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***De-framing* a National Dream**

Identity and Political Legitimacy in the
Discourse on the Chinese Dream

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Chapter 1. Introduction

我们小的时候，也会提醒小朋友要有理想，我们那个时候更多的是说理想、理想追求。梦想的话，是一个很惊异的词汇，很少会说梦想。我们说理想更多一些。理想是比梦想更加理性，坚定的一种追求。所以第一次听到中国梦的时候，我想到美国梦。

When we were kids, we also reminded children to have ideals. At the time, however, we used more the word ideals or pursue ideals. The expression dream is surprising, and we rarely use it. We use more ideals. Ideal is a more rational and firmer pursuit than dreams. So, when I first heard the Chinese dream, I thought about the American dream.

(interview 1)

1.1. Research Background

The goal of realizing the *Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing de Zhongguomeng* 中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦 “Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” – as it is officially defined – was openly announced by Xi Jinping in 2012. This objective should be achieved for the centenary of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 2049, and would consist in China’s entering in a “new era”.

To be fair, this is not the first time that the word *meng* 梦 “dream” is employed metaphorically in the People’s Republic of China. Many *bai nian meng* 百年梦 “centenary dreams” have been used by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in order to create and boost public consensus around specific events. This is the case, for instance, of the Hong Kong handover in 1997¹, the Three Gorges Project,² or the more recent *aoyun meng* 奥运梦 “Olympic dream”. For this latter case, the slogan was *tong yi ge shijie, tong yi ge mengxiang* 同一个世界 同一个梦想 “One World, One Dream”, and the dream was also the leitmotiv of the advertising campaign that accompanied the Olympic torch in Beijing³.

¹ Pan Zhongdan et al. (2005, 50-51).

² Zhongyang zhengfu menhu wangzhan (2006).

³ Puppini (2008)

Since Xi's promotion of the *Zhongguo meng* 中国梦 "Chinese dream" or "China dream"⁴, many campaigns have been launched to promote this political concept: for instance, the one launched by the Ministry of Education and titled *wo de Zhongguo meng* 我的中国梦 "my Chinese dream" that aims at incentivizing students to tell their own views on this national dream in a written composition, so as to express their *aiguo zhi xin, qiangguo zhi yuan, baoguo zhi zhi* 爱国之心、强国之愿、报国之志 "patriotism, wish for a strong nation and will to protect it".⁵ Moreover, in 2013, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences increased research grants for research projects from "various perspectives and in various disciplines" focusing on the Chinese Dream.⁶ Not to mention the huge amount of propaganda posters spread all over the country.⁷ Outside those dreams advocated by the Party-state, the case of the "dream of constitutionalism" promoted by the *Nanfang zhoumo* 南方周末 *Southern Weekly* - an influential newspaper based in Guangzhou and known for its stance pro-political reform - deserves attention. In December 2012, using Xi's rhetoric of the dream, the draft of the New Year's editorial was titled *Zhongguo meng, xianzheng meng* 中国梦, 宪政梦 "Chinese dream, a dream of constitutionalism". Then, the chief of the local propaganda ordered to change the text, writing "We are closer to our dream than ever".⁸

Interestingly enough, in Chinese pre-modern literature, *meng* 梦 "dream" used to carry negative connotations. Chen Xixi acknowledges that many Chinese *chuantong suyü* 传统俗语 "traditional common saying" or "proverbs", still used nowadays, have derogatory sense.⁹ This is the case, for instance, of the common *bai ri zuo meng* 白日做梦 "spinning daydreams" and *chi ren shuo meng* 痴人说梦 "idiots speak of dreams" or the more evocative *Nanke yi meng* 南柯一梦 "Nanke dream" and *huangliang mei meng* 黄粱美梦

⁴ The official translations opt for "Chinese dream", instead of "China dream", in order to provide the nuance that this is a goal pursued by the Chinese people rather than by the Party-state alone. However, "Chinese dream" sounds like an imitation of the "American dream", in Chinese *Meiguo meng* 美国梦. This study decides upon "Chinese dream", because, as will be demonstrated below, it agrees with Fumian (2013) in seeing the Chinese dream as an attempt to borrow "the language of the other superpower in order to look similar and at the same time different to its new superpartner".

⁵ Fumian (2018, 54).

⁶ Barmé (2013).

⁷ Propaganda posters are available at: http://www.wenming.cn/jwmsxf_294/zggygg/index_12218.shtml. See also Gow (2017).

⁸ For more on this case, see Barmé (2014).

⁹ Chen Xixi (2014, 7).

“Golden Millet dream”¹⁰, which all convey the meaning of an unreachable fantasy. Therefore, in premodern time dreams and dreaming were mainly associated with ephemeral pipe dreams, so to speak.

According to the science-fiction writer and professor, Wu Yan 吴岩, it is with the advent of the Republican era that the concept of dream, which used to be eluded and characterized by a negative meaning, started taking on positive overtones.¹¹ Hence, the positive connotations attached to the “dream” are the results of China’s opening to the rest of the world and its embarking on modernity.

1.2 Interpretations of the Chinese dream

Since Xi’s launching of the Chinese dream, several scholars have attempted to explain its connotations and its functions in contemporary Chinese society from various perspectives. Starting with a comparison with previous political concepts and slogan, Damien Ma and Neil Thomas argues that the Chinese dream marks a departure from previous practices, because it does not refer to economic targets or policies, but it is a conceptual idea.¹² In his analysis of propaganda posters on the Chinese dream, Brian Hart argues that

China Dream art is being used not only to create a new source of legitimacy for the Communist Party, but also to establish a cult of personality around President Xi Jinping.¹³

Mahoney, instead, maintains that Chinese dream is a “metanarrative” that attempts to express and signify “Party’s ambitious visions and determination to achieve them”.¹⁴ For Fasulo, the Chinese dream also is a “narrative” aiming at making China’s “political agenda

¹⁰ *Nanke yi meng* 南柯一梦 (a Nanke dream) and *huangliang mei meng* 黄粱美梦 (Golden Millet dream) come from two famous works belonging to the literary genre *chuanqi* 传奇 (Transmitting the Strange) of the Tang period (618-907), respectively Li Gongzuo’s *Nanke Taishou Zhuan* 南柯太守傳 (Biography of the Prefect of Nanke County) and Shen Jiji’s *Huangliang mei meng* 黄粱美梦 (Golden Millet dream). The meaning that both convey is that of a “pipe dream”.

¹¹ Wu Yan (2018, 44-53).

¹² Damien Ma and Neil Thomas (2018).

¹³ Hart (2016).

¹⁴ Mahoney (2013, 16).

a success”¹⁵. Conversely, according to Shiping Zheng the Chinese dream in itself expresses China’s confidence in achieving its goals:

what gives China the reasons to be confident is not how well China has been performing in absolute terms, but how China has been performing relative to its neighboring countries.¹⁶

Differently, for Callahan, the Chinese dream, as it was for the American dream, stems from “patriotic worrying” and is a familiar expression of “nationalism and national belonging”, and an ongoing performance of self/Other coherence-producing.¹⁷ Therefore, the Chinese dream embodies a mix of hopes and anxiety for the future. In agreement with Callahan on the nationalist component of the Chinese dream, Steve Tsang and Honghua Men believe that Xi Jinping is a nationalist and “[h]is advocacy of the China Dream takes the Party sponsorship of nationalism to a level higher than hitherto.”¹⁸ Furthermore, Zhang and McGhee add that “the discourse of the Chinese dream can be seen as a philosophical-political term to describe the phenomenon of the revival of Chinese traditional culture” and represents a hybrid combination of “nationalism, culturalism, racialism and modernization”.¹⁹

At the same time, the Chinese dream represents an attempt to rebalance the relationship between the goals of the Party-state and those of the individuals.²⁰ It attempts to do so, according to Fumian, by appealing to “people’s emotional states”. In that being so, the Chinese dream represents a sort of “soft propaganda [...] that pays more attention to the ‘liquid’ realm of the individual’s subjective perceptions.”²¹ The same direction is followed by Gow’s view, who, by drawing upon Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, studies the Chinese dream in relation to the core socialist values²², arguing that

¹⁵ Fasulo (2016, 13).

¹⁶ Shiping Zheng (2014, 36).

¹⁷ Callahan (2017).

¹⁸ Tsang and Honghua Men (2016, chap. 2).

¹⁹ Shaoying Zhang and McGhee (2017).

²⁰ Callahan (2013).

²¹ Fumian (2013).

²² The core socialist values are: *fuqiang* 富强 “wealth and power”, *minzhu* 民主 “democracy”, *wenming* 文明 “civility”, *hexie* 和谐 “harmony”, *ziyou* 自由 “freedom”, *pingdeng* 平等 “equality”, *gongzheng* 公正 “justice”, *fazhi* 法治 “law-based governance”, *aiguo* 爱国 “patriotism”, *jingye* 敬业 “dedication”, *chengxin* 诚信 “integrity”, *youshan* 友善 “friendship”. For the translation of *fazhi* “law-based governance”, this study

While the primary emphasis of the CCP since the Deng era has been to promote strategies to transform the economic base, the Xi Administration's reforms and policy campaigns place a greater weight on transforming the superstructure.²³

Comparing the Chinese dream with previous political slogans and concepts, Lavagnino argues that the Chinese dream aims at creating “a reassuring vision of the future, in which the guiding role of the party acquires a constant and solid legitimization.”²⁴ According to Chen Rudong, instead, the concept of the Chinese dream represents the last manifestation of *yǔ shí jù jìn* 与时俱进 “keep abreast of the time” of Chinese political communication.²⁵

In discussing the discourse on the “Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” in relation to party's legitimacy, Wang Zheng maintains that since the early 1990s,

The Party used the new phrase “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (*zhonghua minzu de weida fixing*) as its new mission. By using the word “rejuvenation,” it stressed that the Party's work was to restore China to its former position and glory. The mission of the Party was no longer the realization of communism, having deviated to a more nationalistic objective.”²⁶

Wang Zheng argues that the Chinese dream discourse is like old wine in a new bottle, even though “Xi's new bottle is more attractive.”²⁷ In that being so, the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is a continuation of the story told in previous slogans. However, as Noesselts notes, the previous political slogans that constellated Chinese political communication were put forward in an era when social media had not become the major news source yet. This implied that discussions on them by Chinese

follows the official Chinese choice (Golden 2015, 3). For the debate around the translation of *fazhi*, see Golden (2015).

²³ Gow (2017, 97).

²⁴ Lavagnino (2017, 285).

²⁵ Chen Rudong (2017, 131).

²⁶ Wang Zheng (2014, 6).

²⁷ Wang Zheng (2014, 8).

citizens were easily controlled by Chinese government.²⁸ Bislev studies exemplary cases of discussion on the Chinese in microblogs, highlighting that:

whereas previous slogans have mainly generated interest from the political community in China and abroad— seasoned with a light sprinkling of political satire— the Chinese Dream has succeeded in making its way into popular discourse.²⁹

Summing up, the precise meaning of the Chinese Dream remains open to interpretation, as it has been understood in various, and sometimes contradicting, ways. Furthermore, an overall examination of the discursive practices that interweave within the discourse on the Chinese dream is yet to be provided. This study attempts to fill this void, by analyzing the discourse on the *Zhongguo meng* 中国梦 “Chinese dream”, the identity it constructs as well as the implications for the political legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). More specifically, this study wishes to contribute to the understanding of the way in which the discourse on the Chinese dream provides legitimacy to the CCP and a collective identity to a globalized China.

1.3 Thesis approach and research questions

This study draws upon Foucault’s theorization of discourse, even though it does not apply the research methodology developed by the French philosopher. Discourse is hence seen as formed by all those discursive practices, being linguistic or not, that shape people’s worldview. In this sense, it needs to be considered as productive rather than merely repressive. Applying this view means that the discourse on the Chinese dream is made of all those signification practices revolving around the Chinese dream and that shape people’s understanding of China’s past, present and future. This definition of discourse works at the macro level. For the analysis of the discursive practice on the Chinese dream at the micro level, this research employs Goffman’s theorization of frames and frame analysis, and especially its further application to social organizations studies and media studies. Frame analysis has been chosen because it is helpful in outlining the key

²⁸ Noesselt (2014).

²⁹ Bislev (2015, 594).

discursive elements that provide meaning and coherence to a certain topic-issue. To examine the linguistic and visual texts, the present research proposes an integration of frame analysis methodology with the one developed in the school of Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough, for the linguistic texts, and by Kress and van Leeuwen, for the visual texts.

For the application of frame analysis to the discourse on the Chinese dream, it borrows the notion of “master frames” from the field of social movements studies. Moving from theoretical considerations, it focuses on two master frames. The first pertains to the construction of collective identities, which is seen as a twofold process of self-ing and other-ing. The second master frame, instead, revolves around the legitimation of the Chinese communist party, deemed as a never-ending process of building common interests shared by leaders and populace, while showing leaders’ qualities to rule.

The aim is to find out how the Chinese dream is framed in order to provide meaning to today’s China and the path it is walking. The focus is therefore on the role of the Chinese dream in the domestic context and mainly on official discourse, but also on how it reverberates and is received, albeit more marginally. More specifically, the present research seeks to answer the following research question: How is the Chinese dream framed? In order to answer this question in detail, the analysis will be articulated on the following sub-questions, dealing with specific issues and based on theoretical considerations:

- Whose dream is it?
- Who is the other in the discourse on the Chinese dream?
- How is the common interest constructed and framed?
- How is the delegation of power justified?

In addition to the above research questions, the present research attempts also to address: What is new in the discourse on the Chinese dream and in China’s new era?

In sum, the present research aims at contributing to the existing explanation on the Chinese dream. Furthermore, beyond the field of Chinese studies, this research also hopes to further the understanding of the discursive construction of collective identity and political legitimacy. By situating these two concepts within the field of discourse analysis and

frame analysis, this study provides a framework for the scrutiny of discursive practices, going beyond area studies. In terms of the methodology, by integrating the frame analysis methodology developed in previous empirical researches with those advanced by Fairclough and by Kress and van Leeuwen, this study proposes a method for discourse analysis that overcomes the shortcomings of each of these methodologies and that can be applied across various discourses, regardless of geographical boundaries.

1.3 Thesis overview

Excluding this chapter and the conclusive one, this dissertation is structured into three parts, each of which is divided into two chapters.

Part I examines the theoretical framework (chapter 2) and methodological approach (chapter 3) employed to address the above research questions. In particular, chapter 2 can be, in turn, divided into three parts. The first part provides the definition of discourse that works at the macro level as epistemological and ontological premise. In particular, discourse is seen as the place where meanings take place and its power lies in the process of naturalizing beliefs and worldviews. The second part focuses on Goffman's theorization of frames and frame analysis, and its further development in media studies and social movements studies. The third part applies the theoretical framework delineated so far to the object of analysis. More specifically, it integrates frame analysis with theorizations on "collective identity" and "political legitimacy". To do so, it draws upon the notion of "master frames" developed in the studies on social movement organizations.³⁰ The theoretical considerations outlined in this sections constitute the (basic) structure of the dissertation and lay the foundations for the empirical analysis illustrated in the second part of the thesis.

Chapter 3 discusses the process of selection of the case studies and the combination of research methods. The corpus is made of materials for both the synchronic and diachronic analysis. To point out how the Chinese dream is framed, this thesis makes use of three different data: first, the talks by Xi Jinping addressed between November 2012 and October 2017; second, the books gathering Xi's talks, writings and pictures; third, visual materials as well as informal conversations and semi-structure interviews collected during the two fieldworks in Beijing. To analyse the element of ideological rupture or continuity

³⁰ Snow and Benford (1992).

in the discourse on the Chinese dream, besides secondary literature, this research covers the work reports issued at National Congresses of the CCP.

Concerning the methodology applied, after reviewing the various approaches under the umbrella of frames analysis, even though a clear separation among them cannot be drawn, this study opts for the hermeneutic approach. This approach analyses frames by placing them in relation to broader social and cultural elements. The hermeneutic approach is then integrated with the method for the analysis of linguistic texts advanced by Fairclough and the one for visual communication by Kress and van Leeuwen. Chapter 3 then ends with an explanation of the several steps that made up the method employed, highlighting the way in which these methodologies work together.

Part II focuses on the first master frame which sees the construction of a collective identity as a two-pronged process of self-ing and other-ing. Chapter 4 discusses the discursive creation of a collective Chinese-U.s and aims at addressing “whose dream?”, whilst, chapter 5 deals with in the analysis of the discursive construction of the Other. Whereas the process of self-ing draws the borders between a national-U.s and foreign-Others, the process of other-ing, by working on differences, traces the features that distinguish them. The structure of both chapters is according to the result of the empirical research. For the one dedicated to the Other within the discourse on the Chinese dream, the results of the analysis are introduced by an overview providing contextual information useful to understand the analysis that follows.

Part III discusses the second master frame and aims at analyzing the process of legitimation within the discourse on the Chinese dream. Moving from Weber’s view on legitimacy as a “belief”, integrating it with the two principles on which this belief is based as theorized by Beetham, legitimation is seen as a twofold process of constructing common interests shared by governors and governed, and representing leaders’ qualities that justify the delegation of power. Chapter 6, thus, analysis the construction of common interests, whilst chapter 7 focuses on leaders’ rightfulness to rule.

PART I: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2. Theory: Discourse, Frames and Alignment

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to outline the theoretical framework to be used in this thesis for the analysis of the discourse on the Chinese dream. To do so, the first step consists in interrogating the various approaches and, therefore, meanings covered by the expression “discourse”. The expression “discourse analysis” covers many different approaches. Van Dijk traces back the origin of discourse analysis to the study of public speech, language and literature to more than 2000 years ago.¹ Yet, it is not possible to single out just one theory or a sole approach to “discourse analysis”, notwithstanding the diverse kinds of analysis claiming to be “discourse analysis”:

[g]iven this disciplinary diversity, it is no surprise that the terms ‘discourse’ and ‘discourse analysis’ have different meanings to scholars in different fields.²

Generally speaking, the development of perspectives on discourse analyses stems out from the rejection of the reflective theories on language- according to which language works like a mirror, reflecting meanings laying in the world - and of the intentional view, which sees language as expressing merely what a speaker, writer or painter (remember the wide connotations of language here) wants to say. Rather, the starting point is the constructionist approach to language, that sees meaning as constructed in and through language.³

In political science, as Keller suggests, discourse analysis is characterized by a tension between two different perspectives: one tends to be associated with Habermas’s theorization of discourse, defining discourse as an argumentation process that plays a key role in “negotiation”.⁴ The second, instead, rejects this more positive approach, attaching to discourse a reality-constituting power. These two opposite perspectives will be the object of the first part of this chapter. In so doing, the definition of discourse, and hence of discourse on the Chinese dream, will be made explicit. In particular, the perspective

¹ Van Dijk (1985).

² Schiffrin et al. (2015, 1).

³ For a very brief and clear introduction of these three approaches, see Hall (2003).

⁴ Keller (2007, 65).

applied in this thesis falls under the second approach. Therefore, to analyse the discourse on the Chinese dream, this study moves from the view on discourse as being the place where process of signification takes place.

The definitions that will be provided will work at the macrolevel of analysis and for the general understanding of epistemological basis that provides the ground for this research. Once defined the meaning of discourse applied in this study, the chapter will turn to the basic concepts applied for the analysis of discourse on the Chinese dream at the micro-level, i.e. frames. Put differently, among the various approaches to discourse analysis, this thesis chooses frame analysis as a type of discourse analysis at the micro-level. Frame analysis has been chosen because it is a kind of analysis that is intended to bring to the fore the manner in which the communicator of a message uses discursive key elements in order to provide meaning and coherence to a certain topic-issue or event in a certain way so that the audience will view it in that way. Indeed, frame analyses has widely developed in the field of social movements theory to foreground the ways in which social movements attain consent and align people towards a common cause.

In the application of frame analysis to the discourse on the Chinese dream, this study draws upon the notion of master frame, originally developed in the research on social movements. The individuation of master frames - seen as the overall frames at the macro levels that provide coherence to the frames at the micro levels – is based on theoretical considerations. Indeed the third part of this chapter outlines the theoretical considerations – and their application to the Chinese case – on which the analysis of the discourse on the Chinese dream is grounded.

2.2 “Discourse”: from dominance-free to structure

2.2.1 Dominance-free discourse

As stated above, under the umbrella-term “discourse analysis” there are several approaches that draw upon different definitions of discourse. A number of them draws on Habermas’s “positive” approach on discourse, which is defined as being positive precisely because, in

his “theory of communicative action”, discourse is deemed as being “dominance-free”⁵. That is to say, the German sociologist sees communicative actions as useful tools through which social agents can achieve agreements on social norms. From this perspective, discourses are organized processes of argumentation and deliberation aiming at reaching a “rationally motivated consensus”⁶. Habermas sets specific limitations for the use of the term “discourse”:

I shall speak of "discourse" only when the meaning of the problematic validity claim conceptually forces participants to suppose that a rationally motivated agreement could in principle be achieved, whereby the phrase "in principle" expresses the idealizing proviso: if only the argumentation could be conducted openly enough and continued long enough.⁷

The basic idea underlying Habermas’s discourse ethics is that a pragmatic analysis of the conditions implicit in language and rational argumentation leads to the outlining of a “moral point of view”, that is impartial and universal. Fundamental issues should be determined and solved by applying this “moral point of view”, which guides not only the conduct of individuals, but also the political action of the institutions: thus, Habermas “argues for a quasi-transcendental concept of reason as a mean of criticizing and resisting the distortion of domination”⁸.

Habermas’s discourse ethics is therefore a normative model, rather than a research program. For this reason, Keller goes as far as to say that Habermas’s approach can hardly be defined as “discourse analysis”. Habermas’s notion of discourse is not even mentioned in those studies that introduce the various approaches and views on “discourse analysis”.⁹ Indeed, “one might define Habermas as a critical discourse theorist who explores theoretical possibilities (‘How is critique possible?’), rather than a critical discourse analyst who studies social problems (‘How can a social problem be accounted for critically?’).”¹⁰

⁵ Keller (2013, 10).

⁶ Finlayson (2005, 41).

⁷ Habermas (1984, 42).

⁸ Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, 130).

⁹ Gill (2000, 172-190).

¹⁰ Muller *et al.* (2014, 360).

Habermas's view of discourse has been partially invoked by an approach within the school of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a benchmark to evaluate the distortion in real discursive practices. In explaining the discourse-historical approach within the broader Critical Discourse Analysis, Wodak makes clear that this approach is oriented towards Habermas's language philosophy.¹¹ Reisigl and Wodak state even more explicitly that their “*prospective critique*” is associated with the ethic-practical dimension¹² and their political model is “deliberative democracy based on a free public sphere and a strong civil society”. For the two scholars, this model is a theory of rational argumentation and discursive conflict solving, in which, following Habermas, language is the central medium of democratic organizations.¹³

the free public discursive exchange of different interests, wishes, viewpoints, opinions and arguments is vital for a pluralistic democracy in a modern decentered society, since it is essential for deliberatively and justly organizing the different preferences, and since it can also have a critical influence on the relationship between legality and democratic legitimation within a political system. The quality of legislative and administrative power changes if it remains bound to an ongoing, public discursive-democratic process of the formation of opinion and of will as well as of political control, by means of which political power is critically watched during all stages of its exertion.¹⁴

In addition to the definition of discourse, as stated above, the discourse-historical approach takes Habermas' ethics as a normative basis for carrying on discourse linguistic research. In other words, they develop this methodology by pointing out an ideal type. This is the case, for instance, of the argumentative strategies which are seen as “violation” of one or more of the 10 rules that determined rational disputes.¹⁵

However, the main critique levelled at discourse-historical approach is its being politically biased: in the course of the analysis, analysts project their own political ideas onto their data and analyze them accordingly. In this way, the analyst automatically rejects all those political views that are out of his/her own field of view.

¹¹ Wodak (2015, 1-14).

¹² Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 33).

¹³ Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 33).

¹⁴ Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 34).

¹⁵ Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 70-71).

Another approach which stems from Habermas's discourse ethics is discursive institutionalism as developed, primarily, by Vivian Ann Schmidt. According to the American scholar's definition, "discursive institutionalism is an analytic framework concerned with the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes of discourse and policy argumentation in institutional context."¹⁶ Within this framework, discourse is deemed as the interactive process of conveying ideas, while these latter are the substantive content of discourse. For Schmidt, discourse is a generic term "that encompasses not only the substantive content of ideas but also the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed"¹⁷.

Schmidt classifies ideas into two categories: cognitive and normative ideas. Cognitive ideas elucidate "what is [the problem] and what to do [to solve it]", that is to say, they justify policies and programs by referring to their interest-based logic and necessity; normative ideas attach values to political action and serve to legitimate the policies in a program, by speaking about how policies, programs resonate with the values of a society, whether these values are newly emerged or long-standing ones. Normative ideas, in other words, answer the question "what is good or bad about what is".¹⁸ From the perspective of discursive institutionalism, discourse is a medium for conveying these two kinds of ideas and it can be distinguished in two basic forms: the first one is the coordinative discourse among policy actors; the second is the communicative discourse between political actors and the public. For Schmidt, discursive power stems from the ability of "sentient agents" to articulate ideas and use discourse efficiently, whether in the coordinative policy sphere in which they create their ideas or in the communicative sphere in which they, as political actors, inform the public for "discussion, deliberation, and contestation" of ideas and policies.

As it emerges, Schmidt's notion of discourse comprises both ideational and interactive elements. Yet, there are several drawbacks in Schmidt's view on discourse as a "medium to convey" ideas. The major drawback lies in the fact that this view on discourse limits it to a communicative vessel for conveying ideas and, by doing so, Schmidt's view reduces the relation between ideas and discourse as one between form and content, overlooking the meaning conveyed by the forms themselves. In that being so, it "is an unsatisfactory way

¹⁶ Schmidt (2011, 85).

¹⁷ Schmidt (2008, 305).

¹⁸ Schmidt (2008, 307).

of presenting the relations between ideas, power and discourse”¹⁹, as Panizza and Miorelli advance.

2.2.2 Discourse, from negotiation to power/knowledge

To summarize, Habermas’s notion of dominance-free discourse is a more a normative model rather than an analytical approach. Nonetheless, Habermas’s view has been used by mainly two approaches of discourse analysis: discourse-historical approach – one of the branches of Critical Discourse Analysis, that is mostly associated with Wodak - and discursive institutionalism by Schmidt. The first approach is engaged in a kind of analysis that attempts to uncover the ways in which political and media discourses are detached from an ideal type. But, it leaves unsolved the problem regarding the possibility of realizing concretely this ideal type. In the second case, discursive institutionalism overlooks the role of discourse in shaping the meanings it conveys. In this way, discourse is reduced to a channel for exchanging ideas, leaving behind the issue of “where do these ideas come from.”

The other view on discourse, the one which sees discourse as the place where meaning is constructed, is mostly associated with the French philosopher Michel Foucault, to whom must be acknowledged the current and widespread interests in the concept of discourse. Foucault’s major concern is the relation between knowledge and power, and the process of producing knowledge through language, considered in its widest acceptance including all the communication practices. For Foucault, discourse is never detached from power, and therefore cannot be an ideal type of discourse, because even that ideal type would be nestled in that fence of power that governs societies.

By discourse, Foucault means “a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation”²⁰. Therefore, discourse consists in a cluster of statements. Yet, before moving towards a more detailed explanation of the concept of discourse and the relation between power and knowledge, the concept of statement deserves further explanation.

Statements, for Foucault, do not correspond to a linguistic preposition or a clause, nor do they refer to a material object; as Foucault argues in *The Archeology of Knowledge*,

¹⁹ Panizza and Miorelli (2013, 305).

²⁰ Foucault (1972, 117).

statements are not speech acts either. Instead, they are a function that “gave a series of signs an existence”²¹:

[a statement] is a function of existence that properly belongs to signs and on the basis of which one may then decide, through analysis or intuition, whether or not they 'make sense', according to what rule they follow one another or are juxtaposed, of what they are the sign, and what sort of act is carried out by their formulation (oral or written). One should not be surprised, then, if one has failed to find structural criteria of unity for the statement; this is because it is not in itself a unit, but a function that cuts across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents, in time and space.²²

To explain what statements are, Foucault provides many examples of what is and what is not a statement. One of them is the following: the letters marked on a keyboard or a typewriter are not statements, they may be tools to create statements. Yet, some letters written randomly, without any lexical or syntactical correlation, by a person aiming at explaining what statements are, constitute a statement made up of an alphabetic series which is governed by the law of chance. It can be said that whatever meaningful activity constitutes a statement. Indeed, eventually, Foucault admitted that he was wrong in considering statements different from speech acts: the difference lies, actually, not in the nature of statements themselves, but in his interest, since the French philosopher is not concerned with everyday speech acts, as Austin and Searle were.²³ The statements Foucault is interested in are those which gain a sort of autonomy by passing an institutional test, after which they are considered “truth” without the need to make references to the context in which they were uttered:

Statements are not, like the air we breathe, an infinite transparency; but things that are transmitted and preserved, that have value, and which one tries to appropriate.²⁴

²¹ Foucault (1972, 108).

²² Foucault (1972, 86-87).

²³ Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, 44-52).

²⁴ Foucault (1972, 120).

To avoid misunderstanding, Dreyfus and Rabinow call Foucault's statements "serious speech acts"²⁵.

When these statements "[all] refer to the same object, share the same style and support a strategy [...] a common institutional or political drift or pattern"²⁶, they constitute a "discursive formation".

The meaning of these statements does not, however, come from thin air: meanings and meaningful practices are constructed within discourse. This assertion may trigger the following critique: saying that meaning and meaningful practices do not exist outside discourse is equal to say that nothing exists outside discourse, and that there is not real world outside discourse. However, it would be mistaken to conceive things as existing only in discourse as this is precisely because the focal point here is not the thing itself, but its meaning: as Hall makes clear in explaining Foucault's notion of discourse, "the concept of discourse is not about whether things exist but about where meaning comes from."²⁷

Therefore, discourse is the place where the meaning of reality takes shape, and this is more or less the same of defining discourse as the place where the reality of human beings takes place. Drawing upon Foucault's view, Laclau and Mouffe propose a useful example to clarify that "every social configuration is meaningful": kicking a spherical object in the street and doing the same action during a football match, despite being the same physical act, have two different meanings. Therefore, in the second case there would be no doubt that the object is a football, but the meaning of this object does not derive from its shape, or from the sort of material it is made of; instead, it is the system of relations with other objects that which confers to a football its meaning.²⁸ These relations are socially constructed, since they do not stem from the objects themselves: the existence of the spherical object, whether it is kicked in a football match or in a street, is not in any case put into question. The discursive character of objects is always a matter of meanings, not of physical existence.

Discourses are then defined as this systematic set of relations. This systemic set of relations that are socially constructed can be conceived as a context. From here it emerges the way in which discourses, representations, knowledges and statements are highly historicized in Foucault's approach. But it would be misleading considering the historical

²⁵ Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, 48).

²⁶ Hall (2003, 44).

²⁷ Hall (2003, 45).

²⁸ Hall (2003, 70-71).

contexts as a transcendental condition. Conversely, it is discourse itself that produces forms of knowledge in its specific historical context:

Instead of seeing, on the great mythical book of history, lines of words that translate in visible characters thoughts that were formed in some other time and place, we have in the density of discursive practices, systems that establish statements as events (with their own conditions and domain of appearance) and things (with their own possibility and field of use).²⁹

Therefore, discourse is not a contact between the reality and the language used to express reality, but rather it is the practice that puts into existence the objects it talks about. Discourses are made of signs, linguistic and non-linguistic, but they do more than merely designating or describing things, they create the things they talk about. And this claim is far from denying concrete and material implications. It is quite the opposite: the various social, political, economic factors and institutes come to work together coherently, only because discourse provides unity to the whole system to which these belong. These factors, in turn, sustain discursive practices.

Foucault calls archeology the method that aims at highlighting the rules of the “anonymous truth game”³⁰- as Dreyfus and Rabinow correctly label it-, i.e. those rules according to which discourses can be articulated. Archeology “is not a return to the innermost secret of the origin; it is the systematic description of a discourse-object”³¹. The archeological method consists in describing the rules of formation of statements and the relations between discursive and non-discursive domains. By doing so, the archeologist explains the mechanisms of modern historical discourse, and the way in which this discourse has taken history as an uninterrupted progress towards the “truth”. The archeological method aims at freeing itself from whatever claim of truth and describing the ways in which discursive formation comes into being: the elements of history do not “pre-exist”, but are activated with the discourses and tactics that come to exist in society. To put it in a different way, what Foucault is interested in is not the conditions of “validity for judgements”, but the

²⁹ Foucault (1972, 128).

³⁰ Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, 70).

³¹ Foucault (1972, 140).

conditions of “reality for statements”.³² This is exactly what the French philosopher calls “historical *a priori*”.

These basic concepts and notions outlined so far are provided by Foucault in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, which represents the only volume on method written by the French philosopher. However, as Foucault himself acknowledges, in the archeological method, “what was missing from my work was [...] the effects of power proper on the enunciative play.”³³

The problem of power will be at the center of Foucault’s further studies, which will be carried out by applying what is called the genealogical method:

The genealogical aspect concerns the effective formation of discourse, [...] . The regular formation of discourse may, in certain conditions and up to a certain point, integrate control procedures (this is what happens, for example, when a discipline takes on the form and status of scientific discourse).³⁴

The genealogist acknowledges that what is widely deemed to be truth is nothing but sham. Abandoning the supernatural and ahistorical idea of a unifying truth leads straight to the question of power and knowledge. To Foucault, in other words, truth and power are not necessarily opposed to one another, and truth is not a channel that will, eventually, free individuals out of power relations: he rejects the so-called “repressive hypothesis”, which sees power as being “force of a prohibition”³⁵ localized in a centre. Instead, for Foucault, the political technology of the body – that is the combination of knowledge and power as localized in the body – cannot be found in one single institution or in an isolated apparatus of power, such as the state:

[P]ower [...] is not that which makes the difference between those who exclusively possess and retain it, and those who do not have it and submit to it. Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of

³² Foucault (1972, 127).

³³ Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, 104).

³⁴ Foucault (1972, 233).

³⁵ Foucault. (1977, 119).

wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.³⁶

For Foucault power is omnipresent, every social relationship is a relationship of power: between man and woman, in the family, between the employer and his employee, between a teacher and his pupil, and so forth. Relationships of power exist between all individuals. In that being so, power does not manifest itself merely in the form of repression, but it is productive at the same time.

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.³⁷

Power is never held; it can only be exercised. To explain how power circulates in modern times, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault takes Bentham's ideal system of control, the Panopticon, as embodying the mechanisms and technologies of power: it "automatizes and deindividualizes power"³⁸. This ideal kind of prison has a circular structure with the guardian at the center, and the inmates around the perimeter. Although, for the guardian, it is physically impossible to watch and control all the inmates at the same time, the control is guaranteed by the fact that the inmates do not know when they are being watched. For this reason they impose to themselves a kind of "repression" and behave like they were watched all the time: "caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers"³⁹.

Against this backdrop, hence, the subject disappears: discourse are the products of historical and anonymous rules that govern the ways of talking about a topic. In explaining

³⁶ Foucault (1977, 98).

³⁷ Foucault (1977, 119).

³⁸ Foucault (1995, 202).

³⁹ Foucault (1995, 201).

the notion of subject, Foucault clarifies that the subject of a statements does not correspond to “the author of the formulation”, nor does it consist in the individual who had the meaningful intention for that statement. Rather,

It is a particular, vacant place that may in fact be filled by different individuals; but, instead of being defined once and for all, and maintaining itself as such throughout a text, a book, or an œuvre, this place varies - or rather it is variable enough to be able either to persevere, unchanging, through several sentences, or to alter with each one. It is a dimension that characterizes a whole formulation qua statement. ⁴⁰

In a nutshell, whatever subject – whether it is an individual subject or a collective consciousness - cannot be the source of discourse; while, at the same time, a discourse is formed by various texts, books and authors.

Applying this view on the subject to the field of politics, in its narrowest sense, it may entail that political leaders’ decisions are free from intentionality. The question is a matter of focus: rather than what is behind political decision, analyzing power and power relations entails assuming a wider perspective that goes beyond the singular choice of a specific leader. This is precisely because negating the subject does not entail any changes in the directionality of power relations. As Dreyfus and Rabinow suggest on this controversial point in Foucault’s thought, the answer to the question of “how to talk about intentionality without a strategist? [...]lies in the practices themselves”⁴¹.

For the discourse on the Chinese dream, the negation of the subject entails that, although Xi Jinping is deemed to be the author of the concept of the Chinese dream, he will be analysed as being the product of this discourse. This is not equal to negate the existence or the potential of a political struggle inside the Party and the role of Xi Jinping in it, but rather to assume a wider perspective on the discursive practices that interwove together to create a “China model” for a new era.

This study does not employ the methodology proposed by Foucault. To be more specific, this research does not trace objects of discourse through history in the genealogical fashion,

⁴⁰ Foucault (1972, 95).

⁴¹ Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, 187).

nor does it focus only at the level of the micro-practices for the study of power. Nevertheless, this research shares with Foucault's view on discourse some of the ontological and epistemological premises. In particular, following Foucault, this study sees the power of discourse as the process through which specific worldviews are naturalized to such an extent that these worldviews, then, sustain the institutions that govern society. In other words, here discourse is seen as those "serious speech acts" that, over time, become claims of truth. But these truths are never neutral, they are forms of power.

In the specific case of China, the discourse on science, for example, made the ideological connection between being scientific and being right, to such an extent that whatever deemed to be *kexue* 科学 "scientific" always carries positive overtones: scientific means appropriate, objective and, thus, indisputable.⁴² This connection is at the base of "scientism", i.e. the ideology which sees in science the panacea to solve all kinds of problems. This ideology gained ground under Deng precisely because

[a]fter the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, modern science appeared as the way out, a *deus ex machina* that would guide China into the modern world. [...] ⁴³

It has been on this ideology that various political concepts as well as policies have been formulated.⁴⁴

Power is therefore seen as a productive force rather than a repressive one. For China, as well as elsewhere, the central political institutions do not only govern social processes, let's say, directly; but also by controlling symbols.

Inspired by Foucault's view on discourse, this study defines the discourse on the Chinese dream as being made up of all the semiotically meaningful activities, i.e. communication practices, which systematically construct the knowledge of today's China. In particular, by viewing discourse through the lens Foucault's view, this study attempts to trace those "truths" on which the realization of the Chinese dream relies upon and on which the governance of the People's Republic of China, even partially, rests.

In other words, the present research aims at distinguishing, in the communicative practices revolving around the Chinese dream, those that sustain from those that challenge collectively accepted beliefs. As it will be shown in the chapters dedicated to present the

⁴² Schoenhals (1992, 269).

⁴³ Greenhalgh (2008, 76)

⁴⁴ For a deep study on the ideology of scientism in post-Mao China, see Greenhalgh (2008)..

results of the analysis, various discourses interweave with one another within the broader discourse on the Chinese dream. To do so and in line with these ontological and epistemological premises, the analysis attempts at analyzing how the Chinese dream is framed.

2.3 The micro-level of analysis: frames and alignment

Summing up, this research draws upon Foucault's views on discourse as the process through which we construct the knowledge of reality. However, although sharing with French philosopher some ontological premises, this study does not apply his methodology. Instead, to carry on the analysis on the discourse on the Chinese dream at a micro-level, the present research is inspired by Goffman's frame analysis, especially in its application to the study of alignment process, i.e. the process of gaining support and participation. Originally developed in the study of social movements since the 80s, but also in media research, and lately in political communication, frame analysis has been applied to the analysis of Chinese political discourse, by Bondes and Heep⁴⁵. In line with the view of the two scholars, this study sees Chinese political discourse as a framing discourse. However, rather than evaluating the process of framing as "persuasion", this research sees discourse as systematically constructing the people's understanding of the social world.

2.3.1 Goffman's frames and framing

Frame analysis is usually traced back to the symbolic interactionism of the Chicago school. Ervin Goffman is usually credited with the elaboration of the notion of frames, along with Gregory Bateson, to whom Goffman acknowledges his indebtedness for introducing the term frame.⁴⁶ In *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Goffman discusses how various framings of social phenomena affect the way in which we, as human beings, experience them. The Canadian-American sociologist uses the metaphor of a picture frame to explain how conceptual frames structure individuals' perceptions of the society and thus guide their actions in the social world. For Goffman, frames are cognitive schemata that guide the understanding of events, while framing is the process through

⁴⁵ Bondes and Heep (2013).

⁴⁶ Goffman (1974).

which our minds place events into these schemata and bestow meaning on them. He explains that his perspective is “situational”, meaning that he is less concerned with the “big problems” of the sociological field, than with micro-sociology. Goffman’s starting point is therefore the single situations of everyday life:

I assume that when individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: “What is it that’s going on here?” Whether asked explicitly, as in times of confusion and doubt, or tacitly, during occasions of usual certitude, the question is put and the answer to it is presumed by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand. Starting, then, with that question, this volume attempts to limn out a framework that could be appealed to for the answer.⁴⁷

The process of framing leads people to answer the question “What is it that’s going on here?”, as Goffman states, while frames are the answers.

Definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones- and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word [used] to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify.⁴⁸

Goffman coined the expression “frame analysis” to describe the process of deconstructing the individual’s “organization of experience”⁴⁹, that is the way in which people provide meaning to the world by setting their experience of it into basic frameworks. Indeed, Goffman aims at isolating these basic frameworks of understanding available in our society, which are used to make sense of events, and analyzing the special vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are subject. By doing so, he explains that what individuals perceived as something “real”, actually is “plainly a joke, or a dream, or an accident, or a mistake, or a misunderstanding, or a deception, or a theatrical performance, and so forth”⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ Goffman (1974, 9).

⁴⁸ Goffman (1974, 11).

⁴⁹ Goffman (1974, 11).

⁵⁰ Goffman (1974, 10).

Summing up, for Goffman, “schemata of interpretation” help people to “locate, perceive, identify, and label”⁵¹ events in everyday life. His study is primarily concerned with the way in which people rely on expectations to make sense of their everyday experience of the social reality. Therefore, Goffman was less concerned with strategic use of frame than showing the mechanism at stake in the construction and understanding of the social reality. The following development of frame analysis is much more concerned with strategic employments of frames.

2.3.2 Frames, Communication and Alignment

Summing up, for Goffman, framing is the process people unconsciously implement to make sense of the world around them. Following Goffman’s view, Gamson defines frame as “thought organizer”⁵². A more comprehensive definition is provided by Reese, who sees frames as “socially shared organizing principles that meaningfully structure the social world”:

Organizing: Framing varies in how successfully, comprehensively, or completely it organizes information.

Principles: The frame is based on an abstract principle and is not the same as the texts through which it manifests itself.

Shared: The frame must be shared on some level for it to be significant and communicable.

Persistent: The significance of frames lies in their durability, their persistent and routine use over time.

Symbolically: The frame is revealed in symbolic forms of expression.

Structure: Frames organize by providing identifiable patterns or structures, which can vary in their complexity.⁵³

Although scholars have proposed different definitions of framing, there is wide agreement on the selective aspect of the framing process. On this aspect, it is worth quoting Entman’s seminal definition:

⁵¹ Goffman (1974, 21).

⁵² Gamson and Ryan (2006, 14).

⁵³ Reese (2001, 11).

Framing essentially involves *selection* and *salience*. To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described.⁵⁴ [...] (emphasis in the original)

Entman's explanation emphasizes the intentional selection process underlying the use of specific frames, rather than others, in communicative events. In line with Entman's view and recalling the picture metaphor used by Goffman, Gamson and Ryan also highlight the selective aspect of framing process: "like a picture frame, an issue frame marks off some part of the world. [...] each frame gives the advantage to certain ways of talking and thinking, while it places others 'out of the picture.'"⁵⁵ While this study does not agree utterly with the view on the framing process as conscious process – as it is often described in the application of frame analysis to media studies –, the above definitions are nevertheless useful in explaining the power of framing. A good example to explain the various ways in which an issue can be framed is the discourse on abortion: abortion can be seen as killing human life or a free choice. These two ways of framing abortion entail two different definitions of a same problem, triggering different interpretations, evaluations and, finally, diverse recommendations for actions to be taken – in the abortion discourse, whether or not they concede the right to abort. Indeed, only by considering the frames underpinning different positions on abortion is it possible to cast light on the reasons why different people have different opinions on an issue. On the abortion policy, Gamson *et al* carried a comparative study of public discourses in Germany and in the United States, enlightening essential differences in the nature of public discourse in the two countries.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Entman (1993, 52).

⁵⁵ Gamson and Ryan (2006, 14).

⁵⁶ Gamson et al. (2002).

However, before media studies, the framing paradigm has been firstly developed by social movements theorists, who apply frames analysis to the study of the mechanism through which social movements gain support and participation. Snow and Benford maintains that, to be successful, frames have to diagnose a problem, prognosticate solutions, and motivate the movement to action.⁵⁷ Snow *et al* develop the “frame alignment model”, stating that “frame alignment is a necessary condition for movement participation, whatever its nature or intensity.”⁵⁸ Through their diachronic, empirical research, these scholars outline some specific framing processes by which alignment is attained by social movement organizations.

Snow *et al.* proposes four types of frame alignment processes: (a) frame bridging, (b) frame amplification, (c) frame extension. and (d) frame transformation.

Frame bridging consists in “linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem”⁵⁹. In other words, frame bridging takes place in the process of involving individuals that share common grievances and orientations but are not organized to express their discontent, and practically consists in spreading information through interpersonal or intergroup networks, the mass media, the telephone, and direct mail.

By frame amplification, Snow et al. refer to “the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem or set of events.”⁶⁰ This process of frame amplification can be of two kinds: value amplification and belief amplification. “Value amplification refers to the identification, idealization, and elevation of one or more values presumed basic to prospective constituents, but which have not inspired collective action for any number of reasons.”⁶¹ For belief amplification, Snow et al. intend presumed relationships “between two things or between something and a characteristic of it”⁶². Therefore, while values are the objective of an action, believes are “ideational elements that cognitively support or impede action in pursuit of desired values”⁶³ (469-470).

⁵⁷ Snow and Benford (1992, 136).

⁵⁸ Snow *et al.* (1986, 464).

⁵⁹ Snow *et al.* (1986, 467).

⁶⁰ Snow *et al.* (1986, 469).

⁶¹ Snow *et al.* (1986, 469).

⁶² Snow *et al.* (1986, 469).

⁶³ Snow *et al.* (1986, 469-470).

Frame extension takes place when social movements organizations attempt to incorporate participants by extending the boundaries of the primary frame to include or encompass the views, interests, or sentiments of targeted groups.⁶⁴

Finally, “frame transformation” or “reframe” is what Goffman calls “keying”, and consists in the process through which, quoting Goffman, “a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework [that is, a schema of interpretation], is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else”.⁶⁵ An example provided by Goffman to explain the keying process is playing at fighting: even though the action of fighting is the same when a fight is “serious”, so to speak, and when it is a play, the way people understand it, that is the meaning attached to the action of fighting, completely changes when it is done for play or for “real”. So that, “[f]or participants, playing, say, at fighting and playing around a checkers feels to be much the same sort of thing”⁶⁶.

In the case of social movements, the reframe process may occur when the programs, causes and values promoted by a social movement organization do not resonate with the public. Snow *et al* distinguish two types of frame transformation: one is domain-specific and consists in re-framing a particular domain of life “such that a domain previously taken for granted is reframed as problematic and in need of repair.”⁶⁷ The second type is the “global interpretive frame transformation”, where it is the framework that provides coherence to the whole worldview that is transformed, so that events and experiences will be interpreted in a new completely different way. It is the case, for instance, of religious conversions.

2.3.4 Frames and politics

As Bondes and Heep maintains “only a limited number of studies have focused on official frames”⁶⁸. In fact, most of the researches quoted above are from the field of media studies or research on social movement organizations. However, given the functions of frames and the related framing process in conferring meanings to events and issues, organizing experience and hence guiding actions, frame analysis represents a useful tool for the study

⁶⁴ Snow *et al.* (1986, 472-473).

⁶⁵ Goffman (1974, 43-44).

⁶⁶ Goffman (1974, 45).

⁶⁷ Snow *et al.* (1986, 476).

⁶⁸ Bondes and Heep (2013, 319).

of political discourse and how political communications seek to maintain social and political stability.

Among the scholars who applied the frame perspective to politics, perhaps Edelman is the one who most elegantly explains the potential of frames and framing in politics:

Far from being stable, the social world is therefore a chameleon, or, to suggest a better metaphor, a kaleidoscope of potential realities, any of which can be readily evoked by altering the ways in which observations are framed and categorized. Because alternative categorizations win support for specific political beliefs and policies, classification schemes are central to political maneuver and persuasion.⁶⁹

Edelman is concerned with the way in which strategic actors, especially politicians, frame or categorize political debate for the sake of their own advantage. Therefore, the focus in Edelman's thought is on the initial phase of the framing process. Following Edelman, the frame perspective has then been applied to the study of the discourse on European integration by Helbling et al.⁷⁰, showing that the way in which different political parties frame European integration "depends on the interests they traditionally defend at the national level, their general positions towards the EU, and whether or not they belong to the established political forces in their particular country". Or, again, Azpíroz integrates frame analysis with rhetorical criticism to analyze Bush's trip to Europe in 2005.⁷¹ Regarding the application of frame analysis to Chinese political communication, Bondes and Heep analyze the relationship between legitimacy – drawing upon Beetham's view – and official frames.⁷² By doing so, the two scholars provide useful insight into the Chinese political discourse under Hu Jintao, confronting it with the one carried by the previous generation of Chinese leaders. However, although useful for the theoretical understandings of the relation between legitimacy and frames, the study does not go too much into details on the use of linguistic devices linked to frame and the process of alignment.

All these studies focus on the initial phase of framing political events or issues. Matthes, instead, proposes an "integrated approach to frame analysis of political communication",

⁶⁹ Edelman (1993, 232).

⁷⁰ Helbling et al. (2010, 496-521).

⁷¹ Azpíroz (2014, 75-96).

⁷² Bondes and Heep. (2013, 317-334).

going from the creation and selection of frames by strategic actors, through the modification by the media, until the reception by the public.⁷³ The present study mostly focuses on official framing, while also attempting to provide some analysis of the reception of the official frames.

What is worth remembering and underlying is that framing does not consist in picking up preconceived ideas that reside somewhere in the air: frame analysis is not equal to content analysis. This is a point Reese complains about. When commenting on frame analysis conducted by some scholars in the aftermath of Entman's contribution, Reese replies that many works that label their approaches as frame analyses on media texts are actually content analyses, overlooking that "[i]t is precisely *the way* that certain attributes come to be associated with particular issues that should concern framing analysis" (emphasis in the original).⁷⁴ Therefore, framing is an integral part of the meaning making process: framing is the verb used to designate the "signifying work", while ideas are "social productions".⁷⁵

In applying Goffman's view on frames in communication research and in discourse analysis, the starting point is the recognition that the language, in its acceptance that includes the various forms of communication, does not simply reflect reality. Conversely, communication practices themselves contribute to the construction of reality, while providing a specific evaluation of events. Indeed, in explaining the origins of the framing perspective, Snow specifies that

[it is] rooted in the symbolic interactionist and constructionist principle that meanings do not automatically or naturally attach themselves to the objects, events, or experiences we encounter, but often arise, instead, through interactively based interpretive processes.⁷⁶

⁷³ Matthes (2012).

⁷⁴ Reese (2007, 152).

⁷⁵ This is a point underlined also by Snow and Benford in their study on the relation between social movements and ideology. Snow and Benford (1992).

⁷⁶ Snow (2004, 384).

2.4 Applying frame analysis to the discourse on the Chinese dream: Two basic master frames

As discussed earlier, framing refers to the - more or less conscious - process of creating, selecting, and shaping frames, and it is useful in the study of political discourse precisely because “how a social problem is cast makes a big difference in how one responds to it”.⁷⁷

To analyse how the Chinese dream is framed and discursively constructed, this research borrows the notion of “master frames”, which is deeply embedded in the study of social movements. As Snow and Benford explain, master frames function “in a manner analogous to linguistic codes in that they provide a grammar that punctuates and syntactically connects patterns or happenings in the world.”⁷⁸ Master frames perform the same functions as specific action frames -punctuation, attribution and articulation -, albeit on a macro scale: “Master frames are generic; specific collective action frames are derivative”.⁷⁹

For the purpose of the present research, the expression “master frames” is employed for two specific levels of analysis in the discourse on the Chinese dream: one is the level of self-ing and other-ing, the second is the problem of party’s legitimacy.

The concept of master frames provided by Snow and Benford is useful to explain these two levels of analysis because these two levels work as “linguistic code” – to use Snow’s and Benford’s terminology – for the coherence of specific frames, that are those frames that provide meanings to events at the micro-level. In other words, this study adapts the notion of master frames in order to separate the frames that work at the general level from those working at the specific level, and explain the way in which the former provides coherence to the latter.

Indeed, the process of problem identification, which is the first step in the framing process, entails the identification of who is affected by the problem. This, in turn, entails the way in which frames function for identity construction: while creating the problem, and therefore aligning people towards the solution of this problem, framing provides identity to those who are affected by the problem. This is the reason why the first step in the analysis of the discourse on the Chinese dream consists in drawing the line that separates the “Chinese-self” from a “foreign-Other”.

⁷⁷ Reese (2001, 8).

⁷⁸ Snow and Benford. (1992, 138).

⁷⁹ Snow and Benford (1992, 138).

Once identified the object of the Chinese dream, the second step consists in analyzing the frames in the discourse on the Chinese dream that guarantee the political legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, while ensuring common interests shared by the leaders and the people.

2.4.1 Self-ing and Other-ing

As outlined above, in the analysis of the discourse on the Chinese dream, the first step relates to the question of “whose dream”. This, in turn, entails the formation of a collective identity for those to whom the Chinese dream belong.

The study on the formation of collective identity, while still lacking a once for all definition of the notion of identity, has nonetheless outlined the mechanism at stake for the creation of identity: the starting point is that there is no “Us” without the “Them”. As Snow explains:

Although there is no consensual definition of collective identity, discussions of the concept invariably suggest that its essence resides in a shared sense of ‘one-ness’ or ‘we-ness’ anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in relation or contrast to one or more actual or imagined sets of ‘others.’ Embedded within the shared sense of ‘we’ is a corresponding sense of ‘collective agency.’ This latter sense, which is the action component of collective identity, not only suggests the possibility of collective action in pursuit of common interests, but even invites such action.⁸⁰

Putting it in a different way, the contrast with an “Other” is a necessary step for the construction of whatever community. It goes without saying that the process of self-ing and othering is the basic procedure at stake in the construction of national “imagined political communities” - to quote Anderson’s seminal definition. Anderson defines nations as imagined communities, precisely because

⁸⁰ Snow (2015, 174-180).

the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.⁸¹

Being an “imagined community” entails that national identity must be the product of the constructive process of identification, rather than an objective reality given once for all. This process of identification often looks back to find sources of legitimation, making up “traditions”, as Hobsbawm and Ranger convincingly argue.⁸²

What is of particular interests for the present research is that the construction of identity cannot be said to be once and for all. Conversely, it is a non-stop semiotic process, even though it appears as being born with the nation itself. Thus, this study follows Blommaert in applying a “performance perspective” on identity which “emphasizes that identity categories have to be enacted and performed in order to be socially salient”⁸³. Blommaert is not only concerned with collective identity. Nevertheless, seeing identity as a performance rather than as a fixed and stable category is useful to understand the shapes of collective identity as well as the process of shaping it.

Within the semantic process two basic procedures can be outlined: first, the foregrounding of similarities among the members of the national communities, notwithstanding the differences that are among the members of a community; second, the highlighting of the distinctions with those that reside outside the borders of the community.

Therefore, in analyzing the discourse on the Chinese dream as being the *locus* where the “Chinese identity” is constructed, the first task to be answered is “whose dream” and “whose not”. Studying where the boundaries between the national-Us and the foreign-They are placed represents the first task of this research. While the national-Us shows where the borders are located, the juxtaposition with a foreign-Other is the basic process at stake for the attribution of the marking features. This is precisely because the construction of a collective or an individual identity necessarily needs the ‘play’ of differentiating as the operating process: identities are the product of marking differences and distinctions with other “identities”. As Hall suggests,

⁸¹ Anderson (1991, 6).

⁸² Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983).

⁸³ Blommaert (2005, 205).

[L]ike all signifying practices, it [identification] is subject to the 'play' of *differance*. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects'. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process."⁸⁴

Therefore, to grasp what the Chinese dream discourse brings about, the construction of the Other is the necessary prerequisite. Analyzing the construction of the Other will be the other side of the coin for the characterization of "whose dream".

2.4.2 The Second Master frames: On political legitimacy

Weber's notion of legitimacy is the basic framework for analyzing political legitimacy of various political systems, including the Chinese one.⁸⁵ To Weber,

the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a *belief*, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige.⁸⁶

Putting it in a different way, the authority of those who are in a powerful position stems from others' belief in its legitimacy.

Weber's theorization of legitimacy originates from his view on power as being relational: someone does not possess power *per se*, but rather their power springs from others' belief in the rightfulness to wield power.

The problem of legitimacy is thus crucial for every imperative control, because, as Weber states:

no system of authority voluntarily limits itself to the appeal to material or affectual or ideal motives as a basis for guaranteeing its continuance. In addition every such system attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its 'legitimacy'.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Hall (1996, 3).

⁸⁵ Various studies apply Weber's theorization of legitimacy and the process of legitimation to the Chinese Communist Party. For instance, see Holbig (2009); Hwang Yib-Jye and Schneider (2011) as well as Sanbdy-Thomas (2013).

⁸⁶ Weber (1947, 328).

⁸⁷ Weber (1947, 325).

There are different ways of claiming legitimacy. According to the different kinds, Weber distinguishes three types of authority and thus three different processes of attaining legitimacy:

1. Rational-legal authority, in which “obedience is owed to the legally established impersonal order”⁸⁸, not to the person. The obedience to these people is obtained only insofar as they occupy an office.
2. Traditional authority, in which obedience is a matter of personal loyalty: “the object of obedience is the personal authority of the individual which he enjoys by virtue of his traditional status.”⁸⁹
3. Charismatic authority, in which obedience is obtained by virtue of personal trust in a charismatically qualified leader, who is “set apart from ordinary man and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specially exceptional powers or qualities”⁹⁰.

Weber’s view of legitimacy as being criticized, among others, by Beetham⁹¹, whose approach to legitimacy has been applied to the CCP by Bondes and Heep⁹². Beetham criticizes many points in Weber’s view on legitimacy and legitimation: first, to Beetham, Weber neglects the role of legality and overlooks the importance of consent. Based on this first critique, Beetham elaborates his own view on legitimacy, which sees a system as legitimate if: a) conforms to established rules; b) the rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate; c) there is evidence of consent by the subordinate to the particular power relation. However, about this first critique, this study argues that neither consent nor rule can be deemed independent from beliefs.

The second critique that Beetham moves against Weber regards the three ideal types: Weber’s view is, for Beetham, misleading because it elevates to “a self-sufficient *type*”⁹³, what he considers three components – rules, beliefs and consent. Yet, Beetham overlooks

⁸⁸ Weber (1947, 328)

⁸⁹ Weber (1947, 341)

⁹⁰ Weber (1947, 358)

⁹¹ Beetham (1991).

⁹² Bondes and Heep (2013).

⁹³ Beetham (1991, 25).

that, for Weber, these three types should be regarded more as conceptual categories rather than concretely existing regimes. Weber already argues against the existence of any of these three ideal types, since they are rather “pure model” for analytical purposes.⁹⁴

Nonetheless, Beetham’s critique is useful to complement Weber’s view on legitimacy, because Beetham specifies two principles on which beliefs in the legitimacy of a regime are based: a principle of differentiation and a principle of community or “common interests”. The former principle “distinguishes the dominant from the subordinate”, while the second “links dominant and subordinate, and demonstrates the advantage the latter derives along with the former from the rules of power in question”.⁹⁵

These two principles correspond, more or less, to the two contradictory functions of ideology pointed out by Hodge and Louie⁹⁶. The two scholars argue that ideology is designed, on one hand, to “express the power of the powerful” and, on the other, “to assure the solidarity of the non-powerful, their identity of interests with the powerful”⁹⁷. The two scholars call these two functions P-ideology and S-ideology respectively. This view on ideology has then been applied to the study of the discursive functions of metaphors in contemporary Chinese political discourse⁹⁸ and its evolution in post-Mao China⁹⁹.

Summing up, this study considers legitimacy as being based on subordinate beliefs in dominant rightfulness to exercise power. This belief is based on a two-pronged process through which a political system creates acceptance among its subject by, on one hand, highlighting common interests shared by the rulers and the ruled, while, on the other, pointing out the rulers’ capacity to accomplish the tasks.

2.5 Conclusion

Summing up what has been outlined in this chapter, the ontological and epistemological framework of this study draws upon Foucault’s view on discourse and discursive practices, albeit not applying the methodology proposed by the French philosopher. This implies that this study sees the power of discourse as lying in the process of naturalizing worldviews

⁹⁴ The conceptual construction of a “pure model” – i.e. generalized theoretical category - is a characteristic of Weber’s analytical approach. See the introduction by Talcott Parsons in Weber (1947, 11-12).

⁹⁵ Beetham (1991, 76-77).

⁹⁶ Hodge and Louie (1998).

⁹⁷ Hodge and Louie (1998, 48).

⁹⁸ Magagnin (2014).

⁹⁹ Magagnin (2016).

and beliefs, to such an extent that these beliefs become social norms and then rules that govern societies. Therefore, discourse cannot be detached from power, since discourse is the place where claims or better statements – to use Foucault’s terminology – become undisputable truths. The discourse on the Chinese dream is therefore seen as being composed by all those discursive practices that govern contemporary Chinese society through symbolic power.

To single out and analyse these discursive practices that interweave with one another within the discourse on the Chinese dream, the present research adopts frame analysis as micro-level of analysis. It does so because frame analysis provides a useful tool for delving into the “filters” that influence the strategies and actions adopted by people. The terms frame and frame analysis are associated with Goffman; frame analysis has widely been adopted in the study of social movement organizations and, in particular, to research the ways in which social movements attain consent and align people towards a common cause. It has been lately applied to media studies and, to a lesser extent, to political communication.

For the application of frame analysis to the discourse on the Chinese dream, this study draws upon the notion of master frames, which are deemed as general frames that work at the macro levels providing unity and coherence to frames at the micro levels. The individuation of the two master frames, object of analysis, is grounded on theoretical considerations: first, the process of self-ing and other-ing as the basic process at stake for the construction of collective identity; second, the legitimation process drawing upon Weber’s view and Beetham’s two principles.

Looking ahead to the next chapter, it will detail the sample and the process of selection of the materials for the analysis of the discourse on the Chinese dream as well as the methodological approach to be taken. In so doing, it will propose a further development of frame analysis, which integrates linguistic and visual research.

3 Methodology: Towards an integrated approach for the analysis of the discourse on the Chinese dream

3.1 Introduction

This chapter revolves around the methodology applied for the study of the discourse on the Chinese dream. Inspired by Foucault's theorization of discourse, this research defines the discourse on the Chinese dream as the discursive practices that govern contemporary Chinese society through symbolic power. For the analysis of these discursive practices at the micro-level, it relies upon Goffman's theorization of frames and frame analysis and, specifically, its further application to the study of social movements and media. However, frame analysis is not an all-encompassing methodology: as D'Angelo maintains, frame analysis is more a research program rather than a unified paradigm.¹ In this being so, and in line with D'Angelo, Reese sees opportunities not challenges:

If the most interesting happens at the edges of disciplines—and in the center of policy debates—then framing certainly has the potential to bring disciplinary perspectives together in interesting ways.²

Therefore, far from being a unified and structured methodology, frames analysis is open and should be integrated with other approaches. Moving from the various methodological approaches of frame analysis developed in previous empirical research, the present study proposes an integration with the methodology developed by Fairclough for linguistic analysis and the one advanced by Kress and van Leeuwen for visual communication, both belonging to the school of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Before turning the attention to this integrated methodology, this chapter starts with the description of the entire sample and research design. It then proceeds by providing an explanation of the general theories and guidelines of each method. Finally, it outlines how the three methods work together as a whole.

¹ D'Angelo (2002) words are a response to Entman (1993), who saw an obstacle in the fracture nature of the framing perspective.

² Rees (2007, 148).

3.2 The sample

The analysis of the discourse on the Chinese dream and on China's new era is made up of two steps: the synchronic analysis and the diachronic analysis. More specifically, the first step consists in pointing out the basic frames - within the two master frames outlined in the previous chapter on the ground of theoretical considerations - that shape and provide meaning to this national dream. The diachronic analysis, instead, attempts to grasp those elements of ideological continuity and those of rupture in the discourse on Chinese dream. To do so, the starting point for the diachronic analysis is hence the results of the synchronic analysis. In other words, the synchronic analysis comes first and constitutes the prerequisite for the diachronic one.

Since the sample and the materials for conducting the synchronic analysis and the diachronic one are different, in the following pages a detailed explanation of the ways in which the corpus has been selected will be outlined separately.

3.2.1 Data for the synchronic analysis

For the discourse on the Chinese dream, this thesis makes use of three different data sets: first, the talks by Xi Jinping; second, the books gathering Xi's talks, writings and pictures; third, a video, published by the People's Daily, embedding the contents of China's new era, as well as informal conversations and semi-structure interviews gathered during two rounds of fieldwork.

The process of selection of Xi Jinping's talks

The choice of focusing on the full transcription of the political speeches made by the general secretary Xi Jinping is because Xi is the primary instigator of the concept of the Chinese dream. Even though it has been argued that Xi is not the formulator of this concept,³ nonetheless it is mostly associated with him. Indeed, the Chinese dream is included in the theoretical formulation signed by the current general secretary, i.e. "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" added in the

³ Wang Huning is credited to be the mind behind the formulation of the "Chinese dream". See Haig Patapan and Yi Wang (2018).

Party's constitution in October 2017 and in the constitution of the People's Republic of China in March 2018. This is the reason why the speeches made by other politicians, such as the Prime Minister Li Keqiang, are excluded.

The corpus is made of Xi Jinping's talks addressed between November 2012 and October 2017. The materials have therefore been collected simultaneously with the progress of the research. Relevant talks have been selected through constantly monitoring Xi Jinping's activities as reported, initially, on the *Xinhua* website - in the section titled *Xi Jinping huodong baodao zhuanji* 习近平活动报道专集 "Collection of reports on Xi Jinping's activities" → *zhongyao jianghua* 重要讲话 "Important speeches"⁴ – and later, on the website of the *People's Daily* – in the section *Xi Jinping xilie zhongyao jianghua shujuku* 习近平系列重要讲话数据库 "Database of the series of Xi Jinping's important speeches", which, besides Xi's talks, includes also commentaries or editorials. The official *shujuku* 数据库 "database" of Xi Jinping's speeches was disclosed only on the 8th of September 2017, as a "platform for studying the spirit of the important speeches of the general secretary Xi Jinping".⁵ In this latter database, all of Xi's talks and writings are indexed, so that the platform allows users to do, for instance, a keyword research or looking for talks addressed in a specific timeframe.

The primary criterion for the selection of the talks to be analysed is the presence of the keyword *meng* 梦 "dream" in the body of the speech, not merely in the title. However, given that the term is used also in speeches addressed to a foreign audience, it was necessary to introduce a second criterion in order to make the linguistic corpus more manageable: in line with the aims of the present research, only those speeches delivered in the national contexts and addressed to a domestic audience were considered most relevant and selected as data. By doing so, a total amount of fifty-six full transcriptions of Xi Jinping's speeches have been collected and analysed.

The books gathering Xi Jinping's talks, writings and pictures

⁴ Available online at: <http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/xijinpings/zyjh.htm>. Some speeches are no longer attainable on this website since October 2017, when the 19th Party Congress was held.

⁵ *Xi Jinping xilie zhongyao jianghua shujuku zhengshi shangxian* "习近平系列重要讲话数据库"正式上线 "Database of the series of Xi Jinping's important speeches" officially launched. *Renmin wang*, November 8th, 2017. Online available at: <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0908/c117092-29524442.html>.

Besides the full transcriptions of Xi's talks mentioning the keyword "dream", a volume collecting passages of Xi's talks about the Chinese dream – i.e. *Xi Jinping guanyu shixian Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing de Zhongguo meng: Lunshu zhaibian* 习近平关于实现中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦: 论述摘编 "Xi Jinping on realizing the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation: Discussion edition"⁶ - and two volumes gathering Xi Jinping's speeches and writings are object of analysis: *Xi Jinping tan zhiguo lizheng* 习近平谈治国理政⁷ translated into English as *The Governance of China*⁸ and *Xi Jinping tan zhiguo lizheng di er juan* 习近平谈治国理政第二卷 *The Governance of China II*.⁹ The first volume of *The Governance of China* gathers Xi's talks and writings addressed between November 2012 and June 2014, while the second volume gathers those from August 2014 to September 2017. Regarding the first volume of *The Governance of China*, Zappone notes that "no other large collection have [sic] appeared so soon, after the appointment of a Chinese leader"¹⁰. For the second volume, it was released soon after that "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" was officially enshrined in the Pantheon of Chinese political ideology.

The present research takes these volumes as object of analysis because they can be deemed as different statements, to use Foucault's terminology: the same sentence, if printed and published in a revised version or pronounced by Xi Jinping in a specific context, acquires a different meaning and corresponds to different "speech acts". This is the reason why these materials are analysed alongside the full transcription of Xi Jinping's talks.

Of the two volumes of *The Governance of China*, the present study takes into consideration those chapters dedicated to the concept of the Chinese dream, i.e. the second chapter in the first volume and the first chapter in the second volume. It will analyse those speeches included in these chapters, even though they do not contain the keyword *meng* "dream". Besides the talks and writings, this research considers also the pictures contained in both publications as part of the communicative practices which constitute the discourse on the Chinese dream.

⁶ This book is edited by the Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 中共中央文献研究室 "Party Literature Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee". Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.) (2013 edition).

⁷ Xi Jinping (2014).

⁸ Xi Jinping (2014).

⁹ For the English translations, the official translations in Xi Jinping (2014b, 2017b) will be used, including also the title of these two volumes. When the source of the English translation is not specified, translations are by the author.

¹⁰ Zappone (2018, 255).

Paying closer attention to the two volumes, a noteworthy change occurred in relation to the Chinese dream: while in the first volume - that is the one published in 2014 - an entire chapter is dedicated to the Chinese dream, in the second volume – the one released in 2017 - the Chinese dream is treated together with the political concept of Socialism with Chinese characteristics and hence the Chinese dream is levelled to the political ideology that leads the country. Therefore, from the publication of the first volume of *The Governance of China* to the second volume, the Chinese dream has been reframed: from an objective shared by the leaders and the people, it has become a political ideology that leads the country towards its future.

Moreover, by looking at the chapters that include the full transcriptions selected by the process previously delineated, when included in the volumes, they appear mostly – with a few exceptions - in those chapters related to culture and its role in contemporary China, namely *Jianshe shehui zhuyi wenhua qiangguo* 建设社会主义文化强国 “Building a strong socialist cultural nation” and *Jianding wenhua zixin* 坚定文化自信 “Strengthen cultural confidence”. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the structures of these two volumes bear out and embed the domestic nature of the Chinese dream: this concept is mostly addressed to those who are framed as being part of the Chinese community.

Other materials

In addition to the data outlined so far – the full transcriptions of Xi Jinping’s talks, the volume dedicated to the Chinese dream and the two volumes of *The Governance of China* - this study widens the spectrum of the materials to include other materials: a video on China’s new era and semi-structured interviews and informal conversations collected during the fieldwork.

Since the launch of the Chinese dream, many videos focusing on this concept as well as other key political ideas have been produced by institutions linked to the government and other independent organizations. Among the various visual material available, the video *Zhongguo jinru xin shidai* 中国进入新时代 “China enters a new era” produced by the *People’s Daily* has been selected as a representative example of the features and contents of China’s new era, and therefore of the basic subjects of the Chinese dream. This specific video has been chosen for two reasons. First, each represented participant explains his/her

own personal dream in the video, providing insights into the ways in which single dreams should flow into a collective dream, i.e. the Chinese dream, as well as the way in which this collective dream is structured by many small dreams. The second reason has to do with the two master frames outlined in the previous chapter. Both master frames can be traced in the video: indeed, on one hand, the process of self-ing and other-ing is evident especially when a foreigner explains his Chinese dream in Mandarin; and on the other, the process through which attaining political legitimacy – that is, by building common interests and reiterating leaders' ability to rule – is at the center of the other represented participants, including Xi Jinping.

Fieldwork research has been conducted in the People's Republic of China, mostly Beijing, from February 2016 to January 2017 and again in October 2017 on the occasion of the 19th Party Congress. During the last fieldwork, 6 qualitative semi-structured interviews with party members and informal conversations with citizens have also been conducted.

For informal conversation, it is meant the material collected by the author during discussions that were not in themselves research activities and in which the possibility of using their contents as research data were not disclosed to the interlocutors. For the semi-structure interviews, instead, all the interviewees were aware that the conversations would be used as research material.

The form of qualitative semi-structure interviews allowed to adapt the questions to the previous answers and to better structure the interviews as a conversation. This form of interview allows to adjust them in the middle of the fieldwork.¹¹ The questions revolve around the interviewees' personal impressions of the political concept of the Chinese dream and what they would consider the main challenge in the achievement of this goal, as well as the changes that its realization would imply. The highly politically sensitive topics of the interviews constituted the main obstacle to recruit participants. Indeed, all of the interviewees were found thanks to personal relations and academic connections set up during the previous fieldwork. Out of these connections, it was impossible to carry out interviews.

The length of the interviews ranges from 30 to 60 minutes and all of them were conducted in the Chinese language, audio-recorded and entirely transcribed afterwards. None of the interviewees declined to answer any questions or interrupted the interviews.

¹¹ Heimer (2006, 63).

In light of the small corpus of interviews, the results drawn from these do not want to be representative and generalizing the whole of the members of the Chinese communist party, and the results of these interviews and the informal conversations would rather be seen as a complement to the linguistic and visual analysis.

3.2.2 Data for the diachronic analysis

The materials outlined are the ground of the present research on the discourse on the Chinese dream and the ways in which this national dream is framed to shape Chinese identity and assure political legitimacy to the Chinese communist party. Moreover, the synchronic analysis is the starting point also for the diachronic analysis.

The aim of the diachronic analysis is to understand what is new in China's new era and in the discourse on the Chinese dream. To do so, it starts from the results of the synchronic analysis. For a preliminary examination, it uses the secondary literature on the political discourse under Mao Zedong and in post-Mao China. However, when specific concepts which are central in the discourse on the Chinese dream are not mentioned in the secondary literature, this study resorts to primary literature.

To ensure the homogeneity of the texts to be compared, the diachronic analysis involves only one type of text, that is the work reports delivered periodically by the general secretary of the Communist Party.¹² Instead of other kinds of talks or writings, the full transcriptions of work reports have been chosen because, as Magagnin maintains,

as the opening act of the paramount event in the political life of the PRC, it [work report] contains and sums up the most representative features of the language used in the sphere of officialdom.¹³

Magagnin's words echoes those of Qian Gang, who explains that "[e]ach political report can be regarded as the Party's 'general lexicon.'"¹⁴

Therefore, the diachronic analysis is based on all the work reports available on a specific section of the *People's Daily*, including those of the Maoist era.¹⁵ Although aware that the

¹² The CCP National Congress has been held since the foundation of the party in 1921. Yet, it is only with the 11th Congress in 1977 – the first after Mao Zedong's death and the official end of the Cultural Revolution – that the Congress has taken place regularly every five-year. Qian, Gang (2012).

¹³ Magagnin (2016, 348).

¹⁴ Qian Gang (2012).

historical, political and social contexts of the Maoist era - both at the national and international levels – were extremely different from those of today’s China and more in general since the beginning of the epoch of reforms and opening up, all the work reports are included, comprising those issue from 1928 to 1982. A reason for this is that the aim of this research is to identify the origin of the use of specific keywords and their transformation as well as to assess how old concepts replace new ones over time. Analyzing the work reports issued since 1978 would have not allowed to draw comparison or to fully grasp the semantic evolution undergone by specific expressions or the undertones that some keywords still preserve. Indeed, without taking into consideration Mao’s time, it would be hard to identify new or old keywords. As a matter of fact, also Qian Gang analyses *tifa* 提法 “formulaic expressions” or “watchwords” in all the work reports available, including those of Mao’s time. Doing so, he was able to find out that the frequency of the expression *dang de lingdao* 党的领导 “party leadership” in the work report issued at the 19th National Congress is higher than in Mao’s time. ¹⁶

Summing up, drawing upon specific keywords central to discourse on the Chinese dream, the diachronic analysis attempts to trace back their origin outlining whether they have assumed new meanings or not.

3.3 Frame Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis: Towards an integrated methodology

3.3.1 Frame analysis

Within the broad range of methodologies under the umbrella “frame analysis”, Matthes and Kohring distinguish five methodological approaches developed in empirical research on the media: the hermeneutic approach; the linguistic approach, the computer assisted approach; the deductive approach; the manual holistic approach. ¹⁷

¹⁵ *Zhongguo gongchandang lici quanguo daibiao dahui shujuku* 中国共产党历次全国代表大会数据库 “Database of national congress of the Chinese communist party”. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/index.html>

¹⁶ Qian Gang (2017).

¹⁷ Matthes and Kohring (2008, 258-279).

1. The hermeneutic approach is rooted in qualitative paradigm with no quantification. This approach identifies frames and provides an interpretative account of texts by linking frames with broader cultural elements. The main drawback of this approach lies in the lack of transparency for the process of frames identification: “Although most of these studies are well documented and exceptionally thorough in their discussion of media frames, it is fairly difficult to tell how the frames were extracted from the material.”¹⁸
2. The linguistic approach: it is based on the view that specific linguistic blocks signify a frame. That is, this approach is in accordance with Entman¹⁹'s view which sees specific words as the building blocks of frames. The main disadvantage of this approach lies in the difficulty of carrying out the analysis on a large amount of texts.
3. The computer-assisted approach is based, as the linguistic approach, on the idea that words signify frames, but the words are identified and clustered by a computer software. The advantage consists in the objectivity in frame extraction, because words that occur together are found by the software and not by the analyst. The main shortcoming lies in the fact that this method reduces frames to cluster of words. Therefore, while obviating to the problem of justifying frame extraction, it causes a validity problem.
4. In the holistic approach, frames are first generated by a qualitative analysis of some news texts and then are coded as holistic variables in a manual content analysis. As other approaches, namely the hermeneutic and the linguistic approaches, the criticism points at the lack of transparency in explaining the process through which frames are extracted.
5. The deductive approach distinguishes itself from the other approaches for its theoretically deriving frames from the literature and coding them in standard content analysis. In other words, the analyst finds out that the frames are indeed known beforehand and that they suit the topic currently under investigation. Matthes and Kohring criticize this approach for being reduced to already established frames, which in turn may cause the risk of overlooking other important frames of an evolving issue.

As Matthes and Kohring explain, in certain circumstances, these various approaches overlap. For instance, almost all the approaches use linguistic devices as signifying frames

¹⁸ Matthes and Kohring (2008, 259).

¹⁹ Entman (1993, 51-58).

to some extent, even though the linguistic approach offers the most extensive description of linguistic elements. Moreover, all these methods merge the deductive and inductive approaches for frame analysis of linguistic texts.

Therefore, although the methodology applied here for the research of how the Chinese dream is framed is located under the hermeneutic approach, this research also makes use also of other methodologies. For instance, for the diachronic analysis, this study relies on the computer assisted approach.

In order to overcome the main drawbacks of the hermeneutic and of the other approaches, that is the lack of transparency in the process of individuation of frames, the present study adopts two solutions: The first one is to move from theoretical considerations for the analysis of texts – both visual and linguistic – for a preliminary observation of the master frames. In this initial phase, it draws also from the existing literature, mainly the study of Bondes and Heep, but also those studies on Chinese political discourse. The second solution is, even more importantly, that this study integrates the research methodology on frame analysis with Critical Discourse Analysis, especially the methodology developed by Fairclough for the analysis of linguistic texts, and social semiotics as applied to visual communication by Kress and van Leeuwen.

This integration is done also because each of the frame analysis methodologies detailed above, while being useful to single out the various frames, do not provide explanation of the ways in which communicating practices – whether linguistic or visual - contribute to the framing process.

3.3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis for the linguistic analysis

As van Dijk explains, Critical Discourse Analysis does not have a unitary analytical framework.²⁰ Generally speaking, Critical Discourse Analysis stems from critical linguistics. Yet, there are various approaches and methods in the school of Critical Discourse Analysis which may vary largely not only for the analytical methodology but also for the theoretical frameworks. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, discourse historical approach, that is one branch of critical discourse analysis, draws upon

²⁰ Van Dijk (1993).

Habermas theorization of discourse; while Fairclough incorporates many of Foucault's theoretical claims in his theorization of discourse and methodology.²¹

In line with the theoretical framework sketched in the previous chapter, this study implements Fairclough's model for critical discourse analysis, merging it with frame analysis. In *Language and Power*²², the British scholar develops an articulated method for critical analysis of texts as being part of discourses. Fairclough's scheme is structured into three levels: "vocabulary", "grammar", and "textual structure". Moreover, for each level, Fairclough distinguishes three kinds of values, namely "experiential", "relational", and "expressive", which correspond to Halliday's ideational, relational and textual metafunctions.²³ To draw upon these three metafunctions is a common feature between Fairclough's and Kress and van Leeuwen's methodology.

Vocabulary

This level of analysis is mostly concerned with the choice of the lexicon. According to the three kinds of values carried by vocabulary, Fairclough formulates different "research questions" as a valuable guide for textual analysis.

1. What experiential value do words have?²⁴ Experiential value represents a clue of the ways in which producers cast their experience of the natural and social world onto language. Answering this question implies the analysis of
 - Vocabulary *per se*: some words already belong to ideological frameworks, letting the entire text being "placed" in a specific ideological domain. But it may also occur that others are "ideologically contested", as it is the case of "socialism", for instance.²⁵
 - The devices of "rewording" or "overwording". The former occurs when already existing and naturalized words are systematically replaced by others.

²¹ In *Discourse and Social Change*, Fairclough dedicates a whole chapter to Foucault's thought, highlighting the aspects he incorporates in his approach. Fairclough (1992, 37-61).

²² Fairclough (1989).

²³ Halliday (2014).

²⁴ Fairclough (1989, 112-116).

²⁵ Fairclough (1989, 114).

The latter consists in an unusual use of many words that are synonyms. To Fairclough, “[o]verwording shows preoccupation with some aspect of reality - which may indicate that it is a focus of ideological struggle.”²⁶

- meaning relations between words: it may occur, for example, that words which are not synonyms are used as they had exactly the same meaning.
2. What relational value do words have?²⁷ Relational value of words refers to the properties of words that derive from but also help to sustain social relationships between participants.²⁸ In other words, the choice of a specific vocabulary helps create a common ground for the speaker and other participants, while excluding others. Analyzing the relational value of words has mostly to do with euphemisms, and formal or informal expressions.
 3. What expressive value do words have?²⁹ The expressive value means that the choice of words implies an evaluation of the practices described. Therefore, words can shed light on the attitude of speakers and writers.
 4. What metaphors are used? This evaluation at the center of the previous question may be conveyed by means of metaphors. As Fairclough suggests “it is the relationship between alternative metaphors that is of particular interest here, for different metaphors have different ideological attachment.”³⁰ Before going ahead with the methodology developed by Fairclough, metaphors and their role in communication and framing process deserve more attention and explanation, as it has been already pointed out that metaphors are “framing devices”³¹.

The interest in metaphors goes back to Aristotle³². In recent years, a new wave of attention upon metaphorical phenomena has arisen especially in the aftermath of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory elaborated by Lakoff and Johnson.³³ The basic claims put forward by this theory can be summed up as follows: a) the pervasiveness of metaphors in human language and thoughts; b) the cognitive

²⁶ Fairclough (1989, 115).

²⁷ Fairclough (1989, 116-118).

²⁸ Fairclough (1989, 116).

²⁹ Fairclough (1989, 118-120).

³⁰ Fairclough (1989, 119).

³¹ Gallelli (forthcoming).

³² Eco maintains that already in the theorization of metaphors by Aristotele, metaphors were not decorative trick, but were seen as “strumento conoscitivo” (cognitive tools). Eco (1984, 164).

³³ Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003).

nature of metaphors, i.e. metaphors structure our thoughts, helping us grasp abstract matters by means of familiar and accessible concepts based on bodily experience. Metaphors are therefore defined as the interaction between two conceptual domains: that is, an object, an event or an issue – what is called “target domain” in Lakoff and Johnson and “tenor” by Richards³⁴ – is another object, event, or issue – the “source domain” in Lakoff and Johnson and the “vehicle” in Richards.

The meaning conveyed by a metaphor is not provided by one of the two components. Conversely, as Richards explains,

When we use a metaphor, we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction.³⁵

Setting aside the debate on the cognitive function of metaphors, this study concerns the way in which metaphors “achieve particular communication goals”³⁶. In the study of political communication, frame analysis has been also integrated with the analysis of metaphors. Drawing upon the study of conceptual metaphors, Ottati et al develop the Metaphorical Framing Model, emphasizing the role of metaphors in the framing process.³⁷

Grammar

The above section relates the choice of words, but syntactic structures carry ideological implications too. Fairclough proposes the following questions as a guide for the analysis of ideologies behind the choice of grammatical constructions.

1. What experiential value do grammatical features have?³⁸ The experiential value deals with the ways in which events and relationships in the world, the subjects involved etc. are represented in language. The choice of a specific grammatical process and participants, instead of others, can be ideologically significant. The experiential value of syntactic structure relates, for instance, whether the agent is

³⁴ Richards (1965)

³⁵ Richards (1965, 93)

³⁶ Charteris-Black (2004, 247).

³⁷ Ottati et al. (2014, 179-202).

³⁸ Faiclough (1989, 120-125).

clear or not, the use of nominalization or negation, and, furthermore, the selection of a passive form, rather than an active one, carries ideological implications.

2. What relational value do grammatical features have?³⁹ As Fairclough states “There is a variety of grammatical features of texts which have relational values.”⁴⁰ He focuses on three: *modes* of sentence, *modality*, and *pronouns*.

- What modes are used? (declarative, grammatical question, imperative)
- Are there important features of relational modality? Modality is not only a matter of modal auxiliaries. So, for instance, “if it is a matter of the authority of one participant in relation to another, we have relational modality.”⁴¹ Conversely, the expressive modality is a matter of the speaker/writer’s evaluation of truth.
- Are the pronoun “we” and “you” used, and if so, how? Fairclough distinguishes between “inclusive *we*”, that includes the reader and the writer, and an “exclusive *we*”, which refers to the writer plus one or more others, but does not include the addressee(s).⁴² In political discourse, “you” may imply a relationship of solidarity between the politician and the people in general.

3. What expressive values do grammatical features have? When the verb is non-modal present tense (categorical modalities), it tends to support a view of the world as transparent, a world which has no need to be interpreted. In other words, it can imply that what is described is the world, and readers do not need to think about possible alternatives.

Textual Structure

A further step following the analysis of vocabulary and grammar consists in the study of larger structures: textual structures. These structures regard the ways in which single sentences are connected to one another, considering how the whole text is organized into

³⁹ Faiclough (1989, 125-128).

⁴⁰ Faiclough (1989, 125).

⁴¹ Faiclough (1989, 126).

⁴² Faiclough (1989, 127-128).

smaller units. Therefore, the analysis of textual structures proceeds from the following questions:

1. How are simple sentences linked together? This question has to do with the ways in which sentences are connected to one another, but also with how texts are linked to the context of the talk or writing: “some formal features point outside the text to its situational context, or to its ‘intertextual’ context, i.e. to previous text that are related to it.”⁴³ Fairclough points out the following questions as analytical tools:

- What logical connectors are used? casual or consequential relationships between things which are taken for granted (commonsensical) may be ideological. However, the juxtaposition of sentences may create the same effect.
- Are complex sentences characterized by coordination or subordination?
- What means are used to refer outside and inside the text? These means include quite a big range of grammatical devices employed to refer to material previously introduced, as for instance, pronouns and definite article.⁴⁴
- What interactional conventions are used? (turn-taking system -in dialogs; are there ways in which one participant controls the contribution of others? Interruption, enforcing explicitness, controlling topics, formulation)

For the final step the question is:

1. What large-scale structure does the text have? Answering this question entails looking at the ways in which the text is organized and how its various parts work together.

Several critiques have been levelled against the ontology and methodology developed in the school of CDA.⁴⁵ To Fairclough’s approach, the most important critique is the excessive attention paid to the linguistic aspect of discourse, which implies the overlooking of other communicative practices.⁴⁶ To overcome this shortcoming, the

⁴³ Fairclough (1989, 130).

⁴⁴ Fairclough (1989, 132).

⁴⁵ Most of the criticisms CDA was subjected to relates to its epistemological premises. However, this study has already explicated the epistemological and ontological framework on which it is based, and it uses Fairclough approach only as a method for linguistic analysis. For a deeper and more comprehensive examination of the weaknesses of CDA, see Blommaert (2008, 31-38).

⁴⁶ The lack of attention to the linguistic dimension of discourse is the critique Fairclough moves against Foucault. See Fairclough (1992). Conversely, the excessive reliance upon language – in its narrowest sense,

present research complements the methodological approach developed by Fairclough for the analysis of linguistic texts with the one proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen for the study of visual communication. This methodology will be discussed in the following paragraph.

3.3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis for visual analysis

The present research is not pioneering in seeing visual communicative practices as part of the framing process. For instance, Messaris and Abraham study how African Americans are framed through images in television news, arguing that

viewers may be less aware of the process of framing when it occurs visually than when it takes place through words. Consequently, visual images may have the capacity of conveying messages that would meet with greater resistance if put in words, but which are received more readily in visual form.⁴⁷

The study by the two scholars, while highlighting the role of images and their ideological weight in the framing process, falls short in outlining a comprehensive method for the analysis of images. Conversely, Kress and van Leeuwen develop a wide-ranging and detailed approach for the investigation of images, albeit from the perspective of social semiotics and not frame analysis. According to the two scholars,

Visual Structures do not simply reproduce the structure of 'reality'. On the contrary, they produce images of reality which are bound up with the interests of the social institutions within which the images are produced, circulated and read. They are ideological. Visual structures are never merely formal: They have a deeply important semantic dimension.⁴⁸

i.e. the linguistic code, is the first bias Blommaert finds in CDA and especially in Fairclough's theorization and methodology. Blommaert (2008, 34-35).

⁴⁷ Messaris and Abraham (2002, 224).

⁴⁸ Kress and van Leeuwen. (2006, 47).

The present research thus proposes the integration of the methodology proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen with the framing perspective.

As was the case of the methodology developed by Fairclough, also Kress and van Leeuwen draw upon Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. Indeed, they also move from the three metafunctions outlined by Halliday - ideational, interpersonal and textual - , applying them to the study of visual communication. Kress and van Leeuwen delve into the process of how images fulfil one or more of these metafunctions, which they rename respectively representational, interactive and compositional.

1. What ideational/representational meaning do images have?⁴⁹ The ideational or representational values consists in the ways various objects ("represented participants", using Kress and van Leeuwen's terminology) and the relationships among them are depicted into images.

Ideational/Representational values can be narrative or conceptual. In the first case, the visual structure of representation embodies "unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements", while conceptual structure represents "participants in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure or meaning".⁵⁰

Narrative images are characterized by the presence of a "vector", which corresponds to the "action verbs" of linguistic systems.⁵¹ The vector, in turn, determinates the nature of the represented participants: the represented participants who perform the action are the "actor", while the ones who receive it is the "goal". But, the vector may consist also in an eyeline: in this case, Kress and van Leeuwen talk of "reactors" in place of actors and "phenomena" instead of goals.⁵²

Conceptual structures, instead, involve the static represented participants. The two scholars divide the conceptual structures into classificational, analytical and symbolic processes: the first one involves the examination of the relations among the represented participants⁵³; the second relates to participants in term of part-whole structure, that is to say, the analysis focuses on the various parts (technically

⁴⁹ Kress and van Leeuwen do not use question forms to explain the various steps of visual analysis as was the case of Fairclough (1989) *Language and Power*. However, for homogeneity, the various steps are presented under the form of question.

⁵⁰ Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 79).

⁵¹ Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 46).

⁵² Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 67).

⁵³ Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 77-87).

“possessive attributes”) as belonging to a whole, called “carrier” (the analytical processes).⁵⁴ In addition to classificational processes and analytical processes, Kress and van Leeuwen distinguish the “symbolic processes”, which “are about what a participant *means* or *is*”⁵⁵

2. What interpersonal/interactive meaning do images have? The interpersonal/interactive meaning refers to the relationships between the represented participant and the interactive participants, i.e. the viewers. The relationship between the represented participants and the interactive participants can be realized in various ways and several elements contribute to its realization. The gaze of the represented participant, for instance, may look directly at the eye of the interactive participant or not, implying a different interaction between the two participants.⁵⁶ Moreover, the choice of the angle – frontal or oblique; high or low - reveals the attitude of the producer.⁵⁷ Perspective can be also a tool to make an image objective, to make something appear as absolutely true.⁵⁸

3. What textual/compositional meaning do images have? This third element corresponds to the “way in which the representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other, the way they are integrated into a meaningful whole.”⁵⁹ Meaning is provided by information value, salience and edging⁶⁰. Informational value refers to the place where elements are located: whether at the left or right, top or bottom, centre or periphery, elements are endowed with different values and importance.⁶¹ Salience relates to those elements which are made more salient by putting them in foreground, or contrasts in tonal value etc..⁶²

⁵⁴ Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 87-104).

⁵⁵ Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 105).

⁵⁶ Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 117-119).

⁵⁷ Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 136-140).

⁵⁸ Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 145).

⁵⁹ Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 176).

⁶⁰ The authors use the expression “framing”, but here its synonym is used to avoid misunderstanding with the conceptual frames and framing. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 177).

⁶¹ Kress et al. (2006, 179-200).

⁶² Kress and van Leeuwen. (2006,200-203).

Finally, edging regards the presence of dividing tools to separate the various elements.⁶³

3.4 The application of the methodology to the empirical work

As outlined above, this study falls under the hermeneutic approach of frame analysis, albeit not exclusively, complementing it with the methodology advanced by Fairclough for the analysis of linguistic texts and the one by Kress and van Leeuwen for visual texts. This is the basic methodology applied for the synchronic analysis. Regarding the diachronic analysis, as already touched upon above, the research starts from the results of the synchronic analysis and regards specifically and solely some key concepts and words that emerged. Since the method differs for the diachronic and synchronic, to avoid misunderstanding, the explanation of the various steps of synchronic and diachronic study are kept separated.

3.4.1. Integrated method for the synchronic analysis of the discourse on the Chinese dream

The application of this mixed method consists in basically two steps: 1) the individuation of the basic frames; 2) the analysis of texts - both linguistic and visual- for further and deeper evaluation of the devices employed.

The steps outlined below regard both the analysis of the linguistic texts and the visual ones. For the analysis of the full transcription of Xi Jinping's speeches, this study employs the software MAXQDA for qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

The method consists in the following steps:

1. Proceeding from the existing literature, the first step consists in reading the texts looking for the two master frames, based on theoretical considerations.
2. The material is then screened with these theoretical considerations in mind. Once the key passages where the two master frames appear are found, the second step

⁶³ Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 203-204).

consists in finding out the specific frames,⁶⁴ which needs the screening of the texts several times.

3. Once the first cycle of frame analysis of the full transcription of Xi's talk is completed, the attention is turned to the linguistic and visual analysis, based on Fairclough and Kress and Leeuwen methodology.

For the visual analysis, this study agrees with Hodge and Louie who maintain that "Chinese culture is more overtly semiotic than the Western system of code"⁶⁵ and therefore, it argues that the visual communication conveyed by the Chinese writing system is worth taking into consideration.

3.4.2. Method for the diachronic analysis

The results obtained through the synchronic analysis are the starting point for the diachronic analysis of the discourse on the Chinese dream. Indeed, once key concepts and keywords of the discourse on the Chinese dream are identified through the methodology outlined above, the other step consists in examining whether they are new or not. This is done because realizing the Chinese dream would coincide with China's entering into a new era, according to the official definition. Therefore, the diachronic analysis aims at answering the question of what is new in China's new era.

To do so, various resources are used, both secondary and primary literature. For the methodology applied in the analysis of the primary literature – which, as outlined above, consists in all the work reports available – , the software MAXQDA offers a handy tool, as it allows users to run a keyword search in all documents. Although, with regards to the work reports, this study does not carry out a qualitative analysis of the whole texts through reading, it nonetheless does not limit itself to the count of the tokens of keywords, but it considers the co-text – the linguistic context – as well as the social and political contexts of use. Thus, it will outline the elements of originality in contemporary Chinese political discourse under Xi and attempts to trace what these new elements replace.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the sample as well as the methodology employed for the analysis of the discourse on the Chinese dream. In particular, the sample consists in data for

⁶⁴ Regarding the second master frame, i.e. the one related to CCP's political legitimacy, the study conducted by Bondes and Heep provides a good starting point for the individuation of specific frames.

⁶⁵ Hodge and Louie (1998, 8).

synchronic and diachronic analysis, where the former is the necessary prerequisite for the latter. The data for the synchronic analysis includes the full transcriptions in the Chinese language of Xi Jinping's talks mentioning the keyword "dream", the volumes gathering his speeches and writings. In addition to these, within "other materials" this study employs also a video as visual materials, as well as semi-structured interviews and informal conversations as supplemented materials.

For the diachronic analysis which aims at answering the question of "what is new in Chinese political discourse", the present research relies firstly upon secondary literature and, when those specific concepts crucial in the discourse on the Chinese dream are not mentioned in the secondary literature, it makes use of primary literature. For homogeneity, the diachronic analysis interests only work reports.

Concerning the methodology applied, it falls under the hermeneutic approach, even though, it has been pointed out, that a clear separation among the various methodologies under the umbrella of frame analysis cannot be drawn. The hermeneutic approach is then integrated with the method for the analysis of linguistic texts developed by Fairclough and the one for visual texts advanced by Kress and van Leeuwen.

PART II: SELF-ING AND OTHERI-ING

Chapter 4. The Chinese-Us: *Whose dream?*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims at outlining those to whom the Chinese dream is addressed. This is part of the master frame which sees the construction of a collective identity as a never-ending semiotic process of self-ing and other-ing. Therefore, in light of the theoretical considerations explained above, whatever construction of a We-ness requires borders that separate “Us” from “Them”. Yet, these borders can be fluid and do not necessarily correspond to those of the State, in this case the People’s Republic of China.

This chapter aims at tracing where the borders are discursively constructed and located in the discourse on the Chinese dream so as to create a collective Chinese-Us. More specifically, the questions that lead the analysis are: to whom does the Chinese dream belong according to the official discourse? To whom is the Chinese dream addressed? Does it belong to the people living in the People’s Republic of China? Those Han Chinese living abroad? In a nutshell, whose dream? These questions echo the one asked by Guo Yingjie in his study on Chinese cultural nationalism, that is “who is the nation?”¹ As Guo suggests, answering this question is far from being an easy task:

Is it the ‘Pan-Chinese nation’ (*Zhonghua minzu*), ‘the Chinese people’ (*Zhongguo renmin*), ‘the Chinese citizens’ (*guomin/gongmin*), or ‘the people’ (*renmin*)? Although the four overlap to some extent, each has a recognizable boundary and they are not always compatible and can hardly be said to always share a common national interest.

Through the analysis of the data, this research aims at answering the above questions and tracing how and why the borders that separate Us from Them are located or move according to specific purposes. Moving from these questions, this chapter will focus on two key concepts that have emerged from the analysis of Xi’s talks and writings, namely the concept of *Zhongguo renmin* 中国人民 “Chinese people” and *Zhonghua minzu* 中华民

¹ Guo Yingjie (2004, 38-41).

族 “Chinese nation”, delving into their discursive functions and the nuances of meaning they acquire within the discourse on the Chinese dream.

4.2 Whose dream?

In his study of Chinese nationalism, Townsend clarifies that various Chinese nations and forms of nationalism coexist at the same time:

The first one is the official one of state nationalism, composed of all the PRC citizens, Han and non-Han alike. The second one [...] is the PRC’s Han nation, composed of the core Han population, distinct from non- Han nations within the PRC as well as from Chinese outside the PRC who are subject to other political authorities. The third, a product of ethnic nationalism and the vagaries of Chinese political and migratory history, consists of the PRC plus [...] Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao, whom both the PRC and ROC see as part of the same nation-state even though presently under different political authorities. The fourth includes other overseas Chinese who retain some idea, however attenuated, of dual nationality.²

Generally speaking, the Chinese dream is discursively constructed as being the dream of all the four nations pointed out by Townsend. This is mostly reflected in the expressions used to designate the people to whom Xi Jinping is talking when explaining the Chinese dream. Indeed, there are several ways to label the members of the Chinese nation and none of them can be deemed as being perfect synonyms, as already - even partially - noted by Guo: *Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族 “Chinese nation”, *Zhongguo renmin* 中国人民 “Chinese people”, *quanguo gezu renmin* 全国各族人民 “the people of all ethnic groups of the whole country”, *Zhonghua er nü* 中华儿女 “sons and daughters of China”, *quanguo renmin* 全国人民 “the people of the whole country”, *laobaixing* 老百姓 “common people”, *gongmin* 公民 “citizens”, *guomin* 国民 “people of a country”³, *guozu* 国族 “people of a

² Townsend (1996, 128).

³ Interestingly enough, there is no trace of *guomin* 国民 “citizens” in Xi Jinping’s speeches, since it would remind of the *Guomindang* 国民党 “Nationalist Party”.

nation” and so forth. These expressions are by no means semantically interchangeable, even though their semantic fields partly overlap.⁴

Xi Jinping’s use of them proves that they cannot be replaced without triggering semantic changes. For instance, in his talk at the National Museum – which constitutes the first speech in the Chapter *Shixian Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing de Zhongguo meng* 实现中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦 “Realizing the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” in *The Governance of China*⁵, to introduce the idea of the Chinese dream for the first time, Xi said:

大家都在讨论中国梦，我以为，实现中华民族伟大复兴，就是中华民族近代以来最伟大的梦想。这个梦想，凝聚了几代中国人的夙愿，体现了中华民族和中国人民的整体利益，是每一个中华儿女的共同期盼。⁶

We are now all talking about the Chinese dream. In my opinion, achieving the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since the advent of modern times. This dream embodies the long-cherished hope of several generations of the Chinese people, gives expression to the overall interests of the Chinese nation and the Chinese people, and represents the shared aspiration of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation.⁷

In this passage, three expressions are used to designate the members of the Chinese nation, so to speak. *Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族 “Chinese nation”, *Zhongguo renmin* “Chinese people” and *Zhonghua er nü* “sons and daughters of China” are all employed to refer to either the nation or its members.

In the case of *Zhonghua minzu* “Chinese nation”, it is used three times: first in the formula “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” and in this case the focus is more on the “nation” deemed as a single subject, because the “rejuvenation” of this subject is framed as the goal that should be achieved in 2049. In the second case, *Zhonghua minzu* works as one collective representation made up of different subjectivities who, all together, attempt

⁴ This is an issue that has been already raised by Yinjie Guo (2004, 38-40). However, his analysis does not concern with the ideological role of each linguistic expression. It can be deemed more a historical analysis rather than a discursive one.

⁵ Xi Jinping (2014a, 35-37) In Xi Jinping (2014b) the title of the Chapter is “The Chinese Dream” (37-39).

⁶ Xi Jinping (2012c).

⁷ Xi Jinping (2014b, 38).

to realize this goal. Indeed, in the official English version, this *Zhonghua minzu* is translated as “Chinese people” instead of “Chinese nation”. In its third use, *Zhonghua minzu* is juxtaposed to *Zhongguo renmin* 中国人民 “Chinese people”. By that being so, the two expressions – *Zhonghua minzu* and *Zhongguo renmin* - are made semantically close but not interchangeable. In other words, the juxtaposition logically entails that *Zhonghua minzu* and *Zhongguo renmin* are two separate concepts, even though elsewhere they are used as synonyms.

In order to understand who is included in the *Zhonghua minzu* and *Zhongguo renmin* and who is excluded from it, the following pages will concentrate on these two keywords of the discourse on the Chinese dream, their various nuances of meaning and hence the ideological implications of their use.

4.2.1 *Zhongguo renmin*. Chinese people

Generally speaking, *Zhongguo renmin* 中国人民 “Chinese people”, as well as *quanguo ge zu renmin* 全国各族人民 “people of all ethnic groups” are both related to the idea of territorial belonging: “Chinese people” and “the people of all ethnic groups in the whole country” convey the idea of those living within the borders of the PRC. This can be inferred from the morpheme *guo* 国 “state/country” that compounds the two expressions and that conveys the idea of a territory surrounded by borders since the very beginning. Indeed, the evolution of the pictogram *guo* is explained as follows:



Figure 1. The evolution of the character for “country”.⁸

The old character used for “country” was *yu* or *huo* 或 in which, on the left, there is this sign 口 which stands for a territory defended by two walls - symbolized by horizontal strokes on its top and bottom- and a *ge* 戈 “weapons” on the right. Then, 或 got surrounded

⁸ For the evolution of *guo* “country”, see Wieger (1965, 177).

by closed walls 阨, representing the borders of a nation, producing the full – not simplified – form 國. The simplified form *guo* 国 dates back to the Song dynasty (960-1279) and what has changed is the inner part of the character: it has *yu* 玉 “jade” in place of 或. Therefore, since its first appearance, the meaning conveyed by *guo* has always being linked to the need to defend a specific territory.

This has implications for the expressions compounded by the morpheme *guo*. Indeed, the change of a morpheme makes other morphemes assume a different significance. This is the case, for instance, of the morpheme *zu* 族 in *quanguo ge zu renmin* 全国各族人民 “people of all ethnic groups in the whole country” and in *Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族 “Chinese nation”. In the first case *zu* 族 stands for “ethnic groups” or “nationalities”⁹, while in *Zhonghua minzu* “Chinese nation” *minzu* refers to the nation, as will be shown below.

However, for “Chinese people” and “people of all ethnics groups in the whole country” there is more than that: most of the semantic nuances of these expressions derive from *renmin* 人民 “the people”, which, as will be shown later, still carries political overtones.

To fully grasp what the signifier *renmin* stands for, its meaning in contemporary China as well as to understand why it is used in certain contexts and avoided in others – as the results of the analysis of the speeches of Xi that will be explained below –, it is useful to draw upon Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia.¹⁰ The expression heteroglossia coined by Bakhtin describes the social diversity of varieties within any language at any given moment of its historical existence. In other words, within a language, different codes or varieties coexist and these codes bear the traces of their historical developments and social contexts of use, so that

At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word [...], but also [...] into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, ‘professional’ and ‘generic’ languages, languages of generations and so forth.¹¹

⁹ Interestingly enough, Jingjing Li shows that in the ‘80s the expression *quanguo ge zu renmin* 全国各族人民 was translated into English as “the people of all our *nationalities*”, but then in the ‘90s it was changed into “the people of all *ethnic groups*”, because it would be misleading to refer to a country consisting of various “nationalities”. Jingjing Li (2008 118-120).

¹⁰ Bakhtin (1981).

¹¹ Bakhtin (1981, 271-272).

It is this stratification what makes any given words loaded with ideological values, in such a way that there are no “neutral” terms, but all words carry the “taste” of those many languages that are stratified one over the other on a horizontal level.

From this perspective it is possible to trace back the strong political “taste” of *renmin*, which derives from the semantic nuances it had in the previous historical periods and, in particular, during the communist revolution. In Maoist China, the people were those who contribute to the construction of the socialist system:

在现阶段，在建设社会主义的时期，一切赞成、拥护和参加社会主义建设事业的阶级、阶层和社会集团，都属于人民的范围；一切反抗社会主义革命和敌视、破坏社会主义建设的社会势力和社会集团，都是人民的敌人。¹²

At this stage, that is the phase of building socialism, all those social classes, social strata and social groups that support, uphold and participate in the cause of socialist construction belong to the category of ‘the people’; [conversely] all those that oppose the socialist revolution and all those social forces and social groups that are hostile and undermine socialist construction are enemies of the people.

Renmin was therefore opposed to *diren* 敌人 “enemies”, that is to say, those who were considered foes in the new project of building a socialist China. *Renmin* was the signifier used for the four social classes on which the foundation of the People’s Republic of China was grounded: the proletariat, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie are indeed the four small stars around the big one which stands for the Chinese Communist Party in the flag of the PRC.¹³ *Renmin* had therefore strong political connotations.

Wei maintains that at the beginning of the reforms and opening up inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping, when the focus shifted from class struggle to economic development, *renmin* came to be used as synonym of *gongmin* 公民 “citizens”.¹⁴ Later, and specifically at the beginning of the 21st century, the practice of considering *renmin* a synonym of citizens was

¹² Mao Zedong quoted in Wei Chuanguang (2006, 40).

¹³ Guo (2004, 39).

¹⁴ Wei Chuanguang (2006, 41).

officially ratified in Chinese political ideology.¹⁵ With Jiang Zemin's *san ge daibiao* 三个代表 “Three represents”, *renmin* enlarged its semantic field, embracing other social classes: the “ideological contribution” made by Jiang Zemin while redefining the mission of the Chinese Communist Party, at the same time changed the meaning covered by *renmin*. The important thought of the Three represents states that the Chinese communist party:

1. 代表中国先进生产力的发展要求 Represents the development trends of China's advanced productive forces.
2. 代表中国先进文化的前进方向 Represents the progressive courses of China's advanced culture
3. 代表中国最广大人民的根本利益 Represents the fundamental interests of overwhelming majority of the Chinese people

Commenting on this political contribution made by Jiang Zemin, Guo maintains that Chinese leadership led by Jiang “seems to have realized that sooner or later the Party will have to reposition itself in relation to the nation and relaunch itself as a representative of the whole nation.”¹⁶ This is precisely because “‘the Chinese people’ are certainly larger than the ‘people’”.

The third Represent of Jiang Zemin does nothing but ratify what Deng had already put into practice: it implies that the CCP no longer is the party of just the proletariat, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. Jiang Zemin's contribution of the Three Represents changes the semantic field covered by the expression *renmin*.

Nonetheless, even if it is no longer relegated to the four social classes, the Chinese people represented by the Communist party are those politically aligned with it. In other words, *renmin* is still the signifier for those who, as Mao said, *zancheng, yonghu he canjia shehuizhuyi jianshen shiye* 赞成、拥护和参加社会主义建设事业 “support, uphold and participate in the cause of socialist construction”. This can be inferred in light of two considerations. Looking at the third of the three represents, i.e. the party “represents the

¹⁵ For ease of exposition and in line with the purposes of the present research, this study does not analyse the various semantic and ideological nuances of *gongmin* and other terms that can be deemed equivalent of *renmin*. For a discussion on this topic, see Chen Sicong (2017, 43-48).

¹⁶ Guo (2004, 42).

fundamental interests of overwhelming majority of the Chinese people”, Chinese people is modified by *guangda de* 广大的 “broad” which, as Link suggests, “is used in Communist jargon only to modify politically correct groups”.¹⁷ Second, representing the “overwhelming majority of the Chinese people” implies that there is also a minority, however small it may be. In the absence of other specifications, the criterion that sets the two apart is, as before, political fidelity.

Chinese people in the discourse on the Chinese dream

Renmin has a key role in the discourse on the Chinese dream. This centrality is reiterated many times, as in the following extract:

中国梦归根到底是人民的梦，必须紧紧依靠人民来实现，必须不断为人民造福。¹⁸

The Chinese dream is, in the final analysis, the dream of the people; so we must rely firmly on them to realize it, and we must steadily deliver benefits to them.¹⁹

Moreover, the first sentence, i.e. *Zhongguo meng gui gen daodi shi renmin de meng* 中国梦归根到底是人民的梦 “The Chinese dream is, in the final analysis, the dream of the people”, is also the title of the second chapter of the volume “Xi Jinping on realizing the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation: Discussion edition”, which, as previously explained, collects extracts of talks made by Xi Jinping on the concept of the Chinese dream.²⁰ These observations lead to the questions: what does *renmin* stand for in the discourse on the Chinese dream? And who is the people?

The analysis of the speeches shows that *renmin* can acquire different meanings in different contexts. In this sense, *renmin* - exactly as the English “people”, the Italian “popolo” and so forth - is an “empty and floating signifier”²¹, to use Laclau’s terminology. That is to say, the signifier *renmin* cannot point to actual persons, but it operates a “homogenizing

¹⁷ Link (2013, 249).

¹⁸ Xi Jinping (2013c).

¹⁹ Xi Jinping (2014b, 42-43).

²⁰ Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.) (2013, 13-17).

²¹ Laclau (2005).

function”²², so that is possible to talk about “the *renmin*”, whose existence as one entity is taken for granted. It that being so, the signified of the signifier *renmin* can never be finally fixed, nor can it be univocal. *Renmin* acquires various meanings according to the contexts of use, thus it is more a matter of language rather than essence.

To point out what *renmin* stands for in the discourse on the Chinese dream, the analysis has been conducted by observing the concordance lines, that is, the linguistic context in which the keyword *renmin* occurs. In the examination, those proper nouns – such as *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo* 中华人民共和国 “People’s Republic of China”, *renmin daibiao dahui* 人民代表大会 “People’s Congress” and so forth - in which *renmin* is a morpheme have been excluded.

According to the discursive functions it acquires in discourse, *renmin* can be categorized into three types, albeit the boundaries between them are sometimes far from being clear-cut:

1. An historical *renmin*;
2. An abstract collective identity that should be the object of arts and literature, etc.;
3. The weaker social classes.

An historical renmin

On the first use, the historical *renmin* refers to the emancipation of the Chinese people against foreign imperialism. This historical *renmin* is associated with the party’s role in the country’s fight against foreigners’ aggression, in its leading through the three historical phases of *geming*, *jianshe*, *gaige* 革命、建设、改革 “revolution, construction and reforms” as well as in founding the road towards the country’s rejuvenation. In being so, *renmin* is also the holder and protector of the *shiye* 事业 “cause”, i.e. the Party’s historical mission to realize the great rejuvenation of the chinese nation which is shared with the party, as well as the owner of the memory of those periods in China’s history. In this sense, *renmin* often appears as being led by the Party, or being modified by *Zhongguo* “China/Chinese”, as in the following examples:

²² Ibid, 40.

1. 中国特色社会主义是我们党带领人民历经千辛万苦找到的实现中国梦的正确道路，也是广大青年应该牢固确立的人生信念。²³

Socialism with Chinese characteristics is the correct path for leading the people in realizing the Chinese dream that the party articulated after untold hardship, and all young people should firmly adopt it as a guideline for your lives.²⁴

2. 我们党团结带领人民完成社会主义革命，确立社会主义基本制度，推进社会主义建设，完成了中华民族有史以来最为广泛而深刻的社会变革，[...]。²⁵

Our Party [...] united the people and led them in completing socialist revolution, establishing socialism as China's basic system, and advancing socialist construction.²⁶

3. 中国人民抗日战争的胜利，谱写了中华民族不屈不挠抵抗外来侵略的壮丽史诗，彻底洗刷了近代以后中国屡遭外来侵略的民族耻辱，极大增强了中华民族的自信心和自豪感，也为中国人民在中国共产党领导下开辟实现民族复兴的正确道路创造了重要条件。²⁷

The victory of the Chinese people over the Japanese has written a magnificent epic about the indomitable Chinese nation in fighting against foreign aggression, and has wiped out the national humiliation that China suffered by foreign hands. It has largely enhanced the self-confidence and sense of pride of the Chinese nation, and at the same time it has created the conditions for the realization of national rejuvenation by the Chinese people led by the Chinese communist party.

In the first two examples the party is the agent of the action of leading the generic “people”. In the third example, which is taken from a speech delivered for the anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre of 1937-38, *renmin* occurs two times and in both occurrence it is modified by *Zhongguo* 中国 “China/Chinese”. Generally speaking, “Chinese people”, instead of “the party leads the people”, is preferred in talks addressing to an international audience. Indeed, not only in this talk, but also in all the others that touch upon the Sino-Japanese war, “Chinese people” is the expression used to refer to this historical *renmin*.²⁸ However, references to the leading role of the Chinese communist party may also occur in

²³ Xi Jinping (2013e).

²⁴ Xi Jinping (2014b, 54).

²⁵ Xi Jinping (2017g).

²⁶ Xi Jinping (2017h).

²⁷ Xi Jinping (2014p).

²⁸ See for instance Xi Jinping (2014p).

these contexts, as for instance in the last sentence of the third example, where it is specified that 中国人民在中国共产党领导下开辟实现民族复兴的正确道路 “the Chinese people, under the guide of the Chinese communist party, has opened up the right path towards national rejuvenation.”

Linked to this historical *renmin* there is the one who, together with the party, holds the *shiyue* which will be the object of the following part. In that being so, this cause shared by the party and the people should also be the object of loyalty from party members:

我们干事业不能忘本忘祖、忘记初心。我们共产党人的本，就是对马克思主义的信仰，对中国特色社会主义和共产主义的信念，对党和人民的忠诚。²⁹

We must not forget our roots and our ancestors, cannot forget our original aspirations. Our root as communists is the belief in Marxism, the faith in socialism with Chinese characteristics and communism, and the loyalty towards the party and the people.

This historical *renmin* is hence imbued with a political significance and authority for the party: *it* is constructed as safeguarding the mission, which consists in, by and large, achieving the rejuvenation of the nation. However, nowadays this historical *renmin* cannot be deemed as political subject. As Bouieu notes, while during the wars of national liberation, the Chinese people, in the same way as Vietnamese people, existed as political category. This was exactly for a “*retrospective effect of the nonexistence of a state*” (italics in the original). Yet,

As soon as the state in question is formed, [...] the people it claims as its authority ceases to be a political subject. It becomes a passive mass that the state configures, universally, no matter what the form of the state.³⁰

Thus, this historical *renmin* serves more a justifying role for the leading role of the party, rather than representing a precise political subjectivity able to carry political actions. The

²⁹ Xi Jinping (2015h)

³⁰ Badiou (2016, 25-26).

protagonist of the liberation struggles ceased to exist on the day the People's Republic of China was founded.

An abstract collective identity

Connected to this kind of “people” imbued with special political meaning is the other use of *renmin* as an abstract collective identity that must be the object of arts and literature. Indeed, among the case studies there are two speeches focusing specifically on arts and literature: the first is the one delivered for the Beijing Forum on Arts and Literature in 2014, and the second is the talk given at the 10th Congress of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (CFLAC) and the ninth Congress of the Chinese Writers Association (CWA) in 2016.³¹ In both talks, after the conventional greetings, Xi introduces the main themes by saying:

文艺事业是党和人民的重要事业，文艺战线是党和人民的重要战线。³²

The cause of literature and art is an important cause for the party and the people. The frontline of literature and art is an important frontline for the party and the people.

In this case, again, *renmin* is framed as the holder, together with party, of the cause of rejuvenating the nation. Against this background, art and literature in general are called upon to acquire a leading role. This key role is emphasized by means of three main linguistic devices, which are mutually related. Starting from the syntactic structure of the sentence, the two clauses are syntactically identical, there is only a slight change: the *shiye* 事业 “cause” of the first clause is replaced by *zhanxian* 战线 “frontline” in the second one. This leads to the second level of analysis, the lexical analysis, in which the tactic of “overwording” can be pinpointed. The overwording consists in a noticeable use of many words to convey the same meaning and, indeed, both *shiye* “cause” and *zhanxian* “frontline” are repeated twice, signaling an “intense preoccupation”, as Fairclough suggests.³³ This

³¹ A partial transcription of these two is included in the chapter “Cultural Confidence”. Xi Jinping (2017a; 2017b).

³² The talk at the Beijing Forum on Arts and Literature was published only one year after: Xi Jinping (2015e).

³³ Fairclough (1992, 193).

intense preoccupation is also marked by the choice of the war metaphor, specified in *zhanxian* “frontline”, that is meant to enhance the significance of this “cause” held by the party and the people.

However, this meaning of *renmin* is not new in Chinese political discourse. Conversely, in this use of *renmin*, Xi joins the tradition of his predecessors. Indeed, the extract of Xi’s speech at the Beijing Forum on Arts and Literature included in the chapter *Jianding wenhua zixin* 坚定文化自信 officially translated as “Cultural Confidence” in *The Governance of China II* begins with the following passage:

社会主义文艺，从本质上讲，就是人民的文艺。毛泽东同志在延安文艺座谈会上指出：“为什么人的问题，是一个根本的问题，原则的问题。”邓小平同志说：“我们的文艺属于人民”，“人民是文艺工作者的母亲”。江泽民同志要求广大文艺工作者“在人民的历史创造中进行艺术的创造，在人民的进步中造就艺术的进步”。胡锦涛同志强调：“只有把人民放在心中最高位置，永远同人民在一起，坚持以人民为中心的创作导向，艺术之树才能常青。”³⁴

Socialist literature and art are, in essence, the literature and art of the people. In his speech at the 1942 forum on literature and art in Yan’an, Mao Zedong stressed that “This question of ‘for whom?’ is fundamental; it is a question of principle.” Deng Xiaoping made the remarks: “our literature and arts belong to the people” and “it is the people who nurture our writers and artists.” Jiang Zemin exhorted cultural workers to “create art in the context of the history created by the people, and create artistic achievements on the basis of the people’s achievements”. Hu Jintao emphasized, “The tree of art thrives only when our writers and artists place the people above everything else in their minds, always stand by the people, and adhere to the principle of putting people first in their works.”³⁵

The use of the words of the previous leaders can be analysed in terms of the *auctoritas* deriving from them, but for the moment, what must be pointed out is that, in this use of *renmin* as an abstract collective identity, being “with the people” means being politically correct. It can be inferred that the conceptual process at stake for the use of *renmin* is exactly the same pointed out by Schoenhals in his study on *kexue* 科学 “scientific” formulations, for which “what is being judged is not the scientific verifiability of

³⁴ Xi Jinping (2017a, 314).

³⁵ Xi Jinping (2017b, 341).

truthfulness of a formulation but its political utility”³⁶. In the same way, for the works of literature and art what is being judged is not the quality of a work for its themes, style and so forth, but the political efficacy in promoting a sense of belonging to this collective community that is made up by those people who support the “cause” of the Party-state. This is precisely because:

文艺要反映好人民心声，就要坚持为人民服务、为社会主义服务这个根本方向。³⁷

To speak for the people, literature and art must follow the right path of serving the people and serving the socialist cause.³⁸

Here, the political undertones of *renmin* stand out clearly: the objective of whatever piece of art is to express the *xinsheng* 心声 “aspirations” of the *renmin* “people” and this objective can be achieved only by abiding by the political principles of *wei renmin fuwu* 为人民服务 “serving the people” and *wei shehuizhuyi fuwu* 为社会主义服务 “serving socialism”. “Serving the people” and “serving socialism” are two slogans that dominated Mao’s era and are still part of the political rituals nowadays. Interestingly enough, this theme is spread and reiterated also through means of popular tv series.³⁹

Being for the people means political correctness also when it is applied to the academia: the title of Xi’s talk at Beijing Normal University in 2014 is *Zuo dang he renmin manyi de hao laoshi* 做党和人民满意的好老师⁴⁰ “Be teachers with whom the people and the party are satisfied” refers to the political rightness. The entire speech is focused on the role of education for the rejuvenation of the country and the one played by professors along this path:

当今世界的综合国力竞争，说到底人才竞争，人才越来越成为推动经济社会发展的战略性资源，教育的基础性、先导性、全局性地位和作用更加突显。“两个一百年”奋斗目标的

³⁶ Schoenhals (1992, 9)

³⁷ Xi Jinping (2015e).

³⁸ Xi Jinping (2017b, 343).

³⁹ Schneider (2012, 82-88).

⁴⁰ Xi Jinping (2014m).

实现、中华民族伟大复兴中国梦的实现，归根到底靠人才、靠教育。源源不断的人才资源是我国在激烈的国际竞争中的重要潜在力量和后发优势。⁴¹

In today's world, international competition is becoming increasingly fierce. In the final analysis, that competition is a competition between talents. And as talents become a strategic resource for promoting economic and social development, we see the fundamental, leading and overall role that education plays become more prominent. The realization of “two centenary goals” and the Chinese Dream of rejuvenating the Chinese nation lie in talent and education. Our flourishing talent resource is a great potential force and gives China an advantage in the fierce international competition.⁴²

The entire talk is structured according to three *bi bu ke shao de tezhi* 必不可少的特质 “indispensable features” that teachers and professors cannot lack, the first of which is to have *lixiang xinnian* 理想信念 “ideals and beliefs”. This “feature” is argued to have a long history in China, and to be linked to the role of professors and teachers as *chuandao* 传道 “transmit the *dao*”, which unavoidably recalls the ancient “tradition” of propagating the doctrines of the sages of the past. This link between the past and the present is reinforced by means of quotations, among which there is one from the progressive educator Tao Xingzhi (1891-1946) and another from Han Yu (768-924), a distinguished scholar who lived during the Tang Dynasty. This ancient tradition is then actualized as being “serving the people” and, in turn, “serving the people” corresponds to being correct and “good”:

我们的教育是为人民服务、为中国特色社会主义服务、为改革开放和社会主义现代化建设服务的，党和人民需要培养的是社会主义事业建设者和接班人。好老师的理想信念应该以这一要求为基准。⁴³

Our education aims to serve the people, aims at socialism with Chinese characteristics, the open-up cause and socialist modernization. The Party and the people need us to cultivate students to be the builders and successors of socialism. The lofty ideals of a good teacher should conform to the above-mentioned requirements.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Xi Jinping (2014m).

⁴² The English translation is available online at: <http://english.bnu.edu.cn/universitynews/76391.htm>

⁴³ Xi Jinping (2014m).

⁴⁴ The English translation is available at: <http://english.bnu.edu.cn/universitynews/76391.htm>

The weaker social classes

The analysis of these two meanings of the people – an historical *renmin* and an abstract collective identity - imply that, although in different ways, this term still carries strong political connotations, or “taste”, to use Bakhtin’s terminology. Yet, the question that must be still answered is who these people are. This leads to the third meaning that the people have in the discourse on the Chinese dream: the weaker social classes.

Before moving ahead towards the analysis of the major themes to which this meaning of the people is associated, it is worth pointing out that also when *renmin* refers to the object of literature and art, *renmin* is mostly used to designate the weaker social classes. This meaning is even clearer in the use of *renmin* as a modifier of *qunzhong* 群众 “masses” or also *qunzhong* alone, as in the following passage:

人民需要艺术，艺术更需要人民。马克思说：“人民历来就是作家‘够资格’和‘不够资格’的唯一判断者。”以为人民不懂得文艺，以为大众是“下里巴人”，以为面向群众创作不上档次，这些观念都是不正确的。文艺创作方法有一百条、一千条，但最根本的方法是扎根人民。只有永远同人民在一起，艺术之树才能常青。⁴⁵

People need arts, arts need people even more. As Marx said: “The people have always been the only judges of whether writers are ‘qualified’ or ‘not qualified’.” Thinking that the people do not understand literature and art, that the broad masses can be only be “rednecks”⁴⁶, and that those works that are directed to the masses are out of quality is not correct. There are hundreds and thousands of ways of creating pieces of arts, but the most fundamental one is to take roots in the people. Only by being forever with the people, the tree of art can be evergreen.

The *renmin* Xi Jinping is talking about are the weaker social classes. This can be inferred from, first, the clear-cut line drawn between the writers and intellectuals to whom the talk is directly addressed and the “masses” that should be the fertile soil in which art sprouts. Second, the use of *xia li ba ren* 下里巴人 which currently stands for “popular literature and arts”. Originally this expression meant the people of Ba 巴 and Shu 蜀 two ancient states in the present-day Sichuan province, which were used as synonyms of people from

⁴⁵ Xi Jinping (2016i).

⁴⁶ For the translation of *xia li ba ren* 下里巴人, this study proposes “redneck”, a denigrating expression of New York’s American slang.

the countryside.⁴⁷ The four-character phrase *xia li ba ren* is taken from a folk song of the state of Chu.

Regarding the use of *renmin* in the meaning of weaker social classes, besides its use for political utility in arts and literature, two other recurrent themes can be outlined: a) the need to improve the populace living standards; b) the effort of the government must aim at their well-being and, thus, Party members must never be detached from the *renmin*. In other words, this *renmin* refers to those people who have been left behind in Chinese economic miracle and whose living standards are yet to be improved. This *renmin* is also soaked with political meanings, since the weaker social classes should be the foundation, by definition, of communist parties.

In line with the significance of the above extract, the following passage is another suitable example of the political significance of this meaning of *renmin*:

“水能载舟，亦能覆舟。”这个道理我们必须牢记，任何时候都不能忘却。老百姓是天，老百姓是地。忘记了人民，脱离了人民，我们就会成为无源之水、无本之木，就会一事无成。⁴⁸

There is an old saying: “The same water that keeps a ship afloat can also sink it.”⁴⁹ This is something we must never ever forget. The people are the skies above us and the earth below us. If we forget the people and become distanced from them, we will lose their support, like a river with no headwater or a tree with no roots, and achieve nothing.⁵⁰

The *renmin* Xi Jinping is referring to are all those living in the People’s Republic of China, and especially those who have yet to benefit from Chinese economic development. As it clearly emerges from the passage above, improving living standards is far from merely being only an economic issue, as it is framed as being related to politics, in its narrower sense, as well. The Party-state pays ever increasing attention also to people’s perception of Party governance. These two concerns are bonded to one another very tightly. On this point, Golden reports his own experience:

⁴⁷ Chinese-English Dictionary Third Edition. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 19.

⁴⁸ Xi Jinping (2016h).

⁴⁹ This is a quotation from “Governance of the Zhenguan Period” of Wu Jing, a historian and official during the Tang Dynasty. The source of this quotation is reported in Xi Jinping (2017b, 61).

⁵⁰ Xi Jinping (2017b, 55).

On 4 September 2014 in a meeting with foreign experts that I attended in Beijing as part of *The Party and the World Dialogue 2014* dedicated to *China's New Reforms: the Role of the Party*, the Vice- President of China, Li Yuanchao, stated quite clearly that the CPC runs the risk of losing power were it to lose the support of the people and that there is no guarantee of the people's support: the Party must earn it.⁵¹

Indeed, Xi Jinping's words reported in the above extract echo those by Golden. In the first line of the above extract, Xi quotes Wu Jing, a historian and public officer during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) to explain that the power comes from the people's support, but the people can take it back and "sink" the party. This quotation is then juxtaposed to "The people are the skies above us and the earth below us", which is taken from a song performed by Lei Jia 雷佳.⁵² The song is titled *Jiang Shan* 江山, which literally is "rivers and mountains", but in the sense implied by the song its meaning is country, or better *tianxia* 天下 "all under heaven".

Therefore, here *renmin* stands for common people living in the People's Republic of China and in particular those of the middle and lower classes. In this sense, *renmin* is used in correlation with the more colloquial *laobaixing* 老百姓 "ordinary people" and is nestled in the metaphor of the plant. The metaphor of the plant conveys the idea of a dependent bond of the party from the people, and immediately recalls the set phrases of classical origins *yi ren wei ben* 以人为本 "people as roots" which in the Hu-Wen decade has been associated to the idea of social equality.⁵³ This expression, as Magagnin explains, is grounded on the metaphorical association between the nation or the party and a plant, and "represents one of the most pervasive 'trademarks' of the political rhetoric of the Hu Jintao era".⁵⁴ As in many other cases that will be discussed, also *yi ren wei ben*, or its shorter version *minben* 民本 "people as roots", is an old expression that changes meaning in its reuse in modern and contemporary contexts: in her study, Sabattini⁵⁵ elucidates that in the Confucian tradition, *minben* "people as roots" was mostly loaded with negative associations. The

⁵¹ Golden (2014, 1).

⁵² Lei Jia is a famous Chinese folk soprano that is close to the CCP and the PLA.

⁵³ Scarpari (2015, 123-125).

⁵⁴ Magagnin (2016, 360).

⁵⁵ Sabattini (2012, 167-193).

Italian scholar continues by explaining that, nowadays, “people as roots” is mainly used for its emotional connotations, rather than representing a concrete set of “people-oriented policies”:

Such is the emotive content packed into this expression that it is still used for effect today and although it does not apply to true people-oriented politics, it does offer a convenient formula that can be adapted to serve the needs of intellectuals and policies of any period.⁵⁶

The ways in which the party attempts to “earn” people’s support will be the object of the following part of this dissertation. For now, what is worth noting is that, in light of what has been outlined so far, *renmin* in the discourse on the Chinese dream carries strong political connotations. This explains why the use of *renmin* is avoided when there is a need to put politics aside, as happens for instance in those talks centered on Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao.

4.2.2 *Zhonghua minzu*. Chinese nation(s)?

The analysis conducted so far has shown that *renmin* in the discourse on the Chinese dream still carries strong political undertones. In particular, in all the three meanings covered by *renmin* in the discourse on the Chinese dream, the political significance in talking about the people has emerged. The use of *renmin* marks the borders of a sort of community whose members are aligned by political ideology. This section discusses the other ways in which the discourse on the Chinese dream produces alignment, i.e. by means of “culture”.

Indeed, In accordance to the political connotations of *renmin*, the expression *Zhongguo renmin* is mostly avoided in talks addressed to overseas Chinese citizens or people from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.⁵⁷ Instead of *Zhongguo renmin*, other expressions are used, and these expressions refer to the Chinese nation more as a cultural community rather than a group of people occupying the same territory as was for *Zhongguo renmin*.

⁵⁶ Sabbatini (2012, 188).

⁵⁷ The case studies of this research include one talk addressed to Hong Kong, one to Macao and one to Taiwan: Xi Jinping (2014d), Xi Jinping (2014r) and Xi Jinping (2017e).

For instance, in contrast to *Zhongguo renmin* and its political undertones, *Zhonghua er nü* 中华儿女 “sons and daughters of China” is more likely to be used, because it is less linked to the idea of a political state and more bond to the one of a cultural civilization. Indeed, *Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族 “Chinese nation” and *Zhonghua er nü* “sons and daughters of China” are both made up of *Zhonghua* 中华 which refers to the “Chineseness” rather than the Chinese state. Regarding *Zhonghua*, Barmé explains:

Prior to the series of events surrounding Yuan Shikai’s failed attempt to restore the monarchy, from the late-Qing period the word *hua* 华 / 華 had gained renewed currency in the compound expression *Zhonghua* 中华. It was popularized in particular by the noted thinker Liang Qichao 梁启超 who promoted the concept of the ‘Chinese race’ or *Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族. Thereafter, *hua* would frequently be used to represent ‘Chineseness’ in various modern formulations; while today *Zhonghuaxing* 中华性, ‘the ineffable nature of that which is Sinitic’ has been used to denote a kind of Chinese cultural essentialism, with overtones of ‘racial’ uniqueness. In the name of the new state itself ‘China’ was represented as ‘*Zhonghua minguo*’ 中华民国, just as Yuan Shikai’s abortive Great Chinese Empire was the ‘Great *Zhonghua* Empire’ 大中华帝国. From the Republican era onwards, various products have been sold under the Chung Hwa [Zhonghua] brand name, most notably books, pencils and cigarettes.⁵⁸

The idea of Chineseness is also in the name *Zhonghua renmin gong he guo* 中华人民共和国 “People’s Republic of China”. In his study on the emergence of nationalism, Anderson underlies that the name People’s Republic of China unavoidably recalls the nationalist ground on which the Chinese “imagined community” is based.⁵⁹ In particular, the Irish sociologist maintains that

since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in national terms – the People’s Republic of China, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and so forth – and, in so doing, has grounded itself firmly in a territorial and social space inherited from the prerevolutionary past” (emphasis in the original).⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Barmé (2012).

⁵⁹ Anderson (2006).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

The arguments by Elisabeth Perry goes in the same direction, as she cautions against the negation of the role of “cultural governance with nationalist objectives”⁶¹ in mobilizing and ruling China over the whole history of the Chinese Communist Party.⁶² Indeed, the Chineseness is represented also in the national flag in which the yellow color of the five stars on a red background stands for Chinese skin color.⁶³

However, by looking at the work reports, it emerges that there is a growing importance attached to the “Chineseness” or the proudness of being “Chinese”. *Zhonghua minzu* as a keyword in Chinese political discourse starts appearing in the work report pronounced by Zhao Ziyang in 1987 at the 13th National Congress and its employment has steadily increased, except for the 17th work report which signal a slight reduction in its occurrence:

	13th (1987)	14th (1992)	15th (1997)	16th (2002)	17th (2007)	18th (2012)	19th (2017)
中华民 族 “Chinese nation”	3	3	12	17	14	18	40

From the table, the growing importance attached to the concept of *Zhonghua minzu* can be inferred. The 19th work report stands out for the numerous times this expression is used. Even more interesting for the purposes of the present research, since its first appearance in 1987, the idea of *Zhonghua minzu* was tightly bound to the one of *fixing* 复兴 “rejuvenation” and *zhenxing* 振兴 “revitalization”. So that, since the very beginning of its usage, the concept of *Zhonghua minzu* has been anchored to the ideology attempting at

⁶¹ Perry (2013, 6).

⁶² The arguments made by Perry are a reply by those advanced by several scholars, including the already quoted Guo (2004), who argue that the Tian’an men crackdown represents the starting point of state-led cultural nationalist in the PRC. Albeit acknowledging merits in aspects of the arguments by these scholars, Perry argues that contemporary emphasis on cultural nationalism cannot be deemed a break with the past. Perry (2013).

⁶³ Guo (2004, 39).

creating a sense of nationhood and cultural belonging among the citizens, while portraying the Party-state as the embodiment of the nation's will.

The Chinese family

As said before, in light of the political “taste” of *renmin*, this expression is generally avoided in contexts where the borders are drawn on the basis of cultural and ethnic belonging, rather than political faith. In all these circumstances, *renmin* or other linguistic devices carrying political overtones are replaced by expressions belonging to the family metaphor. Indeed, as was for *renmin*, the same goes for *tongzhi* 同志 “comrade”, which is another expression with even stronger political connotations. *Tongzhi* “comrade” is commonly used in the greetings at the beginning of talks addressed to a domestic audience, even in settings not strictly political.⁶⁴ Conversely, those speeches addressed to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan never start with “comrades”. *Zhonghua er nü* 中华儿女 “sons and daughters of China”, *tongbao* 同胞 “compatriots” and *qiaobao* 侨胞 “overseas compatriots” are used in its place. These expressions - “sons and daughters of China”, “compatriots” “overseas compatriots” - all belong to the metaphorical association between the Chinese nation and a family, which is of central importance in the discourse on the Chinese dream.⁶⁵ The use of the family metaphor is by no means a feature of Chinese political discourse only, rather it is widely used in political discourses worldwide, as it is helpful “to bring people together”⁶⁶. However, given the role of the family within the Chinese political, social and philosophical system, the association between family and government, or more generally the state, has travelled over times and has been used regardless the political system.⁶⁷ Drawing upon Dilin Liu's study, Link explains that this metaphorical association is particularly prominent in Chinese:

⁶⁴ This is the case of those speeches pronounced for new year-eves.

⁶⁵ As already explained elsewhere, the morpheme *bao* 胞 “placenta” in both *tongbao* 同胞 “compatriots” and *qiaobao* 侨胞 “overseas compatriots” provides the metaphorical nuance, even though these expressions are no longer perceived as metaphors. Gallelli (2016, 214).

⁶⁶ Ottati, Victor et al. (2014, 181).

⁶⁷ Interestingly enough, in accordance with the metaphorical association between the state and the family, Chinese leaders are also called using kinship nouns. Xi Jinping is called *Xi dada* 习大大 “Uncle Xi”, but also *Xi laoda* 习老大 “Eldest Brother Xi”, and before Xi, Wen Jiabao was known as *Wen yeye* 温爷爷 “Grandfather Wen”. For more on these epithets of Xi Jinping, see Barmé et al (eds.) 2014. For a deeper analysis of the family metaphor and the role of this “emotional politics” for the relation between the state and the citizens, especially in rural China, see Steinmüller (2018).

[T]he “Five Relations” of Confucianism list *jun* 君 ‘sovereign official’ and *chen* 臣 ‘subordinate official’ alongside family relations like *fuzi* 父子 ‘father and son’ and *fuqi* 夫妻 ‘husband and wife’ is already suggestive of a conceptual parallel between political hierarchy and family relations. [...] Despite its traditional—or what the Communists in other contexts have called “feudal”—roots, it has extended even into the informal lingo of the Communist movement itself. When Marx and Lenin arrived in China, the Party called them *lao zuzong* 老祖宗 ‘old ancestors’. During the Mao era, factory workers were sometimes *gongren dage* 工人大哥 ‘worker elder brothers’, farmers *nongmin bobo* 农民伯伯 ‘peasant elder uncles’, and soldiers *jiefangjun shushu* 解放军叔叔 ‘liberation army uncles’. The Soviet Union, until relations with Communist China turned sour, was a *laodage* 老大哥 ‘old big brother’.⁶⁸

For the purposes of this research, the family metaphor plays a key part in defining the border of the Chinese-U.S. Especially in the case of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, where a sense of belonging to a political system cannot work, the family metaphor plays a crucial role, sustaining ideologies which can be traced back long before the foundation of the PRC. Indeed, the family metaphor structures the ties between Hong Kong and Macao and the mainland. For instance, at the speech for the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of Hong Kong’s handover in 2017, the transfer of sovereignty from Great Britain to China is framed as a coming back of a son or a daughter, through the expression *huaibao* 怀抱 “bosom”:

20年前的今天，香港回到祖国的怀抱，⁶⁹

Today, 20 years ago, Hong Kong returned to the embrace of the motherland.

Or, for Macao, the four-character phrase *xie nong yu shui* 血浓于水 “blood is thicker than water” is used to convey the sense of national belonging:

澳门同胞对国家的认同感和向心力不断加强，血浓于水的民族感情不断升华，爱国爱澳成为社会主流价值观。⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Link (2013, 200-201).

⁶⁹ Xi Jinping (2017e).

Macao compatriots have strengthened their sense of identity and attractive force towards the country; their affection towards their family has steadily increased; and their love for the country and for Macao have become the mainstream values of the society.

The same considerations go to the Chinese living abroad. They are also framed as being members of the *Zhonghua da jiating* 中华大家庭 “big Chinese family”:

在世界各地有几千万海外侨胞，大家都是中华大家庭的成员。⁷¹

There are tens of millions of overseas Chinese in various parts of the world, and every one of them is a member of the Chinese family.

On the role of Chinese expatriates regarding the Chinese dream, Sheng Ding⁷² maintains that the Xi administration has made even greater efforts to engage with the Chinese diaspora, with mainly two aims: first, to shape diasporic Chinese identity and second, to use the Chinese diaspora as a means to communicate China's (that is the Party-state's) ideas and initiatives outside national borders and worldwide. By doing so, the border of the Chinese-US becomes much more fluid than that of the PRC and, as matter of fact, the Chinese dream is framed as being shared by all the Chinese people regardless the place where they reside and live. At the same time, in line with the second aim, Xi Jinping clearly states that overseas Chinese should act to *Jiangshu hao Zhongguo gushi, chuanbo hao Zhongguo shengyin* 讲述好中国故事、传播好中国声音 “tell China's story well and spread China's voice”.⁷³

The borders traced by the family metaphor and that include Hong Kong, Macao as well as Chinese living abroad also involve Taiwan. In light of the political situation in the island, the CCP's rhetoric toward this “rebel region” deserves a separate explanation and will be treated separately.

⁷⁰ Xi Jinping (2014t).

⁷¹ Xi Jinping (2014g).

⁷² Ding Sheng (2015).

⁷³ Xi Jinping (2014g).

Before turning the attention to the role of Taiwan in the discourse on the Chinese dream and how its relations with the PRC are discursively constructed, it is worth noting that, in this Chinese family, so to speak, the ethnic minority are considered members, albeit without blood relations. The expression that conveys the idea of unity, notwithstanding the differences, is *duo yuan yi ti* 多元一体 “diversity in unity”.

However, despite the political rhetoric of unity and harmony among the various nationalities living in the PRC, the discourse on the Chinese dream has also been seen as bringing about a new wave of Han chauvinism, in particular in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.⁷⁴ Xinjiang has been the set of ethnic conflict and pro-independence demonstrations as well as terrorist attacks, which have also directly hit Beijing.⁷⁵ At the same time, Xinjiang has a key role in the Belt and Road Initiative, as the main land artery cuts through the entire region.⁷⁶ Ironically, the recent campaign aiming at assimilating and controlling the westernmost region in the PRC – that saw more than 100,000 civil servants placed forcefully in the homes of the Uighurs -, is carried out under the slogan *minzu tuanjie yi jia qin* 民族团结一家亲 “United as One Family”.⁷⁷

Without delving into the concrete and political consequences that the Belt and Road Initiative brings about for Xinjiang and the other border regions, as far as this study is concerned, it is worth pointing out that, although the Chinese dream is framed as belonging to “the people of all ethnic groups in the country”, ethnic minorities are still framed as occupying the periphery. And this is not only a matter of geography. Looking at the video “China enters a new era”, the first represented participant is a little girl who belongs to one of the 56 nationalities in China. The fact that she is not of Han ethnicity, but instead comes from Tibet, can be inferred from mainly her name i.e. 次央拉姆 transcribed as Tseyang Lhamo. Also, her clothes suggest that she is Tibetan, even though they are more a Chinese revised version of what are deemed to be typical Tibetan dresses.⁷⁸ Apart from foreigners, she is the only represented participant that is not Han.

⁷⁴ Meyer (2016).

⁷⁵ In October 2013, a Uighur suicide terrorist attack occurred in Tian’an men square.

⁷⁶ It has been already argued that one of the reasons to have the terrestrial road passing through Xinjiang is to put the region under control by, among other means, boosting its economic development. Gallelli and Heinrich (2018).

⁷⁷ Bayler (2018).

⁷⁸ I would like to thank Laura Trombetta Panigadi, who noted this feature.

1		00:04	
2	 <p>我叫次央拉姆 My name is Tseyang Lhamo</p>	00:08	<p>我叫次央拉姆</p> <p>My name is Tseyang Lhamo</p>
3	 <p>六岁 I'm six years old</p>	00:11	<p>六岁</p> <p>I'm six years old</p>
4	 <p>上学前班了 I'm a preschooler</p>	00:13	<p>上学前班了</p> <p>I'm a preschooler</p>

5		01:08	
6		01:08	<p>我长大了 要去北京</p> <p>I want to go to Beijing when I grow up</p>
7		01:10	<p>看天安门</p> <p>To visit Tian'an men square</p>
8		02:39	

9			
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The dreams of all participants are in line with the objectives of the Party-state: for instance, Xie Yuanli, a welder, dreams of producing “faster, more stable and safer” high speed trains; the one of Guo Bozhi, who is the president of COMAC Shanghai Aircraft Design and Research Institute, is a “large aircraft dream” as part of the Chinese dream; Chen Zeshen, living in Dawan a village in rural Anhui province, dreams that China will lift all the poor out of poverty; Li Qiang, who works as deputy political commissioner in the People’s Liberation Army, aspires to do his work well so as to contribute to the dream of a “strong army”, and so forth. For the Tibetan girl, instead, the dream is not something that has to do with the goal that the Party-state has set. Conversely, in appearance, it has nothing to do with politics, as she says *wo zhangda le yao qu Beijing kan Tian’anmen* 我长大了要去北京看天门 “I want go to Beijing when grown up to visit Tian’an men”. Nonetheless, her dream has deep ideological roots and implications. In light of the political circumstances of ethnic minorities in the PRC, this dream appears to be a revised version of the ancient attractiveness of Chinese civilization for the “barbarians”. Put it differently, the dream of this Tibetan girl depicts the *hua yi zhi bian* 華夷之辨 “Sino-barbarian dichotomy”⁷⁹ in the 21st century, as her dream is to visit the cultural centre of China, which nowadays is represented by Beijing. Therefore, within the big family of the Chinese nation, ethnic minorities are still placed on a “cultural periphery”, whilst the Han civilization occupies the center.

On Taiwan

⁷⁹ For a discussion on the “Sino-barbarian dichotomy” in early China, see Pines (2005).

The case of Taiwan has made generations of Chinese leaders grapple with it. Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, in line with varying international and domestic contexts, the Chinese Communist Party has elaborated different strategies seeking to “unify” the country. In the early years, the discourse on bringing Taiwan under control was soaked with “harsh rhetoric”.⁸⁰

In the mid-1950s, with the end of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, which saw a brief military confrontation with Taiwan's nationalist forces with the U.S. intervention at the latter's side, this hardline approach made way for a more diplomatic and peaceful tactic: *heping jiefang Taiwan wenti* 和平解放台湾问题 “the problem of liberating Taiwan peacefully” replaced the more aggressive *wuli jiefang* 武力解放 “armed liberation”.⁸¹ But it is only at the end of Maoist era and the beginning of the new era of reforms and opening up that the strategy regarding Taiwan saw a substantial shift. The formula *yi guo liang zhi* 一国两制 “One country, two systems” elaborated by Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s was initiated into the policy towards Taiwan.⁸² This formula would allow the island to maintain its socio-economic system on the precondition that the island recognizes the PRC as the only legitimate China in the world.

Since then, economic links between the two straits have grown steadily, so that nowadays Taiwan is “deeply drawn into China's economic orbit, while its international status, in terms of both legitimacy and influence, continues to decline”⁸³.

Jingjing Li retraces the wording regarding the Taiwan issue: from *jiefang* 解放 “liberation” through *hui gui zuguo* 回归祖国 “return to the motherland” to *heping tongyi* 和平统一 “peaceful reunification” and explains this evolution in terms of a changing approach and attitude by Beijing: “the mainland has ceased to view Taiwan as a subordinate province and tends to see both of them as equal entities to be joined together within the one-China framework.”⁸⁴ However, this is not to say that the formula *jiefang Taiwan wenti* 解放台湾问题 “the problem of liberating Taiwan” is no longer used; it continues to be the basic

⁸⁰ Hickey (2009, 34).

⁸¹ Li Songlin (2009, 40-41).

⁸² Li Songlin (2009, 42).

⁸³ Huang Jing (2017).

⁸⁴ Li Jingjing (2008, 195).

expression for the issue of Taiwan in the domestic context.⁸⁵ This shows that, although through different means, Taiwan continues to be a political issue and the goal of re-unifying the motherland or, in other words, putting under control the rebellion region has never gone away. The point is that now it is through economic and diplomatic means that Chinese leaders attempt to achieve this goal.

In line with this approach, the discourse on the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is both the means and the aim: the idea of rejuvenating the country is used as a glue between the two straits, but at the same time without re-unification the realization of the dream would be impossible. Indeed, the titles of the two speeches addressed to Taiwan in the first edition of *The Governance of China* are both linked to the goal of realizing the Chinese dream. One speech was delivered when receiving Lien Chan, the honorary chairman of the Guomindang, and its title is *Gong yuan Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing de Zhongguo meng* 共圆中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦 “Together fulfill the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation”⁸⁶. The second is *dandang qi kaituo liang an guanxi qianjing, shixian minzu weida fuxing de zhongtuo* 担当起开拓两岸关系前景、实现民族伟大复兴的重托 “Take on the Task of Expanding Cross-Straits Relations and Achieving National Rejuvenation” and consists in the main points of a talk between Xi Jinping and James Soong Chu-yu, who is the chairman of Taiwan’s People First Party, and his delegation.⁸⁷

In the same way, in the book edited by the Party Literature Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee, the chapter called *gongyuan Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing de Zhongguo meng* 共圆中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦⁸⁸ “Together fulfill the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation” mostly gathers passages from Xi’s talks addressed to Taiwan: seven passages out of ten are addressed to it.

The basic assumption and rationale used to advocate joint efforts to realize the Chinese dream is that Chinese people from both mainland China and Taiwan belong to the same family. Looking at the expressions used to refer to people of both mainland China and

⁸⁵ See for instance the speeches addressed for the anniversary of the foundation of the People’s Republic of China. Xi Jinping (2014n).

⁸⁶ Xi Jinping (2014b, 266).

⁸⁷ Interestingly enough, the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is used in both titles, but these two talks are included in the chapter *fengfu “yi guo liang zhi “ shijian he tuijin zuguo tongyi* 丰富“一国两制”实践和推进祖国统一 “enrich the practice of one country two system and promote the reunification of motherland”, in the official English version simply “One Country, Two Systems”.

⁸⁸ Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.) (2013, 57-61).

Taiwan in the passages included in the book on the Chinese dream, there is not even one use of *Zhongguo renmin*. *Renmin* is used only once and to refer to the objective of making “people happy”:

我们两党应该以实现民族振兴、人民幸福为己任，促进两岸同胞团体合作，积极宣导“两岸一家亲”的理念，汇集两岸中国人智慧和力量，在共同实现中华民族伟大复兴的进程中抚平历史创伤，谱写中华民族繁荣娉盛的崭新篇章。⁸⁹

Our two parties should take the goal realizing national rejuvenation and people’s happiness as our own duty, promoting cooperation between compatriots on both sides of the strait, actively encouraging the view which sees “the two sides of the strait as one family”, bringing together the wisdom and strength of the Chinese people on both sides, calm down historical tensions along the path towards the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and write together a new chapter in the story of prosperity of the Chinese nation.

In this passage, the goal of making people happy follows the one of rejuvenating the nation, in Chinese *minzu zhenxing* 民族振兴 “national rejuvenation” or “national revitalization”. By juxtaposing the two goals, the text provides a sense of correlation, as if it were that people’s happiness would be the natural consequence of the rejuvenation of the nation. At the same time, it attempts to leverage on a goal which is in itself pretty vague, but easy to be accepted: who would go against people’s happiness? By linking these two apparently unrelated aims, the juxtaposition entails that all those who are against the rejuvenation of a “one single nation” are against people’s happiness.

The other case nears the expression *Zhongguo renmin* 中国人民 is *Zhongguo ren* 中国人. Yet, the expression *Zhongguo ren* 中国人 is specified by *liang an* 两岸 “both sides of the [Taiwan] straits”, implying that people from both Taiwan and mainland China are Chinese, Han Chinese.

For the family metaphor, in the passage above there is the idea of *liang an yi jia qin* 两岸一家亲 “both sides of the Taiwan Straits are of one family” which represents Xi Jinping’s *xin linian* 新理念 “new idea” for the development of peaceful relations between the two sides of the straits, which combines *qing, li, fa* 情、理、法 “emotional, rational and legal”

⁸⁹ Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.) (2013, 60). It is also included in Xi Jinping (2014, 256)

logic.⁹⁰ However, although the idea that “both sides of the Taiwan Straits are one family” may be seen as new, the metaphorical association on which it is based is not, as already shown in the previous section.

4.3 Conclusion

The chapter has outlined the borders that enclose the Chinese community, attempting to answer the question of “whose dream”. It has done so as part of the master frame that sees the creation of collective identities as the product of the two never-ending processes of self-ing and other-ing. Concentrating on the first of these two processes, the one of self-ing, it has outlined those that are meant to be the owners of this national dream. In particular, the analysis of the talks by Xi Jinping as well as of other materials has traced where the borders that separate the Chinese-Us from the Foreign-Them are drawn. Results show that two communities can be outlined: one whose borders are traced by political orientations, and another that coincides with a Chinese cultural community.

In particular, for the first of these two communities, by drawing upon Bakhtin’s theorization of heteroglossia, the analysis has shown the political implications of *renmin* “people” and its discursive functions in the discourse on the Chinese dream: an historical *renmin*, an abstract collective identity characterized by positive connotations and, third, the weaker social classes. Given the political connotations and ideological implications of *renmin*, the latter is largely avoided when the discourse on the Chinese dream attempts at bringing together who may not (wish to) follow the political institutions of the PRC, as it is the case of Hong Kong, Macao, overseas Chinese as well as Taiwan. When the Chinese dream is addressed to this second community, the one whose borders are traced by cultural belonging rather than political creeds, it is framed as being the dream of the Chinese family. Indeed, the family metaphor plays a key role in aligning Chinese people towards this common objective of prosperity. In the case of Taiwan, the Chinese dream therefore becomes both the tool and the aim. However, within the borders of the community made up by the Chinese family, not all the members are equal. This is exemplified by the Tibetan girl, whose dream is to go to Beijing and visit Tian’an men square. This dream exemplifies the way in which Beijing still embodies the center of the higher Chinese culture, which exercises an attractive force for the “barbarians” living in the periphery.

⁹⁰ Li Peng (2015, 1).

Looking ahead to the next chapter, it will outline the process of other-ing, as complementary to the one of self-ing. Specifically, it will answer the question of who is the other in the discourse on the Chinese dream, outlining the way in which the discursive construction of the “other” contributes to carve out the Chinese collective identity.

Chapter 5: The Other in the discourse on the Chinese dream

5.1 Introduction

This Chapter aims at analyzing the discursive construction of the Other in the discourse on the Chinese dream. It will do so as part of the master frame which sees the construction of collective identities as a twofold process of self-ing and other-ing. To quote Hall, “identities are therefore constructed within, not outside, discourse”¹, and this chapter thus attempts to describe the work of “differences” for the production of Chinese identity.

The previous chapter delineated the nature and the borders of Chinese-U.S., highlighting the existence of two types of Chinese community: one political and the other cultural. This chapter works as completion of the previous one. While the process of self-ing draws the borders, the process of other-ing, by working on differences, traces the features that distinguish the national-U.S. from the foreign-Them. By doing so, it outlines the characteristics of the Chinese community.

The Other in the discourse on the Chinese dream takes mainly two shapes: an enemy on one side, and the “ear that should listen to China’s voice”, on the other. These two shapes need to be introduced by an overview on the new definition of the PRC on the international arena as well as the relationship between the discourse on soft power and the one on the Chinese dream. The explanation of each of the two shapes will be therefore introduced by a summary that provides the ground for the analysis that follows.

5.2 External enemies in the discourse on the Chinese dream

5.2.1 Context of analysis

Before turning the attention to explaining in detail the representations of the Other in the discourse on the Chinese dream, it is worth highlighting that the Chinese dream brings about a new definition of China’s place and its role on the international arena. This new definition of the People’s Republic of China is clearly seen in the structure of the first volume of *The Governance of China* in which a whole chapter is dedicated to the relations with other *daguo* 大国 “big countries”. The chapter is titled *tuidong goujian xin xing da*

¹ Hall (1996, 13).

guo guanxi 推动构建新型大国关系, officially translated as “New model of major country relations”², but, more literally, it would be “Promoting the construction of a new kind of diplomacy with big countries”. This chapter gathers speeches with representatives of Russia, United States and Europe.³ This new kind of relations with *daguo* “big countries” is part of a broader strategy of creating *Zhongguo tese daguo waijiao* 中国特色大国外交 officially rendered as “New Model of Major-country relations”. It is worth highlighting since the very beginning that *daguo waijiao* means “diplomacy with major [big] countries”. This will turn out to be of crucial importance in this section dedicated to the linguistic and lexical analysis.

There is a widespread agreement among scholars in deeming this new definition of PRC on the international scene as an official departure from Deng Xiaoping’s *taoguangyanghui* 韬光养晦 “hiding one’s capacities and bide one’s time” towards a more proactive and assertive role, what has been recaptured in the four-character phrase *fenfa you wei* 奋发有为 “strive for achievements”.⁴ This has repercussions on China’s internal affairs. Indeed, interestingly enough, as far as PRC’s domestic policy is concerned, the chapter “New Model of Major Country Relations” in the first volume of *The Governance of China* is replaced by a chapter titled *tuidong Zhongguo tese daguo waijiao* 推动中国特色大国外交 officially rendered as “China’s Diplomacy as a Major Country”⁵ in *The Governance of China II*, that is the one published in 2017. Yet, the speeches included in this latter chapter of the second volume, though dealing with China’s foreign policy, are addressed only and solely in domestic contexts and not to an international audience. This reveals the prominent role that a more assertive foreign policy has in the PRC’s domestic affairs. This will be particularly significant also for the second shape that the Other takes in the discourse on the Chinese dream, i.e. “the ear that should listen to China’s voice”.

5.2.2 The first shape of the Other: identity through differences

² Xi Jinping (2014b, 297).

³ This is a point already noted for the discourse on the Belt and Road Initiative. Gallelli and Heinrich (2018).

⁴ For the implications of this new definition of China’s foreign policy, see Camilla T. N. Sørensen (2015), Berkofsky (2016) and Silvia Menegazzi (2017).

⁵ Here, again, the official English translation does not convey the meaning enclosed in the Chinese *daguo waijiao* “diplomacy with major countries”.

我觉得中国的强或者它崛起应该是和西方的资本主义的崛起，它不是一个样子的，因为它的根基是不一样的，它完全是两个逻辑，它们可能的崛起更多的是在经济上的一个崛起，而我觉得中国的这个强国它更有一种文化上的包容， [...] (Interview 4)

I think that China's strength or its rise is different from that of Western capitalist countries. It is not the same because its ground is different, it has a completely divergent logic. Their possible rise is based on economics, while, I think, China's becoming a strong country includes the cultural dimension [...].

As China defines itself as a major country, all the other major countries become its natural “counterparts”, or in other words, its foreign Other. This is the case, specifically, of those other major countries that “dare to dream”, as stated by Shi Yuzhi 石毓智 in his editorial published on *Renmin Luntan*. Shi's editorial was published just before Xi's visit to the United States in June 2013 to meet with Barack Obama and aims at explaining the major differences between the two most famous national dreams, the American dream and the Chinese dream. To introduce these distinctions, the editorial opens by saying:

迄今为止，敢以国家来“做梦”的只有中国和美国这种大国。要知道，不是每个国家都有资格来做梦的，只有命运掌握在自己手中，有足够大的时空去想像，有实力和自信去实现，才能自己做自己的梦。⁶

So far, only big countries like China and the United States have dared to “dream”. Not every country can dream: only with the faith in one's hands, with enough time and space to imagine, with strength and confidence to realize it, one can dream.

China is directly and explicitly juxtaposed to the United States. In addition, in the above passage from Shi's editorial, it is worth noting that the expression used to define the contemporary world's major countries is *daguo* 大国 literally “large country” or “big country”. Even though it is clear that being large implies being powerful, the expression *qiangguo* 强国 “powerful country”, in the above extract as well as in all the case studies

⁶ Shi Yuzhi 石毓智 (2013).

analysed, is exclusively used to refer to China's ambition to become a strong country or, at least, to indicate the status occupied by China before the "century of humiliation", as, for instance, in the following passage:

近代以前中国一直是世界强国之一。⁷

Before modern times China used to be one of the world's [most] powerful countries.

The use of *da* 大 "large/big" instead of *qiang* 强 "powerful" as modifier of *guo* 国 "country" can be explained in relations to the narrative of the "century of humiliation": *qiang* "powerful" is the morpheme that composes *lie qiang* 列强 "[big] powers", the expression used to designate the "imperialist powers" that invaded China in the 19th century.⁸ *Lieqiang* "[big] powers" is still used nowadays in relation to the pain suffered by China, as in the following example drawn from Xi's talk for the anniversary of the victory of China over Japan and the world war against fascism:

进入近代以后，由于列强的入侵和封建统治的腐败，中国落伍了，一步步成为半殖民地半封建社会。⁹

Following the advent of the modern era, due to the invasion of the powers and the corruption of feudal system, China fell behind and gradually became a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society.

And again, in his speech for the anniversary of the foundation of Chinese communist party in 2016:

⁷ Xi Jinping (2015e).

⁸ I would like to thank Gabriele Battaglia for raising this point and triggering in me the curiosity of examining more in details the role and value of *qiang* "powerful" as modifier of "country".

⁹ Xi Jinping (2014j)

近代以后，由于西方列强的入侵，由于封建统治的腐败，中国逐渐成为半殖民地半封建社会 [...]。¹⁰

Since modern times, due to the invasion of Western powers and the corruption of feudal rule, China gradually became a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society.

Therefore, the use of *qiang* as a modifier for other countries unavoidably carries negative overtones and recalls those foreign countries that invaded China. This is exactly what China wants to distance itself from. While presenting itself as a major country, whose strength can be compared to that of the United States, China constructs its image as being different from Others and, specifically, from the other major countries. At the anniversary of May 4 Movement in 2014, the logic of what is defined as *guo qiang bi ba* 国强必霸 “a powerful country necessarily is hegemonic”¹¹ is used to claim that China will not follow the path of the “other” countries:

中国已经发展起来了，我们不认可“国强必霸”的逻辑，坚持走和平发展道路，但中华民族被外族任意欺凌的时代已经一去不复返了！¹²

China has stood up, but we do not follow the logic that sees “national powers necessarily are hegemonic”, [we] adhere to the path of peaceful development. However, the era of the Chinese nation for being arbitrarily bullied by foreigners is gone and will never be back!¹³

There are at least two important points that deserve attention in this passage: first, the definition of what China is emerges by saying what it is not. That is to say, by spelling out that China does not accept the logic of “a strong country necessarily is hegemonic” and that it follows a peaceful path of development, it is implicitly argued that China is different from other super powers, and that, in being so, it is better. This is what Callahan calls

¹⁰ Xi Jinping (2016e)

¹¹ Even though in the English translation *qiang* “powerful” is rendered as if it was a modifier of *guo* “country”, in this case it is not. In this four-character phrase, *qiang* is a predicate. A more literal translation would be “countries, once became powerful, necessarily are [also] hegemonic”.

¹² Xi Jinping (2014e)

¹³ The official translation of this passage is contained in Xi Jinping (2014b, 189). However, as this moves away from the original in the Chinese language, another translation closer to the original is provided.

“Chinese exceptionalism”, albeit here it is at the official level: Chinese exceptionalism consists in “the idea that Chinese civilization is not just uniquely unique, but ‘uniquely superior’”¹⁴. Yet, even for the Chinese authors studied by Callahan, Chinese exceptionalism stems from “defining not what China is but what it isn’t”. China is better because it would never use military force or violence against other countries. Indeed, the narrative of China’s peaceful nature is an integral part of the discourse on the Chinese dream. To this narrative, the volume on the Chinese dream dedicates a chapter, titled: *Zhongguo meng shi heping, fazhan, hezuo, gongying de meng* 中国梦是和平、发展、合作、共赢的梦 “The Chinese dream is a dream of peace, development, cooperation and win-win.”¹⁵

The second point in the above extract that deserves attention is that, in the last clause, the level of discourse shifts from the country – exemplified in the use of *Zhongguo* 中国 “China” and *guo* 国 “country”- to the one of the nation – specified by *Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族 “Chinese nation” and *waizu* 外族 “foreign nations”. This implies that there is a homogeneity and the concepts overlap completely. Put it differently, in terms of the experiential values of the words used¹⁶, the language sustains the ideological association between the concept of country and the one of nation: the whole statement is informed by the logic of the nation-state and in doing so, it forces the nation to fit into the borders of the state. In turn, this bears the ideology of the Chinese-U.S. as a cultural community, explained in the previous chapter. At the same time, it frames the differences that distinguish the Chinese community from foreign-Others as inner properties of nationalities. Consequently, in the same way as *Zhonghua minzu shi aihao heping de minzu* 中华民族是爱好和平的民族 “the Chinese nation is a nation that loves peace”, the other nations, and specifically imperialist nations, are warlike due to their inner nature, even though this last assumption is not explicitly stated. The ideology that the Chinese nation is peaceful for its own nature is borne by the syntactical structure of the sentence above:

¹⁴ Callahan (2013, 156-157).

¹⁵ Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.) (2013, 63).

¹⁶ Fairclough (1989, 115).

中华民族是爱好和平的民族， [...]。¹⁷

the Chinese nation is a nation that loves peace [...].

The syntax of this sentence sustains its truthfulness: the use of *shi* 是 sentence, instead of having, for example, *aihao* 爱好 “cherish” as the main verb, does not provide space for any “questioning of the truth of the claim, or the satisfactoriness of the situation described”¹⁸. That is to say, the expressive value of the above sentence implies that what is described corresponds to reality.

Summing up, the discourse on the Chinese dream mainly works through binary opposition. To put it differently, it works by juxtaposing the Chinese dream and its overseas counterpart, the American dream. In the same way, the realization of the Chinese dream, that would consist in China becoming a *qiangguo* 强国 “powerful country”, is grounded on describing China’s rise as being different from other global powers. Against this backdrop, the other super powers are the “foreign-Other” in the discourse on the Chinese dream.

5.2.3. From different to enemy

In singling out recurring themes in Chinese political discourse, Qing Cao and Neil Renwick maintains that one of those addressed to the domestic audience is that of the anti-foreignness: that is to say, the idea that China is continually under attack by “hostile external and internal predators.”¹⁹ Anti-foreigner narratives were part of Mao Zedong's anti-imperialist and anti-hegemonic discourse. Indeed, it was Mao himself who coined the expression *bainian guochi* 百年国耻 “century of humiliation”: thanks to him, the hundred years following the First Opium War (1839-1842) were crystallized as the century of

¹⁷ This is the first sentence in the first extract selected for the chapter titled *Zhongguo meng shi heping, fazhan, hezuo, gongying de meng* 中国梦是和平、发展、合作、共赢的梦 “The Chinese dream is a dream of peace, development, cooperation and win-win.” In *Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi* (ed.) (2013, 65).

¹⁸ In his analysis of media discourse, Fowler maintains that specific verbs, like also modals, claim authenticity and sustains the rightfulness of what is uttered. Fowler (1991, 128).

¹⁹ Renwick and Qing Cao (1999, 112).

imperialist humiliations that had forced the Chinese to awaken, stand up, and redeem themselves in the struggle; and it would be him to indicate, in the “liberation” finally accomplished in the “year zero” of 1949, the messianic advent of a new century, all directed towards the rebirth and national revival.²⁰ However, Wang Zheng finds that in the narrative of a bullied and humiliated China that has been promoted since Tian’an men, there’s a slight change on the focus: in Mao’s political discourse, the accent was placed on depicting the Chinese Communist Party as the “hero” that saved China; but in the official narrative on the century of humiliation that has been boosted since the early 90s, the official Maoist victor narrative has been replaced by a victimization narrative.²¹

The discourse on the Chinese dream is by no means an exception: Chinese political foreign Others, especially other powerful countries, are framed as enemies attempting to hinder China’s development or causing its split off. For instance, in his talk for the anniversary of Macao’s re-union with the motherland, Xi states:

澳门各界人士要继续弘扬爱国爱澳的社会主流价值观，支持特别行政区行政长官和政府依法施政，增强社会凝聚力和正能量，共同致力于实现澳门长期繁荣稳定。同时，要防范和反对外部势力渗透和干扰，巩固澳门安定团结的良好局面。²²

People from all walks of life in Macao should continue to carry forward the social main values of patriotism and love for Macao, support the Chief Executive of Macao Special Administrative Region and the government in administering the government according to the law, enhance social cohesion and positive energy, and work together to achieve long-term prosperity and stability. At the same time, we must guard against and oppose the infiltration and interference of external forces and consolidate the good situation of Macao's stability and unity.

In the last sentence of the above extract the need to oppose interferences from abroad is placed in correlation with an *anding* 安定 “stable” and *tuanjie* 团结 “united” Macao. According to He²³, the expression *anding tuanjie* 安定团结 “stability and unity” - or “stable and united” when it is used as modifier - goes back to a 1974 directive from Mao who intended to bring to an end the struggles in Chinese society at the time. The scholar

²⁰ Fumian (2018).

²¹ Wang Zheng (2012) studies the so called “patriotic education campaign” that followed the Tian’an men movement in 1989.²¹ The campaign aimed at instilling proper “values”, especially in those students and youth that had been attracted by the so called “Western democratic values”. Wang Zheng (2012, 95-117).

²² Xi Jinping (2014r).

²³ Henry Yuhuai He (2001, 3).

maintains that, since then, it has been widely used by Chinese leaders as it “is considered to be the underlying promise for carrying out all party’s tasks”²⁴. Moreover, the correlation between the prosperity and the stability of Hong Kong and Macao is nothing new in Chinese political discourse, as exemplified by *fanrong wending* 繁荣稳定, which has become a fixed four-character phrase in China’s work reports since the late 90s, when the two regions came back to the “motherland”.²⁵ Yet, for a deeper understanding of the correlation between external forces and internal stability, the above extract should be also contextualized within the political and social situation in the PRC in 2014: this talk was pronounced in December 2014, thus, the same year that saw the eruption of the *yusan yundong* 雨伞运动 “umbrella movement” in Hong Kong. This call for opposing external forces is, therefore, directed not merely to those living in Macao, but also to the citizens of Hong Kong. As other protests movements in the PRC, including those of the 1989²⁶, the umbrella movement, according to the official discourse, was orchestrated and directed by “external enemies”.²⁷

Stability is therefore a prerogative. In his study on stability²⁸ discourse in the PRC, Thomas analyzes the way in which the Party-state has used it to legitimate its authority:

stability was discursively constructed as a positive value that served to legitimate, often indirectly, the authority of the CCP and as a negative value that worked to delegitimize the ‘other’, be that the demonstrators in 1989, *Falun Gong* demonstrators in 1999 or the ‘anti-Japan’ demonstrators in 2005.²⁹

Nowadays, it still works to align people towards a common cause. Indeed, it is conceptualized by one of the interviewees as a must for the realization of the Chinese dream:

²⁴ Henry Yuhuai He (2001, 3).

²⁵ The expression *fanrong wending* “prosperity and stability” appears for the first time in the work report issued by Jiang Zemin in 1997 and, since then, has been used in the following work reports, including the one of the 19th Party Congress.

²⁶ Zhang Liang, Nathan and Perry (2001, 419).

²⁷ So (2015)

²⁸ Sanbdy-Thomas (2013)

²⁹ Peter Sanbdy-Thomas (2013, 67).

如果国家的稳定不能保证的话，我觉得这个中国梦很难实现。比如说那些民族独立问题他可能和国外的因素或多或少和国外的因素会有点关系。(Interview 3)

I think that if country's stability cannot be guaranteed, the Chinese dream can hardly be realized. For example, those national independence issues may have something to do with foreign factors more or less.

Within the context of this call for maintaining stability, the expression *zheng nengliang* 正能量 “positive energy” in the excerpt from Xi's talk deserves further attention and analysis. After being named the most popular phrase of 2012,³⁰ this expression entered in Chinese political lexicon and has been used for everything in line with the view of the Party-state.³¹ In the case studies analyzed by this research it appears in various contexts, including the above extract. Placing this expression within the analysis of the discursive construction of the Other as an enemy for China, it emerges that this enemy is not only embodied in physical “intervention”, but it is mostly personified in ideas. In other words, while other “major countries” are other-ed in order to provide for China the ground on which constructing its own features, foreign-ideas constitute the main enemy that must be fought. The so defined “Western values” are still the Other that attempts to overturn China:

国内外各种敌对势力，总是企图让我们党改旗易帜、改名换姓，其要害就是企图让我们丢掉对马克思主义的信仰，丢掉对社会主义、共产主义的信念。而我们有些人甚至党内有的同志却没有看清这里面暗藏的玄机，认为西方“普世价值”经过了几百年，为什么不能认同？西方一些政治话语为什么不能借用？接受了我们也不会有什么大的损失，为什么非要拧着来？有的人奉西方理论、西方话语为金科玉律，不知不觉成了西方资本主义意识形态的吹鼓手。³²

Various hostile forces at home and abroad always try to make our party change its flag and change its name. Their main aim is to try to make us lose our faith in Marxism, socialism and communism. Some of us, even some comrades in our party, have not seen what it is hidden, and believe that the Western ‘universal value’ has gone through hundreds of years. Why can't we agree? Why can't some political discourse in the West be borrowed? If we accept them, there will be no big losses.

³⁰ Shi Jiangtao (2013).

³¹ Bandurski notes that “positive energy” has become a keyword since Xi took office in late 2012, highlighting that, in official news reports, it is usually associated with Party-state's control over the media, arts, and culture in general. Bandurski (2014).

³² Xi Jinping (2015h).

Why do you have to insist on keep fighting them? Some people use Western theories and Western discourse as the golden rule, and unwittingly become eulogists of Western capitalist ideology.

Whilst it cannot be denied that behind the discourse on “human rights” there are economic and geopolitical interests, nonetheless “Western values” keep working as an enemy. Indeed, the attack against the influences of ideas coming from the “West” is nothing new in Chinese political discourse, and it can be seen as the results of what Chen Xiaomei has notoriously called “official Chinese Occidentalism”, that is “an ideology that imagined a West as a counter Other subversive to ‘revolutionary’ China”.³³ Still, the discourse on the Chinese dream brings about a worsening of the war against this “enemy”.³⁴ Indeed, as Callahan highlights, following the 1989 Tiananmen movement, Beijing has attempted to “shift the focus of youthful attention away from domestic issues and towards foreign problems” and “*redirect* protest toward ‘the foreigner’ as the key enemy”.³⁵ This is true also for the discourse on the Chinese dream, in which the narrative of the Other as enemy legitimizes the status quo and provides the ground for the construction of native values.

The construction of Western idea as enemies will turn out to be of crucial importance in the section dedicated to the analysis of the ways in which the discourse on the Chinese dream constructs common interests shared by the leaders and the populace. This is precisely because this representation is intrinsic in the problem it claims to describe. However, for now, it can be said that the war against “Western values” is the other side of the coin of the one which sees the coming back of the so called “Chinese traditional culture”, as will be shown in the following chapter.

Analyzing the process of othering in Chinese political discourse is not to deny that the same procedure can be traced elsewhere. This study does not claim that this process of othering is a feature of Chinese political discourse. Conversely, it has got the same “meaning making practices” that Chengxin Pan analyses in the discourses carried by American International Relations Studies for the construction of the “China threat” theory,

³³ Chen Xiaomei (1995, 165).

³⁴ In 2013 Beijing launched a campaign against the dissemination of constitutionalism in the University and in the Academia. In 2015 Yuan Guiren, Minister of Education Minister in the PRC at that time, declared an *jue bu yunxu* 决不允许 “absolute prohibition” on “textbooks promoting Western values”. See Davies *et al.* (2016).

³⁵ Callahan (2015, 222)

albeit they are the other way round.³⁶ In other words, in the same way as the discourse on “China threat” works for the creation of the U.S. American self, the discourse on “Western values” as part of the one on the Chinese dream works for the construction of the Chinese self.

5.3 The Other as the ears of China’s voice

5.3.1 Context of the analysis

The Chinese dream is part of a broader discussion aiming at building a *guojia huayu tixi* 国家话语体系 “national discourse system” and enhancing China’s “discursive power” on the international scene. This discussion, not surprisingly, entails the wide debate on the ways to increase China’s soft power and the means through which the PRC may affirm its international role as a global power.³⁷ As Schambaugh suggests:

Over a long period of time, a distinguishing feature of China’s modernization mission has been the national pursuit of ‘comprehensive power’ (综合国力). The Chinese have wisely learned one key lesson from studying the experiences of other previous powers: genuine global powers possess multidimensional strength.³⁸

The concept of *zonghe guoli* 综合国力 “comprehensive power” embraces both a kind of soft power and hard power. It has sharp “Chinese characteristics”, as it is born in Chinese discussion on how to increase and improve China’s international status. The formulation of this concept shows Beijing’s growing concern with the need to shape its image on the international arena.

This discussion on China’s need to enhance its soft power was introduced by the previous generation of Chinese leaders. Already in 2007, soon after Hu Jintao’s introduction of the expression *wenhua ruan shili* 文化软实力 “cultural soft power” into Chinese political terminology,³⁹ Kurlantzick 2007⁴⁰ talked about a “charm offensive” launched by Beijing. Indeed, the aim of “building a culturally strong socialist country” was already central in the

³⁶ Chengxin Pan (2004, 305-331).

³⁷ For a detailed analysis of the debate on diplomacy and soft power in China, see Zappone (2017).

³⁸ Shambaugh (2013, 5).

³⁹ Hu Jintao (2007).

⁴⁰ Kurlantzick (2007).

work report pronounced by Hu Jintao at the 18th National Party's Congress.⁴¹ The ways and means Beijing adopts to achieve this goal are various: a widespread dissemination of Confucius Institutes plays a major role in portraying China as an ancient civilization;⁴² staging international events, such as the Beijing Olympics in 2008⁴³ or the Shanghai Expo, attempts to shift the discussion away from politics, in its narrow sense; and a new kind of political communication seeks to improve China's national image.⁴⁴

As far as the Chinese dream is concerned, this concept was linked to the one of soft power even before Xi Jinping visited the National Museum.⁴⁵ Yet, this debate on the need for China to increase its persuasive power on the international scene has intensified under Xi Jinping. The Chinese dream, as well as the Asian-pacific Dream, the World Dream and even the Belt and Road Initiative⁴⁶, are among the many manifestations of this intensification, even though the Belt and Road Initiative – with the huge investments it carries⁴⁷– can be deemed as a U-turn towards a harder approach to power, since it deals mostly with economic influence.

Xi Jinping has highlighted more than once the tight bond between the realization of China's rejuvenation and its discursive power. For instance, at the end of 2013, at the 12th study session of the Political Bureau of the 18th Party Congress, Xi Jinping said:

⁴¹ Hu Jintao (2012)

⁴² For the role of Confucius Institute in the strategy of enhancing China's national soft power, see Scarpari (2015, 89-93).

⁴³ For a detailed analysis of the cultural devices employed for the Beijing Olympics, see Chen Rudong (2011, 57-65) who examines this event from the viewpoint of visual rhetoric, and also Barmé (2009). For what concerns the campaign aimed at "civilizing" Chinese people that anticipated the Beijing Olympics, see Brady (2012).

⁴⁴ Tanina Zappone (2016).

⁴⁵ Li Xiguang quoted in Callahan (2015b).

⁴⁶ For the Belt and Road Initiative, interestingly, it is called *changyi* 倡议 "initiative" instead of *zhanlüe* 战略 "strategy" that is an expression much more common in Chinese political discourse. This is precisely because "strategy", belonging to the war metaphor, may convey the idea that China is pursuing geopolitical objectives through enhancing economic ties. The same view goes for the translation of the expression *xuanchuan* 宣传 "propaganda", which in China is not a derogatory term, officially translated as "publicity".

⁴⁷ China is the main investor in the project: the entire project is expected to cost more than \$1tn, and China has invested more than \$210bn. This sum does not consider the investments by Chinese companies, which have secured more than \$340bn in construction contracts along the Belt and Road. Kuo and Kommenda (2018).

提高国家文化软实力，要努力提高国际话语权。要加强国际传播能力建设，精心构建对外话语体系，发挥好新兴媒体作用，增强对外话语的创造力、感召力、公信力，讲好中国故事，传播好中国声音，阐释好中国特色。⁴⁸

To increase national cultural soft power, we must work hard to improve international discourse power. [We] must strengthen our communication skills on the international arena, carefully construct a discursive system for foreign audience, give full play to the role of new media, enhance the creativity, appeal, and credibility of our foreign discourse, [so as to] tell China's story well, spread China's voice and explain Chinese characteristics.

In this passage there are keywords central to the debate on the strategy of building a “national discourse system”: *wenhua ruanshili* 文化软实力 “cultural soft power”, *guoji huayu quan* 国际话语权 “international discursive power”, *dui wai huayu tixi* 对外话语体系 “discursive system for foreign audience”. Drawing upon concepts such as the one of soft power, discursive power and new media, the Chinese leadership shows to fully master the rules that govern international relations, as Zappone⁴⁹ maintains. In the above passage as well as elsewhere, the need for a “national discursive system” is summarized in the formula *jiang hao Zhongguo gushi, chuanbo hao Zhongguo shengyin* 讲好中国故事，传播好中国声音 “tell China's story well and spread China's voice”. This is the reason why this study calls the second shape of the other in the discourse on the Chinese dream as the “ear that should listen to China's voice”.

Indeed, the goal “to be heard” has specific purposes; the most important of them is to elevate China's status in the international arena and to find supports for this purpose. In his speech at the centenary celebration of the Western Returned Scholar Association⁵⁰ delivered in October 21, 2013, part of which is enclosed in the chapter “The Chinese dream” in the first edition of *The Governance of China*, Xi Jinping clearly says:

⁴⁸Xi Jinping (2013m).

⁴⁹Tanina Zappone (2017).

⁵⁰The Western Returned Scholars Association is affiliated to the Chinese government and consists in Chinese scholars and students who have studied abroad.

希望广大留学人员充分发挥自身优势，加强内引外联、牵线搭桥，当好促进中外友好交流的民间大使，多用外国民众听得到、听得懂、听得进的途径和方式，讲述好中国故事，传播好中国声音，让世界对中国多一分理解、多一分支持。⁵¹

I hope you will make full use of your advantage to strengthen connections and exchanges between China and other countries, acting as unofficial ambassadors to promote people-to-people friendship, and explaining China's culture, history and points of view in such a way that the people from other countries can understand and identify with china, and be ready to give it greater appreciation and support.⁵²

The main assumption underlying this passage is that a better understanding of China would imply, as a natural consequence, a greater support to this country. In this being so, the shape of the other as the “ear that should listen to China's voice” is a reaction to older ideologies, which saw China relegated to the periphery of the world. Indeed, it has been already maintained elsewhere that contemporary Chinese political discourse, and particularly the one on the Chinese dream and on the Belt and Road Initiative, is characterized by a call for a new global order.⁵³

In the above passage another element is worth highlighting: the context of the speech and the audience. Xi Jinping pronounced these words in front of the members of the Western Returned Scholar Association, which is made up of people who had spent a certain amount of time abroad before going back to China. These students and scholars had thus experienced a period of studying or researching in other countries, including European and American countries and had, probably, come across with different opinions and points of view on the political, social and economic situation in the People's Republic of China. Now, they should be the main actors in the big project of boosting China's soft power. The Chinese community to whom the Chinese dream is addressed, indeed, is formed by all Chinese, including those of Han nationality living abroad, as already shown in the previous chapter.

⁵¹ Xi Jinping (2013h).

⁵² Xi Jinping (2014b, 65-66).

⁵³ Gallelli and Heinrich (2018).

5.3.2 What is the rationale to spread China's voice?

The most important arguments carried out abroad as the reason why China's voice should be heard is that China can contribute to the development of *renlei* 人类 “mankind”. This is China's clearest manifestation of its exceptionalism. However, what is often overlooked is that this goal cannot be said to be completely new in Chinese political discourse. The idea of China's contribution to the world has been a key element since the foundation of the Chinese communist party. Therefore, in terms of a diachronic perspective, today's China's contribution to the world cannot be said to constitute a break with previous discursive practices. Nonetheless, the ways and arguments sustaining this idea have gone through substantial transformation.

Starting from the analysis of Xi Jinping's talks, the idea of building a *renlei mingyun gongtongti* 人类命运共同体 “community of shared destiny” emerges as a key concept in an attempt to align other countries towards China's global project. As Barmé suggests,

[t]he expression featured in Chinese pronouncements from as early as 2007 when it was declared that the Mainland and Taiwan formed a Community of Shared Destiny.⁵⁴

For the purposes of this research, in terms of diachronic analysis, the question is: what does this community of shared destiny replace? By looking at the work reports, it emerges that *renlei* “mankind” replaces *shijie renmin* 世界人民 “people of the world”.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Barmé (2015).

⁵⁵ It should be noted that in the speeches by Xi Jinping that are taken as case studies to analyse the discourse on the Chinese, the expression *shijie renmin* “people of the world” appears only four times, while *renlei* “human beings” as modifier of *shehui* 社会 “society”, *wenming* 文明 “civilization”, *gongtongti* 共同体 “community” and so forth appears 170 times.

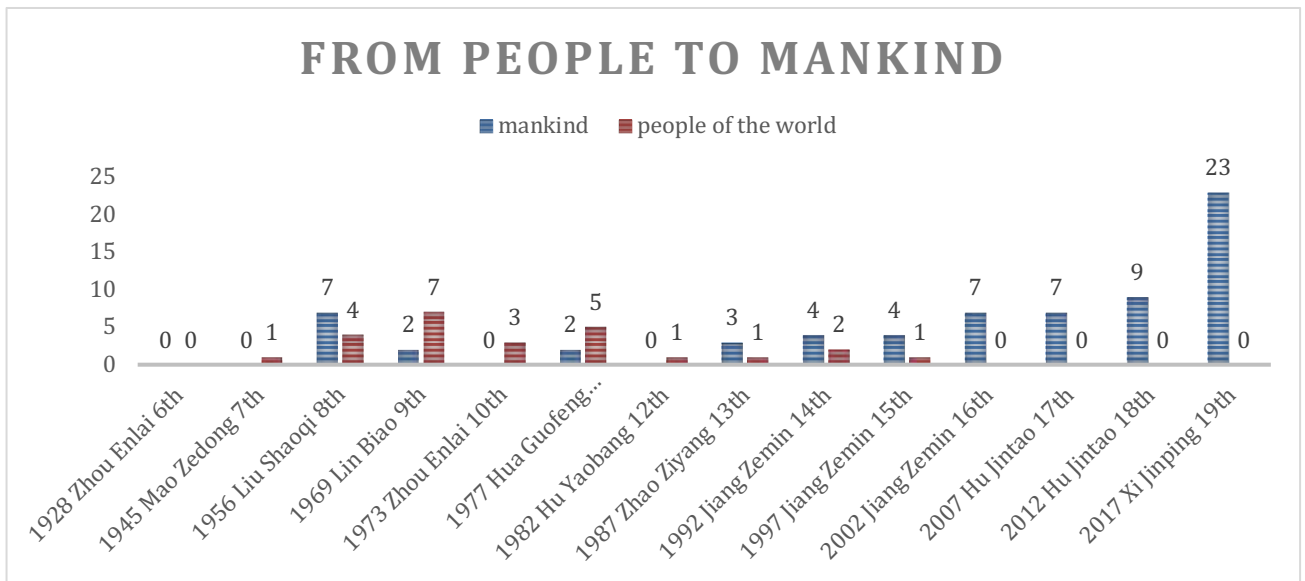


Figure 2. “From people to mankind”

The results can be understood in terms of the political “taste” of *renmin* highlighted in the previous chapter. Indeed, even when the expression “human beings” is used it is highly politicized, as in the following example taken from the work report pronounced by Liu Shaoqi in 1956:

我们的国家参加了以苏联为首的争取持久和平和人类进步的社会主义阵营[...]⁵⁶.

Our country has taken part in the socialist side which, with the Soviet Union as the head, struggle for enduring peace and the progress of human beings [...].

Of course, the historical context in which these words were pronounced was completely different from today’s. The world was divided – both ideologically and physically - into two blocks – the Western Block (lead by the USA) and the Eastern Block (lead by USSR) – and, as a consequence, the above passage implies that it was the communist block as a whole that should contribute to the development of human beings. In line with this, communism as a political ideology should lead the progress of mankind. In other words, the development of mankind, together with *chijiu heping* 持久和平 “enduring peace”, used to be framed as a political goal or mission pursued by communists countries in their “struggle”, and thus the progress of human beings should have followed the success of the communist cause worldwide.

⁵⁶ Liu Shaoqi (1956).

It is only at the beginning of the 90s that the “Chinese characteristics” of socialism have become the main contributor to the progress of mankind. Interestingly enough, Zhao Ziyang makes no references to the contribution by Chinese culture or China’s own “characteristics”. It is only after the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989 that the main source of development for “mankind” has been re-framed as being China’s own history and cultural traits. This result confirms the views which see the increasing of state-sponsored “cultural nationalism” after The Tiananmen movement in 1989, highlighted in the second chapter. This process of re-framing has seen a further acceleration and improvement since the beginning of the 21st century. In 2001 China enters the WTO and this historical event has been accompanied by a growing consciousness that, as Zappone maintains,

nowadays country's development capacities are crucially related to its ability to promote a new economic, social, cultural and political model in the international society, rather than to its availability to continue to be a follower in the established political order.⁵⁷

This new economic, social, cultural and political model it’s nothing but what Ramo called the “Beijing Consensus”⁵⁸.

In Jiang’s work report pronounced in 2002, there is the first mentioning of the contribution to the *renlei* by Chinese civilization:

中华文明博大精深、源远流长，为人类文明进步作出了巨大贡献。⁵⁹

Chinese civilization is broad and deep and has a long history. It has made immense contribution to the progress of human civilization

Then Jiang Zemin continues by specifying that China’s development and China’s becoming a “wealthy and powerful nation” will benefit the cause of “mankind” development:

⁵⁷ Zappone (2018, 255-256).

⁵⁸ Ramo (2004).

⁵⁹ Jiang Zemin (2002).

全面建设小康社会，加快推进社会主义现代化，使社会主义中国发展和富强起来，为人类进步事业作出更大贡献，这是我们党必须勇敢担负起来的历史任务。⁶⁰

Our party must bravely take on the historic responsibility of building a moderately prosperous society, accelerating socialist modernization, leading socialist China becoming developed, prosperous and strong, and making greater contributions to the cause of human progress.

Following the footsteps of Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao introduces the idea of “building a community of shared destiny” for the first time in 2007, referring to the need of further developing the relations between mainland China and Taiwan, as already anticipated above.⁶¹ Then the borders of this “community of shared destiny”, expands to embrace mankind as a whole,

合作共赢，就是要倡导人类命运共同体意识，在追求本国利益时兼顾他国合理关切，在谋求本国发展中促进各国共同发展，建立更加平等均衡的新型全球发展伙伴关系，同舟共济，权责共担，增进人类共同利益。⁶²

In promoting mutually beneficial cooperation, we should initiate a community of common destiny for all human beings. Each country should accommodate the legitimate concerns of others when pursuing its own interests; and it should promote common development for all countries when advancing its own development. Countries should establish a new type of global development partnership that is more equitable and balanced, stick together in times of difficulty, both share rights and shoulder obligations, and boost the common interests of mankind.

Here, exactly as it is for the discourse on the Belt and Road Initiative,⁶³ the idea of a “community of shared destiny” is mostly structured by the economic frame: expressions like *liyi* 利益 “interests” or *fazhan* 发展 “development” all clearly frame this “community”

⁶⁰ Jiang Zemin (2002).

⁶¹ See Hu Jintao work report 2007. See also Barmé (2015).

⁶² Hu Jintao (2012).

⁶³ Gallelli and Heinrich (2018)

as a “community of common *economic* interests”. In this way, this community is informed by the logic of economic interdependence among the states, sustaining the ideology which sees economic development as the only way to bring benefits to “mankind”.

Furthermore, the above passage contains the seed of the kind of “call for change” that characterizes Chinese political discourse abroad under Xi Jinping and in which a major role is played by the Belt and Road Initiative. These seeds can be found even in the expression *mingyun* 命运 “destiny” in “building a community of shared destiny”. Interestingly enough, Woolley rightly notes that, since the character *ming* 命 means also “a decree” or “a command” and *yun* 运 has the meaning of “to carry” or “to transport”, “the “term *mingyun* 命运 thus encapsulates the various tensions between [...] predetermination and individual volition”⁶⁴. Given the semantic nuances of *mingyun*, and placing them within the context of China’s call for a different world order, building “a community of shared destiny” in which China has a key and leading role is deemed to be the results of the predetermined “nature of things”, from the point of view of the Chinese community. Put it differently, China’s becoming a “wealthy and powerful” nation-state at the *zhong* 中 “center” of other nation states is the results of the natural course of events. As will be shown in the following part of this dissertation, this viewpoint is far from being new, both in China and elsewhere.

The real novelty in Chinese political discourse under Xi Jinping is that China will not merely contribute to mankind progress and development but proposes itself as a *fang’an* 方案 “approach” or “answer” for the illness of today’s world. In other words, the Other is shaped as in need of help, and China works as a model for it:

中国特色社会主义进入新时代，[...] 意味着中国特色社会主义道路、理论、制度、文化不断发展，拓展了发展中国家走向现代化的途径，给世界上那些既希望加快发展又希望保持自身独立性的国家和民族提供了全新选择，为解决人类问题贡献了中国智慧和方案。

This is what socialism with Chinese characteristics entering a new era means:

[...] It means that the path, the theory, the system, and the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics have kept developing, blazing a new trial for other developing countries to achieve modernization. It offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their

⁶⁴ Woolley (2015).

development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.

In this passage, *Zhongguo zhihui* 中国智慧 “Chinese wisdom” and *Zhongguo fang’an* 中国方案 “Chinese approach” can be the solution for the problems “mankind” faces and especially for “other developing countries to achieve modernization”. In this sense, Xi Jinping’s words seems to echo and implement those of Ramo:

China is marking a path for other nations around the world who are trying to figure out not simply how to develop their countries, but also how to fit into the international order in a way that allows them to be truly independent, to protect their way of life and political choices in a world with a single massively powerful centre of gravity. I call this new physics of power and development the Beijing Consensus.⁶⁵

The growing importance placed on China’s contribution to the world that characterizes Chinese political discourse and that is highlighted in the above passage can be also seen as the product of a reaction to the changing landscape in the whole world. During the time elapsed between the publications of the two volumes of *The Governance of China*, the world has seen tremendous transformations. Especially the election of Donald Trump in the United States has been seen as the clear manifestation of the relentless decline of Western style democracy.⁶⁶ Indeed, the growing importance of the concept of “a community of shared destiny” can be seen by looking at the organization of the two volumes: only the second volume, which was published in November 2017, soon after the 19th National Party’s Congress, contains a whole chapter dedicated to this concept, while the first edition does not. Therefore, despite being an expression used already by Hu Jintao, the idea of “building a community of shared destiny” has enjoyed the international changing circumstances.

This view of China’s contribution to the world is expressed also in the video called *Zhongguo jinru xin shidai* 中国进入新时代 “China enters a new era” made by the

⁶⁵ Ramo (2004, 3-4).

⁶⁶ Zhu Junqing (2016). Furthermore, for a detailed analysis of the figure of US president Donald Trump juxtaposed to Xi Jinping, see Scarpari (2018b, 162).

People's Daily. In this video, Gregory Gibb, whose Chinese name is Ji Kuisheng 计葵生, the chief executive officer (CEO) of Shanghai Lujiazui International Financial Asset Exchange Co., Ltd. (Lufax) in China, describes his Chinese dream:

我的中国梦是希望中国可以维持一个比较好的一个发展。现在中国对未来“一带一路”的发展的策略，感觉到其实中国是从未来一个比较被动的角色，已经变成一个比较主动的一个角色。

My Chinese dream is a wish that China can maintain a sound development. Now China's plan for the future development of the Belt and Road make me feel that China has changed from passive to a more active role.

His dream is structured by the economic frame, as it deals mostly with *fazhan* 发展 “development”. In addition to the linguistic dimension, the settings in which the shooting took place undoubtedly point to the economic power acquired by the PRC as well: in all the shots the represented participant is surrounded by elements of technological modernity, being them buildings and skyscrapers, or computers.

	(00:31)	<p>我是计葵生</p> <p>I'm Ji Kuisheng</p>
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	(00:33)	<p>现在担任</p> <p>Now</p>
	(00:34)	<p>国内陆金所公司的 CEO</p> <p>The CEO of Lufax in China</p>
	(01:40)	<p>我的中国梦</p> <p>My Chinese dream</p>
	(01:42)	<p>是希望中国可以维 持一个比较</p> <p>Is a wish that China can maintain</p>
	(01:44)	<p>好的一个发展</p> <p>A sound development</p>

	(01:45)	<p>现在中国对</p> <p>Now China's plan</p>
	(01:47)	<p>未来“一带一路” 的发展的策略</p> <p>For the future development of the Belt and Road</p>
	(01:49)	<p>感觉到其实中国是 从本来一个比较被 动的角色</p> <p>Make me feel that China has changed from passive</p>
	(01:53)	<p>已经变成一个比较 主动的一个角色</p> <p>To a more active role</p>

	(02:36)	
	(02:49)	

Moreover, analyzing the role of this represented participant by means of the methodological instruments provided by the Kress and van Leeuwen, it emerges that Gregory Gibb is “offering” its own experience as part of the “China’s story”, so to speak. In all the shots, except for one of them, the interviewee does not look directly at the camera. By doing so, he is providing an “item of information”⁶⁷. In this case, the information offered is his own experience of China, as conveyed also through the language he speaks, that is the Chinese language. Linking this with his Chinese dream, it follows that having a more “active” China has already benefited himself and will benefit the entire world. In the last shot, instead, the gaze is directed at the viewers, becoming a “demand” and, in this case, a demand of agreement.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that, by employing a foreigner – i.e. a non-Chinese – to promote the Chinese dream and his-her own version of this dream, the goal of realizing the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is framed as being a request made by the rest of the world, thus reinforcing the idea that it is beneficial to other countries. To put it differently, "contributing to the development of humankind" is framed as collecting consensus abroad, sustaining, in turn, China's call for the change of the international order. The example offered by this video is even more significant in light of

⁶⁷ Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, 119).

Gibb's home country, i.e. the US. In that being so, Gibb speaks on behalf of the entire US and, for extension, all those countries that are deemed to be part of the "West".

Thus, the Chinese dream acquires the connotation of a "global dream", reminding of *Tong yi ge shijie, tong yi ge meng xiang* "One World, One Dream", the slogan that accompanied the Beijing Olympics in 2008. Interestingly, the Beijing Olympics took place in a time of financial crisis for the US and other European and so-called Western countries. Indeed, as Callahan notes,

That the Great Recession started in New York less than one month after the Beijing Olympics confirmed for many that China could be successful on its own terms, especially in comparison with America. Thus, the China dream is starting to replace the American dream in the global imagination.⁶⁸

Hence, in the precursor of the Chinese dream, i.e. Beijing's Olympic "One World, One Dream", already contained the seeds of China's aspiration to become the new globalizing force in the 21st century. Gibb does nothing but enforcing the view which sees the Chinese dream replacing the American dream.

This is not the first time that foreigners are recruited in videos promoted by the Chinese government. In their study on the TV documentary series 复兴之路 *Road to Revival*, Schneider and Hwang point out the strategic use of foreign scholars to

legitimize the facts and figures and provide the viewer with the impression that the documentary is relaying a consensus among foreign and Chinese scientists in a neutral and factual way.⁶⁹

In their analysis, the two scholars find out that foreigners are used to personifying European countries, as in the case of Christopher Hughes, a British scholar at the London School of Economics, whose interview was manipulated to justify the Chinese official interpretation of the Opium War.⁷⁰ In the same way, Gregory Gibb personifies the rest of

⁶⁸ Callahan (2013, 4)

⁶⁹ Schneider and Yij-Jye Hwang (2014, 155).

⁷⁰ Florian Schneider, Yij-Jye Hwang (2014, 155).

the world, but his figure has mostly positive undertones since he embodies the rest of the world that is asking China to have a more active role in world governance and international development.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has delineated the shapes of the other in the discourse on the Chinese dream. It has demonstrated that, first, the other superpower – mainly the United States – is othered in order to highlight the differences with the Chinese community. In this sense, the results of the analysis are in line with Fumian's view which sees the Chinese dream as a device for China to look similar but, at the same time, different from the other superpower. Second, the other is also carved out as an enemy seeking to hinder China's prosperity and development. This second shape does not regard merely specific countries, but also ideas, especially the so-called "Western values", framed as being harmful to Chinese reality. Third, within the relationship between the discourse on the Chinese dream and the one on enhancing China's soft power, the Other takes the shape of "the ear that should listen to China's voice". This shape, in turn, is informed by Chinese exceptionalism, since the rationale for listening to China's voice lies in China's contribution to humankind. In addition, the source of this contribution sees a shift from the political level, mainly embodied in the expression *shijie renmin* "people of the world", to the cultural level, as exemplified by *renlei mingy un gongtongti* "a community of shared destiny".

These shapes of the Other altogether contribute to carving out the Chinese community. Indeed, the construction of the Other as the "ear that should listen to China's voice", together with the need to enhance the country's soft power work as glue internally, echoing Callahan's words:

soft power is primarily an issue of domestic politics – determining China's future direction – and only secondarily about international politics. While Chinese discussions of soft power certainly seek to build favor among foreign audiences, they are also concerned with the identity/security issue of safeguarding regime legitimacy at home.⁷¹

⁷¹ Callahan analyses the negative aspect of China's soft power – the kind of soft power that depicts the Other as an enemy - boosted by the PRC's government. Callahan (2015, 219). This is the same argument advanced by Edney (2015).

PART III: ON POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

Chapter 6: The Chinese dream as a common interest

6.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the construction of common interests within the discourse on the Chinese dream. It does so as part of the second master frame outlined in the section dedicated to the theoretical framework. While the previous part focused on the master frame for the discursive construction of Chinese identity, this part revolves around the legitimation of party's rule.

The approach to the study of CCP's legitimacy applied in this dissertation is not to deny the role played by other sources of legitimacy, chief among which is economic performance.¹ Conversely, while acknowledging the role played by economic growth and other² elements, this study argues that they cannot be detached from the one by discursive practices in shaping people's belief.³

As outlined in chapter two, this study sees the delegation of political power as based on a two-pronged process of creating common interests shared by the governors and governed and the representation of leaders' quality to rule. For the identification of these two master frames, it moves from theoretical considerations. In order to examine the legitimation of the Chinese Communist Party as constructed within the discourse on the Chinese dream, this research draws upon Weber's view of legitimacy as a "belief", integrating it with the two principles on which this belief is grounded, as theorized by Beetham. Hence, this chapter aims at singling out the common interests shared by the Party-state and Chinese citizens and the way they are framed. More specifically, the main purpose is to outline what meanings are given to this national dream in order to boost national cohesion,

¹ Economic growth and anti-foreign nationalism are often deemed to be the "*raison d'être* of the regime's legitimation" (Chin-Chuan Lee 2003, 1). Joseph goes as far as to say that "consumerism" is the new ideology in China (Joseph 2014, 187).

² Holbig (2009) maintains that during the Hu-Wen administration, the party has re-emphasized political ideology, as a reaction to perceived challenges to its own legitimacy to rule (Holbig 2009). Furthermore, Holbig and Gilley (2009), while not denying the role of economic performance and nationalism, point out a shift in emphasis from these two elements towards an ideological-institutional approach adopted by the party to gain legitimacy (Holbig and Gilley 2009). In addition, mass persuasion is also considered to be a central element in the maintaining of a party's grasp of power (Brady 2008).

³ This view follows, among others, the one of Hwang and Schneider, who outline the way in which the celebration of the People's Republic of China sixty years anniversary attempts to bridge China's contemporary modernity with party's revolutionary past for the sake of party's legitimacy (Yib-Jye Hwang and Schneider 2011).

blurring the distinction between the leaders and the common people, and making the Chinese community aligned towards this common goal.

To do so, this chapter moves from an explanation of the official definition of the Chinese dream, its evolution from 2012 to 2017, as well as its various ideological implications. In particular, the first part delves into the various discourses that are nestled and bound together in the definition of the Chinese dream. It then proceeds by delineating the main frame that provides meaning to the goal of realizing this national dream. Throughout the analysis, elements of ideological continuity and those of rupture in the discourse on Chinese dream will be discussed.

6.1 The dream of a “powerful” nation

In 2012, the official definition of the concept of the Chinese dream was:

我坚信，到中国共产党成立100年时全面建成小康社会的目标一定能实现，到新中国成立100年时建成富强民主文明和谐的社会主义现代化国家的目标一定能实现，中华民族伟大复兴的梦想一定能实现。⁴

I firmly believe that the goal of bringing about a moderately prosperous society in all respects can be achieved by 2021, when the CPC celebrates its centenary; the goal of building China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous [wealthy], strong [powerful], democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious can be achieved by 2049, when the PRC marks its centenary; and the dream of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will then be realized.⁵

The path towards the realization of the Chinese dream was thus conceptualized as being made of two steps: the first lies in building a *xiaokang shehui* 小康社会 “moderately prosperous society” for the centenary anniversary of the foundation of the Chinese communist party; the second, consists in transforming China into a *fuqiang minzhu wenming hexie de shehuizhuyi xiandaihua guojia* 富强民主文明和谐的社会主义现代化国家 “modern socialist country that is wealthy, powerful, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious” by 2049, the centenary of the foundation of the PRC.

⁴ Xi Jinping (2012c).

⁵ Xi Jinping (2014b, 38).

The concept of *xiaokang shehui* “moderately prosperous society” has a long history in China. It used to have negative overtones in Confucian thought, as it meant an imperfect and “selfish” society, juxtaposed to *datong* “great unity”, an ideal (utopian) society, which, once realized, would be the model for the world at large.⁶ Nonetheless, from the original negative connotations, it has taken on positive nuances in contemporary usage, as other ancient expressions entered into Chinese political lexicon.⁷ Nowadays, it describes a fairer society and, more specifically and concretely, it means wiping completely out poverty from the PRC. Bei Cai analyses the discourse on building a “moderately prosperous society” under the previous generation of Chinese leaders in relation to the legitimacy of the CCP, emphasizing that

The eschatological vision of a *xiaokang* society gives the CPC the discursive means of power to shape China’s social, economic and political realities.⁸

The moderately prosperous society is conceptualized in the discourse on the Chinese dream as an intermediate step in the path along a better reality, that is the era of the Chinese dream. Indeed, the second step consists in turning China into a *fuqiang minzhu wenming hexie de shehuizhuyi xiandaihua guojia* “modern socialist country that is wealthy, powerful, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious”, as mentioned above. This is the official definition attached to the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation when it was first launched.

In five years, this explanation has gone through a few but significant changes. In 2017, an additional and intermediate step between these two “centennial goals” has been added, that is, the goal of realizing *shehuizhuyi xiandaihua* 社会主义现代化 “socialist modernization” by 2035:

从二〇二〇年到二〇三五年，在全面建成小康社会的基础上，再奋斗十五年，基本实现社会主义现代化。⁹

In the first stage from 2020 to 2035, we will build on the foundation created by the moderately prosperous society with a further 15 years of hard work to see that socialist modernization is basically realized.¹⁰

⁶ For a deeper explanation of the Confucian roots of the *xiaokang shehui*, see Scarpari (2009, XXIX-XXX) and also Dessein (2017).

⁷ As was the case of *yi ren wei ben* “people as roots” explained in Chapter 4.

⁸ Bei Cai (2008, 19)

⁹ Xi Jinping (2017g).

In addition, the official definition of what concretely the realization of the Chinese dream entails has been enriched:

第二个阶段，从二〇三五年到本世纪中叶，在基本实现现代化的基础上，再奋斗十五年，把我国建成富强民主文明和谐美丽的社会主义现代化强国。¹¹

In the second stage, from 2035 to the middle of the 21st century, we will building on having basically achieved modernization, work hard for a further 15 years and develop China into a great [powerful] modern socialist country that is prosperous [wealthy], strong [powerful], democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful.¹²

The most striking change of this second definition is that, now, *qiang* 强 “powerful” appears two times. The first is in the two-character expression *fuqiang* 富强 “wealthy and powerful”, while the second soon before *guo* “country”. In this latter case, *qiang* is officially translated as “great”. The goal of transforming China into a “wealthy and powerful” and again “powerful country” is therefore central in the discourse on the Chinese dream.

As already anticipated in the previous chapter, the adjective *qiang* is always solely used to indicate the prestigious status of China before the century of humiliation and is closely linked with its semi-colonial experience. For the so called other major countries, the Chinese expression used is *daguo* 大国 “big country”. The use of two different expressions – *qiangguo* “powerful country” for China and *daguo* “big country” for the others – suggests a substantial distinction amongst them.

Besides *qiang* “powerful”, the other modifiers of *guo* “country” deserve further analysis, as each of them encloses a world of significances. Yet, before moving ahead, it is worth highlighting that the first four of these modifier, namely *fuqiang* 富强 “wealth and powerful”, *minzhu* 民主 “democratic”, *wenming* 文明 “culturally advanced” and *hexie* 和谐 “harmonious”, are part of the “core socialist values”. These values cover three levels of morality: those pertaining to the nation or state at large, those pertaining to the society and those pertaining to individuals. There values are thus structures in accordance with the doctrine of Mencius: “Among the people there is the common saying, ‘The empire, the

¹⁰ Xi Jinping (2017h).

¹¹ Xi Jinping (2017g).

¹² Xi Jinping (2017h).

state, the family.’ The empire has its basis in the state; the state has its basis in the family, and the family has its basis in oneself”¹³. The “Chinese dream” and the “core socialist values” represent two sides of a discursive coin: one speaks of a common goal; the other, of shared roots. Indeed, the four adjectives that modify *guo* “country” are moral principles at the level of the nation-state.

Fuqiang - wealthy and powerful

The two-character term *fuqiang* “wealthy and powerful” has a long history. Interestingly, it has also crossed China’s borders. Schell and Delury trace back its origin and explain that the expression was coined by Han Feizi, the Legalist philosopher lived during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).¹⁴ Then,

since the early nineteenth century, these two characters have repeatedly stood in for the profound desire among China’s cognoscenti to see their country restored to the kind of greatness their ancestors had once taken for granted.¹⁵

In addition, the leaders of Japan’s Meiji government (1868-1912) adopted the expression *fukoku kyōhei* 富国強兵 “wealthy state and powerful military” as their guiding slogan.¹⁶ One of their top priorities was indeed modernize national military in order to protect the country from Western imperialism.

Although in its modern usage in China, the four-character phrase *fuguo qiangbin* 富国强兵 “wealthy state and powerful military” has been shortened in *fuqiang* “wealthy and powerful”, it nonetheless keeps the idea of military might. In other words, the Chinese dream, thus, is not so different from its overseas counterpart, as it encloses the *qiangjun meng* 强军梦 “the dream of a powerful army”.

The nature of this “military” dream and the context in which it was born and promoted are exemplified by the video “China enters a new era”. Here the dream of a powerful army is exemplified and declared by Li Qiang, a deputy political commissar at the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) guard of honor. Li Qiang personifies his category, that includes

¹³ Mencius 4A5, in: Ivanhoe (2009, 76).


¹⁴ Schell and Delury (2013, chap. 1).

¹⁵ Schell and Delury (2013, chap. 1).

¹⁶ Chen Jingjing and Strange (2018, 7).

those working for the PLA or, more generally, those involved in the military field. This personification found expression also linguistically, as the possessive pronoun used for *mengxiang* “dream” is plural – *women de* 我们的 “our” – in the place of *wo de* 我的 “my”. The use of *women* “we” – which in the Chinese language may and may not include listeners –, instead of *zanmen* 咱们 “we” – which certainly includes speakers and listeners –, refers to the symbolic role of Li Qiang in representing his professional category and the PLA as a whole. Furthermore, it underpins the hypothesis that the video is addressed not only to domestic context, but mainly to a foreign audience, as suggested also by the English subtitles.

The shots involving the military dream open up with Li Qiang shouting a command to the troops. By doing so, it emphasizes the role of authority within this military dream. In 2015, indeed, the Chinese army was the object of reforms aiming at “consolidating CCP control over the PLA through a dual centralization of power.”¹⁷ Without delving into a detailed analysis of the military reforms, it is safe to say that the shots dealing with the “military” dream all convey the idea of hierarchical order through the composition of represented participants. Indeed, when Li Qiang is portrayed with the troops, he is always in the foreground, except for one shot, which is the fourth below. Being in the foreground entails being more prominent and, in it being so, the composition contributes to the hierarchization of the elements. Moreover, even in the shot where Li Qiang is not in the foreground, he is still the most salient participants, since he is the only subject in focus, as

1		00:54	向左转 Turn Left!
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in the fourth shot.

¹⁷ Dossi (2018, 127)

2		00:57	我叫李强 I'm Li Qiang
3		00:59	现任中国人民解放军仪仗队 Serving the PLA guard of honor
4		01:01	副政治委员 As a deputy political commissar
5		01:14	我为自己是一名仪仗兵 I'm the Honor guard

6		01:16	<p>感到无比的 光荣和自豪</p> <p>I feel very honored and proud</p>
7		02:10	<p>我的梦想就是</p> <p>是</p> <p>Our dream</p>
8		02:12	<p>立足本职岗 位</p> <p>Is to do our jobs well</p>
9		02:14	<p>是指仪仗事 业</p> <p>Devote ourselves to the cause of honor guard</p>

10		02:17	为实现强军 目标 And strive for a stronger army
11		02:19	贡献自己的 力量 By contributing my own strength
12		02:24	

The idea of a strong army is, thus, enclosed in the two-character *fuqiang*. In 2015 – the same year of the military reforms – Li Zhuhui edits a volume collecting metaphors, popular saying and quotations from Chinese classics employed by Xi in his talks and writings dealing with military affairs.¹⁸ The first extract selected by the editor claims:

我们要实现中华民族伟大复兴，一定要继续积极努力，坚持富国和强军相统一，建设巩固国防和强大军队。¹⁹

¹⁸ Liu Zhuhui (2017).

¹⁹ Liu Zhuhui (2017, 3)

If we want to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we must keep working hard, insist on integrating the [goal of] “rich country” with [the one of] “strong military forces”, and build and consolidate national defense and a strong army.

Then, after an introduction of the role on this military dream within the bigger project of realizing the Chinese dream, the features of a strong army are listed:

听党指挥、能打胜仗、作风优良²⁰

Listening to the party’s commands, being able to win battles, and have a good style of work.

Therefore, for a metonymic effect, China is identified with the Chinese communist party and, as a consequence, this dream of a powerful army is a dream of military forces that “listen to the Party’s commands”. In this being so, the Chinese *fuqiang* of today is similar to the *fukoku kyōhei* 富国強兵 “wealthy state and powerful military” of Meiji’s Japan, at least in the centralization it brings about.²¹

Minzhu - *Democratic*

Minzhu “democratic” ranks second in the national “socialist core values” as well as in features that the *Zhonghua minzu* “Chinese nation” will have once the Chinese dream will be realized. *Minzhu* in the PRC means *minzhu jizhongzhi* 民主集中制 “democratic centralism”, or *shehuizhuyi minzhu* 社会主义民主 “socialist democracy”. According to He, “democratic centralism” was coined by Mao and it constitutes the application of Party’s *qunzhong luxian* 群众路线 “mass line”, whilst “socialist democracy” first appeared in the notorious Party’s document “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the PRC”, in which the lack of democracy in the socialist political system was deemed to be one of the causes of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.²² Since then, the expression “socialist democracy” has been repeated in all the documents issued by the Party. Xi’s talks as well as the work report at the 19th National Congress do not constitute an exception.

²⁰ Liu Zhuihui (2017, 13).

²¹ On the military reforms in Meiji’s Japan, see Kublin (1949).

²² Henry Yuhuai He (2001, 280-281).

To delve into the role of “democracy” in the discourse on the Chinese dream, it is worth starting with a quotation from Xi’s talk at the 65th Anniversary of the Founding of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in 2014:

民主不是装饰品，不是用来做摆设的，而是要用来解决人民要解决的问题的。中国共产党的一切执政活动，中华人民共和国的一切治理活动，都要尊重人民主体地位，尊重人民首创精神，拜人民为师，把政治智慧的增长、治国理政本领的增强深深扎根于人民的创造性实践之中，使各方面提出的真知灼见都能运用于治国理政。²³

Democracy is not an ornament to be used for decoration; it is to be used to solve the problems that the people want to solve. In all the activities of the Party as it exercises state power, and in all of the PRC’s activities related to governance, we need to respect the people’s principal position in the country, and respect their activity. We need to look to them as our teachers, and ensure that increased political wisdom and stronger governance capability are deeply rooted in the people’s innovative practice. We need to incorporate constructive advice and opinions from all sides of society into the governance of the country.²⁴

This extract is included in a chapter devoted to the concept of “socialist democracy” in the second volume of *The Governance of China*. Since the beginning, the passage works as a reaction to former critiques raised against the PRC’s political system. *Zhuangshipin* 装饰品 “ornament” and *baishe* 摆设 “decoration” refers to the “decorative” function that is attributed to the eight democratic parties composing the People’s Political Consultative Conference of the PRC, as they are called ironically *huaping* 花瓶 “flower vases”. This paves the way for the counter argument, that is the meaning of “democracy” from the Party-state perspective. From this point of view the aim of democracy is to benefit *renmin* “the people”, in line with the notion of “democratic centralism” formulated by Mao Zedong. The centrality of *renmin* in the Chinese definition of “democracy” also emerges from the use of *renmin* in the above passage, as it appears five times in just four lines. Counter-meanings – i.e. meanings different from those previously associated to *gine* signifiers - for “democracy”, but also “human rights” are carved out around *renmin*. On this point, the success in eradicating poverty in the last decades is framed as being the

²³ Xi Jinping (2014m) and Xi Jinping (2017a, 296).

²⁴ Xi Jinping (2017b, 323-324).

affirmation of human rights in the PRC and constitutes, hence, an answer to all those claiming the violation of human rights is China.²⁵

In light of the attributes given to democracy from the Chinese perspective, Elisabeth Perry calls it “populist democracy”:

In China, populist conceptions of democracy, for which the litmus test of a “democratic” government is whether it benefits the people and reflects the will of the people, seem consistently to trump electoral conceptions.²⁶

Bringing benefits to the people is therefore a competitive frame used to provide meaning to the notion of “democracy”. On the resonance of this meaning of democracy, noticeably, in a national survey of political attitudes conducted in 2011, the overwhelming majority of respondents preferred a definition of democracy as “a system in which government leaders reflect people’s interests, serve the people, and submit to supervision by the people” instead of one meaning “a system of periodic elections in which national leaders are chosen through competition between political parties.”²⁷ The reason why an electoral democracy cannot be introduced in the PRC lies in the physical dimension of the PRC: as a result of an informal conversation, no other political system would be able to lead such a big country.²⁸

Furthermore, as Holbig and Schucher rightly maintain:

it is evident that China’s self-description as a “democracy” not only corresponds to the self-image amongst Chinese citizens, it is also part of its pursuit of the international prerogative of interpretation.²⁹

²⁵ A white paper released in February 2016 focuses specifically on the link between human right and poverty relief (Xinhua 2016).

²⁶ Perry (2015, 908).

²⁷ Zhang quoted in Elisabeth Perry (2015).

²⁸ This is the summary of the informal conversation 1.

²⁹ Holbig and Schucher (2016, 2).

Providing an alternative understanding to concepts like democracy and human rights is therefore part of PRC's strategy in the what Schambaugh calls a "discursive war".³⁰

As a matter of fact, the "populist democracy" and "electoral democracy" are two different ways of framing and, thus, understanding democracy. Consequently, instead of venturing into the debate that juxtaposes the so-called "Western-style democracy" with the Chinese "authoritarian regime", a debate that often ends up in a "blind alley", the issue that deserves attention is the meaning of *renmin* "the people" and the instrumental use of the discourse on "being with the people".³¹ It has been already pointed out that *renmin* still carries a political "taste" and is mostly used as a signifier for those politically aligned with the Party-state. In addition, it has been outlined that "being with the people" means being "right" and "correct". This has much more political implications than the debate around the views on democracy, since, as will be explained later, it is the discourse on "being with the people", among others, the ground on which Xi Jinping's symbolic power is based. A symbolic power that has become political and institutional culminated into the amendment of the Party's constitution at the 19th National Congress with the elimination of temporal limits for the general secretary. This latter has been perceived by some as a *daotui* 倒退 "retrogression" to Mao's days.³²

Wenming - Culturally advanced or civilization

Wenming is officially translated into English as "culturally advanced" when it is used as a modifier, and "civilization" when it is a noun. Besides the core socialist values and the official definition of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, *wenming* is a compound word that appears continuously in Chinese political rhetoric. In its noun function, it is used alone as well as a component of four-characters expressions, namely *wuzhi wenmin* 物质文明 "material civilization", *zhengzhi wenming* 政治文明 "political civilization", *jingshen wenming* 精神文明 "spiritual civilization", *shehui wenming* 社会文明 "social civilization" and *shengtai wenming* 生态文明 "ecological civilization". Of these civilizations, none of them is a new entry under Xi Jinping.

³⁰ Shambaugh (2015).

³¹ Interestingly, the modern term *minzhu* originates from the ancient *yi min wei zhu* 以民为主 "priority to the people" or "people first". Scarpari (2018a).

³² Informal conversation 2.

Wuzhi wenming “material civilization” and *jingshen wenming* “spiritual civilization” were first formulated by Deng Xiaoping in 1979, because:

The “two civilizations” rhetoric allowed Deng to push forward with bourgeois economic reforms while placating hard-line ideologues in the Party elite.³³

However, whilst at the beginning the main emphasis was on the construction of the “material civilization” embedded in economic growth, with Jiang Zemin it shifted towards the “spiritual civilization” and the need to “unify” values in post-Tian’an men China. At the beginning of the 21st century, Jiang introduced the third “civilization”, i.e. the political one, mostly aimed at Party members and against corruption within the Party-state.³⁴ Then, when Hu Jintao theorized the concept of *hexie shehui* 和谐社会 “harmonious society” – which concretely means a more balanced pattern of China’s socio-economic development – , he also introduced the “social civilization”. At the time, the formulation of “ecological civilization” was also on his way to officially enter into Chinese political lexicon.³⁵

In addition to these five civilizations, *wenming* is employed in many other contexts and is far from having a fixed and univocal meaning. As Boutonnet argues,

Wenming should [...] not be regarded as an autonomous concept, but rather as a palimpsest that carries several layers of meanings which overlap and at times contradict one another.³⁶

This is reflected also in the role of *wenming* in the discourse on the Chinese dream. Looking at the contexts where *wenmin* occurs, it assumed two main meanings. In its first usage, *wenming* is semantically close to *wenhua* “culture”. This is the case, for instance, of the references to the *5000 duo nian wenming lishi* 5000多年文明历史 “more than 5,000 years of civilization” of the Chinese nation, which are ubiquitous in Chinese political talks and writings addressed to both domestic and international contexts. Or again,

³³ Dynon (2008, 86).

³⁴ Dynon (2008, 100).

³⁵ For a more detailed explanation of the contents of these civilizations, see Dynon (2008, 86).

³⁶ Boutonnet (2011).

Zhonghua wenming yuanyuan liuchang 中华文明源远流长 “the Chinese civilization has a long history” is also quite common. Then, for a metonymic effect, *wenming* designates the people that are bound together by a shared culture. That is to say, *wenming* stands also for the re-constructed Chinese cultural community, or better the “Chinese family”, analysed in chapter 4.³⁷ When it means cultural community whose borders are drawn by re-constructed cultural traits, *wenming* is used also for other cultural communities:

要尊重世界文明多样性，以文明交流超越文明隔阂、文明互鉴超越文明冲突、文明共存超越文明优越。³⁸

We should respect the diversity of civilizations. In handling relations among civilizations, let us replace estrangement with exchange, clashes with mutual learning, and superiority with coexistence.³⁹

The second meaning covered by *wenming* is “civilized”, understood as the progress of human development and opposed to “uncivilized”, “barbarian”. In this sense, *wenming* is associated to the discourse on citizens’ *suzhi* 素质 “quality”, which “justifies social and political hierarchies of all sorts”⁴⁰.⁴¹ The bond between the discourse on *wenming* and the one on *suzhi* is so tight that the two expressions are sometimes used together, as in the following passage:

在前进道路上，我们要始终高度重视提高劳动者素质，培养宏大的高素质劳动者大军。
[...]提高包括广大劳动者在内的全民族文明素质，是民族发展的长远大计。⁴²

³⁷ Kaufman conducts a similar analysis on the meanings of *wenming* in contemporary Chinese political discourse. According to the scholar, *wenming* has three different meanings: 1) culture; 2) cultural community; 3) civilized. Therefore, Kaufman considers culture and cultural community as two different meanings covered by *wenming*. However, this study does not make this distinction, because the second of these meanings is deemed to be the result of a metonymy. Kaufman (2018).

³⁸ Xi Jinping (2017g).

³⁹ Xi Jinping (2017h).

⁴⁰ Kipnis (2006, 295).

⁴¹ It exists a quite large body of literature dealing with the discourse on *suzhi* “quality” and its political implications in contemporary China. For a useful introduction, see Tamara Jacka (2009, 523-535). For a comprehensive study on *suzhi* in academic and political contexts, see Delia Lin (2017).

⁴² Xi Jinping (2015a).

On the way forward, we must always attach great importance to improving the quality of work and cultivating a contingent of high-quality workers. [...] Improving the civil quality of the entire nation, including the broad masses of workers, is a long-term plan for national development.

The *suzhi* of individuals are therefore framed as weighting on and determining the development of the nation, where nation is understood as an abstract collective identity. In the work report at the 19th National Congress, this correlation between the individual *suzhi* and national prosperity is created and emphasized by means of parallel sentences:

人民有信仰，国家有力量，民族有希望。要提高人民思想觉悟、道德水准、文明素养，提高全社会文明程度。⁴³

When the people have ideals, their country will have strength, and their nation will have a bright future. We will help our people raise their political awareness and moral standards, foster appreciation of fine culture, and enhance social etiquette and civility.⁴⁴

Thus, the discourse on *wenming*, *suzhi* and also *wenming suzhi* triggers a mechanism of auto-control and auto-govern. By doing so, the discourse on the Chinese dream carries on the “civilizing project”, which, as Tomba argues:

aims at producing a strong correlation between the *suzhi* (quality) of the population and the strengthening of the nation, between the “responsibilization” of the citizenry and the goal of an orderly and productive market society.⁴⁵

Therefore, although in the official translation of those features that the Chinese nation will have by 2049 *wenming* is translated as “culturally advanced”, the Chinese *wenming* also encloses the meaning of being “civilized”. Indeed, in all its various meanings, *wenming* keeps “revolving around notions of excellence and high standards of culture, social

⁴³ Xi Jinping (2017g).

⁴⁴ Xi Jinping (2017h).

⁴⁵ Tomba (2009, 592).

practices and morality”⁴⁶. By doing so, it represents a form of “ideational governance” at home and “soft power building efforts” abroad, as Klimeš and Marinelli maintain.⁴⁷

Hexie – *Harmonious*

The concept of *hexie* 和谐 “harmonious” or “harmony” has its roots in China’s distant past. It enters into Chinese political vocabulary soon after the events of June 4, 1989, and then “rose steadily from keyword to buzzword to paradigm”⁴⁸ with the Hu-Wen administration. *Hexie shehui* “harmonious society” articulates and accompanies the political life under the fourth generation of Chinese leaders.

In the case studies analyzed here, it appears in mainly two contexts, excepts when it is used as modifier of *guo* “country”. First, *hexie* refers to the need to “harmonize” the social relations among individuals, different social classes and so forth. In this sense, *hexie yinsu* 和谐因素 “harmonizing elements” are distinguished from *bu hexie yinsu* 不和谐因素 “disharmonizing elements”, even though it is not clearly specified which element falls under the two categories:

劳动关系是最基本的社会关系之一。要最大限度增加和谐因素、最大限度减少不和谐因素，构建和发展和谐劳动关系，促进社会和谐。⁴⁹

Relationships among workers are one of the most basic social relationships. It is necessary to maximize the harmonizing elements and minimize disharmonizing elements, build and develop harmonious labor relations in order to promote social harmony.

Interestingly, in its dealing with social relations, *hexie* often appears together with *wending* “stability” or “stable”, forming a four-character expression. Even more interesting, keeping and preserving *hexie wending* 和谐稳定 “harmony and stability” is framed as a duty of the government. In talking about the need to *jiejue fazhan zhiliang he xiaoyi wenti* 解决好发

⁴⁶ Boutonnet (2011).

⁴⁷ Klimeš and Marinelli (2018, 321).

⁴⁸ Delury (2008, 38).

⁴⁹ Xi Jinping (2015a).

展质量和效益问题 “solving the problems concerning the quality⁵⁰ and efficiency of [economic] development” at the Second Conference of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, Xi said

如果经济增长速度挺高，但政府没有税收，没有钱干政府要干的事，民生和公共服务无从改善，社会也难以和谐稳定。⁵¹

If the economic growth rate is quite high, but the government does not have taxes, there is no money to do what the government has to do, people's livelihood and public services cannot be improved, and it is difficult to maintain harmony and stability in society.

This is the only case where the possibility of not maintaining “harmony and stability” is conceptualized through the adjective *nan* 难 “hard”, “difficult” in predicative function followed by the final conjunction *yi* 以. This speech is clearly addressed to the Party-state. In all the other linguistic contexts in which *hexie wending* occurs and which are addressed to Chinese citizens as a whole, the expression is introduced by, mostly, *weihu* 维护 “safeguard”, but also *cujin* 促进 “promote” or *baochi* 保持 “preserve”. It appears, thus, that the greatest attention and importance in order to safeguard harmony and stability in contemporary Chinese society is attached to government’s work and behavior. In this sense, the discourse on harmony flows into the one on the anti-corruption under Xi Jinping, that will be analysed in more details in the following chapter.

The second meaning of “harmony” pertains to the relationship between humans and nature, and the need to tackle environmental degradation, as exemplified by the following extract:

绿色发展注重的是解决人与自然和谐问题。⁵²

Green development focuses on solving the problem of harmony between humans and nature.

⁵⁰ It is worth noting that the Chinese term for “quality” in this context is *zhiliang* 质量, not *suzhi*. Scholars usually argue that the difference between these two expressions lies in the fact that *suzhi* is used for humans, while *zhiliang* for non-humans. However, Lin (2017, 85-89) challenges this quite common view, arguing that it is a matter of potentiality: “*zhiliang* measures the standard achieved of an end product, whereas *suzhi* points to the level of unseen, inherent capacity for future growth and development” (86).

⁵¹ Xi Jinping (2015f).

⁵² Xi Jinping (2015f).

The last modifier of *guo*, *meili* 美丽, is also concerned with the need to halt pollution as it represents a major issue in today's China.

Meili – Beautiful

Jianshe meili Zhongguo 建设美丽中国 “building a beautiful China” firstly appears in the work report at the 18th National Congress, in the section dedicated to the theme *da li tuijin shengtai wenming jianshe* 大力推进生态文明建设 “Vigorously promote the construction of the ecological civilization”⁵³ Then, “[u]nder Xi Jinping, ‘Advance Ecological Civilization and Build a Beautiful China’ became a mantra,” as Marinelli argues.⁵⁴ Indeed, in the 19th work report, the title of the section concerned with natural environment changes into *jiakuai shengtai wenming tizhi gaige, jianshe meili Zhongguo* 加快生态文明体制改革, 建设美丽中国 “Speeding up Reform of the System for Developing an Ecological Civilization, and Building a Beautiful China”, signaling growing attention paid to ecological sustainability.

Despite the rhetoric, however, Golden highlights that:

even though awareness of ecological risk is high among emergent civil society, ministry advisers, policy-makers and opinion-makers, the management of ecological risk is hampered by contradictory priorities and criteria in the meritocratic evaluation of performance by government and Party officials, on the one hand, and the need to generate wealth, on the other.⁵⁵

The goal of “building a beautiful China” does not only pertain to an ecological aspect, but it also covers the promotion of country's attractiveness. In other words, while “building an ecological civilization” goes straight to the need of a sustainable economic growth and the necessity to adjust the current model of development, “building a beautiful China” emphasizes also attractiveness of the country for both Chinese citizens and foreigners. This

⁵³ Hu Jintao (2012).

⁵⁴ Marinelli (2018, 377).

⁵⁵ Golden (2017, 14).

again resonates with an aspect of the national discourse constructed by the current Japanese political leadership.⁵⁶ Indeed, *Toward a Beautiful Country* is the title of a book written by the current Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, and published in 2006. In the book, Abe laid the foundations for his first and second terms at the helm of the country presenting his idea of a society providing “multiple opportunities” to the citizens also revitalizing the economy and renovating the educational system, but, above all, strengthening Japan’s position internationally.⁵⁷ The recurrent theme of making one’s own country “beautiful” equates Chinese and Japanese political discourses.

6.2 The Chinese dream as a historic mission

Through the analysis of the several modifiers of *guo* “country” in the official definition of the Chinese dream, it has been demonstrated that various discourses weave together within the one on the national dream, and most of them are far from being new, as the ideologies they sustain are but a continuation of former ones. In addition, many of these discourses show similarities with the ones taking place overseas. A few affinities with modern and contemporary Japan have been noted.

All these features - that China will have once the Chinese dream is realized - can be summed up in “China becoming a powerful nation”, and, possibly, a model for other countries as explained in the previous chapter. Looking at this goal through the lens of the theorization on political legitimacy, the Chinese dream is conceptualized as a common interest *per se*. However, the real significance of this national dream resides in the imaginary it can inspire. Results of the case studies demonstrate that what really provides meaning to this national dream is its being framed as a *lishi shiming* 历史使命 “historic mission”. In all the speeches analysed, the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation – never of the “Chinese people” – is structured as being a long-cherished objective pursued by the Chinese people. Even the expression *lishi shiming* “historic mission” appears repeatedly in reference to this objective, as for instance in the work report pronounced at the 19th National Congress:

⁵⁶ I would like to thank Professor Fuess for this point.

⁵⁷ S. Abe (2006) and Halloran (2007)

九十六年来，为了实现中华民族伟大复兴的历史使命，无论是弱小还是强大，无论是顺境还是逆境，我们党都初心不改、矢志不渝，团结带领人民历经千难万险，付出巨大牺牲，敢于面对曲折，勇于修正错误，攻克了一个又一个看似不可攻克的难关，创造了一个又一个彪炳史册的人间奇迹。⁵⁸

Over the past 96 years, to accomplish the historic mission of national rejuvenation, whether in times of weakness or strength, whether in times of adversity or smooth sailing, our Party has never forgotten its founding mission, nor wavered in its pursuit. It has united the people and led them in conquering countless challenges, making enormous sacrifices, meeting setbacks squarely, and courageously righting wrongs. Thus we have, time and again, overcome the seemingly insurmountable and created miracle upon miracle.⁵⁹

Within the process of framing the Chinese dream as the culmination of a historic mission, three aspects deserve particular attention: the starting point of this historic mission, the guiding principles on which it is based and, third, the way to achieve it. For clarity of exposition, a paragraph will be dedicated to each of them.

The starting point: “the old bad days”

The starting point of this historical mission goes back long before the foundation of the PRC. Indeed, the historical *renmin* put forward and analysed in chapter four is exactly the owner of this mission. The historic and historical nature of this mission is already intrinsic in the expression *fuxing* 复兴 “rejuvenation”, which is compound by *fu* 复 “repeat”, “resume” and *xing* 兴 “prosper”, “rise”. Indeed, as Wang Zheng maintains,

The use of that word [*fuxing*] underscores an important point: the Chinese view their fortunes as a return to greatness and not a rise from nothing.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Xi Jinping (2017g).

⁵⁹ Xi Jinping (2017h).

⁶⁰ Wang Zheng (2013).

This significance emerges also from the linguistic context in which *fixing* was used before Xi Jinping took the reins of the country. For instance, in the work report issued in 2007, the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” is already defined as a “historic mission”:

我们党自诞生之日起就勇敢担当起带领中国人民创造幸福生活、实现中华民族伟大复兴的历史使命。⁶¹

Since the day in which our party was founded, it has bravely taken on the historic mission of leading Chinese people in achieving happy lives and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Framing the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation as a historic mission is therefore not a novelty. The same frame was already pointed out by Bondes and Heep in their study, and the two scholars suggest that it

serves to provide a long-term vision that connects the country’s collective historical memory with a future vision. Both [Jiang and Hu’s] administrations portray the party as the legitimate authority to guide the Chinese nation into a bright socialist future.⁶²

The discourse on the Chinese dream keeps functioning by making references to a historical mission that only the Chinese communist party has the capacity to accomplish. This mission is constructed by juxtaposing a mythical golden age of prosperity of the Chinese nation with the narrative of the century of humiliation. The first passage in the first page of the volume dedicated to the concept of the Chinese dream provides a good example. It is an excerpt taken from a talk made by Xi on the 15th of November 2012, hence before its official announcement. This passage begins with the two epochs of the past - i.e. the old good days and the old bad days, so to speak - and then ends by opening up a bright future for the Chinese nation:

⁶¹ Hu Jintao (2007)

⁶² Bondes and Heep (2013, 324).

我们的民族是伟大的民族。在五千多年的文明发展历程中，中华民族为人类文明进步作出了不可磨灭的贡献。近代以后，我们的民族历经磨难，中华民族到了最危险的时候。自那时以来，为了实现中华民族伟大复兴，无数仁人志士奋起抗争，但一次又一次地失败了。中国共产党成立后，团结带领人民前仆后继、顽强奋斗，把贫穷落后的旧中国变成日益走向繁荣富强的新中国，中华民族伟大复兴展现出前所未有的光明前景。我们的责任，就是要团结带领全党全国各族人民，经过历史的接力棒，继续为实现中华民族伟大复兴而努力奋斗，使中华民族更加坚强有力地自立于世界民族之林，为人类作出新的更大的贡献。⁶³

Our nation is a great nation. Over more than 5,000 years of development of [our] civilization, the Chinese nation has made indelible contributions to the progress of human civilization. Following the advent of modern times, our nation has suffered great hardships and has reached the most dangerous time. Since then, countless people with lofty ideals have risen to fight in order to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, but all of them have failed, again and again. Since its foundation, the Chinese Communist Party has united and led the people to follow the example and struggle hard, turning the poor and backward old China into a new China that is increasingly wealthy and powerful, making the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation show itself in all its brightest prospects as never before. Our responsibility is exactly to receive the historical baton, and unite and lead the whole party and the people of all ethnic groups in the country to keep working hard in order to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, make the Chinese nation stand firm and strong in the forest of the world's nations, and make new and bigger contribution for mankind.

Before turning the attention to these epochs, it is worth noting that these words are addressed mostly to the Chinese cultural community, as exemplified in the recurrent use of *minzu* “nation”, instead of *renmin* “people”. *Minzu* appears three times in *Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing* “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”, and other six times as *minzu* alone or *Zhonghua minzu*. *Renmin*, instead, appears only twice and in both occurrences it is “united and led” by the party. Therefore, this rejuvenation is framed as being of the Chinese cultural-community; and, even more interesting, it is this cultural community that will stand up “in the forest of the world’s [*minzu*] nation”.

Going back to examine the various eras, these are: (1) an undefined golden age of the Chinese nation; (2) a period when China suffered “hardships” and that begins with modern times; (3) an era when China has embarked on the path towards its rejuvenation. These last two are juxtaposed by means of the common expressions in Chinese political discourse, *jiu*

⁶³ Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.) (2013, 3).

Zhongguo 旧中国 “old China” and *xin Zhongguo* 新中国 “new China”, aiming at emphasizing the clear-cut line that distinguishes them.

Since the beginning of the “old China” various men have *fendou* 奋斗 “struggled” to overturn China’s conditions, or better to *qiu guo qiu min* 救国救民 “save the country, save the people”. In these words, once again, a semantic world is enclosed. *Fendou* “struggle”, as Fumian explains, is a keyword that appears at the dawn of Chinese modernity and that, since then, has travelled together with the nation, transforming its undertones several times, yet never losing its essence.⁶⁴ Nowadays, it keeps functioning in the discourse on the Chinese dream to construct a referential object and a shared goal to be achieved. At the same time, it helps juxtaposing these “old bad days” of the Chinese nation with the prospect of a bright future, framing it as a continuous historical line, as *lishi de jielì bang* 历史的接力棒 “historical baton” itself suggests. This line finds its starting point in the need to *qiu guo qiu min* “save the country, save the people”, an attempt that saw all the men “with lofty ideals” - before the CCP - failing:

实现中华民族伟大复兴始终是近代以来中国人民最伟大的梦想。无数志士仁人前仆后继、不懈探索，寻找救国救民道路，却在很长时间内都抱憾而终。太平天国运动、戊戌变法、义和团运动、辛亥革命接连而起，但农民起义、君主立宪、资产阶级共和制等种种救国方案都相继失败了。战乱频仍，民生凋敝，丧权辱国，成了旧中国长期无法消除的病痍。⁶⁵

Realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has always been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since modern time. Countless people with lofty ideals looked and searched for ways to save the country and save the people, but they all ended up in regrets for a long time. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement, the Reform Movement of 1898, the Boxer Uprising as well as the Revolution of 1911 emerged one after the other, but all their plans to save the country, including the various peasant uprisings, constitutional monarchy, and bourgeois republicanism, have failed. The frequent wars, the destitution of people’s lives, the humiliation of the nation and loss of its sovereignty became the disease and plague that the old China could not eliminate for a long time.

⁶⁴ Fumian (2014).

⁶⁵ Xi Jinping (2013i).

This is an extract of Xi's talk in the occasion of the anniversary of Mao's birthday in 2014.⁶⁶ Interestingly enough, the “old bad days” are framed by the disease metaphor - through *bing li* 病疢 “disease and plague”. The disease metaphor unavoidably recalls the humiliating term of the *Dong Ya bingfu* 东亚病夫 “sick man of East Asia” attached to China at the turn of the 20th century. Arguably, this metaphor has its origin in the spread of opium addiction in 19th century and was then applied to the entire country for its political, social, military and economic weakness. As Haomin Gong maintains, the disease metaphor has had a key role in Chinese nationalism:

the “Sick Man of East Asia” (*Dong Ya bingfu* 东亚病夫), among other terms, may be the most vociferous expression of Chinese nationalism with respect to disease. The Chinese, as a nation, were regarded as being weak and sick physically, and by extension, spiritually. Remarkably foreign in its origin, the term had been detailed in both real and imagined ways, so as to spur a nationalistic sentiment. Understandably, its *foreign* character was markedly stressed, and as a result, the Sick Man of East Asia has become a national unconscious, the specter of which has to be exorcised repeatedly on various occasions thereafter.⁶⁷

As will be shown, this is not the only context where the disease metaphor is employed in the discourse on the Chinese dream. It is used to frame the problem of corruption within the Party-state, and, also within this other context, the disease metaphor cannot be conceptualized without the ghost of the humiliation suffered by China.

Therefore, in the discourse on the Chinese dream, the narrative on the “century of humiliation” still occupies a central position. Even the context chosen to put forward the Chinese dream reminds of the humiliation suffered by China. Xi Jinping discussed it for

⁶⁶ This talk is quite notorious, because here Xi downsizes Mao Zedong's mistakes. In particular, he does so in the following passage:

革命领袖是人不是神。尽管他们拥有很高的理论水平、丰富的斗争经验、卓越的领导才能，但这并不意味着他们的认识和行动可以不受时代条件限制。不能因为他们伟大就把他们像神那样顶礼膜拜，不容许提出并纠正他们的失误和错误；也不能因为他们有失误和错误就全盘否定，抹杀他们的历史功绩，陷入虚无主义的泥潭。

Revolutionary leaders are [just] men, they are not gods. Although they have a high theoretical level, rich experience, and excellent leadership qualities, this does not mean that their understanding and actions are not influenced by conditions and limits of their times. [We] cannot worship them like gods or refuse to allow [people] to point out and correct their errors just because they are great, nor can we totally repudiate them because they made mistakes and obliterate their historical achievements, [this would lead] into the quagmire of nihilism.

Interestingly, part of this speech is reported in Xi Jinping (2014a), but this passage is excluded.

⁶⁷ Haomin Gong (2016, 126).

the first time at the end of a tour of the permanent exhibition titled “Road to Rejuvenation”, which

reflects the Opium War of 1840 onward, the consequent downfall into an abyss of semi-imperial and semi-feudal society, the protests of people of all social strata who had suffered, and the many attempts at national rejuvenation.⁶⁸

In this sense, the Chinese dream does not represent an ideological rupture in this Chinese political discursive practice.⁶⁹ Conversely, it can be said that within the discourse on the Chinese dream, the one on the century of humiliation has acquired a greater importance: it is the logical foundation for the very existence of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. To put it differently, if there had not been the humiliation suffered by China, there would be no need of talking about its “rejuvenation”. In this sense, this study echoes Callahan, who labels China a “pessoptimistic nation”⁷⁰, using this expression also in relation to the discourse on the Chinese dream.⁷¹

“Spiritual” ties: the Chinese spirit between “cultural traditions” and “revolutionary legacy”

Alongside the narrative of the humiliation, the discourse on the Chinese dream works on the construction of a type of philosophical or spiritual tie, whose main expression consists in the *Zhongguo jingshen* 中国精神 “Chinese spirit”. It is defined as follows:

中国精神[...]就是以爱国主义为核心的民族精神，以改革创新为核心的时代精神。这种精神是凝心聚力的兴国之魂强国之魂。⁷²

the Chinese spirit [...] is the national spirit with patriotism at its core, and it is the spirit of the times with reform and innovation at its core.⁷³

⁶⁸ <http://en.chnmuseum.cn/tabid/520/Default.aspx?ExhibitionLanguageID=83>

⁶⁹ For the role of museums in the ideological continuity in China, see Cammelli (2016, 119-120).

⁷⁰ Callahan (2010).

⁷¹ Callahan (2014).

⁷² Xi Jinping (2014a, 40).

Not surprisingly, in light of the “back to Confucius”⁷⁴ phenomenon, this spirit is framed as stemming from 5000 years of uninterrupted civilization. A chapter in the volume dedicated to the Chinese dream is entirely dedicated to the *Zhongguo jingshen* “Chinese spirit”, and the first line in the first passage of this chapter explicates:

中华民族有着五千多年的文明史，创造和传承下来丰富的优秀传统文化。 ⁷⁵

The Chinese nation has more than 5000 years of history of civilization, it has created and inherited the rich and outstanding traditional culture.

The so called “traditional culture” thus plays a key role and it is a fundamental part of this Chinese spirit. Indeed, the expression *minzu jingshen* 民族精神 “national spirit”⁷⁶ – instead of *Zhongguo jingshen* – is also widely used. Not to mention the quotations from Chinese classics that are spread in Xi’s talks and writings, which have been also collected in two books edited by *Remin pinglun bu*.⁷⁷ Furthermore, in the work report issued at the 19th National Congress, Xi once again emphasizes the closed ties between what is defined as *wenhua zixin* 文化自信 “cultural confidence”, and the realization of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”:

文化兴国运兴，文化强民族强。没有高度的文化自信，没有文化的繁荣兴盛，就没有中华民族伟大复兴。 ⁷⁸

Our country will thrive only if our culture thrives, and our nation will be strong only if our culture is strong. Without full confidence in our culture, without a rich and prosperous culture, the Chinese nation will not be able to rejuvenate itself.

⁷³ Xi Jinping (2014b, 42).

⁷⁴ It is the translation by the author of the title “Ritorno a Confucio”. Scarpari (2015).

⁷⁵ Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.) (2013, 33).

⁷⁶ “National spirit” appears already in the work report issued in 1987. Zhao Ziyang (1987).

⁷⁷ Renmin ribao pinglunbu (2015) and Renmin ribao pinglunbu (2018).

⁷⁸ Xi Jinping (2017g).

Initially, there were three “confidences”, that is to say *daolu zixin* 道路自信 “confidence in our road”, *lilun zixin* 理论自信 “confidence in our theories” and *zhidu zixin* 制度自信 “confidence in our institutions”. The fourth confidence was added later under Xi.⁷⁹

Each of the two volumes *The Governance of China* dedicates a chapter to the role of culture in contemporary China. The one in the first volume entitles *Jianshe shehuizhuyi wenhua qiangguo* 建设社会主义文化强国 “Building a powerful socialist cultural country”⁸⁰, highlighting the close ties between culture and the realization of the dream of becoming *qiang* “powerful”. This is the only case where there is an explicit reference to the goal of becoming a *qiangguo* “powerful country”. For instance, the chapter dedicated to *fazhi* “law based governance”, which is another key theme in recent Chinese political discourse, is titled simply *Jianshe fazhi Zhongguo* 建设法治中国 “Building a law based governed China”, without referring to the goal of *qiangguo*. In the second volume, the title of the chapter dealing with culture is *Jianding wenhua zixin* 坚定文化自信 “Strengthen Cultural Confidence”, and none of the chapters’ titles mentions *qiangguo*. Furthermore, all the talks included in these two chapters – in both volumes of *The Governance of China* – are addressed to domestic contexts, never to a foreign audience, signaling the role of social glue attached to culture.

In addition, the voices in the underground of major cities in the PRC, like Beijing, call for abiding by *Zhonghua minzu de chuantong meide* 中华民族的传统美德 “traditional virtues of the Chinese nation”

各位乘客，尊老爱幼是中华民族的传统美德。请把座位让给需要帮助的乘客。谢谢您的合作。

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Attention passengers: respecting the elderly and taking care of children are traditional virtues of the Chinese nation. Please relinquish your seats for those passengers that need help. Thank you for your cooperation.

Remarkably, while other pieces of information are translated into English, this is not, as if other nations did not have the virtue of “respecting the elderly and taking care of children”.

⁷⁹ Feng Pengzhi (2016).

⁸⁰ The official translation in Xi Jinping (2014b) is “Culturally Advanced China”

⁸¹ It was recorded during the fieldwork in Beijing.

The revival of an “essentialized” Chinese culture, especially Confucianism⁸², begins in the PRC in 1990s and constitutes an integral part of the process of framing the present days as being in continuity with prerevolutionary Chinese history.⁸³ Now “traditions”⁸⁴ are no longer deemed at odds with Chinese political ideology. Conversely, cultural values are placed alongside with revolutionary legacy. The chapter devoted to the Chinese spirit mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph provides a good example of this new form of Chinese syncretism embedded in the Chinese spirit. The second page of that chapter refers to the so called “models”, in particular, Xi quotes Lei Feng (雷锋) of Mao’s time, Guo Mingyi (郭明义) Luo Yang (罗阳) of more recent days:

要大力加强思想道德建设。雷锋、郭明义、罗阳身上所具有的信念的能量、大爱的胸怀、忘我的精神、进取的锐气，正是我们民族精神的最好写照，他们都是我们“民族的脊梁”。要充分发挥各方面英模人物的榜样作用，大力激发社会正能量，为实现中国梦提供强大精神动力。⁸⁵

We must vigorously strengthen the ideological and moral construction. Lei Feng, Guo Mingyi and Luo Yang’s energy of beliefs, their care of love, their spirit of selflessness, and the spirit of progress are the best portrayal of our national spirit. They are “backbone of our nation”. [We] must give full play to the role of good examples of these heroic models, stimulate vigorously the positive energy of the society in order to provide a powerful spiritual motive force for the realization of the Chinese dream.

Here it is worth noting the use of *zheng nengliang* “positive energy” already encountered in the previous chapter. The “positive energy” that opposes the evil “Western ideas” is, thus, to be found in these figures, weaved together with the “Chinese traditional value”. In particular, in 2012 Lei Feng has been the object of a two-year-long government propaganda campaign encouraging China’s citizens to adopt a good moral behavior. As Jeffreys and Su Xuezhong explains,

⁸² The view that Confucianism cannot be boiled down to a single coherent school of thought and that many and even conflicting values coexist under its umbrella is also expressed by Paderni (2015).

⁸³ To be fair, the revival of Confucianism began not in the PRC, but in other Chinese societies and among overseas Chinese, as Dirlik maintains (2011).

⁸⁴ For “traditions”, this study adopts the critical approach developed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983).

⁸⁵ Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.) (2013, 34).

Repackaging Lei Feng enables the CCP to emphasize a core continuity of the socialist modernization project in the form of ethical citizen behaviors, even as understandings of modernizing China and Chinese citizenship have changed.⁸⁶

The Chinese spirit is, accordingly, a hybrid that combines the so-called “Chinese traditional culture” with Chinese revolutionary legacy for the sake of China’s becoming a *shehuizhuyi xiandaihua qianguo* “powerful modern socialist country”. By doing so, what used to be viewed as an “obstacle to modernity, appears now as the source of a better, superior, modernity – or at least as a cure for some of the ills of western modernity”⁸⁷, to quote Dirlik. Confucianism, indeed, is a case in point.

Interestingly, this is a feature that, once again, contemporary Chinese political discourse shares with Meiji’s Japan:

The tension inherent in the effort to articulate linkages between economic-technological modernity and (essentialized) cultural identity echoes the way in which culture became a battleground during Meiji and early Showa eras in Japan.⁸⁸

The way to achieve it: economic development as top priority

It has been demonstrated so far that realizing the Chinese dream is framed as a historical mission pursued long before the founding of the Chinese communist party. In line with this frame, a new shape of Chinese syncretism, which conjugates the so called “cultural traditions” and “revolutionary inheritance” – mostly exemplified in the Chinese spirit – has been elevated as guiding principle along the path towards this “historical dream”. Nonetheless, whether it is political ideology or Chinese traditions that is meant to align and guide Chinese people toward this goal, *fazhan yiran shi dangdai Zhongguo de di yi yaowu* 发展依然是当代中国的第一要务⁸⁹ “[economic] development is still the top priority of contemporary China”. It is so regardless of the *xin changtai* 新常态 “new [economic] normality” characterized by a slower economic growth rate: economic development keeps

⁸⁶ Jeffreys and Su Xuezhong (2016, 40)

⁸⁷ Dirlik (2002, 27).

⁸⁸ Golub (2016).




⁸⁹ Xi Jinping (2015c).


being the *yingdaoli* 硬道理 “absolute principle”, to quote Deng’s famous expression widely used also by the current general secretary.

The video “China enters a new era” offers significant examples of the emphasis placed on economic development. Three represented participants – thus three dreams – out of seven deal with it, including the one pertaining to the benefits that China’s development over the past three decades has brought to the war against poverty. If then we add the one of the foreigner (Gregory Gibbs), i.e. China maintaining “a sound development”, it emerges that the video embedded in itself the idea of “development is the top priority”. Below, a detailed analysis will be provided for the two most relevant “dreams”: high speed train and large aircraft.

Starting with the high-speed trains:

1	 <p>腾讯视频 立即下载</p> <p>我叫谢元力 My name is Xie Yuanli</p>	00:18	我叫谢元力 My name is Xie Yuanli
2	 <p>腾讯视频 立即下载</p> <p>一名焊接机械手操作工 a welding machine manipulator</p>	00:19	一名焊接机 械手操作工 A welding machine manipulator

3		01:19	<p>我们的中国 梦是</p> <p>Our Chinese dream</p>
4		01:21	<p>让我们生产 的高铁</p> <p>Is to produce high speed trains</p>
5		01:23	<p>更快、更 稳、更安全</p> <p>Featuring faster, more stable and safer</p>

6		01:25	链接世界、 造福人类 So as to connect the world and benefit mankind
7		01:27	
8		02:35	

The above shots clearly celebrate the achievements in the industrial field of high-speed trains in the PRC. In addition, the seventh shot attempts to create an equilibrium between natural environment and economic development by juxtaposing high speed trains on the

left and green plants on the right, all surmounted by a blue sky. In the last shot, again, Xie Yuanli, the protagonist of this “high-speed train dream”, is surrounded by a landscape made up of both natural and artificial elements. This attention to the natural features is in line with the aforementioned goal of building a “Beautiful China”, while preserving development as top priority.

Moreover, analyzing the way in which the relationship between Xie Yuanli and the surrounding environment is constructed, it appears that Xie Yuanli functions mostly as a “narrative voice”. In other words, despite the efforts to personalize this “high speed trains” (mostly visible in the second and last shots), the main emphasis is not on Xie Yuanli, but on the trains and the technologies he describes. This is mostly clear in the use of the focus: Xie Yuanli is not placed in a sharp focus compared to other elements, as it was in the case of the military dream, for instance.

The same effect is achieved in the “large aircraft dream” by means of the size of the participants. Indeed, Guo Bozhi functions as “narrative voice” as well. For example, in the third and fifth shots the main protagonist is the large aircraft, while the men serve merely to provide a unit of measurement. Put it differently, in these shots the men are the touchstone, compared to which the size of the aircraft can be understood. By doing so, these shots provide the idea of the magnitude of technological development.

Additionally, the fact that Guo Bozhi is just a “narrative voice” is provided also linguistically. Instead of using a personal pronoun, Guo affirms that “The large aircraft dream is a part of the Chinese dream”. In that being so, in the case of the “large aircraft dream” there is no attempt to personalized it. The fact that this is just a part of a larger national dream is sustained also by the use of PRC’s flag. In three shots (the first, the third and the eighth) out of nine, PRC’s flags are on the walls. In particular, even though in the eighth shot the flag is not in focus, the contrast between colors makes it relevant.

In terms of the relational value of images, as for all the other participants, all these dreams represent “offers”. Indeed, none of the participants look directly at viewers, except for the final clips, where they are filmed one after the other and smile. As a matter of fact, the entire video is structured in such a way to, first, provide pieces of information relating to the contents of this “national dream” and, only in a second moment, establishing a direct relationship with viewers by means of direct gazes. Moreover, all of them smile, so that

“the viewer is asked to enter in a relation of social affinity with them”, while, in the background, Xi Jinping explains the Party’s duties and PRC’s goal.⁹⁰

1		00:23	我叫郭博智 I'm Guo Bozhi
2		00:24	是中国商飞 上海飞机设 计研究院院 长 President of China COMAC Shanghai Aircraft Design and Research Institute

⁹⁰ Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, 119).

3		00:29	
4		01:29	<p>大飞机梦，就是中国梦的组成部分</p> <p>The large aircraft dream is a part of the Chinese dream</p>
5		01:32	<p>航空公司愿意买</p> <p>Those aircrafts that airlines want to by</p>

6		01:34	飞行员愿意 飞 Pilots like to fly
7		01:35	中国的商用 飞机 Are the commercial aircrafts we want to make
8		02:35	
9		02:47	

These two dreams – the “high speed dream” and the “large aircraft dream” support the faith in scientific and technological development as the way to solve all problems. This, once again, does not constitute a novelty. “Development as Panacea” has been also found as a key frame by Bondes and Heep under the previous leaderships, namely Jiang and Hu’s. Furthermore, the two scholar point out that from Jiang administration to Hu’s one, important changes occur:

[While] Zhu [Rongji] calls for more ‘comprehensive development’ [...] Wen [...] goes further in promoting the more ambitious idea of ‘coordinated development.’ Faced with growing challenges to CCP legitimacy caused by public discontent as a result of social inequality and economic degradation, he places an even stronger focus on social justice, sustainability and regional balance, [...].

The concepts introduced by Wen Jiabao are tightly bound with Hu Jintao’s own contribution to Party’s political ideology, i.e. *kexue fazhanguan* 科学发展观 “the scientific outlook on development”. As it is clear from the use of *kexue* “scientific”, this political contribution is anchored to the ideology of “scientism” mentioned in chapter 2. Furthermore, talking on development, Dirlik raises another issue, that is:

one problem that has not received sufficient attention, however, is the idea of “development” itself. The program suggested by “the scientific outlook on development” (科学发展观 *kexue fazhan guan*) for instance, has noted the importance of making adjustments in development policies to alleviate ecological and social problems and move toward more “sustainable” development, but it does not question the idea of development itself.⁹¹

The same goes for the discourse on the Chinese dream. Even though, the main contradiction in today’s China has turned into the one “between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life”⁹², as

⁹¹ Dirlik (2014b, 285)

⁹² Xi Jinping (2017h).

proclaimed in the work report at the 19th National Congress, the way to solve it has not changed. In other word, today's PRC has already solved the contradiction "between the growing material and cultural needs of the people and the backward social production" that has characterized the whole period of reforms and opening up since its beginning until the 18th National Congress. However, the way to fulfil "people's ever-growing needs for a better life" is still based on the ideology of developmentalism, that is, as Dirlik defines it, the

ideological orientation characterized by the fetishization of development, or the attribution to development of the power of a natural (or even, divine) force which humans can resist or question at the risk of being condemned to stagnation and poverty.⁹³

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the construction of common interests within the discourse on the Chinese dream. In particular, in its first part, the analysis has centered on the official definition of the Chinese dream. It has outlined the main changes occurred between 2012 and 2017. It has then delved into the ideological weight of each of the adjectives used to describe the features that the PRC will possess once its centennial dream will be realized. The analysis has demonstrated that the discourse on the Chinese dream bonds together various discursive practices that are far from being new. Among these, *fuqiang* has also travelled abroad, while others are shared with other countries.

The second part has centered on the main frame that provides meaning to the Chinese dream, i.e. "historical mission". Put it in a different way, the realization of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is framed as being a historical mission pursued by China long before the foundation of the CCP. Within this frame, three "sub-frames" have been object of analysis: the starting point of this historical mission; the guiding principles and the way to achieve this goal. Once again, results reveal that the discourse on the Chinese dream, in spite of superficial innovation, keeps working on and sustaining "older" ideologies.

⁹³ Dirlik (2014a, 30-31).

Chapter 7: Representing leaders' qualities to rule

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses how the image of the leadership figure is constructed through discursive practices. This corresponds to the second part of the master frame which sees legitimacy as based on the two principles 1) of “common interests” shared by the ruled and the rulers, and 2) of “separation” of the rulers from the ruled. The previous chapter has focused on the first principle, highlighting the process of discursive construction of common interests. In particular, it has demonstrated that various “old” discursive practices are nestled together within the discourse on the Chinese dream and the way in which this national dream is framed as a “historic mission” pursued by the Chinese people together with the party. The Chinese dream represents a common interest *per se* shared by the party and the people. Framing the Chinese dream as a historic mission enhances its symbolic power, and makes it the common denominator for the various self-governing practices, such as, for instance, the one related to the discourse on *wenming* “civilization”.

While the previous chapter was concerned with the Chinese dream as a common interest and its “productive power” of aligning people, this chapter, instead, analyses the other side of this discursive coin, that is the ground on which Party’s qualities to rule is based. In other words, it focuses on the ways in which the Chinese communist party is presented as being the only and sole force able to lead the country towards its “rejuvenation”. It does so precisely because, to quote Beetham,

Rules of power [...] are considered rightful in so far as they select the qualified and exclude the unqualified, and ensure the dominance of the superior and the subordination of the inferior.¹

Before analyzing in detail the ways in which the CCP ensures its own rule, it is worth introducing a “paradigm shift”, as Health² calls it, which occurred in 2002. At the 16th National Party Congress, the Chinese communist party defined itself a *zhizheng dang* 执政

¹ Beetham (1991, 77).

² Health (2015). Heath, Timothy R.. 2015. *China's New Governing Party Paradigm: Political Renewal and the Pursuit of National Rejuvenation*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

党“governing party”, officially moving away from the previous definition of *geming dang* 革命党 “revolutionary party”. This new paradigm, albeit problematic considering the CCP’s historical and theoretical evolution, concretely, “aligns the [Chinese communist] party with governing elites”³. Against this backdrop, the representation of contemporary Chinese leaders' qualities to rule appears as a patchwork made up of various elements in which political ideology is just one of them. This makes the CCP even more exposed to a legitimacy crisis.

The chapter is structured into three parts and each of them corresponds to the sub-frames emerged from the empirical research. More specifically, the analysis reveals that the party's qualities to rule are constructed mostly by resorting on the personal qualities of Xi Jinping and on the party leadership’s willingness to overcome its own shortcomings. Whilst this latter is found out also by Bondes and Heep⁴ in their study of official frames under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, references to “personal qualities” are a feature of the discourse on the Chinese dream.

7.2 Personal qualities

The construction of Xi Jinping’s figure as an ideal leader is an integral part of the discourse on the Chinese dream and on China’s new era. Precisely for his central and centralizing figure, Barmé labels Xi the “the Chairman of Everything”,⁵ recognizing, since the very beginning, the process of accumulation of political power in his hands and the construction of symbolic power aura around him. Furthermore, his figure represents one of the main novelties in contemporary Chinese political discourse from a diachronic perspective, especially in relation to his immediate predecessor, Hu Jintao, who had a much lower profile. These “personal qualities” mark the beginning, or better, the return to a kind of personalized political style, which, in turn, triggers a “charismatic turn” in the ongoing legitimating process.

The construction of Xi Jinping’s image entails various practices, two of which appears to be especially relevant for the purpose of the present dissertation: the visual representation of Xi Jinping in both volumes *The Governance of China* and *Xi’s shi yuyan* 习式语言

³ Health (2015, 39).

⁴ Bondes and Heep (2013).

⁵ Barmé (2015, XXI).

“Xi’s language style”, to which various books and articles have been dedicated over the past few years. These two practices correspond to the linguistic and visual levels of analysis. For ease of exposition, these two levels are analysed separately. However, it is worth underlining that they are by no means independent or subordinate to one another. Conversely, they are complementing each other, as they work as a unified whole creating a narrative around Xi Jinping for the sake of the CCP’s legitimacy. In the course of the analysis, when in need, references to the linguistic dimension in the visual analysis and vice versa will be made.

7.2.1 Framing Xi through images

This section is concerned with the results of the analysis of visual materials as included in the case studies. Specifically, by means of the methodological tools provided by Kress and van Leeuwen, it analyses pictures portraying Xi Jinping in the two volumes *The Governance of China* as well as a sequence in the video dedicated to “China’s new era” in which the leader himself appears.

Before turning the attention towards the narrative created by these pictures and the ways in which the image of Xi is framed, it is worth pointing out that the focal point of all the pictures included in the *The Governance of China*, with no exception, is Xi himself. In other words, it is Xi, neither the PRC nor its governance, the authentic protagonist of all the images selected in the two volumes.⁶ This is also in line with the Chinese title of the volumes, that is *Xi Jinping tan zhiguo lizheng* 习近平谈治国理政 literally “Xi Jinping talks about governance and administration”. It is officially translated as “The Governance of China” with the name “Xi Jinping” towering above in capital letters. As a matter of fact, already the title of the volumes suggests that the most important topic consists of Xi Jinping and not in the governance of the country.

Starting with the image on the cover of both books, it portrays Xi in a rounded frame, recalling the practices in vogue during Mao’s time. Indeed, already Zappone highlights that

⁶ The Chinese and English versions contain the same pictures, with minor variations concerning the order. In particular, the order of the first two in the first volume is inverted: the first image in Xi Jinping (2014a) corresponds to the second in Xi Jinping (2014b) and vice versa.

The book's cover reveals an evident continuity with the past: a portrait of the leader in a rounded frame stands out from a beige background, above a red letter title, which recalls to mind Maoist publications.⁷

Moreover, some pictures represent Xi together with the other members of the Standing Committee⁸, but none of them appears ever alone, except for Xi. Therefore, despite the sense of collective leadership provided by these pictures, it can be inferred that representing Xi at the center of the other top leaders makes them just additional elements of information about Xi's governmental style, but they are by no means essential in the construction of China's *gushi* “story”. Looking at all the pictures included in both volumes, it emerges that the most relevant and essential element in the discursive construction of Xi's image is the section revolving around Xi's personal life before taking office in Beijing. To put it differently, these pictures are meant to “win hearts and minds across China”⁹, quoting Roberts’ explanation of the functions performed by photography in China.

It is no chance that, in the first book of *The Governance of China*, the first sequence of pictures dedicated to Xi Jinping deals with the leader’s life prior to moving to the central government.¹⁰ This sequence is placed soon after the index and, thus, before any introduction to the main theme of the book, i.e., the “governance” of the country. Looking at the order in which the pictures are arranged, they are organized mostly chronologically. All the other pictures in both volumes portray Xi after assuming the offices in both domestic and international contexts. Hence, the order *per se* suggests that the nomination of Xi as the leader of both the party and the country is based on his personal qualities and the political career he experienced before 2012. This is confirmed and upheld by the appendix in the same book. Unlike the rest of the volume where passages of Xi’s talks and writings are selected to explain the principles leading the country, the appendix, written by the publisher, describes Xi Jinping as a leader “close to the people” and lists the qualities that make him fit to rule the country. Xi’s words are quoted just in the title of the Chinese version, which is *Renmin qunzhong shi women liliang de yuanguan – ji Zhong Gong Zhongyang zongshiji Xi Jinping* 人民群众是我们力量的源泉——记中共中央总书记习

⁷ Zappone (2018, 257).

⁸ The first and third picture in the second sequence in Xi Jinping (2014a) and the eight in the first sequence in Xi Jinping (2017a)

⁹ Roberts (2013, 104).

¹⁰ This is the main difference between the two books, as the second one does not include pictures portraying Xi before 2012. (Xi Jinping 2017a, 2017b)

近平¹¹ “Popular masses are the source of our strength- Records on general secretary of the CCP, Xi Jinping”. The title of the English version, instead, does not quote Xi, as it is “Man of the people. Profile of Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC”^{12,13} Concerning the appendix, again Zappone’s comments are worth quoting:

An appendix, edited by the publisher, further strengthens this heroic narrative around Xi Jinping, giving more details on his private life, and so contributing to the picture of a strong, hard-working, cultured and decisive leader who has a great "affection for the common people" and embodies the realization of China's dream.¹⁴

Analyzing more in detail the first sequence of pictures, that is the one revolving around Xi’s personal life before 2012, the images are roughly arranged chronologically: starting from the young Xi and ending with more recent days. Among the first three pictures portraying young Xi, the caption of the second one informs that it was taken in 1972 when Xi was *cha dui hui Jing tanqin* 插队回京探亲时 “back to Beijing from the countryside to visit [his] relatives”. Xi Jinping, indeed, was among those *zhiqing* 知青 “educated youth” sent to the countryside, as part of the *shang shan xia xiang yundong* 上山下乡运动 “Up to the Mountain, Down to the Village Movement” during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). For this reason, Xi Jinping spent seven years in Liangjiahe (梁家河) a small village in the north of Shaanxi Province to “learn” from peasants.¹⁵

The picture portrays young Xi in the foreground, with a bag on his shoulder, surrounded by a natural environment.

¹¹ Xi Jinping (2014a, 423).

¹² Xi Jinping (2014b, 475).

¹³ The appendix is structured into seven sections, and each of them has a title made up of a quotation from Xi’s talk. The second section deals with the Chinese dream, as explicated in the official English version

¹⁴ Zappone (2018, 258).

¹⁵ In recent years, Liangjiahe has become a primary destination for communist pilgrims (South China Morning Post 2016).



Figure 3: Xi Jinping 1972, Beijing.¹⁶

The meaning of this picture is more interactional and emotional than just descriptive. Xi looks directly at viewers' eyes, hinting at a smile. Probably, the picture was originally just for family recollection and, therefore, the relationship set up by Xi's direct gaze regarded family affections. However, in the context of the volume *The Governance of China*, it acquires a new significance, as the relationship established by the direct gaze no longer concerns relatives but, rather, the leader and its people.

Interestingly enough, the same picture is also on the cover of *Xi Jinping de qi nian zhiqing suiyue* 习近平的七年知情岁月 “Xi Jinping’s Seven Years of Educated Youth”¹⁷, a book recording interviews with the villagers that worked with Xi when he was in Liangjiahe during the Cultural Revolution. The editorial notes explain that the main objective of collecting these interviews is to *Jianghao Xi Jinping zongshuji de gushi* 讲好习近平总书记的故事 “tell well the story of the general secretary Xi Jinping”¹⁸. The reference made by these words goes straight to the debate on the need to increase China’s discursive and soft powers in international contexts, already mentioned in chapter 5 in relation to one of the shapes of the Other in the discourse on the Chinese dream. In that being so, Xi Jinping’s story coincides with the story of the entire country, placing the content of Xi’s story at the center of China’s story.

¹⁶ Xi Jinping (2014a, VIII).

¹⁷ Qiu Ran and Huang Shan (2017).

¹⁸ Qiu Ran and Huang Shan (2017, 1)

Within Xi's story, his experience of the Cultural Revolution acquires a key role in shaping the figure of the ideal leader: a leader that knows the harsh life of the ordinary people because he went through it. Indeed, as already touched upon while analyzing the meanings covered by *minzhu* "democracy" within the context of Chinese official discourse, it is the discursive construction of close ties between Xi and the *renmin* the ground on which Xi's symbolic power is based. Noticeably, these ties take roots during the Cultural Revolution. On this point, Bandurski maintains that

The story of Xi's time in Liangjiahe has become the most basic foundation of the myth of Xi, of a politics of adoration built atop a narrative of sacrifice and hardship, in a place where Xi is imagined to have set down deep roots among the common people.¹⁹

Xi's experience during this decade of political and social turmoil, to use a euphemism, functions as the logical foundation for the narrative of "Xi as a man of the people", so to speak. A section in the appendix at the end of the first volume of *The Governance of China* is devoted to the attention paid by Xi to *renmin*, in its meaning of weaker social classes. This section is titled *Xiang ai ziji de fumu na yang ai laobaixing* 像爱自己的父母那样爱老百姓 "love the common people as they were one's parents"²⁰, officially rendered as "Regarding the People as Parents"²¹. From the point of view of the language employed in the Chinese title, it is worth lingering briefly on *ai* 爱 "love/to love". Using *ai* "to love" to characterize the relationship between party members and the masses is by no means fortuitous, nor is it a novelty. In his analysis of "linguistic engineering" during Mao's era, Ji Fengyuan explains that

In the spirit of revolutionary love, cadres were asked to establish intimate relationships (*jiao zhixin pengyou*) with the laboring masses; they were told that they could turn for advice to comrades who were friends who know each other's hearts (*zhixin pengyou*); and, of course, cadres were officially loved by the revolutionary masses, who were encouraged to use the language of popular love songs to call them *zhixin ren* (the person who understands my heart).²²

¹⁹ Bandurski (2018).

²⁰ Xi Jinping (2014a, 428).

²¹ Xi Jinping (2014b, 479).

²² Ji Fengyuan (2004, 82).

Zhixin ren 知心人 “the person who understands my heart” is also widely used nowadays in referring to the approach that party members should have towards the masses. This “intimate relationship” is also underlined by Xi's words in the video on China's new era:

全党同志一定要永远与人民同呼吸、共命运、心连心，永远把人民对美好生活的向往作为奋斗目标。

The entire Party and the Chinese people of all ethnic groups should share the same breath and the same fate and link with each other. The whole party should always take the aspirations of the people to live a better life as the focus of all the CPC comrades' efforts.

The three parallel phrases *tong huxi, gong mingyun, xin lian xin* 同呼吸、共命运、心连心 “share the same breath and the same fate, and link with each other's heart” contribute to frame the relationship between party members and the *renmin* “people” as pertaining to emotional attachments. This, once again, cannot be deemed new.

With Xi Jinping, the novelty lies in the positive connotations attached to the experience during the Cultural Revolution in order to cultivate this affection and intimacy with popular masses. Therefore, even though that decade is deemed as being “utterly wrong in theory and practice”²³, the experience that Xi Jinping, as well as others of his generation, had is considered in the best light. Liangjiahe is the theme that links the first and the second volume of *The Governance of China*. The first picture of the opening sequence in the second volume, indeed, portrays Xi during his visit at Liangjiahe in 2015:

²³ After a few days of silence over the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the People's Daily publishes an editorial stating that: “文化大革命”在理论和实践上是完全错误的，它不是也不可能是任何意义上的革命或社会进步。The Cultural Revolution is utterly wrong in theory and practice. It is not and cannot be a revolution or social progress in whatever sense. Ren Ping (2016).



2015年2月13日，习近平在陕西延安市延川县文安驿镇梁家河村看望村民，并就革命老区脱贫攻坚进行实地调研。

Figure 4: Xi Jinping with villagers of Liangjiahe, Shaanxi Province, in February 2015.²⁴

Xi Jinping is precisely at the center of a group of men, who represent the villagers of Liangjiahe. Already the position suggests that Xi is the main represented participant. Kress and van Leeuwen note that central composition plays an important role in Chinese communities, maintaining that

Perhaps it is the greater emphasis on hierarchy, harmony and continuity in Confucian thinking that makes centering a fundamental organisational principle in the visual semiotic of their culture.²⁵

While this consideration may need more research, it is safe to say that centrality in itself implies occupying a principal position.

In addition, the prominent role of Xi Jinping is not only given by his position within the composition of the picture, but also by the villagers' gaze, as most of them look at him. Moreover, their smiles convey the meaning of people's satisfaction towards their leader, and, by extension, of the government's work. Indeed, under the symbolic value of Liangjiahe, the photo highlights Xi and government's commitment to *tuopin* 脱贫 “shake off poverty”, which is the main goal of building a “moderately prosperous society”, as explained before. At the same time, the language used in the caption reveals the political accents of tackling poverty, because the expression used to pinpoint to poor areas is *geming laoqu* 革命老区 “old revolutionary base areas”. These areas, despite their

²⁴ Xi Jinping (2017a, 111).

²⁵ Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 195).

historical importance for the CCP and the Chinese revolution, have been left behind by Chinese economic development and are still impoverished. Therefore, the “war”²⁶ against poverty declared by the Chinese communist party - and pursued with more vigor since the early 2000s, from Hu Jintao onwards - has a deep symbolic meaning for the Chinese communist party and its political legitimacy. This theme will be analysed in more detail in the linguistic level of analysis.

Poverty is also at the center of the first volume of *The Governance of China*. In addition to the three pictures portraying young Xi during and soon after the Cultural Revolution, other pictures in the first sequence depict Xi before taking office in Beijing in moments in which his dedication to helping the weaker is visible. For instance, he is represented at listening to *laobaixing*'s opinions or working together with them:



Figure 5: Xi Jinping and *renmin* between 1983 and 1995.²⁷

All this contributes to carve out the image of a leader who is very close to those in need. Again in these pictures Xi is surrounded by other people, but he is always represented as the main actor by means of various visual devices.²⁸

In addition to his “grass-roots approach”, Xi’s figure embodies family values as well. In the last four pictures in the first sequence in *The Governance of China*, Xi is portrayed with his wife, Peng Liyuan, with his daughter, Mingze, with his father, Xi Zhongxun as well as with his mother, Qi Xin. Thus, alongside values such as diligence, dedication to work, empathy with those in need and so forth, Xi Jinping personifies at the same time family values. As pointed out before, such elements are usually framed as being proper of Chinese traditional culture. In particular, the last two pictures – i.e. the one portraying Xi

²⁶ A study on the discourse on poverty alleviation under Xi Jinping conducted by the author reveals that the war metaphor is the key domain used to frame the work for poverty relief.

²⁷ Xi Jinping (2014a, X, XII-XIII).

²⁸ For instance, he is in the foreground and, in the first picture, he is also the object of others' gaze; in the second, his being in the foreground is highlighted by the distance between him and the others; in the third, he is also placed in a higher place than other men.

with his father and the one with his mother – are worth analyzing within the broader context of the “Protection of the Rights and Interests of Elderly People” law enacted in 2013.



习近平与父亲习仲勋、夫人彭丽媛、女儿的家庭照。



习近平陪母亲亲心散步。

Figure 6 (on the left): Xi Jinping with his family.²⁹

Figure 7 (on the right): Xi Jinping with his mother, Qi Xin.³⁰

The *Xiao falü* 孝法律 “Filial piety law” - as this law is rebaptized, recalling the Confucian virtue of *xiao* 孝 “filial piety” - aims at compelling the visit of one’s aging parents. Transcending the traditional domain of law, this piece of legislation intervenes in the sphere of individual morality. The *Xiao falü* represents an illustrative example of the process of the “confucianization of law”³¹, as Scarpari maintains. As will be shown later, this is not the only case where the sphere of morality overlaps the one of law. Against this backdrop, the last two pictures of the sequence acquire more significance for mainly two reasons: first, they represent the application of this new law - it is worth remembering that the book was published in 2014, i.e. the following year that the “Filial piety law” was enacted - ; second, they manifest Xi’s own filial piety, contributing to shape his figure of ideal leader and a model for others. Going more into details, both pictures do not merely represent Xi together with his parents, but they portray him while he is putting into practice the virtue of filial piety. That is to say, both pictures represent actions and are thus narratives rather than just descriptions: in the first photo, Xi pushes his father’s wheelchair,

²⁹ Xi Jinping (2014a, XXI).

³⁰ Xi Jinping (2014a, XXII).

³¹ This is a translation by the author of the “confucianizzazione della legge” used by Scarpari (2014).

while in the second he “takes a stroll” with his mother, holding her hand. Therefore, the represented participants are not just posing for a picture, but rather are the protagonist of a snapshot of the leader’s daily life.

In particular, the represented participants in the first picture – from right to left, Peng Liyuan, Mingze, Xi Zhongxun and behind him, Xi Jinping – create a continuous line by holding each other hands. By doing so, the shot conveys a sense of familial continuity, while also enhancing the ties between yesterday's China – represented by Xi Zhongxun - and today's China. Moreover, only Xi Zhongxun looks directly at viewers’ eyes, as it can be inferred from the angle of his face. All the others, Xi Jinping included, are looking in other directions. Thus, Xi Zhongxun is at the same time both the goal of an action and the agent of another: he is the goal of Xi Jinping’s action of pushing his wheelchair –, more generally, it can be said that he is the object of Xi’s care - , while also being the actor of another action, that is looking directly at viewers in search for consensus. In the second picture, the one representing Xi with his mother, both have direct gaze. Thus, evaluating these two pictures in relation to the order in which they appear, the first picture functions as a representation of how things are, while the second is a “demand” of following the example of Xi Jinping.

Turning the attention towards more recent days, all the other pictures in both volumes of *The Governance of China* were taken after 2012. In both books, they are divided into two groups: the first sequence focuses on domestic politics, while the second on foreign policies.

Those photographs concerning Xi Jinping in national contests in both volumes cover various fields: from politics in its narrow sense to the military, to scientific and technological development, to the policies for poverty alleviation, ethnic minorities and so forth.³² Each of them puts pieces into the puzzle representing the PRC’s achievements and ambitions. In a sense, Xi Jinping acts as both the unifier and the *trait d’union* across different spheres and field.

Providing an overhaul analysis of the pictures, given the available space in this dissertation, in line with the construction of Xi’s story as China’s story, Xi is always depicted as the main represented participant and generally at the center of the picture from a frontal perspective. This is in accordance with Chinese photographic “tradition of depicting rulers

³² Not surprisingly, the picture portraying the handshake in 2015 between Xi and Ma Ying-jeou, the Taiwan leader at that time is included in this sequence, not in the one dealing with foreign politics. (Xi Jinping 2017a)

and leaders using a frontal view in order to emphasize their integrity and authority”³³. Moreover, Xi Jinping is portrayed as being “offering” himself, his wisdom, skills and moral qualities to the Party-state for the good of the nation. Indeed, noticeably, Xi never looks directly to viewers’ eye, excluding those pictures where Xi is evidently in pose. This is true for all the photographs where Xi is in both domestic contexts and international contexts.

7.2.2 Framing Xi through language

The previous paragraph has analysed the role of visual communication in crafting Xi Jinping’s image. It has revealed that Xi’s personal life and, in particular, his experience during the Cultural Revolution, provides the ground to depict Xi as an ideal leader. Within this process, the first sequence in the first volume of *The Governance of China* occupies a central role, as it deals with his life prior to moving to Beijing. Through these pictures, Xi is framed in mainly two ways: first, “a man of the people” who has never backed down from working side-by-side with the *renmin*, in its sense of "weaker social classes" even before stepping up to power as a paramount leader. Second, an epitome of familial values, especially filial piety, as part of the so-called Chinese tradition. This first sequence of pictures provides the base for the political legitimacy of Xi, who thus deserves the place he occupies nowadays thanks to his personal life and attitude.

Alongside this visual dimension, the language used by Xi contributes to frame him as both "a man of the people" and as embedding Chinese values. This is worth analyzing in light of the long Chinese tradition that links a correct language with personal respect and political power. The fundamental assumption of this tradition consists in, as Link explains, "correct language use, when properly internalized in a person, leads to personal ‘cultivation,’ which gives rise to appropriate moral behavior, which in turn provides legitimate authority to rule."³⁴ Considering this process the other way round, a decorous use of language manifests a proper moral behavior, which in turn sustains the legitimacy of the person’s position within the social and political order. In communist China, despite the attempt to destroy the *si jiu* 四旧 “four olds”³⁵, this ancient principle survived and thrived. Mao

³³ Roberts (2013, 98).

³⁴ Link (2013, 308).

³⁵ The *si jiu* “four olds” was the expression used during the Cultural Revolution to indicate the aim of eradicating the old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits.

Zedong himself “appropriated this traditional belief for his purposes of achieving ideological unity”³⁶, so that, in Mao’s China, one’s morality was expressed by speaking his words, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Nowadays, with Xi Jinping, this ancient tradition has returned to the scene with even more strength. The *zhengfeng yundong* 整风运动 “rectification movements” launched under Xi involve *wen feng* 文风 “writing style” as well, much in the same spirit of Mao’s campaign to improve the writing style.³⁷ At the same time, Xi’s language skills have been the object of a propaganda campaign since 2013. This campaign should be deemed as an integral part of the legitimating process. For ease of exposition, the main themes and outcomes of this campaign will be treated in an introducing paragraph, before going ahead with the analysis of the discursive functions of the rhetorical and linguistic devices most used by Xi.

7.2.2.1. The campaign around “the spirit of the series of important speeches by general secretary Xi Jinping”

Since 2013, *Xi Jinping zongshuji xilie zhongyao jianghua jingshen* 习近平总书记系列重要讲话精神 “the spirit of the series of important speeches by general secretary Xi Jinping” has been repeated endlessly across the whole country and in Chinese media. Following this propaganda campaign, Xi Jinping’s talks and writings delivered both at home and abroad have, since then, become a well-remunerated field of research.³⁸ Furthermore, the new party education drive, i.e. *liang xue yi zuo* 两学一做 “two studies, one action”³⁹ Campaign launched in December 2015 and institutionalized as a permanent requirement in March 2017, incorporates the study of Xi’s “important speeches” as one of the fundamental *xue* 学 “study”. Probably, all this paves the way for Xi Jinping’s thought entering into the

³⁶ Lu Xing (2017, 200)

³⁷ Improving writing style has been an integral part of the *qunzhong luxian* 群众 “mass line” launched by Xi since 2013, and indeed it is one of the main points touched upon when explained the need to *gaijin zuofeng* 改进作风 “improve work style” in his speech on this campaign included in the case studies. Xi Jinping (2014o). For the campaign on “improving writing style” under Mao, for an introduction see Barmé (2018).

³⁸ Huang (2014).

³⁹ The “two studies” require all CCP members to, first, “study” Party constitution and its related rules, and, second, learning Xi’s important speeches. The action consists instead of being a *hege dangyuan* 合格党员 “Qualified Party Member”.

pantheon of Chinese political ideology, also becoming a study subject in national universities⁴⁰.

Described as having a *ji qiang huayu li* 极强的话语力 “strong discursive force”⁴¹, Xi’s talks and writings have then been the object of many newspaper articles, academic papers as well as books.⁴² Talking of volumes, Chen Xixi⁴³ compiled twenty-five metaphors, twenty popular sayings and seventy quotations from the Chinese classical literature used by Xi in his speeches delivered in both domestic and international contexts during the first two years of government. The aim, as stated in the editorial notes, is to

让更多的党员、在校大学生、社会公众通过学习习近平总书记系列重要讲话精神，领略中央治国理政的内涵和思想，读懂中国[...]

Let more party members, college students and the public grasp the contents and ideas of governance formulated by the central government as well as better understanding China, through the study of the spirit of the important speeches by the General Secretary Xi Jinping [...].

A similar project is carried out by Liu Zhihui⁴⁴ in his volume mentioned above, albeit focusing solely on those speeches dealing with *guofang* 国防 “national defence” and *jundui* 军队 “armed forces”. Liu collects twenty metaphors, nineteen popular sayings and twenty quotations from Chinese classics in order to provide materials for a deeper *xuexi* 学习 “study” and *lijie* 理解 “understanding” of Xi Jinping’s “important speeches”. The volumes edited by the *Renmin ribao pinglun bu*, instead, are entirely dedicated to specific rhetorical devices: two volumes are concerned with literary references⁴⁵ and one with

⁴⁰ Since the 19th Party Congress special research centers devoted to Xi Jinping’s thought have been opened in universities across the whole country Bandurski (2017).

⁴¹ Liu Jin (2013, 569).

⁴² The great importance attached to these publications focusing on Xi Jinping’s communication skills or gathering of his speeches was upheld by the fact that all these books and volumes occupied the shelves of many bookstores in Beijing for the nineteenth Party’s National Congress held in October 2017 (Wang Zhen 2017).

⁴³ Chen Xixi (2014)

⁴⁴ Liu Zhihui (2017).

⁴⁵ *Renmin ribao pinglunbu* (2015). *Renmin ribao pinglunbu* (2018a).

anecdotes used by Xi in the contexts of his talks.⁴⁶ For this latter, a version for kids has also been published.⁴⁷

In addition to these books, several academic papers deal with Xi Jinping's language. What has become known as *Xi shi yuyan* 习式语言 “Xi's language style” is explained as having, on the one hand, a *youliang wenfeng* 优良文风 “refined speech style”⁴⁸ and a distinct *Zhongguo wei* 中国味 “Chinese taste”⁴⁹. On the other, it is *kouyu hua, jiedi qi* 口语化、接地气 “colloquial and down-to-earth”⁵⁰, especially for his use of expressions that the “broad masses” *er shu neng xiang* 耳熟能详 “frequently heard and can easily repeat”⁵¹. In that being so, the style of Xi's *huayu tixi* 话语体系 “discourse system” is quite similar to Mao's style, Li Jiyao argues.⁵² In many cases, the results of the analysis illustrated below confirms Li Jiyao's view, which is also in line with Lu Xing's arguments.⁵³ However, what still misses in Li's analysis is an evaluation of the reasons why Xi talks Mao's language and the relation between the use of this kind of language and the legitimation of the Chinese communist party.

Moreover, alongside the academia, mass media also pay close attention to Xi's rhetorical devices. For instance, *Xinhua* calls *pingyu jin ren* 评语近人 “comments close to people” its section dedicated to Xi's language, drawing upon the *chengyu* 成语 – *pingyijinren* 平易近人 “plain and simple” used by Chen Xixi and Liu Zhihui in the titles of their work mentioned above. *Pingyu jin ren* is in the title of a Television Program that has gone on in since the beginning of 2018 on CCTV, and that focuses on the quotations from classics used by Xi.⁵⁴ In the website of *China Daily*, the section focused on Xi's language style is part of the broader one titled *Xue Xi Shidai* 学习时代, translatable as both “Study Era” or “Study Xi's Era” for it is playing on the surname Xi 习, literally “practice”, “learn”.

⁴⁶ Renmin ribao pinglunbu (2017).

⁴⁷ Renmin ribao pinglunbu (2018b).

⁴⁸ Ma Zhong, Li Shuanggen (2014).

⁴⁹ Dong Weiwu, Cheng Yin (2014, 10).

⁵⁰ Zhang Haifa, Hu Zhongbing (2014).

⁵¹ Lu Liu 鲁六; Zhao Yong 赵勇 (2017).

⁵² Li Jiyao (2016, ??).

⁵³ It has been already demonstrated elsewhere that those metaphors defined as “creative” are actually ideologically old and most of them can be traced back to Mao's time. Gallelli (2018). Furthermore, Qian Gang's lexical analysis also reveals that there is a “dangerous” coming back of *hongse* 红色 “red” expressions.

⁵⁴ The title of this TV program is *Ping yu jin ren. Xi Jinping zongshuji yongdian* 《平“语”近人——习近平总书记用典》 “Comments close to the people. Quotations by General Secretary Xi Jinping”. It goes on air since October 2018, soon before the 19th Party Congress.

Moreover, an application for smartphone called *Xue Xi Zhongguo* 学习中国 “Study China” or “Study Xi’s China” is based on the same pun. This app was developed and launched by the Central Party School in April 2015 and has been improved over the past years. Among the various perfections, the app has also become interactive as it has recently started testing users’ knowledge around Xi’s political concepts and slogans: at every new access a question is set, and *fen 分* “points” attributed for each correct answer. Noticeably, the app features a section dedicated to anecdotes – *Xi zhuxi gushi hui* 习主席故事汇 “Collection of anecdotes by Xi Jinping” - and another to quotations from Chinese classical literature – *yin jing diangu* 引经用典 “Quoting from classics”.

This play on the surname of Xi, as it will be demonstrated below, has significant implications. Indeed, in addition to these uses, the metaphor of “teaching” is used by Xi in his talks, and has a crucial role in the legitimating process of the CCP within the discourse on the Chinese dream.

Summing up the main points argued by the studies mentioned so far, Xi Jinping’s political communication is depicted as *xin de guanhua* 新的官话 “new official language”, standing in sharp contrast to the *konghua, taohua, feihua* 空话、套话、废话 “empty talks, formulaic language and superfluous words” that characterize the old kind of official language⁵⁵. To put it in a different way, Xi Jinping is transforming the official formulaic political language that is *jia da kong chang* “假大空长” “false, grandiose, empty and long” into a *duan shi xin* 短实新 “concise, real and fresh” code, as Qi Gaolong maintains.⁵⁶ In that being so, it seems that Xi Jinping is closing the rift between “ganbunese” and “baixingese”⁵⁷, employing Thøgersen’s terms for political language and ordinary talk respectively. This “bifurcation”⁵⁸, as Link calls it, between official language and the code spoken by common people is by no means a feature of the Chinese context, and it can be found all over the world. For the specific Chinese case it has a long history which can be traced back long before the foundation of the Chinese communist party. As far as modern China is concerned, ironically, Mao Zedong himself embodied at the same time this

⁵⁵ Gao Shan (2015).

⁵⁶ Qi Gaolong (2018, 75).

⁵⁷ Thøgersen (2006).

⁵⁸ For a more detailed analysis of the “bifurcation” between official language and ordinary talk, see Link (2013, 235-243).

“bifurcation”, while advocating for a more direct communication from politicians.⁵⁹ Li Tuo coined *Mao Wenti* 毛文体 “Mao’s style” in 1989, to refer to the specific and “unified system of language style that has extended a solid grip on all realms of discourses”⁶⁰. For the same purpose, Barmé uses the term *Maoyu* 毛语 “Maospeak”, alluding to the concept of “Newspeak” in George Orwell’s seminal work *1984*.

Interestingly enough, Xi’s “new” kind of political communication is deemed to be the key index of Xi Jinping’s *xin sixiang, xin guandian, xin lunduan* 新思想、新观点、新论断 “new thoughts, new ideas, new arguments”⁶¹ and, in that being so, it plays a crucial part in the construction of Xi’s image as a model leader.

However, it has been already demonstrated in the previous chapters that, despite superficial originality, official Chinese political discourse can hardly be defined ideologically new. Conversely, an ancient root can be traced back even in the importance attached to the language used by Xi. As already pointed out in the introducing paragraph, in Chinese tradition, language, morality and political legitimacy are inextricably related to one another. It is against this backdrop that the analysis of rhetorical and linguistic device used by Xi will be analysed in the following section.

7.2.2.2. Xi’s language style

The previous paragraph has demonstrated that, since 2013, a populist propaganda campaign revolving around Xi Jinping’s rhetorical skills has been carried out. Its central argument lies in emphasizing the originality of Xi’s political communication, re-baptized as *Xi shi yuyan* “Xi language style”. It greatly contributes to justify Xi’s leading position within the Party-state and the Chinese political and social hierarchy at large. At the same time, it marks the returning of a “personalized” politics.

In language, this process of personalization of politics takes place in different ways, which can be identified and analysed in light of three recurring elements: 1) the use of stories belonging to country’s history as well as personal anecdotes; 2) quotations from Chinese

⁵⁹ As Li Tuo explains, after having criticized the *dang ba gu* 党八股 “stereotyped Party writings” of the Party at Yan’an, Mao himself became the promoter of this kind of *wenfeng* 文风 “style of writing” especially during the Cultural Revolution.

⁶⁰ Li Tuo (1993, 274).

⁶¹ Peng Longfu (2015).

classics and previous leaders' talks and writings; 3) the use of figurative, evocative and plain language. The image constructed through these elements depicts Xi as both “a man of the people” and a modern *junzi* 君子⁶², so to speak, embedding both Chinese tradition and socialist legacy.

Anecdotes

Among the various linguistic elements contributing to the creation of Xi's image, *jiang gushi* “telling stories” is, undoubtedly, the chief device revealing the “personalized” approach to legitimacy in contemporary Chinese politics. At the same time, telling anecdotes was a feature of Mao's rhetoric. The book devoted to gather Xi's anecdotes spare no effort to hide this continuity with the past. Its preface, indeed, starts with:

善讲故事是古今中外著名政治家、思想家的共同特点，更是中国共产党领袖的过人本领。在延安，党的七大闭幕式上，毛泽东主席就给大会代表们讲过一个“愚公移山”的故事。⁶³

Good storytelling is a common feature of famous politicians and thinkers both at home and abroad, and, even more, it is a remarkable skill of Chinese Communist Party leaders. In Yan'an, at the closing ceremony of seventh National Congress, Chairman Mao Zedong told the delegates of the conference a story about “Yugong removes the mountain”.

The stories told by Xi cover various topics and are drawn from several different sources, such as the history of the Chinese communist party, those of important personalities in Chinese history and popular culture as well as Xi's personal life. As Kirkpatrick notes, the use of historical examples to buttress one's arguments is an integral part of Chinese *ars oratoria* since ancient times,⁶⁴ and it will also be linked to the discursive function of the direct quotations from authoritative texts. The combination of both is, as it was in early China, “a powerful rhetorical device, used to persuade audiences of the superiority of one's worldview”⁶⁵.

⁶² Scarpari (2015, 165).

⁶³ Renmin ribao pinglunbu (2017, 1).

⁶⁴ Kirkpatrick (1995).

⁶⁵ Van Els (2012, 159).

Pertaining to the *gushi* "stories", for the purposes of the present research, the most significant source is the narrative around Xi's life before moving to Beijing. Within it, Xi's experience at Liangjiahe again occupies a central position. His talk at the Forum on Literature and Arts offers a relevant example of the small village's role in the creation of Xi's image:

在德国，我讲了自己读《浮士德》的故事。那时候，我在陕北农村插队，听说一个知青有《浮士德》这本书，就走了 30 里路去借这本书，后来他又走了 30 里路来取回这本书。我为什么要对外国人讲这些？就是因为文艺是世界语言，谈文艺，其实就是谈社会、谈人生，最容易相互理解、沟通心灵。⁶⁶

In Germany, I talked about the story of my reading "Faust". At the time, I was in a village in the north of Shaanxi province. I heard that another "educated youth" had this book, and so I walked for 30-mile to borrow it. Later, he took another 30 miles to have the book back. Why should I tell these things to foreigners? It is because literature and art are the world language. Talking about literature and art is actually talking about society and life, they make it easier to understand and communicate with each other.

The above excerpt depicts Xi as an avid reader since his early age, willing to make great sacrifices and even going against rules just to read a book. During the Cultural Revolution, almost all books were banned, except, of course, for Mao's writings and those of a few other authors, such as Lu Xun. That is the reason why Xi and others had to walk long to read "Faust".

In this specific example, Xi's experience is used to promote social responsibility of those engaged in the field of arts and literature and, by and large, of all the intellectuals. Indeed, it has been already outlined that the so-called "traditional culture" has been used discursively as a shield for what is framed as foreign ideas aggression, mainly embedded in "Western values". However, by resorting to anecdotes taken from his own personal life, the above passage also frames Xi as having a thirst of knowledge since his early youth. Framing Xi in this way increases his "cultural capital", to borrow Bourdieu's terminology, and thus his symbolic power over the Party-state and the society at large.

⁶⁶ Xi Jinping (2015e).

In other cases, his experience at Liangjiahe helps justify the current path that China has walked on in front of both Chinese and foreign eyes. For example, the following excerpt is taken from Xi's talk at a reception in Seattle, in the United States, and it has also been included in the second volume of *The Governance of China*. The talk is thus addressed to an international audience and, by extension, to the Chinese people as well.

上世纪 60 年代末，我才十几岁，就从北京到中国陕西省延安市一个叫梁家河的小村庄插队当农民，在那儿度过了 7 年时光。那时候，我和乡亲们都住在土窑里、睡在土炕上，乡亲们生活十分贫困，经常是几个月吃不到一块肉。我了解乡亲们最需要什么！后来，我当了个村子的党支部书记，带领乡亲们发展生产。我了解老百姓需要什么。我很期盼的一件事，就是让乡亲们饱餐一顿肉，并且经常吃上肉。但是，这个心愿在当时是很难实现的。

今年春节，我回到这个小村子。梁家河修起了柏油路，乡亲们住上了砖瓦房，用上了互联网，老人们享有基本养老，村民们有医疗保险，孩子们可以接受良好教育，当然吃肉已经不成问题。这使我更加深刻地认识到，中国梦是人民的梦，必须同中国人民对美好生活的向往结合起来才能取得成功。

梁家河这个小村庄的变化，是改革开放以来中国社会发展进步的一个缩影。我们用了 30 多年时间，使中国经济总量跃居世界第二，13 亿多人摆脱了物质短缺，总体达到小康水平，享有前所未有的尊严和权利。⁶⁷

In the late 1960s, when I was in my teens, I was sent to a small village named Liangjiahe in Yan'an, Shaanxi Province, in western China. There, I worked in the fields as a farmer for seven years. Like the locals, I lived in caves dug out from loess hills and slept on an earthen bed. The locals were impoverished, and they could go for months without a bite of meat. I grew to understand what they needed most. Later when I became secretary of the village's Party branch, I set out to develop the local economy, because I knew what they needed. I very much wanted to see them have meat on their dinner tables, and I wanted to see that often. However, that was a hard goal to obtain.

This Spring Festival I went back to Liangjiahe, which now has asphalt roads, tile-roofed brock houses, and internet access. The elderly enjoy the basic old-age pension, the villagers are covered by medical insurance, and the children receive a good education. Having meat for dinner is of course no longer a dream. This made me feel strongly that the Chinese dream is the people's dream, and that if it is to succeed, it must be based on the Chinese people's aspiration for a better life.

⁶⁷ Xi Jinping (2015c).

Changes in the small village of Liangjiahe epitomize the development and progress of the Chinese society since 1978. In less than 40 years we have boosted our economy to become the world second largest, supplying 1.3 billion people with food and clothing and basically achieving moderate prosperity. These effects have not only affected the lives of the Chinese.⁶⁸

The above excerpt reveals the use of his personal life to describe China's story, making his story the one of the whole country. This consideration finds its ground in the analysis of the use of personal pronouns: at the beginning, the focus is on Xi Jinping, as typified by the first singular person *wo* 我, even though he was not the only one who was sent to the countryside to *dang nongmin* 当农民 “work as a farmer”. Then from his own personal experience, Xi shifts the focus of his speech to the achievements of China’s policy of reforms and opening up. It is at this point that the pronoun becomes plural, i.e. *women* “we”, highlighting the collegial nature of the decision of implementing economic reforms and opening to the external world.

About his own experience, interestingly enough, Xi recalls his experience during the Cultural Revolution in neutral terms, without providing an evaluation of the events he had witnessed. Only the verb *chadui* 插队- literally “jump the queue”, mostly used to refer to those settled in the countryside as a member of a rural production team during the Cultural Revolution - suggests that the period was during that decade of turmoil. No other syntactic or lexical element suggests that going to the countryside was not a youth’s choice. Indeed, in the Chinese version, not a single sentence presents a passive construction. On the contrary, the lesson drawn by that experience makes Xi *liaojie* “understand” what people need, casting a good light on this experience. Two sentences, with a very short distance between them and minor lexical variations, outline this idea, reiterating roughly the same meaning:

- a. 我了解乡亲们最需要什么！
I understand what villagers need most!
- b. 我了解老百姓需要什么。
I understand what common people need.

⁶⁸ Xi Jinping (2017b, 29-30).

Using personal examples to shorten the distances between leaders and the *renmin* is reminiscent of Mao's style. In her analysis of Chairman Mao's rhetoric, Lu Xing explains that the founder of the PRC was used to sharing his own experience in public occasions

to illustrate that the only way to fuse oneself with the masses and transform one's class consciousness into a proletarian type was to mingle with the masses, even if this process could be long and painful.⁶⁹

The same rhetorical strategy is applied by Xi nowadays. However, despite being centered on Xi Jinping, the *gushi* of Liangjiahe provides legitimacy not only to Xi Jinping's personal rule but to the rule of the entire party as well, as exemplified in the use of pronouns explained above. That is, the use of *women* - instead of, for instance, *Zhongguo gongchandang* 中国共产党 "Chinese communist party"-, stresses that Xi Jinping, this exemplary leader, so to speak, is the product of a collegial decision. Furthermore, ironically, it is the very experience of the Cultural Revolution that justifies the implementation of a kind of market-oriented economic reforms, not led by a political creed. That experience, at the height of Maoism, provides the arguments to praise the success of Deng Xiaoping's policies. Hence, even more ironically, Xi uses a rhetorical device typical of Mao's style, i.e. anecdotes, to justify Deng's approach.

Quotations

In line with the representation of young Xi eager to read books during the Cultural Revolution, a second element that prominently contributes to craft the leader's image is the several references to authoritative texts belonging to both Ancient China and socialist tradition. Noticeably, in both volumes of *The Governance of China*, citations of works from pre-Qin time to the last dynasty far outnumber those of Marx, Engels or Lenin. However, this is not to say that Chinese traditional culture is replacing communist legacy in a play where one excludes the other. Conversely, the whole range of classical Chinese thinking is weaved together with references to Marx, Engels, Mao, Deng and so forth in order to sustain political arguments and crafting Xi's image as the heir of both traditions.

⁶⁹ Lu Xing (2017, 57).

Making literary references to Chinese classics is by no means a new entry, as it has been part of Chinese rhetoric since ancient times. Scarpari maintains that it was not so much a rhetorical expedient to show off one's erudition, rather a way to sustain and provide authority to one's claims, entrusting oneself with the "*auctoritas*" of a work of the past.⁷⁰ Indeed, it has been already mentioned that what may be deemed "innocuous historical account"⁷¹ can be turned into powerful rhetorical devices. In her analysis of Mao's rhetoric, Lu Xing points out the use of references to Chinese history and Classics by the Great Helmsman in order to deal with enemies and enhance the leadership of the party.⁷² As will be shown below, this latter objective is pursued by Xi as well.

In the case studies analysed, various classical texts and authors are quoted with different objectives and according to the contexts. The quotes from Tang and Song poems as well as Ming and Qing Novels are generally employed just for evocative purposes. Others, instead, recall significant principles for the art of government and are used to sustain specific policies or political formulations. For instance, the following line from the work of the Legalist thinker Han Feizi is used to support the idea of *yi fa zhi guo* "law-based governance":

“国无常强，无常弱。奉法者强则国强，奉法者弱则国弱。”⁷³

“No state is forever strong or forever weak. If those who uphold the law are strong, the state will be strong; if they are weak, the state will be weak.”⁷⁴

The quotation, which is - as Mitchell suggests – “at once striking, suggestive, and highly ambiguous”,⁷⁵ links directly the rule of law with the strength of the country, emphasizing once again the goal of a powerful country. In that being so, it recalls another expression from Han Feizi, that is the two-character term *fuqiang* “wealth and power”, which is the first modifier of *guo* “country” in the definition of the Chinese dream, as explained before. Interestingly enough, the above quotation relates, in a straightforward way, the strength of the rulers with that of the country.

⁷⁰ Translation from Italian by the author. Scarpari (2015, 164).

⁷¹ Van Els (2012, 162).

⁷² Lu Xing (2017, 81-85).

⁷³ Xi Jinping (2014k).

⁷⁴ Translation of Han Feizi by Watson.

⁷⁵ Mitchell (2015).

In other talks, quotations from Chinese classical literature appear as a list. It is the case of Xi's speech in occasion of the anniversary of the May 4 Movement in 2014, which contains more than thirty quotations, despite its relative brevity.⁷⁶ Most of the literary references in this speech are from Confucian texts. This can be understood in relation to the main focus of the talk, that is the “core socialist values”, which, as suggested before, merge together so-defined traditional values with socialist morality. Thus, quotations from the *Lunyu* 论语 “The Analects”, *Mengzi* and other founding texts of Confucianism are placed side-by-side with other from philosophical and historical works as well as from Mao, Li Dazhao (1889-1927) and Lu Xun's writings (1881-1936). In this way, these citations help, as Magagnin argues,

to draw an unbroken line connecting traditional norms of conduct and contemporary “socialist” virtues in which the individual, social, and national dimensions are still hierarchically structured but intimately interconnected.⁷⁷

In addition to functioning as social glue in the whole society, Confucianism is also widely used in Xi's talks in order to re-emphasize discipline and “morality” within the Party-state and promoting a grassroots approach among party members. As a matter of fact, a wide repertory of Confucian aphorisms and principles are used to remind party members to *bu wang chu xin* 不忘初心 “not forget their original ideals” and work to benefit the people. This four-character phrase *bu wang chu xin* “not forget one's original ideals” - followed by *jixu qianjin* 继续前进 “keep marching forward” - was firstly introduced by Xi in his speech for the 95 anniversary of the founding of the CCP in 2016. A partial transcription of this speech is included in the second volume of *The Governance of China*, in the chapter “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and the Chinese dream”.⁷⁸ The version in *The Governance of China* starts, indeed, with a quotation from a historiographic work *San Guo Zhi* 三国志 “Records of the Three Kingdoms” stressing the role of the past in guiding into the future:

⁷⁶ Magagnin (2017) analyses the ideological implications of intertextuality in this speech.

⁷⁷ Magagnin (2017, 230).

⁷⁸ *Bu wang chu xin, jixu qianjin* 不忘初心、继续前进 “stay true to one's original ideals and keep marching forwards” is the title of the partial transcription of this speech that is included in the second volume of *The Governance of China*. Xi Jinping (2017a, 32).

“明鏡所以照形，古事所以知今。”⁷⁹

Looking at the mirror we know about ourselves, reflecting on the past we know what to do now.”⁸⁰

The entire talk focuses on the role of *lixiang xinnian* 理想信念 “faith and ideals” within the CCP. It offers a good example of the way in which authoritative texts belonging to both Confucianism and a more recent communist legacy are nestled together. In the same speech, Engels, Mao, Deng as well as “revolutionary martyrs” are quoted alongside Confucianist and Neo-Confucianist works.⁸¹ For example, in explaining how to *jianchi bu wang chu xin, jixu qianjin* 坚持不忘初心、继续前进 “stay true to one’s original ideals and keep marching forwards” and the role of political ideology in contemporary China, Xi quotes a Neo-Confucian philosopher alongside revolutionary martyrs:

“志不立，天下无可成之事。” 理想信念动摇是最危险的动摇，理想信念滑坡是最危险的滑坡。一个政党的衰落，往往从理想信念的丧失或缺失开始。我们党是否坚强有力，既要看全党在理想信念上是否坚定不移，更要看每一位党员在理想信念上是否坚定不移。95 年来，共产主义远大理想激励了一代又一代共产党人英勇奋斗，成千上万的烈士为了这个理想献出了宝贵生命。“砍头不要紧，只要主义真”，“敌人只能砍下我们的头颅，决不能动摇我们的信仰”，[...]。⁸²

“Without resolve one can accomplish nothing.” The wavering of one’s faith and ideal is the most dangerous risk. The decline of a party often begins with its members’ loss of faith and ideals. Whether our party is strong or not depends on whether our members’ faith and ideals are strong or not. In the past 95 years, communist ideals have encouraged one generation of communists after another to work hard, and many have even lost their lives in the process. “Let them cut off my head, I will not abandon my faith.” “Our enemies can take our lives but they cannot take away our faith.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Xi Jinping (2016e; 2017a, 32).

⁸⁰ For the translation of the citations, those provided in *The Governance of China* are used when available.

⁸¹ Each quotation has an explanatory note that reports the original author and the title of the work from which the citation is drawn.

⁸² Xi Jinping (2016e).

⁸³ Xi Jinping (2017b, 35).

According to the explanatory notes provided in the volume *The Governance of China*, the first line is taken from "Rules for students at Longchang" by Wang Yangming (1472-1529), a Neo-Confucian philosopher; while the closing quotations are respectively from Xia Minghan and Fang Zhimin, two revolutionary martyrs lived at the turn of the 20th century.

And again, ancient wisdom and revolutionary ideals are blended together in the following passage from the same talk where a citation from the *Daxue* 大学 “The Great Learning”⁸⁴ - one of the Four Books – is used to encourage party cadres to get closer to the masses:

人民立场是中国共产党的根本政治立场，是马克思主义政党区别于其他政党的显著标志。党与人民风雨同舟、生死与共，始终保持血肉联系，是党战胜一切困难和风险的根本保证，正所谓“得众则得国，失众则失国”。⁸⁵

Prosperity for the people is the basic political position of the CPC, and it is the prominent feature that distinguishes Marxist parties from other parties. Our party and people stand together through storm and stress, go through thick and thin together, and keep blood and flesh ties, which is the basic guarantee of the Party in overcoming all difficulties and risks. “Win popular support, and you win the country; lose it, and you will lose the country.”⁸⁶

This excerpt provides a narrative based on two ideological associations: a) “putting people first” is a feature of Chinese government tradition; 2) it is a peculiarity of Marxist parties. These two associations take place in language by blending/wedging?? (incastonare insieme) together a code which can be traced back to the socialist legacy and another linked to the cultural tradition. Indeed, on one hand, the Maoist expression *xuerou lianxi* 血肉联系 “blood and flesh ties”⁸⁷ provides a good example of a kind of code which re-evokes the Chinese revolutionary past.⁸⁸ On the other hand, instead, the quotation from the *Daxue* presents the people-oriented approach as being part of Chinese ancient tradition.

⁸⁴ In the notes, this quotation, as well as all the others taken from the *Daxue* and those from *Zhongyong* are indicated to be drawn from the *Liji* 礼记 Book of Rites, of which the two books were originally part. Xi Jinping (2017a, 46)

⁸⁵ Xi Jinping (2016e).

⁸⁶ Xi Jinping (2017b, 40).

⁸⁷ Sun Yuhua (2013).

⁸⁸ A significant example of the coming back of Mao’s language is the *qunzhong luxian* 群众路线 “mass line” campaigns launched under Xi that were mentioned above.

Towards the end of the speech, three classical-sounding phrases are used to stress the direct connection between one's morality, authority and role within the political and social order:

以德修身、以德立威、以德服众， [...]。⁸⁹

Use virtue to cultivate oneself, establish one's authority, and win the trust of the people.⁹⁰

The first and the third phrases, i.e. *yi de xiu shen* 以德修身 “use virtue to cultivate oneself” and *yi de fu zhong* 以德服众 “use virtue to win the trust of the people”, were already used by Hu Jintao in his speech at the anniversary of the foundation of the CCP in 2011.⁹¹ In spite of their syntactical structure which sounds as classics, they are not direct quotations. They echo the principle of *wei zheng yi de* 为政以德 in the *Lunyu* “governing by virtue” and *yi de fu ren* 以德服人 “subdues men by virtue” in the *Mengzi*, though.⁹² Noticeably, *yi de li quan* 以德立威 “use virtue to establish one's authority” is a new entry by Xi Jinping. It straightly points at the assumption linking morality and authority, thus confirming even more the emphasis on personal moral qualities for CCP's political legitimacy.

Summing up, the above excerpts from Xi's talk at the anniversary of the founding of the CCP reveal that Chinese philosophical principles belonging to a mythicized past of more than two thousand years ago are now called to sustain and highlight a features that are defined as characterizing Marxist parties, crafting a kind of Chinese political and philosophical syncretism for the sake of party's legitimacy. This syncretism is represented in language by the use of two different codes – a code that speaks of cultural tradition and another of revolutionary morality. Both codes provide authority to Xi himself and to what he utters. By quoting the *Daxue* together with using “scientific” language or quotes from Mao's and other previous leaders as well as revolutionary martyrs,⁹³ Xi represents himself

⁸⁹ Xi Jinping (2016e).

⁹⁰ Xi Jinping (2017b, 46).

⁹¹ Hu Jintao (2011).

⁹² Cao Deben 曹德本 explains the link between that ancient wisdom concentrated in the extracts from the *Lunyu* and the *Mengzi* with contemporary Chinese political principles. Cao Deben (2018).

⁹³ It is worth highlighting that references to Mao's talks and writings are also widely spread in Xi's talks on the Chinese dream. For instance, the well-known speech at the exhibition "The Road to Rejuvenation" in November 2012, quotations from Mao's are placed side by side with Chinese classical literature. (Xi Jinping 2012c).

as embedding this syncretism. In that being so, he is invested with symbolic power coming from both sides – socialist and cultural traditions. This authority makes him a *primus super pares* – as opposed to *primus inter pares* – within the party, and also a model for the other members. In that being so, Xi is much close to Mao, who also “used the classics to promote himself as the leader of both the military and the masses.”⁹⁴

Figurative language

The previous sections have demonstrated that personal anecdotes and quotations from Chinese classics depict Xi as being at the same time “a man of the people” and a modern *junzi*. It has been also demonstrated that references to the past – whether personal experiences or national historical anecdotes – together with citing authoritative texts from both socialist and cultural traditions feature Chinese rhetoric since ancient times. These two devices contribute to increasing Xi's authority and symbolic power, albeit in different ways and are used in conjunction with analogies, metaphors and other figures of speech. The linguistic landscape so crafted aims at shortening the distance between Xi and the masses, while representing him as a model for other party members.

Regarding figurative language in Xi's political talks and writings, the “Chinese dream”, it is in itself a metaphor, as already noted elsewhere.⁹⁵ Alongside it, many others are used to provide meaning and coherence to today's China and the political goals set by the leaders. For instance, Lu Xing points out other three main metaphors used by Xi in the contexts of his speeches: 1) animal metaphor; 2) hygiene metaphor; 3) medicine metaphor.⁹⁶ All these three metaphors are used to frame the discourse on anti-corruption.⁹⁷ Despite being defined creative, many of them cannot be deemed so, as they were previously widely employed by Mao.⁹⁸ Moreover, others conceptual domains are used to provide meanings to

⁹⁴ Lu Xing (2017, 83).

⁹⁵ Gallelli (2016). M

⁹⁶ Lu Xing (2017, 193-195).

⁹⁷ Zhuo Jing-Schmidt and Xinjia Peng analyse the media and political discourse on the anti-corruption campaign under Xi Jinping. The two scholars point out the use of disease, vermin, weed and slovenly domains as the major frames to designate corruption and corrupted behavior. Vermin and slovenly can be equated to Lu's animals and hygiene respectively. Jing-Schmidt and Peng Xinjia (2017).

⁹⁸ Lu Xing (2017), Gallelli (2018).

the various political concepts put forward by Xi over the past five years as well as to the Chinese dream⁹⁹ and country's new era.

For the purposes of the present chapter, a major role to carve out Xi's image is the "teaching" metaphor. While other rhetorical devices – included other metaphors - shape Xi as a model for other party members indirectly, the "teaching" metaphor straight points at the didactic purpose of the discursive representation of Xi as a model leader.

As anticipated above, the name of the application for smartphone *Xuexi Zhongguo* "Study China" can be alternatively read "Study Xi's China", playing on Xi Jinping's family name, *Xi* 习. In line with the representation of Xi as a "teacher", a whole set of "didactic" metaphors are employed to urge party members to assume a proper behavior. Not surprisingly, this metaphor is mostly addressed to party members. Thus, in addition to the metaphors pointed out by Jing-Schmidt and Peng¹⁰⁰, the anti-corruption campaign is articulated around *keti* 课题 "question for study and discussion", *bixiuke* 必修课 "compulsory classes"¹⁰¹, *kaoshi* 考试 "exams"¹⁰² as well as *kaoyan* 考验 "tests"¹⁰³.

Noticeably, the didactic metaphor is often sustained by the authority of works of the past, whether quotations from Classics or previous leaders. For instance, in Xi's talk at the Party school in 2013, three passages from the *Lunyu* are quoted in order to highlight the role of *xuexi* "studying" for the Party:

兴趣是激励学习的最好老师。“知之者不如好之者，好之者不如乐之者。”讲的就是这个道理。领导干部应该把学习作为一种追求、一种爱好、一种健康的生活方式，做到好学乐学。有了学习的浓厚兴趣，就可以变“要我学”为“我要学”，变“学一阵”为“学一生”。学习和思考、学习和实践是相辅相成的，正所谓“学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆。”

⁹⁹ For the analysis of the conceptual domains used Xi's speeches to frame the concept of the Chinese dream, see Shen Lijun (2015) and Gallelli (2016).

¹⁰⁰ Zhuo and Peng (2017).

¹⁰¹ Xi Jinping (2015h).

¹⁰² Xi Jinping (2016e).

¹⁰³ *Si da kaoyan* 四大考验 the "four tests" include *zhizheng kaoyan*, *gaige kaifang kaoyan*, *shichang ingji kaoyan*, *waibu hunajing kaoyan* 执政考验、改革开放考验、市场经济考验、外部环境考验 "the tests on exercise governance, carrying out reforms and opening up, developing market economy, and responding to the external circumstances". The four tests are closely related to *san da weiji* 大危机 "four risks", which are *jingshen xiedai de weiji*, *nengli buzu de weiji*, *tuoli qunzhong de weiji*, *xiaojifubai de weiji* 精神懈怠的危险、能力不足的危险、脱离群众的危险、消极腐败的危险 "the risks of spiritual sluggishness, incompetence, being detached from the masses, corruption".

你脑子里装着问题了，想解决问题了，想把问题解决好了，就会去学习，就会自觉去学习。要“博学之，审问之，慎思之，明辨之，笃行之”。¹⁰⁴

A genuine interest in the subject is the best teacher. This concept is reflected on a Chinese saying, “Regarding knowledge, those who are devoted to it learn better than those who are aware of it, and those who enjoy it the most are the best students.” Leading officials should pursue study as a quest, a hobby, and an element of a healthy life, which will make them happy and eager to learn. With a keen interest in study we will be enthusiastic volunteers rather than reluctant conscripts, and study will be a lifelong habit instead of a temporary pastime.

Study and deliberation complement each other, as do study and practice. As another Chinese saying goes, “Reading without thinking makes one muddled; thinking without reading makes one flighty.” If you have problems in mind and want to find solutions, you should start studying and study conscientiously. You must “learn extensively, enquire earnestly, think profoundly, discriminate clearly and practice sincerely.”¹⁰⁵

The three lines from the *Lunyu* marked by quotations marks are nestled in a passage where *xue* 学 “study” is used thirteen times, and blended with a code recalling everyday language.

In other talks, the Great Helmsman is also evoked:

1949年3月23日上午，党中央从西柏坡动身前往北京时，毛泽东同志说：“今天是进京赶考的日子。”60多年的实践证明，我们党在这场历史性考试中取得了优异成绩。同时，这场考试还没有结束，还在继续。¹⁰⁶

On the morning of March 23, 1949, when the Central Committee moved from Xibaipo to Beijing, Comrade Mao Zedong said: “today is the day we go to Beijing to sit at the exam.” More than 60 years of practice have proved that our party has achieved excellent results in this historic examination. At the same time, the exam is not over yet, as it continues nowadays.

Jin Jing gan kao 进京赶考 “go to the capital to sit at the imperial exam” was used by the Mao to convey the idea of taking control over Beijing and the whole country, and founding the New China. Xi draws on the metaphor used by Mao to highlight the success achieved

¹⁰⁴ Xi Jinping (2013b).

¹⁰⁵ Xi Jinping (2014b, 454-455).

¹⁰⁶ Xi Jinping (2016e).

by the party, while also stressing that political power is not given once and for all, but the party must earn it. Against this backdrop, and in line with the Maoist legacy, party members are asked to learn from the *renmin*:

在人民面前，我们永远是小学生，必须自觉拜人民为师，[...]。¹⁰⁷

In front of the people, we will always be primary school students, and we must consciously honor the people as [our] teachers.

These words were pronounced in the climate of the mass line campaign launched in 2013 and the following years. As Miranda rightly notes, the mass line under Xi Jinping is not a “dive”¹⁰⁸ into Mao’s China. In Mao’s era, mass mobilization fell partially out of the leadership’s control, and even turned against parts of it. Xi’s 21st century mass-line campaigns are much more controlled. What it is interesting here is the use of the people to increase Xi’s symbolic power over other party members. “Honoring” *Renmin* as *shi* 师 “teachers” has important implications for carving out the charisma and qualities of Xi Jinping. It is worth remembering in this context that, as already stated in relation to Xi’s use of personal anecdotes, Xi explicitly refers to his own “understanding” of the people’s needs thanks to his own experience in Liangjiahe during the Cultural Revolution.

Furthermore, it is worth remembering that, when talking about the meanings covered by the “empty” signifier *renmin*, the expression “for the people” means political correctness. Then, since Xi “knows” the people, he thus knows what is politically correct. This, in turn, implies that study Xi entails study the people. Therefore, the role of the didactic metaphor in contemporary China can be summed up in the following syllogism: party members must study the people; Xi knows the people; thus, party members must study Xi.

7.3 Overcoming shortcomings

So far the discursive construction of the myth around Xi Jinping has been analysed. In particular, the previous section has demonstrated the ways in which visual and linguistic

¹⁰⁷ Xi Jinping (2013i).

¹⁰⁸ Miranda (2016, 56).

communication contributes to craft the image of Xi Jinping as a leader who is a) close to the masses and b) a scholar-politician with a comprehensive and substantial cultural baggage, c) a follower of China's ancient tradition. The analysis has also revealed that, among the various tropes, the didactic metaphor – which is based on Xi's family name – is used in his talks and writings in order to enhance Xi's role as a model for other party members. In that being so, Xi's personal qualities and charisma, so discursively crafted, have become a source of legitimacy for the entire party.

Depicting Xi as a model for other party members goes hand in hand with the process of self-reform within the CCP. The "willingness to overcome shortcoming" is a crucial sub-frame for the legitimation of the party's guiding role, as it assures that the party has the will and the capacities to solve its internal issues. As anticipated above, this subframe is also identified by Bondes and Heep.¹⁰⁹ The central theme in the self-reform sub-frame is the *fan fubai douzheng* 反腐败斗争 “war against corruption”. This latter has been a crucial issue since the late 1980s but has become particularly fierce under Xi Jinping and has targeted, among the others, top ranking party and army officials. Xi's anti-corruption campaign has also been seen as a mere political struggle inside the party. However, instead of delving into the intra-party struggle, this study intends to discuss how the process of self-reform is framed and its role in maintaining the leading position of the Chinese communist party while providing legitimacy to the Chinese political system.

The following extract is a case in point of the way in which the anti-corruption discourse is presented in language and the devices most used to represent it:

我们必须坚持把中国共产党建设好。办好中国的事情，关键在中国共产党。我们要坚持党要管党、从严治党，增强党自我净化、自我完善、自我革新、自我提高能力，永不动摇信仰，永不脱离群众。凡是影响党的创造力、凝聚力、战斗力的问题都要全力克服，凡是损害党的先进性和纯洁性的病症都要彻底医治，凡是滋生在党的健康肌体上的毒瘤都要坚决祛除，使中国共产党始终同人民心连心、同呼吸、共命运。¹¹⁰

We must insist on building well the Chinese Communist Party. The key to running China well is the Chinese Communist Party. We must uphold the party's ability to manage and govern itself

¹⁰⁹ While being useful to demonstrate that this sub-frame is not new, the two scholars do not carry out an analysis of the linguistic and rhetorical devices used to frame these shortcomings and the way to solve them. Bondes and Heep (2013).

¹¹⁰ Xi Jinping (2014m).

strictly, enhance the party's self-purification, self-improvement, self-innovation, self-improvement. [Our] faith can never wave, and [we] can never leave the masses. All problems affecting the party's creativity, cohesiveness, and combat effectiveness must be fully overcome. Any disease that impairs the party's advanced nature and purity must be thoroughly healed. Any cancer that breeds on the healthy body of the party must be resolutely eliminated. The Communist Party has always been in harmony with the hearts of the people, breathing together and sharing the destiny.

Both the syntax and the wording of this passage stress the process of self-reform that the party should undertake. The two four-character phrases *dang yao guan dang, congyan zhi dang* 党要管党、从严治党 “the party has to manage and govern itself strictly”, together with *zi wo jinghua, zi wo wanshan, ziwo gexin, ziwo tigao nengli* 自我净化、自我完善、自我革新、自我提高能力 “self-purification, self-improvement, self-innovation, self-improvement”, stress the war against corruption as an intra-party matter that must be solved by itself. The verb *zhi* 治 in *congyan zhi dang* leads to the lexical level of analysis. Indeed, *zhi* has “cure” among its various meanings. Besides *zhi* “cure”, the above extract offers an all set of expressions belonging to the disease metaphor: *jinghua* 净化 “purify”, *chunjuexing* 纯洁性 “purity”¹¹¹, *bingzheng* 病症 “disease”, *yizhi* 医治 “cure”, *jiankang* 健康 “health”, *duliu* 毒瘤 “cancer” all associate corruption to a physical disease, or better “cancer” to cure.

On this metaphorical association, Sorace¹¹² observes that, within party's anatomy, each party member corresponds to a *xibao* 细胞 “cell” as part of a larger *jiti* 肌体 “organism”, which is the party. Interestingly, as Sorace notes, Xi coined the phrase *xibao gongcheng* 细胞工程 “cellular engineering” as an integral part of *dang de jianshe* 党的建设 “party construction”. For the purposes of the present section¹¹³, it is worth pointing out that the metaphor of an organism compound by many cells helps to circumscribe the corruption of disease, albeit acknowledging that it may eventually bring about gangrene of the entire body politics. Noticeably, the disease metaphor has been a permanent feature of party discourse. The underlying logic has always been Mao's *zhi bing qiu ren* 治病救人 “treat the disease in order to save the patient”.

¹¹¹ *Jinghua* 净化 “purify”, *chunjuexing* 纯洁性 “purity” may be deemed also expressions of the slovenly metaphor. However, for easy of exposition, they will be discussed within the disease metaphor.

¹¹² Sorace (2017).

¹¹³ For other ideological implications of the use of the disease metaphor, see Gallelli (2018).

This is not the only aspect for which the discourse on self-reform under Xi keeps older practices. Another key frame that provides meaning to the discourse on anti-corruption – thus on self-reform - has its roots in older practices. Already the Chinese term *fubai* 腐败 encapsulates this key frame that gives meaning to the self-reform process. As Stafutti and Ajani note, *fubai* – conventionally rendered as “corruption” - hints more at moral decline rather than political patronage.¹¹⁴ Following the semantic nuance of *fubai*, since the late 1990s moral ethics has been blended together with the concept of socialist law aiming at providing the country with that legal apparatus it needs in order to be part of the international economic community. *Yi fa zhi guo he yi de zhi guo xiang jiehe* 依法治国和以德治国相结合 “the combination of rule of law and rule of virtue” has thus been urged since the beginning of the 21st century, and it has been repeated in all the work reports since the one issued in 2002 by Jiang Zemin.¹¹⁵

In the discourse on the Chinese dream, the entire process of self-reform is repeatedly framed as a matter of moral behavior rather than one of abiding by the law. In this sense, it is worth remembering the three parallel phrases analysed above: “use virtue to cultivate oneself, establish one’s authority, and win the trust of the people”¹¹⁶. The discourse on self-reform is thus informed by the association between the moral character of the rulers with their authority, and thus their power over the ruled. From this perspective, the discourse on anti-corruption has its roots in an ancient vision of legitimacy and legitimation, which, as Tong Yangqi argues, has close ties with moral standards.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, this ancient vision finds expression also in the dichotomy that juxtaposes the *gong* 共 “public” good with the *si* 私 “private” interest. In Confucianism, as Fabre explains, “the honest administrator or the virtuous emperor [represents] the public good (*gong*) as opposed to private interests (*si*)”¹¹⁸. This juxtaposition is re-evoked by Xi Jinping through the metaphor of *siren julebu* 私人俱乐部 “private club”. In February 2017, at a study session on implementing the decision of the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eighteenth CCP Central Committee, Xi explains that without a strong central government, the party would have become a *siren julebu* “private club”¹¹⁹. As already explained else,

¹¹⁴ Stafutti and Ajani (2008, 107). Furthermore, noticeably, *fu* 腐 “rotten” has its roots in the healthy metaphor, as emerging from its radical *rou* 肉 “meat”.

¹¹⁵ *Yi de zhi guo* 以德治国 “rule by virtue” was introduced for the first time by Jiang Zemin in 2001.

¹¹⁶ Xi Jinping (2017b, 46).

¹¹⁷ Tong Yongqi (2011).

¹¹⁸ Fabre (2011, 460).

¹¹⁹ Xi Jinping (2017a, 21; 2017b, 20-21)

the negative overtones of this metaphor stem mostly from the juxtaposition of a political *dang* 党 “party” that is called *gong* 共 “public” and a *siren* 私人 “private” club.¹²⁰

These examples demonstrate that CCP's legitimacy nowadays is a continuation of old practices in which good governance is based on the morality of the rulers, which in turn, guarantees the obedience of the ruled. Again, the widely used expression *de cai jian bei, yi de wei xian* 德才兼备、以德为先 “have both integrity and ability, with priority given to integrity” does nothing but reiterating the same conception, placing moral integrity on an even higher level of importance than capacities. This result echoes the view of an “ethical revolution” currently underway in China. In their study on the anti-corruption campaign under Xi, Zhang and McGhee argue that

[...]in contrast to the dominant assumption that legitimation can only be fulfilled by democratization, President Xi aims to sustain the Party's legitimacy not by democratizing its political structure, but by resetting the ethical subjectivity of the Party through revolutionary mobilization.¹²¹

The process of moralization, hence, enhances the foundation of party's legitimacy. This is because as far as the problem of corruption is framed as a matter of individual ethics - which has nothing to do with the political system itself - the legitimacy of the political system in the PRC is not put into question. That is to say, treating corruption as specific and circumscribed cases of misconduct leaves the rest of the Chinese “body politics” unaffected.

7.4 Conclusion

The analysis conducted so far demonstrates that leaders' qualities to rule are based on the personal qualities of Xi Jinping and CCP capacities to self-reform and solve its critical issues. More specifically, in the first part of this chapter, the discursive construction of Xi Jinping as a model leader through visual and linguistic communication has been analysed. The results of both levels of analysis— i.e. the visual and the linguistic - reveal that a major

¹²⁰ Gallelli (2018, 607-608).

¹²¹ Zhang and McGhee (2017, 67).

source for Xi's symbolic power stems from the narrative around his personal experience before becoming general secretary of the CCP. In particular, his experience during the Cultural Revolution helps mold his figure as a “man of the people” that knows and understands the weaker social classes having spent several years working side-by-side with them. In this sense, these results sustain Kerry Brown's argument:

this presentation of Xi as someone with authentic grass-roots networks, someone who has a specific story to tell justifying his position, is striking. Xi differs from Hu Jintao, his predecessor, in a number of ways. However, perhaps the most notable is his willingness to use his own life story, a narrative on his personal life, to give himself political validation. This story says he has earned the right to be general secretary through his varied experience, his lifelong commitment to serving the rural constituencies of China and being able to speak to them, and his fundamental belief in the mission of the Party.¹²²

Furthermore, Xi's authority within the party and the society at large is constructed by means of the ancient correlation that links language with moral behavior, and thus with political legitimacy. Quotations from previous leaders and classical literature, together with anecdotes and other rhetorical devices, crystallize Xi's morality and provide a justification for his leading position.

As far as the legitimacy of the CCP is concerned, the “political validation” provided by Xi’s own “life story” and the language he speaks should be related to its function in maintaining the political status quo as well. To put it differently, while providing legitimacy to Xi Jinping, the creation of the model leader Xi justifies the Party-state system as a whole. This is because, from the perspective of the discourse on the Chinese dream in its historical dimension, Xi is the expression of a "collective will". The legitimacy of the CCP is guaranteed insofar as it "select the qualified", to quote Beetham's words once again. The same goes for the self-reform, or "ethical revolution", currently underway.

However, looking at the depiction of Xi from a broader perspective, his figure undoubtedly marks the beginning - or better the coming back – of a charismatic and populist approach to party’s legitimation. The image of Xi as a man of the people – that is, of the weaker social classes – contributes to the instalment of a kind of “populism with Chinese

¹²² Kerry Brown. “CEO, China.” iBooks, 167.

characteristics”¹²³, as Scarpari calls it. The features and implications of this “Chinese populism” will be further discussed in the final remarks.

Furthermore, to fully grasp the coming back of a charismatic politics, it is noteworthy that political communication and economic practice under Xi seem to divert one from another. That is to say, although for many aspects Xi’s approach reminds of Mao’s style, the path he is walking in the economic sphere is much closer to the one of Deng. In this sense, “perhaps Xi is ‘talking the Mao talk’ but ‘walking the Deng walk’”, as Golden compellingly notes.¹²⁴ One of the aims of ‘talking Mao’s words’ may be just safeguarding ‘Deng’s walk’ from the extreme left-wing voices inside the Party and in the PRC at large – the so-called neo-Maoist that are particularly critical of economic reforms and market economy. The recent disappearance of Marxist students is a case in point.¹²⁵

¹²³ Scarpari (2018).

¹²⁴ Golden (2015).

¹²⁵ Specifically for this case, Zizek argues that in today's China, “the most dangerous thing to do [...] is to believe in and take seriously the official ideology itself.” Zizek (2018).

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Results overview

This dissertation has discussed the way in which the Chinese dream is framed. In particular, it has analyzed the creation of a Chinese collective identity and Party's political legitimacy within the discourse on the Chinese dream. In addition, throughout the study, the elements of ideological continuity and those of rupture with previous discursive practices have been outlined, in order to demonstrate that the discourse on the Chinese dream features a substantial ideological continuity.

In the first part of the study, the theoretical-methodological framework has been illustrated. The discussion has moved from a definition of discourse as the *locus* where claims or better statements – to use Foucault's terminology – become undisputable truths that govern societies. This view implies that power, rather than merely repressive, is a productive force. This theoretical framework provides the structure for the analysis of the meaning(s) of the Chinese dream as well as the study of the way in which contemporary Chinese identity and the Communist Party of China's political legitimacy are produced and sustained within and by means of discourse.

Regarding the analysis of the discursive practices interlacing within the discourse on the Chinese dream, this study has drawn upon frame analysis, especially its further development in social movements and media studies. In particular, these theoretical tools have been applied to the case study in point, borrowing the concept of master frames from the field of studies on social movements. Consequently, the construction of a collective identity and party's political legitimacy are theorized as being two master frames. The use of said master frames is grounded on specific theoretical considerations. The first master frame moves from the assertion that "identity" is not a stable category, rather it is a never-ending meaning-making process. Within this process, two factors have been identified as the basic steps in identity production: the first is *self-ing* through the foregrounding of similarities among members of a community *in fieri*; the second is *other-ing* by highlighting distinctions between such a community and the Others.

In turning to consider the second master frame – that is, the one on political legitimacy – this thesis moves from Weber's conceptualization, which is the standard framework for the

examination of the legitimacy of various political systems. However, this thesis finds useful to integrate Weber's theorization with one aspect of Beetham's view of political legitimacy, i.e. the principles of "common interests" shared by both the ruled and the rulers and "differentiation" between them. Referring to these two principles has been useful during the analysis of the discourse on the Chinese dream, because this "dream" is itself a "common interest". In other words, limiting the discussion of party's political legitimacy within the boundary of Weber's view would overlook this important aspect. Thus, the process of legitimation is deemed as being based on a two-pronged process of constructing common interests while representing the qualities that make a leader "fit" to rule the country.

The method and the data on which the analysis of these two master frames is elaborated are the objects of the third chapter. The data analysed include the full transcriptions Xi Jinping's talks mentioning the keyword "dream" and three volumes gathering his speeches and writings as well as pictures. In addition, an official propaganda video dedicated to the Chinese dream has been employed to further understand the frames providing meaning to this national dream. At the same time, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with young Party members conducted during two fieldworks in China have been used as supplementary materials. These data aim at answering the question of "how the Chinese dream is framed". For the question of "what is new in Chinese political discourse", the present research relies upon secondary literature and, when necessary, it makes use of primary literature, i.e. work reports issued at the various National Congresses of the CCP.

The method of analysis moves from frame analysis, integrating it with the one for the analysis of linguistic texts developed by Fairclough and the one for visual texts advanced by Kress and van Leeuwen. Drawing upon and combining these three methodologies aim to overcome their shortcomings.

The other two parts discuss the results of the empirical research. The first of the above-mentioned master frames, i.e. the construction of a Chinese collective identity, has been discussed in the second part. The research has been led by the two major research questions of "whose dream?" and "who is the Other in the discourse on the Chinese dream?". Regarding the first of these questions, the analysis has revealed that two "Chinese communities", so to speak, can be outlined: first, a *political* community and, second, a *cultural* community. The borders of the former are traced mainly by political

ideology, while those of the latter are drawn by a shared history and culture. Such a mechanism is apparent in the comparisons drawn in chapter 4 between speeches addressed to mainland Chinese versus those addressed to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.

Two keywords of the discourse on the Chinese dream stand for these two communities: *renmin* “people” and *Zhonghua minzu* “Chinese nation” respectively. The analysis of the occurrences of *renmin* in the context of Xi’s talks and writings reveals that, far from having one referent exhausting all its semantic nuances, *renmin* is the signifier of, at least, three different meanings. The first is a historical *renmin*, which is a discursive reconstruction of a political subject – the Chinese people – that realized national independence. In that being so, it is depicted as holding the *shiye* “cause” shared by the common people and the CCP. The second *renmin* is an abstract collective identity, which cannot be the subject of political action, but only the objects of others’ work. That is to say, this abstract collective identity does nothing but demarcating what is politically correct and what is not: “being with the people” signifies political correctness. The third meaning of *renmin* can be associated with the middle and lower social classes. In this sense, *renmin* is used to urge the improving of populace living standards in a more equitable fashion as well as directing the government’s efforts towards this goal.

Zhonghua, a term which refers to a sense of “Chineseness”, instead, symbolizes the Chinese cultural community. This cultural community is widely and mostly framed through the family metaphor so that the Chinese nation is a “big family”. This metaphor makes the Chinese dream the dream of all the members of this family, regardless of their residency, including Taiwan and overseas Chinese. However, within this “big Chinese family” of the 21st century, ethnic minorities are still placed on a “cultural periphery”. This is symbolized by the “dream” of the little Tibetan girl, which is visiting China cultural center, i.e. Beijing.

While the process of self-ing draws the borders, the process of *other-ing*, by working on differences, delineates the features that distinguish a national-Us from the foreign-Them. In the discourse on the Chinese dream, the Other has mainly two shapes. First, other superpowers – mainly the United States – are *other-ed* in order to highlight the differences with the Chinese community and more specifically with China’s becoming a *qiangguo* “powerful country”. That is to say, other-ing foreign superpowers highlight the main differences that distinguish PRC’s rise from theirs. The words used to define China’s rise and the others’ status stress the boundary between them: while today’s superpowers are

simply *daguo* "large countries", whose strength is based on the economic ground, China is becoming a *qiangguo* "powerful country" from multiple perspectives, including cultural and political. When the Other is no longer specific *daguo* "large countries", but ideas and values, it is then framed as an enemy for the Chinese community. In this sense, the discourse on the Chinese dream is still informed and in turn, sustains the ideology that depicts the "West" as a counter Other attempting to subvert China.

Moreover, the second shape of the Other is "the ear that should listen to China's voice", recalling the need to "spread China's voice". This last shape is based and at the same time bears Chinese exceptionalism. This is precise because the rationale for listening to China's voice lies in China's contribution to *renlei* "mankind".

The second master frame is dedicated to the issue of political legitimacy. The concept of legitimacy and legitimation is based on Weber's view, which is integrated with the two principles theorized by Beetham. Legitimation is thus deemed as a never-ending two-pronged process of constructing common interests shared by ruled and rulers while representing leaders' qualities, which contribute to making the delegation of political power to one or more leaders rightful facing the public opinion.

These considerations provide the theoretical framework within which it has been possible to analyse how the discourse on the Chinese dream helps the construction of the CCP's political legitimacy. The concept of the Chinese dream represents in the first place a common interest *per se*. In order to show how this common goal is conceptualized and what this conceptualization brings about, the analysis has focused, firstly, on the official definition of the Chinese dream, delving into the various semantic nuances contained in each of the modifiers of *guo* "country", i.e. *fuqiang minzhu wenming hexie meili*. The analysis demonstrates that the meaning conveyed by these terms cannot be boiled down to one singular and univocal signified, but instead they acquire different meanings within the context of discourse and contain in themselves wide and deep ideological worlds.

Secondly, the chapter has outlined the frame providing meaning to this national dream, which is its being a "historic mission". This historic mission finds its basic and logical foundation in the "old bad days" suffered by the Chinese nation between the XIX and the XX centuries. Then, "Chinese spirit" – which blends "Chinese cultural traditions" with the revolutionary legacy – is called to be the light leading the nation towards its rejuvenation. This path, again, is nothing new, as the ideology of developmentalism still informs the discourse on the path to achieving this goal. In other words, development is still framed as

the cure to all contradictions, whether these have to do with “backward social production” or “people’s ever-growing need for a better life”.

All the results reveal that the discourse on the Chinese dream might be considered a continuation of “older” discourses. However, the last chapter, which has dealt with the representation of leaders’ quality to rule, has exposed the main innovative aspect of this discourse. As a matter of fact, the main novelty lies in the “charismatic turn” that the discourse on the Chinese dream brings with it. The analysis has demonstrated that the CCP’s qualities to rule are represented through mainly two sub-frames: the personal qualities of the top leader and the capacity of self-reform of the entire party. As far as this latter is concerned, morality, rather than rule of law, appears to be the basic frame within which the process of self-reform – and thus also the anti-corruption campaign – is conceptualized. This way of framing CCP’s self-reform goes hand in hand with the construction of Xi’s image as a model leader. This construction takes place through both linguistic and visual communication practices. Xi Jinping personifies the model leader with consistent cultural capital, but also prone to help those who have been left behind by PRC’s economic miracle. Shaped through the use of his personal history - in which the experience during the Cultural Revolution plays a significant role – Xi Jinping is framed as a model for other members of the party and a sort of national leader who will lead the country towards its rejuvenation. A significant role in this construction is played by what is defined by “Xi’s language style”. The analysis of the CCP’s political legitimacy is thus analysed in light of the close ties between proper language use, moral behavior and political legitimacy. Although for many aspects the discursive construction of Xi's image reminds of Mao's practice, praxis diverts from the one of the Great Helmsman. The representation of Xi as a strong leader is better understood as being part of the broader discourse on creating a “Chinese model”, in which a strong centralized state power goes hand in hand with the market economy.

8.2 Final remarks

In light of the above results, this study advances two conclusive remarks. The first revolves around the political configurations that have become particularly evident since Xi took the reins of the Party and the country. The second has to do with the goal of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation from a diachronic perspective.

To start with the first of them, Xi's approach has already been defined populist, albeit presenting "Chinese characteristics". This final remarks want to go one step further, providing an understanding of how populism is articulated. However, before going ahead, it is worth remembering that given the discursive approach of this research, when naming Xi Jinping, the referent actually is not his physical person, rather his figure as constructed through discursive practices. Following this approach, populism is conceived not as a political orientation belonging to a single politician, but as a social and political practice.

Populism is nothing but a mode of identification that emerges "in time of unsettlement and de-alignment"¹, as Panizza insightfully argues. Populism thus works by creating alignment around a "demand"². By doing so, it fills the "empty" signifier of "the people" with a specific signified, i.e. all those advancing that demand. In the case of the discourse on the Chinese dream, it has been shown that *renmin* "people", after a diachronic evolution, has acquired at least three main meanings. The first is the historical *renmin* that realized national liberation and that nowadays is the hold of the *shiye* "mission". The second consists of a *renmin* that stands for political correctness. Third, *renmin* represents all those who have been left behind by economic development. Different meanings of *renmin* imply different shapes of populism. The current political practices can be defined populist at two levels. The first has to do with the *renmin* as weaker social classes; the second, with the historical *renmin*.

The first of these levels moves from the meaning of *renmin* as weaker social classes and involves the results of the empirical research dealing with the representation of leaders' qualities. On this specific level, the "demand" around which populism is articulated can be summed up, by and large, in the quest for a more balanced economic development. This "large demand", so to speak, contains many single instances, which may range from wiping out corruption to the quest for a different economic system, or labor rights and so on. The crucial point is around which of these instances populism is articulated.

As explained above, a major narrative within the construction of Xi's image is his being "a man of the people". Within this narrative, it is his experience during the Cultural Revolution that made him know "people's need", where "people" stands for all those who have not enjoyed the fruits of economic development. That Xi is crafted as "man of the

¹ Panizza (2005, 9).

² For this final remarks, this study draws upon Laclau's theorization of populism (2005).

people” carries two political consequences.³ The first is that he wields the power of orienting the “demand” of “the people”. The second, instead, is the dispossession of this right from the hand of “the people”. For the first of these consequences, stating that Xi is a man of the people confers him a strong symbolic power to be used not only over the so-called people but also over the party. Equipped with this power, Xi thus directs the “large demand” for social equality towards the goal of eradicating corruption within the party.

At the same time, stating that he knows people’s needs deprives them of the right to express these needs by themselves. In other words, the action of naming “the people” on the one hand constitutes “the people”, while, on the other, dispossessing them of the right to express their needs. Therefore, while re-constructing the political foundations of the party through the political taste of *renmin*, in the very moment in which Xi pronounces the words “I know the people”, these weaker social classes are deprived of the right to express their requests by their own. This specific political configuration can be summed up in the formula “populist authoritarianism”, rather than just “populist”.

Regarding the second level of populism in contemporary Chinese politics, it has been already pointed out that *renmin*, in its historical meaning, ceases to exist as a political subject able to carry out political actions after the end of the war for national liberation and the foundation of the PRC in 1949. In this sense, *renmin* no longer has its concrete referent, but it endures only and solely in political discourse. References to this historical *renmin* are thus called to justify the leading role of Xi, who stands for the entire party nowadays. From this perspective, Xi’s populism cannot be deemed as a novelty. Indeed, references to the historical *renmin* are far from being a new entry under Xi, as they are but an integral part of the victimization narrative since Mao.

As a matter of fact, the goal of realizing the Chinese dream appears to be less a “new ideological entry” and more a continuation of old discourses, albeit in a new “bottle”. Indeed, the objective as symbolized by the Chinese dream is, in a nutshell, the goal of becoming a *qiangguo* “powerful country” and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This goal has been a major topic in Chinese political discourse long before the foundation of the PRC. Without going too long ago and delimiting the analysis from 1949, it is safe to say that what has changed over the past decades is the idea of how to achieve this goal, but not the objective in its essence. In other words, the very idea of the

³ This study talks about “two consequences” just for analytical reasons. As will be clear, these two consequences are two faces of the same coin.

Chinese nation – which the discourse on *fixing* “rejuvenation” implies – has never been questioned. Applying the theoretical and methodological tools advanced by Snow and Benford⁴ in their “frame alignment model”, it can be said that the Chinese dream can be better understood in terms of “frame extension” instead of re-framing, which consists in a complete change of the reference frame. To put it differently, the Chinese dream is not the product of the passage from communism to nationalism in a play where one excludes the other. Rather, it “extends” the boundaries of a specific objective (i.e. the above-mentioned *qianguo*) in order to include and align all those who used to be left out (i.e. the Chinese people as a whole, encompassing all social classes and *milieus*). It does so by recalling a common imaginary, deeply anchored to a distant recent past, which is re-evoked in order to act as social glue.

In short, the core essence of the Chinese dream is constituted by an old ideology. However, what still needs to be unearthed is the reason behind this new guise, which has little to do with its contents, at least apparently. In light of the various connotations of *meng* “dream” explained at the beginning, the Chinese dream is the product of China's growing involvement with globalization, a phenomenon formerly led by the "West". It is, indeed, within the framework of globalization that the Chinese dream should be analyzed. China's mounting involvement in global relations and exchanges has caused the country leadership to look back in search for a shared cultural root, i.e. a Chinese "tradition" underlying the "futuristic" ideal of the Chinese dream. This, again, is not merely a feature of the PRC but involves other countries as well. Chinese nationalistic claims and desire for international recognition as a modern-day superpower, however, makes use of a rhetoric, the one of the dream, which was introduced from abroad at the dawn of Chinese modernity. In this sense, the Chinese dream is the result of China's encounter with foreigners, but now it uses this same rhetoric to differentiate itself from them. For this reason, the Chinese dream is, on one hand, the result of a globalized China, and, on the other, it represents its ambition to become a “globalizing” force.

8.2 Contributions to scientific knowledge and limitations

This study contributes to further theoretical and methodological development of discourse analysis while enriching the discussion on contemporary China. Starting with the

⁴ The contribution by Snow and Benford (1986) is already explained in chapter 2. Snow et al (1986).

theoretical and methodological contributions, it offers an integration of Foucault's approach to discourse analysis with frame analysis which can be applied to various discourses and diverse contexts. Methodologically, by integrating frame analysis with the methodology advanced by Fairclough and Kress and van Leeuwen, this study seeks to overcome the shortcomings of each of these methods if applied alone.

As far as Chinese Studies are concerned, the arguments developed through the analysis of various data have enriched the understanding of the concept of the Chinese dream. In particular, it offers a deeper understanding of identity creation and of political legitimation in the PRC in the era of globalization, and especially nowadays that the party seeks to export its model of governance and development.

The main limitations of this study revolve around both the literature review and the empirical research. As far as literature review is concerned, for many topics, relevant studies are left unmentioned. This is the case for instance of the concept of and PRC's soft power, or the debate around *gongmin* "citizen" and other terms that, for convenience, may be called synonyms of *renmin*. Providing a thorough literature review is a challenging task given the many issues and narratives covered by the discourse on the Chinese dream. Thus, when confronted with the necessary choice among the various studies, only the more pertinent to the discussion were chosen. This is precise because in many cases, offering an in-depth literature appraisal would have led away from the purpose of this research.

The shortcomings pertaining to empirical research consist mainly in the data collected during the two rounds of fieldwork and the possibility of analyzing in more detail the resonance of the Chinese dream. Indeed, it has been already mentioned that the scarce number of interviews does not allow to infer general conclusions on people's understanding of this concept. Furthermore, another shortcoming is the lack of a broader and more global perspective from which looking at the dynamics taking place in the PRC. For instance, with the new wave of strong leaders worldwide, Xi Jinping's figure appears to be only an example of a global trend. It would be worth analyzing similarities and differences in the construction of Xi's image and other "charismatic leaders" more in details in future research.

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