

MARXISM STILL MATTERS: THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY'S DESCRIPTION OF FOREIGN DEMOCRACIES AS AN IDEOLOGICAL STRATEGY

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The role of ideology is a disputed topic among scholars interested in the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. By means of investigating the description of foreign democracies in the party's prominent newspaper, *Renmin ribao* the 'People's Daily', the ideological strategy of the Hu Jintao administration is analysed in the present study. This description is compared with the concept of liberal democracy as perceived by some prominent representatives of liberalism, Marxism, and Confucianism. The results show that the description of foreign democracies in the 'People's Daily' to a high extent complies with traditional Marxist perspectives. It seems plausible that the party still relates to Marxism in order to legitimise its own rule and delegitimise liberal democracy. Marxist strategy, thus, still seems to be of great importance to the party's legitimacy.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, US politics have been firmly tied to the oligarchs of Wall Street. The Democrats and President Obama are maybe even more dependent than the Republicans on economic support from the financial oligarchy of Wall Street. (Liu 2011: 4)

This quotation is taken from an article published in 2011 in *Renmin ribao* the 'People's Daily' (hereafter, the PD), the most authoritative newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party (the CCP). This kind of statement about foreign democracies may not only have an informative but also an ideological and legitimising function for the CCP, since it discredits the party's main ideological competitor, liberal democracy. This study aims at deepening the understanding of the CCP's legitimacy by studying ideological strategy in the PD's discourse on foreign democracies during the Hu Jintao era (2003–2011).¹ The research question is: to what extent does the PD's image of the democratic systems in Japan, India, Brazil, and the USA resemble the concept of liberal democracy as interpreted by prominent representatives of liberalism, Marxism, and Confucianism?

¹ Due to practical reasons, material from the last two years of the Hu Jintao era has not been included in this study. For more details on the material selection, see the method section.

The significance of ideology, not least Marxist ideology, to the CCP's legitimacy is a disputed topic among China scholars, and further studies are needed in order to form a deeper understanding of this issue. The method of this study, to investigate the CCP's image of foreign political systems in order to increase the knowledge of the party's ideology, is an established approach (Shambaugh 2009: 41–102). Nevertheless, few studies have investigated how the party's descriptions of different foreign democracies reveal its ideological strategy. This study will thus make methodological as well as empirical contributions to the field.

DEMOCRACY, LEGITIMACY, AND IDEOLOGY

This section briefly introduces the core concepts of this study: democracy, legitimacy, and ideology. One factor confounding the understanding of the CCP's description of liberal democracy is that the party regards itself as democratic. In the party's discourse, *xifang minzhu* 'Western-style democracy' is often used as a preferred term to distinguish liberal democracy from China's political system (Holbig & Gilley 2010: 411). Before the end of the Cold War, it was common that academic discourse included the political systems of communist countries, usually termed people's democracies, in the wider concept of democracy (Ball & Dagger 2009: 40). More recently, prominent scholars have stressed the importance of not stretching the democracy concept that far (Hadenius 1992: 32; Beetham 1994: 27; Sartori 1991: 248; Dahl 2000: 101). Drawing from this literature, the following study's definition of democracy is based on Robert A. Dahl's polyarchy concept, and minimum levels of political and civil freedoms are thus required for a political system to qualify as democratic (Dahl 2000: 85). The decision is motivated by normative as well as practical reasons. As stated by Giovanni Sartori (1991: 248), comparison becomes difficult if very different political systems are described by the same concept.

According to Seymour M. Lipset (1960: 77), the legitimacy of a political system can be defined as "the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for their society". Legitimacy is of great importance to democratic as well as authoritarian political systems but it is often more fragile for nondemocracies. The legitimacy of democracies is usually based on the political process, most importantly free and fair elections, while authoritarian systems have to base their legitimacy on other foundations. Ideology has historically been an especially prominent source of legitimacy to authoritarian political systems, not least since ideology can be used in order to discredit alternative political systems such as democracy. (Huntington 1991: 46–50; Wejnert 2014: 73) In its broadest sense, ideology can be defined as "an abstract and highly systematic set of political ideas" (Heywood 1998: 6). While scholars disagree on how to define ideology, it is widely recognised that power holders can use it more or less deliberately in order to legitimise their authority (Marx 2001: 92; Sartori 1969: 410–411; Minogue 1994: 8–10). Inspired by Arthur Schweitzer (1962: 46–66), I use the concept ideological strategy in order to refer to this dimension of ideology. The content of an ideological strategy, that is, the political ideas and ideological perspectives it reflects, deserves attention since it determines to what extent authoritarian regimes are successful in legitimising their authority (Beetham 1991: 181–186). In this study, the discourse on democracy in the PD is perceived as an expression of the CCP's ideological strategy, and its content is analysed by the help of broader ideological perspectives.

THE IDEOLOGICAL STRATEGY OF THE CCP

In this section, previous research on the ideological strategy of the CCP is discussed and the concept of liberal democracy according to prominent representatives of liberalism, Marxism, and Confucianism is introduced. According to popular media and some academic discussions, the contemporary CCP mainly retains its legitimacy by performance-based economic growth and by appellations to patriotism (Roskin 2010: 426; Pan 2008: 323; Laliberté & Lanteigne 2008: 8). However, many influential China scholars also describe ideology as of crucial importance to the party's legitimacy (Brown 2012: 66; Holbig 2013: 76; Holbig & Gilley 2010: 397). The content of the party's official ideology *zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi* 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' is a debated topic (Yu 2008: 56; Naughton 2008: 143; Weatherley 2007: 153; Bell 2007: 22). According to Heike Holbig (2013: 64) it consists of a mix of different ideological perspectives: "the (re)production of party ideology remains a highly fluid framing process, where Marxist-Leninist and other traditional tenets of socialist ideology are constantly recombined with new political concepts such as nationalism, populism, the revitalization of traditional culture, etc." One method of studying the party's ideological strategy is therefore to use relevant ideological perspectives as analytical tools.

Depending on the field of study, scholars use different ideological perspectives as categories in order to understand the ideological strategy of the CCP.² In this study, three of the most commonly used categories, namely liberalism, Marxism, and Confucianism, are selected. These ideologies are appropriate to the purpose of this study, since they represent relatively well the different perspectives on democracy represented in China's political society. Nationalism and economism have been noted as ideologies influencing the CCP, but since these ideologies are not very concerned with democracy, they are not appropriate to be used as foundations for constructing the analytical tools of this study (Laliberté & Lanteigne 2008: 6; Weatherley 2007: 160).

Liberalism

After the end of dynastic rule in 1912, the newly formed Chinese Republic introduced elements of liberal ideology. The attempts to democratise the country were, however, halted by the authoritarian rule of the nationalist government of Jiang Jieshi, and came to a definite end after the CCP gained power in 1949 (Nathan 1999: 63). During the first decade of economic reforms in the 1980's, liberal perspectives became popular among intellectuals as well as among many CCP members. After the crackdown on student protesters at Tiananmen Square in 1989, liberalism sustained another setback.

According to Andrew Nathan (2008: 36), there was still a significant liberal faction in the CCP during the early twenty-first century, mainly consisting of retired party officials. A common trait of Chinese Liberals is that they want to introduce institutions that have proven universally effective at checking abuses of power, such as freedom of speech and the right to organise. Western democracies are often described as political models (Nathan 2008: 38). According to Yu Keping (2008: 53), one of China's most influential liberal scholars, the early twenty-first century CCP has been taking small steps towards democratisation, a strategy he

2 Nathan (2008) contrasts Marxist and Confucian "neo-conservative" ideology to "liberal" ideology; Holbig & Gilley (2010) use Marxist "new-left", Confucian "culturalism", and "nationalism" as categories to describe the most important ideologies influencing the CCP.

terms *incremental democracy*: “Its most striking feature is the use of incremental reforms to enlarge the political rights of the citizenry”. Although vague on the timetable and final destination of democratisation, Yu (2008: 56) describes “overall democratisation” as the aim of the new policies. Like Yu, most Chinese liberals having links to the CCP want to introduce democracy gradually and simultaneously with economic development (Misra 2003: 732; Nathan 2008: 38). In contrast to Yu, Holbig and Gilley (2010: 413) describe the Hu administration’s liberal strategies as rare: “Notions of human rights, civil society, the separation of party and government functions, and multiparty democracy remain marginal or even inimical to the CCP’s overall plans.”

Few people have been as influential in determining the liberal definition of democracy as Dahl. Dahl’s democratic criteria are widely used by scholars as well as indexes such as the “Polyarchy Dataset” and “Vanhanen’s Index of democracy” (Hadenius 2012: 21; Democracy Barometer). Dahl is also known in China’s political society and his writings have even been used as study material by the CCP (Shambaugh 2009: 100). In this study, Dahl’s (2000: 38) set of five democratic criteria is used as an analytical tool in order to identify and understand liberal strategy in the PD. The criteria are presented below:

- *Effective participation*. Before a policy is adopted, all the members of a society must have equal and effective opportunities for making their views known.
- *Voting equality*. Every member of a society must have an equal and effective opportunity to vote and all votes must be counted as equal.
- *Enlightened understanding*. All members of a society must have equal and effective opportunities for learning about the relevant policies and their likely consequences.
- *Control of agenda*. All members of a society must have opportunity to decide what is placed on the agenda.
- *Inclusion of adults*. All, or at any rate most, adult permanent residents should have the full rights of citizens that are implied by the first criteria.

Marxism

Since the foundation of the CCP in 1921, Marxism has been one of the official fundamentals of the party’s value system. During its first 30 years of power, the CCP transformed China mainly in accordance with Marxist and Leninist principles. Rule by a “vanguard party”, and a strict command economy were introduced during the 1950s. However, the economic and social costs caused by Mao Zedong’s campaigns “the Great Leap Forward” and “the Cultural Revolution” forced the party to adjust its former Marxist and Leninist doctrines. During the last 30 years, the CCP has, for instance, introduced market reforms and allowed entrepreneurs from the private sector to join the party.

Some scholars stress the return of Marxist or at least left-wing perspectives to the CCP’s value system, propaganda, and policy during the early twenty-first century. The Hu administration’s references to the party’s revolutionary past, its focus on social justice, and its tighter political control are interpreted by Barry Naughton (2008: 143) as an ideological tilt to the political left. According to Holbig (2013: 69), the Hu administration played down the earlier Jiang Zemin administration’s focus on the upper classes, which some Chinese critics describe as a capitalist fascist dictatorship: “thus reorienting party politics away from Jiang’s elitism and back to a more populist outlook”.

In contrast to this view, some scholars question whether Marxism has any *de facto* influence on the party's value system. Robert Weatherley (2007: 153) interprets what he sees as an increasing divergence between Marxist ideology and the CCP's policy as a reason for growing legitimacy problems for the party. He comments on the CCP's policy of accepting entrepreneurs in the party, implemented during the turn of the millennium, as: "leaving it in a position where it seems almost ridiculous to describe the CCP as a communist party." Jiaotong University Professor Daniel A. Bell (2007: 22) has also questioned the *de facto* influence of Marxism on the value system of the contemporary CCP:

I would surmise, however, that the main reason Chinese officials and scholars do not talk about communism is that hardly anybody really believes that Marxism should provide guidelines for thinking about China's political future. The ideology has been so discredited by its misuses that it has lost almost all legitimacy in society.

In order to differentiate Marxism from the CCP's official understanding of socialism, this article uses the thoughts of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, not the thoughts of Soviet and Chinese authorities, as a representative type of Marxism. As stated by Joseph Fewsmith (2008: 175), Hu Daping (2010: 194), and Robert Ware (2013: 141), traditional Marxism and Marxist classics such as the Communist Manifesto are still considered as very relevant by CCP leftists. Marx's view of an ideal society and his criticism against democracy in capitalist societies can be summarised in three dimensions. In this article, this set of three dimensions is used as an analytical tool in order to identify and understand Marxist strategy in the PD:

- *Economic equality.* Marx and Engels (1955: 24) describes capitalism as characterised by enormous economic inequality. Based on a materialist philosophy, Marx (2001: 92) argues that the capitalists not only own the means of production, but they also produce the dominant ideas of society. Marx's thinking implies that the economic elite has disproportionate influence on many formally democratic states. Producing the ideas of society, capitalists in liberal democracies should be able to manipulate the electorate to vote in favor of policies contradictory to the interests of the majority.
- *Class consciousness.* The proletarians – the modern working class – are, however, able to see through this manipulation by increasing their knowledge and unity. By organising in socialist groups and parties, the proletarians can fight for their interests against the capitalists. (Marx & Engels 1955: 19)
- *Rule by the proletariat.* Marx argues that the proletarians, represented by socialist parties, have to seize power and "by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property" confiscate the economic resources of the capitalist class (Marx & Engels 1955: 56). It is only then that "we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (Marx & Engels 1955: 32).

Modern Confucianism

Confucianism was the dominant philosophy in imperial China from the rise of the Han Dynasty in 200 BC to the fall of the last emperor in AD 1911. During the Mao years, particularly through the anti-Confucius campaign 1973–1976, the CCP criticised Confucianism and accused it of being feudal and reactionary. Since the end of "the Cultural Revolution", the party has gradually restored the legacy of Confucius.

Bell argues that Confucianism did become a more important part of the CCP's value system, replacing what he describes as increasingly irrelevant Marxist ideology during the early twenty-first century. Bell (2007: 23) interprets the Hu administration's focus on social

harmony and virtuous leadership as signs of Confucian rather than Marxist influence. He considers Confucianism as especially applicable to China, since it rejects elements of liberal democracy which he perceives as worrisome to many Chinese, such as rule by uneducated masses and creation of internal conflict among a huge population (Bell 2007: 26). Besides Bell, many other scholars stress the growing influence of Confucianism on the party's value system and ideological strategy (Chan 2003: 195; Holbig & Gilley 2010: 410; Misra 2003: 733).

As the topic is not familiar to most social scientists outside East Asia, it is important to present how a representative type of modern political Confucianism should be constructed. In this article, the political thought of Jiang Qing, the director of the Yangming Confucian Institute, is used as a representative type of modern Confucianism. Bell (2013: 1) has described Jiang as China's "most prominent Confucian political thinker of the day". Jiang's political thought is suitable for the purpose of this study, not least because he is a fierce critic of democracy.

Jiang (2013: 30) criticises liberal democracy for treating the sovereignty of the people as the only source of legitimacy in a political system. Based on Han-dynasty commentaries on Confucius' writings, Jiang (2013: 28) argues that the legitimacy of a political system should not only be based on the will of the people but also on sacred values and historical heritage. According to Jiang, the will of the people only reflects the interests of the current electorate, while sacred values represent morality and the common interests of humanity. Moreover, Jiang states that a political system should contain aspects of a country's historic tradition and heritage. In this way, citizens' feelings of safety and their loyalty to the state will increase. (Jiang 2013: 90–93)

According to Jiang (2013: 33), the exaggerated importance given to the will of the people in democracies creates a political system characterised by selfishness, a lack of historical continuity, and immorality. Democratic leaders are considered to be ignorant and insufficiently moral. Nor do they usually consider the interests of human beings outside the electorate, such as future generations or foreigners. Consequently, democracies tend to destroy the environment and exploit other countries, even though these actions are perceived as negative for humanity as a whole: "This is why democratic electorates give rise to imperialism, fascism, and hegemonism". (Jiang 2013: 34)

Modern Confucianism also treats the conflictual nature of liberal democracy as a serious problem. According to Jiang, democracy lacks institutions of continuity and stability. A democratic process is contrasted to institutions of hereditary authority, which are considered to strengthen the national stability and make citizens feel safer. (Jiang 2013: 93)

Jiang's Confucian solution to these problems of democracy is to create a political system ruled by a scholarly bureaucracy consisting of sages, who will use their superior wisdom and morality to take the common interests of humanity into account: "This is because worthy and capable scholar-officials have a heart of benevolence, moral conduct, breeding, ideas, learning, wisdom and ability such that they must receive more political power so that they can use it to serve the people". (Jiang 2013: 201) The head of the state should ideally be a symbolic Monarch, representing the historical tradition and continuity of a country.

Jiang's view of an ideal Confucian society and his criticism of democracy can be summarised in three dimensions. In this article, this set of dimensions is used as an analytical tool in order to identify and understand Confucian strategy in the PD:

- *Harmony and continuity*: Society should ideally be ruled by consensus. Conflicts should if possible be avoided. Aspects of hereditary authority should be introduced in order to increase the continuity of a political system. The conflictual nature of democracy is viewed as contrary to the Confucian ideal of harmony.

- *Morality and benevolence*: Policy must harmonise with moral principles such as respect for the interests of minorities, foreigners and future generations. The political policies made by temporary elected governments tend to be short-sighted and immoral.
- *Hierarchy*: The electorate are not believed to have sufficient knowledge and moral to rule. Instead, an elite consisting of people having superior moral, breeding, and knowledge should rule society.

METHOD

In the analysis, the analytical tools are compared to the discourse on foreign democracies in the PD. Any similarities between the PD's description of democracy and the concept of democracy as interpreted by the representatives of the three ideological perspectives are identified and used in order to understand how the CCP formulates its ideological strategy. As pointed out by Michael Freedman (1996: 2), ideologies are not mutually exclusive but overlapping. Thus, it is important to point out that the ideological perspectives interact with each other and that the CCP's ideological strategy can be understood not only through one, but through two or more ideological perspectives.

In order to create a more comprehensive picture of how the CCP portrays democracy, the party discourses of four different democracies, India, Japan, Brazil, and the USA, are studied. The countries have been selected because they have different values on three key variables, each regarded as of particular importance according to one of the ideological perspectives (see Table 1). The relevant variables consist of "freedom" (desired by Liberals), "the strength of political left-wing forces" (desired by Marxists) and "continuity" (desired by Confucians). Freedom, as measured by the Freedom House index, is an indicator of maximalist democracy. (Högström 2013: 204) During every year between 2003 and 2011, Freedom House considered the USA and Japan to be freer than India and Brazil. If the PD describes the political systems in the USA and Japan in a more positive way than the political systems in India and Brazil, the newspaper's ideological strategy may reflect a more liberal perspective. Left-wing forces are considered to be strongest in Brazil, which has been ruled by the Worker's Party since 2002; second strongest in India, due to its influential left leaning Congress Party and its strong but fragmented communist movement; third strongest in Japan, where the Japanese Communist Party is represented in the parliament; and weakest in the USA. If the PD describes the political

Table 1 Selected cases

Country	Freedom rating (1 highest, 7 lowest) (2007) ³	Strength of political left- wing forces (1 highest, 4 lowest)	Continuity
India	2.5	2	Republic
Japan	1	3	Monarchy
USA	1	4	Republic
Brazil	2	1	Republic

³ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2007.

systems in Brazil and India in a more positive way than the political systems in Japan and the USA, the newspaper's ideological strategy may reflect a more Marxist perspective. As a stable monarchy, dominated by one party, the Japanese democracy is considered to have higher levels of continuity than the other three democracies. If the PD describes the political system in Japan in a more positive way than the political systems in the other three democracies, the newspaper's ideological strategy may reflect a more Confucian perspective.

The material used in this study consists of articles published on the PD's webpage, *Renmin wang* the 'People's Net' 2003–2011. The material thus covers almost the entire Hu era.⁴ The PD describes itself as *houshe* the 'mouthpiece' of the party and as a "window through which the world can watch and understand China" (*Renmin ribao* 2003). The PD has historically been described as a useful source for understanding Chinese politics and ideology: "Editorials and commentaries in the *People's Daily* represent the viewpoints of the Chinese leadership. Thus, the *People's Daily* is central to understanding the Chinese propaganda state, as well as elite politics." (Wu 1994: 195) The PD's content is not a representative example of the CCP's internal communication, since the party uses other media internally (Shambaugh 2007: 50). It is more proper to describe its content as a representative example on how the party communicates its opinions to the Chinese people. Previous research has emphasised the external communication or propaganda system as of prominent importance to the CCP's legitimising and ideological strategy, and the material should thus be relevant (Holbig 2013: 66). Although different writers express their opinion in the PD, and some proliferation of opinion is allowed, China's powerful *xuanchuanbu* 'Propaganda Department' strictly controls the paper's written content (Shambaugh 2007: 53; Wu 1994: 199). Thus, the description of democracy in the PD can be treated as a relatively coherent picture of how the party communicates its view of liberal democracy to the Chinese people.

Articles are selected with the help of the search tool on the newspaper's webpage (Table 2). Articles containing the terms *minzhu* 'democracy' as well as the terms describing any of the four countries *Meiguo* 'USA', *Yindu* 'India', *Riben* 'Japan', and *Baxi* 'Brazil' are selected. In order to limit the data, only articles tagged with the labels *Zhongguogongchandang xinwen* 'CCP news' and *guandian* 'opinion' are selected.⁵

ANALYSIS

In this section, the PD's discourse on democratic states is compared to the concept of democracy as interpreted by the representatives of liberalism, Marxism, and Confucianism. In order to increase reliability, the analysis has been carried out twice, once in the autumn of 2011 and once in the spring of 2014. The collected data is described in Table 2. As expressed in the table, while publishing many articles describing the US democracy, the PD does not publish articles about the Japanese, Indian, and Brazilian democracies frequently. Despite the limited material, given the method of selection, the study should cover a large proportion of the PD's few analytical articles describing these democracies.⁶

4 Articles from 2012 and 2013 have not been included, since the People's Net has updated the label system of the search engine.

5 Articles labelled as "CCP news" are presented at a special webpage also containing information about the party's ideology and its highest leadership, <cpc.people.com.cn/>, accessed 13 May 2014.

6 Longer quotations are accessible in their original Chinese version in the Appendix.

Table 2 Frequency of People's Daily articles describing democracy in India, Japan, Brazil, and USA, 2003–2011

	India	Japan	USA	Brazil
Keywords: 'term describing country' + 'democracy' Label: CCP news, opinion	13	32	219, 21 ⁷	10
Articles containing analytical descriptions⁸	6	8	5	2

Few signs of Liberalism

On Dahl's first criteria, *effective participation*, Japan and Brazil are considered to perform very well. According to the PD, citizens in these countries and to some extent even citizens in the USA seem to have substantial and efficient ways of influencing the political system (Yu 2010: 13; Wang 2010: 4; Zhu & Xiu 2011: 3; Yu 2006: 2). Japan's politicians are, for instance, described as being responsive to the demands of the people:

When the relations and interaction between urban residents and local communities changed, citizens started to care even more about vital environmental problems. Residents initiated wave after wave of environmental campaigns. The Japanese government gradually become conscious about the environmental situation's importance for the stable feelings of people in a society marked by competition. (Zhu & Xiu 2011: 3)

However, citizens are not considered to have an effective influence on politics in all democracies. Citizens in India and the USA are not described as having efficient tools for influencing politics. On the contrary, these democracies are often described as being ruled by the economic elite (Yu 2006: 5; Liu 2011: 4; Wang 2011: 3). One writer states that "money is the mother's milk of politics" in the USA (Yu 2006: 5). This argument is easier to interpret as an expression of Marxist criticism against the lack of *economic equality* in capitalist states than an expression of liberalism. Although the USA is perceived as being ruled by the wealthy, the USA and India, as well as Japan and Brazil, are described as having real freedom of expression, one aspect of *effective participation* (Wang 2011: 1; Zhu & Xiu 2011: 3; Yu 2010: 13). This freedom is portrayed as something positive. In one PD article, Professor Shang Kuai-peng (2010: 11) of Beijing University, even considers India to have more freedom of expression than China:

In comparison to India's lower classes, the Chinese lower classes still lack channels for expressing their discontent. During the decades following the reform opening-up policies, China's GDP rose 150% but the salaries of migrant workers only rose 40%. During this long period of time, their requests and complaints have not been aired, or their voices have been blocked and ignored.

Regarding Dahl's second criteria, *voting equality at the decisive stage*, vote buying is considered a serious problem in the Indian democracy:

⁷ Since the democracy of the USA is described in disproportionately many articles, only 21 or one tenth of these, selected randomly, have been included in the material.

⁸ Not all articles selected by the mechanical search tool were extensive enough to give any information about CCP's view on democracy. The numbers in the second row express the frequency of articles containing analytical descriptions of democracy.

The functioning of India's parliamentary democracy still has many problems. Actually, India's democratic politics in essence do not give a majority of the people real democratic rights, something incompatible with modern democratic theory. For instance, although the law states all Indian adults have the right of suffrage, the deep-rooted Indian caste system means that a lot of discrimination still exists. Money still has an important influence on Indian politics. Vote buying is very common during elections. Altogether, these things have greatly reduced the actual effect of the Indian democracy. (Wen 2007: 8)

The PD's criticism against vote buying in India can be interpreted as an expression of liberal perspectives. India's political system is described as not living up to its own principles on voters' equality. The weakness of this aspect of Indian democracy is contrasted with the ideals of "modern democratic theory", and India's lack of respect for "democratic theory" and "democratic rights" is considered problematic.

The quote can also be interpreted as an expression of Marxist perspectives, since the caste system is regarded as the driver behind the unequal participation during elections. The caste system might be regarded as an expression of how the class system manipulates the lower strata of society to not participate in elections and thus decreases their *class consciousness*.

Voters in democracies are sometimes described as not living up to Dahl's third democracy criterion, *enlightened understanding*. The PD describes poor Indian voters as aggressively protesting by throwing stones and rotten eggs at politicians, although this behaviour is considered as having no effect on the country's politics. (Shang 2010: 7) The description of India's voters as lacking the knowledge needed to effectively participate in the democratic process can be interpreted as an expression of liberal perspectives.

Japanese voters are described as having sufficient knowledge to influence the country's political future. Although criticising the government of Japan, the PD also expresses confidence in the Japanese citizens' ability to influence their country's politics: "For the pressured people, sharply raised taxes mean additional burdens. Under these circumstances, the ballot in one's hand will not fall on the Democratic Party". (Hong 2010: 7) The Japanese people are also described as efficiently influencing their country's local and environmental issues (Zhu & Xiu 2011: 3). This description implies that Japanese citizens are considered to have sufficient knowledge about their country's political system, since they are able to influence it.

The PD's normative discourse on the four democracies does not resemble the view that would be expected from representatives of liberalism. In spite of America's being recognised as one of the world's freest political systems by Freedom House, all the six PD articles discussing the American democracy described it in a negative way. In contrast, all PD articles described the Brazilian political system in a positive way, even though Freedom House considered Brazil to be less free than the US during the time period.

Many expressions of Marxism

While some writers' views on citizens' participation in politics can be interpreted as liberal, a considerable part of the discussion on this issue may also reflect a Marxist view on democracy. Although citizens are often described as having real freedom of expression, the PD criticises democracies' lack of *economic equality* by describing the economic elite as having much more influence on the democratic system than other groups in society. For instance, huge economic resources are described as a prerequisite for successful political candidates in the USA:

We all know the American elections are a game of spending huge sums of money. Approximately speaking, a senator needs on average 6 000 dollars per day to be re-elected, while a representative of Congress needs 1 200 dollars per day. Such a heavy cost makes it difficult for members of Congress to reject lobbyists who use political aid as a door-opener. An expert on American lobbying has said: “talking with politicians is a good thing, but if you bring some money they will listen more carefully.” (Yu 2006: 5)

Ordinary Americans are described as being able to express their opinions by “post, telephone and email” (Yu 2006: 2). However, although these channels of influence exist, rich Americans are described as having far more opportunities to express their opinions than people without money (Liu 2011: 4). The democratic process of India is also considered unequal:

The costs of the Indian system built on the principle of one man, one vote are very high. In order to have a successful campaign, political parties have to spend huge sums of money. Politicians often conspire with criminal business people, thus carrying out “black money politics”. (Wang 2011: 4)

Politicians with criminal contacts and considerable financial assets are considered to have a higher level of influence on India’s political process than non-corrupt and less wealthy politicians. While sometimes actively participating in politics, poor voters in the Indian electorate are not considered able to improve their livelihood through political action. (Shang 2010: 8) On the other hand, the political systems of Brazil and Japan are not portrayed as entirely in the hands of the economic elite. Japanese voters are described as having a strong influence on local issues and parliamentary elections. (Zhu & Xiu 2011: 7; Hong 2010: 7) Brazilian voters are described as having a strong influence on the country’s presidential elections and its policies combating ethnic discrimination (Yu 2010: 13; Wang 2010: 4).

The PD generally describes political forces belonging to the right and centre in a negative way, while political forces belonging to the left are described in a positive way. Since Marx perceives left-wing forces as more *class conscious* and more willing to implement socialism than right-wing forces, this kind of description can be interpreted as an expression of Marxism. Although Japan’s democratic system is largely viewed in a positive light compared to the American and Indian democracies, the political right wing of Japan is described in negative terms. Right-wing forces in Japan are, for instance, frequently accused of denying the country’s crimes during the Sino-Japanese war of 1937–1945. (Ri gaoguan 2005: 4; Shen 2006: 6; Huang 2005: 6) Right-wing political forces in India and the USA are described in the same negative way (2008: Quanjihua: 10; Sun 2007: 10). Centrist parties such as the Democratic Party of Japan (Hong 2010: 7), the Congress Party in India (Wang 2011: 6), and the Democratic Party in the USA are also criticised (Liu 2011: 4). The PD’s descriptions of left-wing politicians in Japan, India, and Brazil are more positive (Guan 2007: 3; Zhuanfang Riben 2006: 1). Brazil’s former president Lula da Silva is portrayed very positively:

During Lula’s time in power the coordinated economic and social reforms have resulted in the longest period of economic growth in the history of Brazil. During this booming period, Lula has implemented a number of social reforms which have efficiently improved life for the lower middle class. (Wang 2010: 4)

The PD’s normative discourse on the four democracies is to a high extent similar to the view expected to be put forward by representatives of traditional Marxism. Brazil and the Indian state West Bengal, polities ruled by socialist parties, are portrayed entirely in a positive light. The political systems of the rest of India and Japan receive both praise and criticism, while the American democracy, with its right leaning political forces, is criticised in all articles.

Some expressions of Confucianism

The PD frequently discusses the morality and harmony of democratic polities. This discussion shows similarities to Confucian perspectives but can in many cases also be interpreted as an expression of Marxist perspectives. As do modern Confucians, the PD describes democratic politicians as lacking *morality and benevolence*. The religious patriotism of the US is, for instance, portrayed as a force of imperialism and ethnocentrism:

The religious patriotism of the USA has become the moral base for territorial expansion and cultural export. According to this ideology, US political expansion overseas is described as a divine plan. This plan is predetermined, justified, splendid and sacred, since “the Americans are God’s selected people and shall lead the world to a new revival”. (Sun 2007: 10)

India’s democracy is criticised for creating xenophobia and religious violence, and for allowing supposedly religious nationalists, such as Gujarat’s former premier, Narendra Modi, (which the PD accuses of “putting oil on the fire of ethnic violence”), to become political leaders (2008: Quanqiuhua: 12). This description of democracy as leading to fascism-like ethnocentrism can be interpreted as an expression of Marxist as well as Confucian perspectives. From a Marxist point of view, the upper class in a democracy can use religion and nationalism as tools to manipulate and decrease the proletariat’s *class consciousness* (Avineri 1991: 640). However, in some articles, the description of the supposedly immoral behaviour of democracies is better interpreted as an expression of Confucian rather than Marxist ideological perspectives. In one article about a US budget conflict, the American democracy is criticised for not paying attention to future generations and creditors, foreign as well as domestic:

At the same time this system shows that the US has difficulties in forming a powerful government which takes the long term interests of the citizens into account. Consequently, the interests of American creditors, and in particular the interests of foreign creditors, have limited possibilities in achieving any assurance of repayment from the American state. Thus, the American Treasury irresponsibly continues to allow the debts to rise. (Zhou 2011: 5)

The PD’s criticism of the US government’s management of the debt crisis shows many similarities to the Confucian portrayal of democracies as not paying attention to the interests of foreigners and future generations. In another article discussing Japan’s view on history, Shen Dingli, vice chairman of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University, contrasts democracy and the will of the people against morality and honesty, two important Confucian virtues:

Basically, this problem is linked to democracy and justice. These are in practice two different categories of ideas. For instance, in political life democracy refers to letting power and decisions represent the will of the people, while justice refers to whether decisions are lawful, honest and fit to moral principles. Apparently, some policies have been shaped through a democratic process, and this might imply that the process has been just. It does however not necessarily mean that the results have been just. People do not only seek a just process, they also seek a just result. (Shen 2006: 3)

The PD generally describes left-wing politicians as possessing more morality than their right-wing counterparts. This might reflect that the PD considers *class conscious* actors to possess more Confucian virtues than right-wing politicians:

Before the end of the Cold War, the mainstream of Japanese politics was conservative. and some problems in the understanding of history existed in the high ranks of the Liberal Democratic Party. However, since the democratic thought of Japan is robust, left-wing forces have been strong and

Japanese right-wing politicians have been put under pressure, simply not daring to deny historical aggressions in open speeches. (Ri gaoguan 2005: 4)

Politicians who are described as moral are often either labelled as left wing or portrayed as possessing Confucian virtues such as morality and wisdom (Huang 2005: 5). This positive description of a politician opposing the Japanese government's view on World War II history is one example:

During this year's mayoral election, the current mayor is standing for reelection once more. He is challenged by a 52 year-old Japanese woman who bravely demands respect for the people's will and strongly questions the right-wing text books.

This woman who has the courage to tell the truth is called Chieko. She studied history in Beijing for four years. In Japan, she has been working as a translator of Chinese texts. When she expresses her opinions on the upcoming election she speaks Chinese fluently. "I believe children should absolutely not be allowed to use these kind of text books." "I want to tell China, we in the Sugunami-municipality do not want to twist history or glorify war." "Many Japanese want to have a friendly relationship with their Asian neighbours. The desire for peace has not changed. In this election, the people of our district have the good desire for peace. During this election, we are striving together." (Liu 2007: 2)

Like representatives of modern Confucianism such as Jiang Qing, the PD describes the conflicting nature of democracy as harmful to the *harmony and continuity* of society. The conflicts of democracies are described as causing instability:

When the opposition wins a majority of the seats in the senate, two parties once again split Japan's society and a "twisted Diet" (where the two chambers confront each other) reappears. This indicates Japan's political system soon will re-enter a period of instability. (Hong 2010: 2)

The conflicting nature of the US and Indian democracies is also described in negative terms (Zhou 2011: 5; Liu 2011: 3; Quan 2006: 11). The conflicts between the USA's major political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, are for instance described as confusing the American people and contributing to the fragmentation of society:

The battle between the Donkey and the Elephant is becoming more and more intense. It is not only leading the American people to not knowing which course to follow, it is actually also leading USA as a national state to internal confrontation and fragmentation. (Cai 2004: 5)

Too much conflict between different political parties would perhaps be criticised by representatives of most political ideologies. However, the emphasis of the devastating impact of political conflicts on people's feelings, contained in idioms such as *wusuoshicong* 'not knowing which course to follow' is easier to interpret as an expression of a Confucian belief in the importance of *harmony and continuity*.

The PD's normative discourse on the four democracies is not very consistent with the expected view of representatives of Confucianism. In spite of its continuity, aspects of the Japanese political system are criticised in all articles except for Zhu Tao's and Xiu Mei's article about local democracy. The democracy in Japan is described in a more positive way than the democracy in the US, but it is portrayed in a much more negative way than the democracy in Brazil.

RESULTS

In Table 3 follows a summary of the PD's most prominent and recurrent statements about democracy.

Table 3 Statements about democracy in the People's Daily articles

	Enables effective participation	Characterised by low economic equality	Works if ruled by class conscious actors	Lacks morality and benevolence	Damages harmony
Expression of liberalism	Yes				
Expression of Marxism		Yes	Yes	Partly	
Expression of Confucianism				Yes	Yes
Articles expressing the statement	5 articles	4 articles	11 articles	4 articles	5 articles

A prominent part of the PD's discourse on democracy can plausibly be interpreted as an expression of Marxist ideological strategy. The PD underlines the great influence exerted by the economic elite on the political process in democracies as a huge problem. Furthermore, democracies are almost only described as functional when being ruled by political actors labelled as "left wing" by the PD. This indicates that the PD attempts to portray the *class consciousness* of political actors as an important factor in predicting whether a political system will be functional or not. The PD's discourse on democracy may sometimes also plausibly be interpreted as an expression of Confucian ideological strategy. Interestingly, "left-wing" politicians are not only described as devoted to social justice, but are also attributed Confucian virtues such as truthfulness and benevolence. In the PD articles, democracies are often portrayed as lacking *morality* and *harmony*. This line of argument resembles Confucian criticism of democracy. Although democracy is described as enabling effective participation, it is generally difficult to interpret the PD's discourse as an expression of liberal ideological strategy.

As expressed in Table 4, the PD describes the democracies in countries ruled by left-wing governments such as Brazil in a more positive way than democracies ruled by more right leaning governments such as the USA. The normative description of the four democracies further strengthens the interpretation that the PD's ideological strategy reflects Marxist perspectives and weakens any interpretation suggesting that the PD reflects liberal perspectives.

It seems reasonable to believe that the PD more or less deliberately uses Marxist ideological strategy in its discourse on liberal democracy. These findings problematise Bell's and Weatherley's argument that Marxism should have been of little importance to the CCP during the early twenty-first century. According to this study, Marxist ideological strategy seems at least to have had a prominent position in the party's external communication during most of

Table 4 Normative discourse on the four democracies

	Positive discourse	Mixed discourse	Negative discourse
India	1 article	2 articles	3 articles
Japan	1 article	6 articles	1 article
USA		1 article	4 articles
Brazil	2 articles		

the Hu era. By describing democracy as immoral, inharmonious and ruled by the rich, the CCP probably intends to strengthen its own legitimacy by discrediting liberal democracy. This interpretation supports scholars such as Brown, Holbig, and Gilley who have emphasised the importance of ideology to the contemporary CCP's legitimacy.

Last but not least, it is important to point out that the PD does not discredit democracy altogether. Since socialist and left-wing actors active in a democratic context are described in a positive way, the PD does to some extent legitimise democratic socialism. This is perhaps a more or less unintended side effect caused by the PD's use of Marxist ideological strategy. If the positive view of democratic socialism is a representative case of the party's broader discourse, party hard liners might be vulnerable to internal as well as external demands for democratic socialism. More research is needed in order to uncover the party's discourse on this topic in more detail.

ABBREVIATIONS

CCP Chinese Communist Party

PD People's Daily

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APPENDIX**Quotation 1.**

美国的政治早已被华尔街寡头牢牢绑住，民主党和奥巴马总统比共和党人甚至更加依赖华尔街金融寡头的资助。

Quotation 2.

随着城市居民与地域社会的功能性互动和交换关系的变化，居民对赖以生存的环境问题也空前关注，居民环保运动此起彼伏，日本政府逐渐意识到环境状况对竞争社会中人心安定的重要作用。

Quotation 3.

与印度的底层相比，中国的底层民众还比较缺乏表达不满的渠道。改革开放几十年，中国的GDP增长了150%，而农民工的工资才增长40%。在这么长的时间里，他们的要求和呼声没有表达出来，或者他们的表达被阻断了，被忽视了。

Quotation 4.

印度议会民主制度的运转也存在不少问题。实际上，印度民主政治在实质上并没有给广大人民以充分的实行民主权利，不符合现代民主的理念。例如，从立法上，虽然规定每个成年人都有选举权，但由于印度社会根深蒂固的等级制度，仍然存在许多歧视。金钱的作用对民主政治有重要影响。选举期间贿选现象十分普遍。所有这些，都使印度民主实际效应大打折扣。

Quotation 5.

这对于已感到捉襟见肘的民众来说，大幅度加税无异于增加生活的负担，自己手里的选票自然不会投给民主党。

Quotation 6.

众所周知，美国的选举是耗资巨大的金钱游戏。据估算，一位参议员上任后平均每天要筹款6000美元才有可能连任，众议员每天则需筹款1200美元。如此沉重的费用负担，使得国会议员们很难拒绝用政治捐款当“敲门砖”的说客。正如美国游说专家所言：“同政客们交谈是一件好事，不过如果带点钱的话他们会更好地听你说。”

Quotation 7.

印度一人一票的民主选举制度成本很高，为竞选成功，政党竞选费用数额庞大，政客常与不法商人互相勾结，进行“黑金政治”。

Quotation 8.

卢拉执政期间，推行经济与社会协调发展的政策，使巴西经历了该国历史上最长的经济繁荣周期。同时，卢拉通过实施一系列社会计划有效改善了中下层民众的生活。

Quotation 9.

美国的宗教是一种政治宗教，这种政治宗教的突出特征就是宗教为国家和民族的政治服务。美国宗教政治作用的发挥离不开所谓的“美国宗教民族主义”。所谓宗教民族主义，是指民族宗教与民族主义紧密结合在一起，使本民族神圣化，使宗教为本民族或本国的一切利益服务。美国的这种宗教民族主义成为领土扩张和文化输出的道德依据。他们认为美国在海外的政治扩张活动是在完成上帝的使

命。这一使命是注定的、正义的、辉煌的和神圣的，因为“美国人民作为上帝选定的民族将最后领导世界的复兴”。

Quotation 10.

同时，这种体制也使得美国很难形成一个坚强有力的、能够以美国国民长远利益为着眼点的政府。因此，美国债权人的利益，特别是外国债权人的利益，在美国国内政治体制中缺乏可靠政治制度保障，从而使美国国债不负责任地一再膨胀、衍生。

Quotation 11.

这个问题的本质，是将民主与正义挂钩，其实这是两个不同范畴的概念。比如，在政治生活中，民主是指权力和决策能代表多少民意，而正义是指决策是否合法、正当和符合道德原则。显然，某种权力和决策在形式上通过民主产生，可能意味着程序上的正义，但未必能在结果上也带来正义。人们追求的不仅仅是程序正义，同时还要寻求结果正义。

Quotation 12.

冷战结束前，日本主流政治虽然是保守政治，自民党高层对历史认识也存在种种问题，但由于日本民主思想盛行，左翼势力强大，因此，日本的一些右翼政客迫于压力，轻易不敢把否定侵略历史的言论表面化。

Quotation 13.

今年区长选举中，前区长继续参选。为与之对抗，一位52岁的日本女性挺身而出，要求尊重民意，强烈反对采用右翼教科书。

这位敢于说真话的女士名叫鸟生千惠，曾在北京留学四年学习历史，在日本一直从事中文翻译工作。她用清晰流利的汉语向记者表达其竞选主张。“我想绝不应该，也绝不能允许让孩子们使用这样的教科书。”“我想告诉中国，我们杉并区决不想歪曲历史，颂扬战争。”“很多日本人希望与亚洲各国人民友好相处，企盼和平的心愿没有改变。此次选举正是我们区的民众带着对和平的美好愿望，站出来共同奋斗的一次选举。”

Quotation 14.

在野党在参议院占据过半数议席，日本再次出现了朝野政党分控众参两院的“扭曲国会”（即众参两院对峙），预示着日本政局可能再次进入动荡期。

Quotation 15.

驴象之争愈演愈烈，不仅让美国人民无所适从，实际上也导致了美国作为一个民族国家的内部对抗与分裂。