ideological driven formulations in these clauses, "socialist", "people's democratic dictatorship", "alliance of workers and peasants", were used as attributives to define the State and its system. Therefore, in the original text before 2018, the focus was a concrete description of the characteristics of State institutions.

Whereas, in clause 3 – added in 2018 – there is a shift: the subject is the "leadership" (*lingdao* 领导) of the Chinese Communist Party, as a "defining feature" (*tezheng* 特征) of socialism in China. The new formulation introduces in the article a much more abstract perspective, which is not directly related to the characteristics or the functioning of State institutions. Nonetheless, a strong ideological link between the four clauses is guaranteed by the reiterated use of "socialism" (*shehuizhuyi* 社会主义) as an attributive adjective or noun.

<sup>1</sup> The English translation of the article was retrieved from *Chinalawinfo Co. Ltd.*, an online legal information service established by Peking University in association with the university's Legal Information Center. See <http://en.pkulaw.cn/display.aspx?cgid=311950&lib=law>. The emphasis (underscored) is mine.

Thus, stating that the leadership of the Party is the most intrinsic trait of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the article affirms that the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party is crucial for the system's correct deployment, and is necessary for the full realization of the basic identity of the country, that is to say, socialism. Implicitly, it claims the centrality of the Party in exclusively administrating the State: moreover, it prohibits any attempt to reduce its supremacy (Yu Keping 2018, p. 7).

This assumption is fully confirmed by the fact that the clause added to Article 1 is, indeed, a full citation from the *Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party* adopted by the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress in October 2017, where the final paragraph of the General Principles section *incipit* is:<sup>2</sup>

- (2) 中国共产党的领导是中国特色社会主义最本质的特征，是中国特色社会主义制度的最大优势。

The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party is the most essential attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and the greatest strength of this system. (Zhongguo Gongchandang 2017)

And again, in the official press conference after the adoption of the amended text of the People's Republic of China Constitution, in March 2018, when a journalist at China National Radio asked the National People's Congress spokesmen why the leadership of the Party had been introduced in the text of Article 1. Shen Chunyao's answer was quite long (according to the records, the oral exposition lasted 9 minutes) and it ended with the spokesman affirming:

- (3) 总之，这个修改内容还是非常重要的，体现了党的领导的根本性、全面性和时代性。

In short, the content of this amendment is still very important, reflecting the fundamentality, comprehensiveness, and timeliness of the Party's leadership. (Shen Chunyao 2018)

Several considerations in both legal and historical perspectives further validate the assumption. Simultaneously, intertextual links between the texts belonging from the selected corpus (see Table 1), demonstrate that the pervasive emphasis on the Party leadership in political discourse is both a product of social context and a tool to bring about a new ideological shift.

Prior to the amendment, no mention of the Chinese Communist Party appeared in the articles of the state Constitution: it was only cited in the

<sup>2</sup> The English translation of the sentence was retrieved from the English translation of the *Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party* (revised and adopted at the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party on October 24, 2017), published by Xinhua. See [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c\\_136725945.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725945.htm).

Preamble.<sup>3</sup> In legal terms, this change is quite important, as some scholars testify to the intention of the 1982 legislator to consider the Preamble as a transitory text, to be dismissed after the consolidation of the stability of the political system (Zhang Qianfan 2013). Therefore, the first section (that is to say, the Preamble) would not perform the same legal function as that of the following chapters, divided into articles.

Hence, the new formulation of Article 1 is of great importance for the legal and political systems. First, it introduces in the constitutional text a customary norm of an unwritten constitution (from the political system, Jiang Shigong 2010), which subordinated all political activities to the leading role of the Chinese Communist Party since the foundation of the People's Republic of China. Second, it sets a new emphasis on one of the tenets of Chinese contemporary political ideology, formally ratifying the Chinese Communist Party's leading role for the present and affirming its influence on the future of Chinese politics.

Such emphasis on the Party leadership seems to impact long-term processes in the Chinese political system. Even though the Chinese Communist Party has been ruling the People's Republic of China since 1949, the characterization of its function and power in the political arena has undergone broad changes since then. Starting from 1978, several institutional reform plans have been promoted, following three basic tenets: the devolution of power from the central institutions to the local ones, the division of tasks between State and Party, and the institutionalization of cadres' management and administrative procedures.

In this process, one milestone has been the reform of political structures project, presented in 1987 by Zhao Ziyang. The declared aims of the reforms were to reinforce the leadership commitment to increase the efficiency of the political system and to support the realization of economic reforms by stimulating the vitality and spirit of the initiative in every sector of society. One of the main strategies adopted would be a separation of the Chinese Communist Party and the State organs by distinguishing their respective functions. The concrete measures would be a division between decision-making and operational or management activities; a reform of the governing bodies, clarifying their functions; a reform of the institutions personnel system. Since then, the implementation process of this project has not been straightforward, but the basic tenet of the separation of Party and

<sup>3</sup> Since 1982 the *Preamble of the Constitution* – a short historical text that narrates the founding of the Republic and identifies the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a key political actor – contributes to the legitimation of the structure of the political system, and of the balance of power between its main actors. This function has been strengthened, through the decades, by the insertion in the text of formulas drawn from political discourse, thus sanctioning major stages in the transformation of the role and objectives of the Chinese Communist Party.

State functions, which has been vital for the efficiency of the political system and for economic reform, has not been dismissed. The 2018 amendment of Article 1 seems to drive the country in quite a different direction (Bai, Liu 2020; Guo 2020).

While the characteristic of intertextuality between legal and political texts is not to be considered a peculiar feature of this corpus, especially in the Chinese context, as has been shown, the above-mentioned ideological formulation seems to be a product of the Xi Jinping era. On the basis of this observation, it is interesting to go beyond the convergence between the 2018 Constitution of the People's Republic of China and the 2017 Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party, the two most authoritative texts in the Chinese political system, in order to trace a link to other texts and clarify the scope of the discourse-building effort associated with the introduction of the new ideological formulation.

### 3. Texts and methods

In order to better define the boundaries of the discourse-building effort associated with the introduction of the new ideological formulation, a corpus of texts has been selected from different fields of action (Reisigl, Wodak 2009, pp. 90-91; Wodak 2001, pp. 66-67). The rationale for the selection was intertextuality: they all displayed an explicit reference to the 2018 amendment wording (Reisigl, Wodak 2009, p. 90).

| <b>Fields of action</b>                            | <b>Textual genres</b>  | <b>Corpus</b>                    |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Law-making procedure                               | People's Republic of China Constitution  | Legal language sub-corpus        |
| Party internal development of an informed opinion  | Chinese Communist Party Constitution<br>Decisions of the Central Committee of the CCP<br>Xi Jinping speeches | Political language sub-corpus    |
| Formation of public opinion<br>Self-representation | 251 newspaper editorials and commentaries (2013 – 2019)<br>Press conference                                  | Journalistic language sub-corpus |
|  | <i>All from the genre repertoire of contemporary Chinese politics</i>  |                                  |

Table 1  
Fields of action and textual genres in the corpus formation.

As shown in Table 1, the data that provided the starting point for this study were retrieved from Chinese law-making procedures and Chinese Communist Party internal opinion-building fields of action, and were analysed in a

qualitative perspective against the background of the historical and political context. In order to trace the pervasiveness of the new ideological formulation in Chinese political and media discourses, the analysis was broadened to the field of formation of public opinion and self-representation, and a longer period of time was taken into account (see Table 1).

The inclusion in the corpus of newspaper articles published from 2013 to 2019 first required a quantitative approach. Press articles were selected through an automatic search in the *Factiva database*. Initially, the collection was based on the occurrence of “the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics” (*Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi zui benzhi de tezheng* 中国特色社会主义最本质的特征) in all journalistic sources published in Chinese simplified characters, from December 1978 to December 2019.<sup>4</sup> No occurrence of the sentence was found before 2013, but in the following years, more than 1740 articles were retrieved. In terms of yearly distribution, the string incidence in the selected corpus had a peak in 2018 (Figure 1).

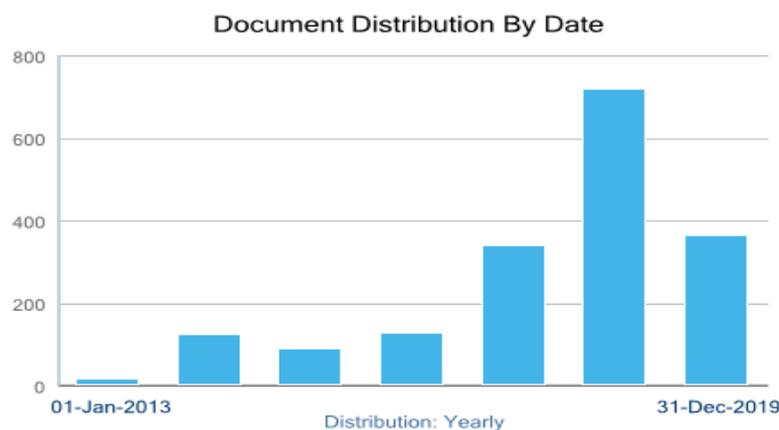


Figure 1  
Newspaper articles distribution by year (2013-2019).

A further step in the analysis was to refine the database search by focussing only on editorials and commentaries. These journalistic genres, traditionally linked to the expression of views, have a key role in the promotion of institutional or personal positions in Chinese society (Lupano 2018). The extracted corpus was composed of 251 articles: 54 texts published between 2013 and 2014, 36 texts issued in 2017, 86 published in 2018, and 76 in 2019. In this limited segment of the corpus, the number of texts *per* year grew significantly in the last two years. The data further ratify the hypothesis of a

<sup>4</sup> *Factiva Database* displays a fairly accurate research platform. I limited the search to Chinese simplified-character texts and to the period 1978-2019, as I was mainly interested in mainland China contemporary domestic political discourse.

growing presence of the new ideological item after its inclusion in the constitutional text.

As discussed before, the composite corpus for this paper was created on the basis of the feature of intertextuality. As summarized in Table 1, the process led to data stemming from State and Party constitutions, Plenum decisions, leaders' talks, press conferences, editorials and commentaries: a wide variety of genres rooted in different discourse domains. The hypothesis was that they were parts of the genre repertoire (Devitt 1991; 2004, pp. 54-55) of contemporary Chinese politics, hence they were connected to one another in a sequential chain of action and they concurred to the building of a discursive strategy aiming at disseminating and consolidating the new ideology by fostering consensus on an ideological slogan.<sup>5</sup>

In this perspective, the State and Party constitutions were super-genres, serving as the basis and reference point for other genres (Devitt 2004, 74). Intertextuality linked the paramount legislative and political texts to one another, confirming a sort of dialogue between the genres within the repertoire.

In the following Section, three research questions will be addressed:

1. A genre repertoire ought to be produced by a social group within a particular sphere of activity (Devitt 2004, pp. 77-78). This, then, can constitute a prerequisite for considering these genres the linguistic tools for political cadres' action in China, but the texts were published by different professional groups, such as National People's Congress members, Party leaders, official spokespersons and journalists. How does one define the community which is using those genres to reflect and reinforce its values, epistemology, and power relationships?
2. In a generic perspective, it is commonly understood that each genre has an intended reader. The State and Party organs, as well as the citizens, for the constitutions; the Party members for the leaders' talks; the national and international journalists for the press conference; the general public for the editorials and commentaries published in newspapers. Who are the targets of this discursive strategy over the data?
3. A discursive strategy is usually related to topics (Reisigl, Wodak 2009, p. 88), often linked to one another with a persuasive intent. Which are the manifest or latent topics in the corpus?

<sup>5</sup> In 2004, Devitt states that what she used to call a 'genre set', in her 1991 article, would be renamed 'genre repertoire', as "Repertoire' is an especially helpful term for this set, for it connotes not only a set of interacting genres but also a set from which participants choose, a definer of the possibilities available to the group." (Devitt 2004, p. 57).

#### 4. Intertextuality in a diachronic perspective

In Section 2, I analysed the new sentence added to Article 1 of the People's Republic of China Constitution in 2018, and I claimed it has introduced a new perspective in Chinese political ideology since the Reform era. In this Section, I will show how the wording of the new slogan appeared in several political and journalistic texts from 2013 to 2019 (i.e. in the Journalistic language sub-corpus).

The journalistic language sub-corpus aggregate observation confirmed that the constitutional amendment increased the circulation of the new formula in newspaper texts, but that a discursive strategy had been promoted by circulating key ideological terms long before its adoption in 2018.

Moreover, most of the retrieved articles were published by *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao* 人民日报), the official organ of the Chinese Communist Party. Additionally, after the genre-based selection in the press sub-corpus, the proportion of articles published in the *Renmin Ribao* 人民日报 was even higher. As this media outlet is one of the newspapers distributed by national political institutions, the publishing context demonstrated that the circulation of the new ideology in the press was heavily based on a propaganda effort by the Chinese Communist Party itself.

Nonetheless, the targets of the communication flow were both the elite and public opinion. The assumption is corroborated by one of the basic features of Chinese media context. Even though the *Renmin Ribao* 人民日报 as a Party organ is often read by the political elite and its articles are discussed in routine ideological meetings throughout the country, it also has a crucial role in shaping Chinese public opinion. Its commentaries are widely circulated in the media sphere after they appeared in the newspaper. Other mass media, whether radio, television, or newspapers, often have to re-broadcast or reprint the original texts. Therefore, commentaries in the *Renmin Ribao* 人民日报 play a significant direct role in Chinese politics (Wu Guoguang 1994).

The corpus texts highlighted two phases: before 2018, discourses influenced social and political processes and actions as the ideological shift was embedded in an already existing discursive strategy; on the other hand, after the adoption of the amendment, the change in institutional settings shaped and affected discourses (Wodak 2001, p. 66). These mechanisms can be highlighted in selected data in a diachronic perspective (the emphasis and English translations are mine). “The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics” saw its first occurrence in Chinese newspapers in December 2013 when it appeared in a commentary on *Renmin Ribao* 人民日报 front page.

In June 2014, during the 16th Collective Study of the 18th Central Political Bureau, General Secretary Xi Jinping mentioned the principle stating:

- (4) 中国特色社会主义最本质的特征就是坚持中国共产党的领导，中国的事情要办好首先中国共产党的事情要办好。实现‘两个一百年’奋斗目标，应对和战胜前进道路上的各种风险和挑战，关键在党。

The most essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics is adherence to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. To do well in China, we must first do well in the Chinese Communist Party. To achieve the goal of the “Two Hundred Years” struggle, and to cope with and overcome the challenges on the way, the key response to these risks and challenges lies with the Party. (Xin Xiangyang 2015)

In September 2014, in a speech celebrating the 60th anniversary of the founding of the National People’s Congress, Xi Jinping once again emphasized the formulation. A few days later, in a speech celebrating the 65th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, he subordinated the future development and progress of the institution to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party on all democratic parties, groups, ethnic groups, and social strata, mentioning the same principle.

A further step in affirming the ideological importance of the slogan was taken in October 2014, when the sentence was included in a highly official political document. The *Decision on Several Important Issues Concerning the Comprehensive Promotion of Governing the Country by Law*, adopted by the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, stated:<sup>6</sup>

- (5) 党的领导是中国特色社会主义最本质的特征，是社会主义法治最根本的保证。

The leadership of the Party is the most essential trait of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and is the most fundamental guarantee for Socialist rule of law. (Zhonggong Zhongyang 2014)

These citations of the slogan in political documents are milestones in the process of incorporating the new ideological formulation in the Party canon as a first step towards its broader diffusion through the media. Henceforth,

<sup>6</sup> The English translation of the sentence was retrieved from the English translation of the *Decision on Several Important Issues Concerning the Comprehensive Promotion of Governing the Country by Law* (Adopted at the 4th Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on October 23, 2014), published by China Copyright and Media. See <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/10/28/ccp-central-committee-decision-concerning-some-major-questions-in-comprehensively-moving-governing-the-country-according-to-the-law-forward/>.

the expression “the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party is the most intrinsic quality and essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics” appeared in a wide variety of political and journalistic texts. For example, leaders’ talks mentioned it and articles were published in specialized journals to clarify the meaning and scope of the role attributed to Party leadership (for example: Ding Junping 2017; Xin Xiangyang 2014).

Moreover, the collocation of the linguistic string I searched for appeared to be quite coherent in all articles. Looking closely at a selection of texts we can find explicit references to the principle linked to different topics:<sup>7</sup>

- (6) 办好中国的事情，关键在党。中国特色社会主义最本质的特征是坚持中国共产党领导。

The Communist Party is the key to do things well in China. The most essential attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics is adherence to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. (2013)

- (7) 中国特色社会主义最本质的特征，就是中国共产党领导。充分发挥党总揽全局、协调各方的领导核心作用，这是我们国家各项事业取得胜利的根本保证。

The most essential attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. Giving full play to the core role of the party in overseeing the overall situation and coordinating the leadership of all parties is the fundamental guarantee for the success of our country’s various undertakings. (2014)

- (8) 习近平同志指出：“党的领导是中国特色社会主义最本质的特征，是社会主义法治最根本的保证。”党的领导与依法治国是统一的。全面推进依法治疆，必须加强和改进党对依法治疆的领导。

Comrade Xi Jinping pointed out: “The Party’s leadership is the most essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the most fundamental guarantee of socialist rule of law.” The Party’s leadership corresponds to governing the country according to law. To comprehensively advance the rule of law, we must strengthen and improve the party’s leadership over the rule of law. (2015)

- (9) 这个“治党方略”，核心是加强党的领导，基础在全面，关键在严，要害在治。深刻体认“党的领导是中国特色社会主义最本质的特征”。

The core of this “strategy for governing the Party” is to strengthen the Party’s leadership. The foundation is to be comprehensive, the key is to be strict, and the vital point is governing. Deeply realize “the Party’s leadership is the most essential attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics”. (2016)

<sup>7</sup> The sample of articles mentioned above has been selected in the corpus on the basis of their publication at the beginning of each year. The rationale was to testify to the continuity in the discursive strategy through the years.

- (10) 党员、干部的责任担当是多方面的，但首先体现在全面从严治党的上。因为中国共产党的领导是中国特色社会主义最本质的特征，中国特色社会主义政治发展逻辑决定了我们党治国理政的成败取决于管党治党是否严格有效。

The responsibilities of Party members and cadres are multifaceted, but first of all, they are reflected in being strict in the administration of the Party. Because the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party is the most essential attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the logic of political development of socialism with Chinese characteristics has determined that the success or failure of our Party's governing the country depends on how strict and effective are the management and the rule of the Party. (2017)

- (11) 全面从严治党，必须坚持和加强党的全面领导。中国特色社会主义最本质的特征是中国共产党领导，全面从严治党核心是加强党的领导。坚持党的领导，最根本的是坚持党中央权威和集中统一领导。

To administer the Party comprehensively and strictly, we must uphold and strengthen the Party's comprehensive leadership. The most essential attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. The core of administering the Party comprehensively and strictly is to strengthen Party leadership. To uphold the Party's leadership, the most fundamental thing is to uphold the Party's central authority and centralized and unified leadership. (2018)

The discursive strategy did not change after the 2018 amendment adoption.

- (12) 把蓝图变为现实，必须坚持和加强党的全面领导。中国共产党领导是中国特色社会主义最本质的特征，是中国特色社会主义制度的最大优势。新时代推进伟大事业，必须充分彰显这一最本质的特征、充分发挥这一最大优势。

To turn the blueprint into reality, we must uphold and strengthen the Party's comprehensive leadership. The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party is the most essential attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics, it is the greatest advantage of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. The New Era will promote great undertakings, if we fully highlight this essential trait and give full play to this greatest advantage. (2019)

In October 2019, the *Decision on Upholding and Improving the Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics: Several Major Issues Concerning the Modernization of the National Governance System and Governance Capabilities*, issued by the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the 19<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (Zhonggong Zhongyang 2019), refers to sub-topic 1 by adding an emphasis on hierarchy between political and social actors:

- (13) 中国共产党领导是中国特色社会主义最本质的特征，是中国特色社会主义制度的最大优势，党是最高政治领导力量。

The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party is the most essential attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the greatest advantage of the

socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and the Party is the highest political leadership force.

In the examples, fragments of texts of one genre were incorporated into the texts of other genres, giving birth to a sort of dialogue. Intertextuality created cohesion building a discursive strategy, a tie confirmed by the time distribution of the texts' production and by the homogeneity of the collocations of the linguistic strings I searched for in the journalistic language sub-corpus.

As we can see, all selected texts displayed at least one occurrence of both (a) the “leadership of the Chinese Communist Party” (in the Chinese forms: *Zhongguo Gongchandang lingdao* 中国共产党领导; *Zhongguo Gongchandang de lingdao* 中国共产党的领导; *Dang de lingdao* 党的领导) and (b) the “most intrinsic quality” (in the Chinese form: *zui benzhi de tezheng* 最本质的特征) linked together. Further, through *Factiva database* search engine, I verified that the (a) linguistic string incidence in the sources was wider than the contemporary occurrence of both elements. This difference could be explained, on the one hand, by the long history of the ideological relevance accorded to the leadership of the Party in China, as one of the tenets of the Marxist-Leninist background of local politics, or, on the other hand, by the originality of the new formulation revolving around the “most intrinsic quality” of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The following Table summarizes the intertextual embeddedness of the discourses.

| <b>Fields of action</b>  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Law-making procedure   | Formation of public opinion<br>Self-representation | Party internal development of an informed opinion    |
| <b>Social and political actors</b>   |  |  |
| State organs   | Journalists<br>Public opinion                      | Party leaders<br>Party organs                        |
| <b>Textual genres</b>  |  |  |
| State constitution<br>Amendment  | Press conferences<br>Newspaper articles            | Party constitution<br>Leaders' speeches<br>Decisions |
| <b>Overlapping sub-topics</b>  |  |  |
| Centrality of the Chinese Communist Party;<br>Elite group cohesion                       |  |  |
| <b>Overlapping macro topics</b>  |  |  |
| Legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party to govern<br>Stability of the political system |  |  |

Table 2  
Multiple dimensions of the corpus related to the 2018 constitutional amendment.

The data confirm that the corpus created for the current analysis can be considered a concrete output of the process of building a discursive strategy in which the new ideology can be fostered and consolidated.

In addition, the examples show that the texts associate the ideological formulation with two topics. In examples (1) through (5), (9), and (10), the topic is a renewed centrality of the Chinese Communist Party in national politics as a guarantee for a healthy political context governed according to the law. Besides, examples (6) through (8) are focused on a strong internal management within the Party as a prerequisite for effective governance of the country. Here, the topic is promoting loyalty and cohesion within the elite group, strengthening ideological and ethical values.

As we have seen, textual topicality links the leadership of the Party to guaranteeing the rule of law, to good governance, and the country's success; in parallel, the quality of its leadership is based on the members' ideological stance and moral virtue. These elements of the employed discourse strategy display a persuasive character as they indirectly call into play two overlapping macro-topics of Chinese politics, both rooted in extra-linguistic variables, such as institutional context and the country's political history: first, the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party to be the only political actor entitled to govern China; second, the objective of preserving the stability of the political system.

## 5. Concluding remarks

In the previous Sections, the complexity of contemporary Chinese political discourse clearly appeared in the analysis of the data revolving around the first Article of the 2018 People's Republic of China Constitution. As we saw, the amended text in the constitutional article is part of a much broader discursive strategy which has been built since 2013 through a composite embedding of texts.

In this framework, as far as the texts themselves are concerned, they are produced in distinct disciplinary fields and are realizations of textual genres pertaining to different specialized languages (of journalism, politics, law, and so on), and therefore have definite communicative purposes and perform specific functions in their respective original domain. Nonetheless, in parallel, and displaying a high level of intertextuality, they work synergistically to promote awareness and consensus among institutional organs and citizens towards the new ideology formulation.

In an analytical perspective focused on the functions performed by genres in social activities, these distinct textual genres, interacting with each other and contributing to one common objective, give birth to a genre repertoire. In terms of authorship, first we observe that the authors of the

texts collected in the corpus are members of distinct professional groups. Nonetheless, as shown previously, a closer look highlights that they belong to a rather cohesive albeit heterogeneous community.

The voices of a variety of different professional groups contributing to the genre repertoire represent one single ideal institutional author, the Party-state in its broadest sense. This claim is deeply rooted in the socio-political context of contemporary China. The structure of China's current political system has its origins in a political and discursive continuity between organs of the Chinese Communist Party and organs of the People's Republic of China as a State (Cabestan 2014; Jiang 2010), as well as in the close relationship between media and politics (de Burgh 2017; Xu Jing, Wang Dengfeng 2018). This network between the three organizations clearly emerges in the corpus, especially in the journalistic sources, mostly belonging to the authoritative category of official newspapers (namely, direct emanations of political organs).

Furthermore, on the basis of the main characteristics of the selected genre repertoire, the corpus appears to be unquestionably elite-oriented. This can be confirmed by the selection of genres in use, by the formal language of the texts, and by the high formality of the contexts of publication. As we pointed out previously, elite members are the main recipients of the communication flow articulated through the texts of the corpus, and the effort devoted to the construction of a discursive strategy to promote the new ideological formulation reinforces the values within this social group. Finally, data observation confirms a strategic use of the genre repertoire by the discourse community of political cadres in order to foster internal cohesion and strengthen power relationships within society at large.

However, despite the main orientation of the textual data, the intended recipients are not limited to the restricted circle of the political elite. The general public is a second target of the discursive strategy, as its long-term efficacy is based on public acceptance and positive public opinion towards the new ideological item. As mentioned in the introduction, throughout the same period, the emphasis on the importance of the constitutional text for Chinese society as a whole was publicized through a variety of communicative channels and programs (Mottura 2019).

By way of conclusion, the immediate purposes of the discursive strategy were to affirm a renewed centrality of the Chinese Communist Party in national politics (sub-topic 1), and to promote loyalty and cohesion within the elite group (sub-topic 2). Moreover, the long-term objectives of the genre repertoire were to reinforce the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party to govern the country (macro-topic 1), and to guarantee the stability of the political system (macro-topic 2). Based on this perspective, drawing from Wodak's discourse-historical approach (2001), the analysis of the

relationship between the corpus texts, genres, discourses and the extra-linguistic social and historical variables could be divided into the dimensions showed in Table 2.

The rich and multifaceted genre repertoire amplifies and strengthens the programmatic and legitimizing function performed by the constitutional article in the Chinese political context. Thus, the genre repertoire becomes an effective tool in building the discursive strategy in which the new ideology is embedded and consolidated. It fosters political awareness and consensus in a time when a progressive centralization in multiple aspects of the exercise of power seems to emerge, promotes trust in central institutions, and strengthens the stability of the political system.

In an historical perspective, the existence of one social group producing such a multifaceted genre repertoire confirms that, despite the previous commitment to promoting a growing separation between the functions of the Party and those of the State, in recent years, the trend in internal politics has led to a growing convergence between the functions of the two main institutional actors.

Finally, on the basis of the corpus selected for this study, we can affirm that in the Chinese political background, the discursive context incessantly produced and disseminated by a multifaceted discourse community stemming from the Party-state, strengthens the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party to rule the country by spreading new ideology formulations through the strategic use of a genre repertoire.

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