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Finding a Place for the Party: Debunking the “Party-State” and Rethinking the State-Society Relationship in China’s One-Party System

Holly Snape and Weinan Wang¹

Abstract: This paper proposes a new agenda for research on Chinese politics that overcomes the obscuring effect of the ubiquitous “party-state” construct, finds a substantive place for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and thereby reveals dynamics of the interplay between the Party, society and state that otherwise remain hidden. Since the 1980s, the state-society relationship has been the subject of extensive scholarship. Yet most such work treats the CCP as little more than the assumed and elusive source of power behind the state. We show why, in conceptualizing and theorizing this one-party state’s state-society relationship, it is imperative to separate “Party” from “state,” to bring the former under close scrutiny, and to do so in a way that accounts for the multidimensional, multidirectional interplay between state, society *and* Party. We combine a historical perspective with analysis of political documents and discourse to demonstrate how research toward this new agenda might be pursued. By doing so, we offer examples of the dimensions and dynamics of governance processes, such as tensions between Party and state imperatives, the implications of Party reliance on the state to influence society, and the possible spaces for actor agency that, without this proposed shift, go ignored or misinterpreted.

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present the case for jettisoning the “party-state” concept and transforming the way we think about the “state-society relationship” in China’s one-party system. What we are proposing is a major conceptual shift and perhaps, ultimately, a significant change in the way one-party systems are analyzed.

For years, researchers have observed Chinese politics using a state-society relationship lens. But by failing to examine the relationships between the ruling party and both state and society, that lens can obfuscate as much as it can

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explain. For researchers examining local governance processes this can mean that important dimensions, such as the tensions between competing Party and state imperatives, go unexamined, leading us to miss or misinterpret the dynamics of those processes. Similarly, attempts to understand the behaviors of cadres, civil servants, social activists and other actors involved in these processes may overlook and misconstrue these people's agency.

In 1992 Kenneth Lieberthal wrote in an introduction to an edited volume on decision-making processes, "it may be that lack of direct consideration of the Party itself does not seriously distort our understanding of policy process."¹ He noted that future research should seek to support or refute this idea. This paper is an initial step toward its refutation and the correction of its distortions.

To propose this shift in the research agenda, we examine the absence of the Party in existing studies of the state-society relationship; set out the challenges to questioning the "party-state" lens; provide our own example of a multilayered approach to examining "the Party"; and use a specific policy field to probe in finer detail the relationships between Party, state and society. This is done by selecting and analyzing key political and policy documents (for example the Communist Party Central Committee's 2018 *Plan on Deepening Party and State Agency Reform*), examining institutional structures and changes to them, taking seriously discourse and informal institutions, and revealing spaces where agency may be at play that would be obscured without this conceptual shift.

Though the limitations of the state-society relationship lens go back to at least the beginning of the post-Mao era (c.1978)² the need to address them has never been more pressing. With Xi Jinping as its leader, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—the sole governing party of the People's Republic of China's (PRC)—has made broad and deep-reaching changes to the way Chinese society is governed. It has overhauled internal Party systems for controlling the behavior of its members and organizations; enshrined "Party leadership" in the General Principles of the state Constitution; reinvigorated the discourse of the "revolutionary," the "red" and the "political"; used "small leadership groups" and existing Party organizations to take authority from state bodies; and extended the span and nature of its reach into spheres of civic organizing. These actions have changed the roles of, and relationships between, the CCP, state, and society in myriad and complex ways.

But before Xi too, over the decades since the CCP became the "governing party," different administrations, events, and developments have called for different roles for, and relationships between, Party, state, and society.

A fundamental flaw in existing analytical frameworks prevents us from understanding not just major changes, such as those under Xi, but also less

obvious but integral dynamics of the interplay between CCP, state and society actors.

It is this flaw that we seek to address by proposing a new agenda for studying Chinese politics that finds a meaningful place for the Party. By this we mean not simply paying more attention to the CCP while still retaining the concepts of the “party-state” and the “state-society relationship,” but questioning, even abandoning, those obfuscating conceptual tools in favor of an approach that makes the Party a core part of analysis in its own right along with the state and society. In part four of this paper we offer a rudimentary example of how this might be done, by peeling back the CCP’s layers and probing the interplay of Party, society, and state.

Background to the study

Chinese- and English-language studies on China’s state-society relationship have been common since the early 1980s³ and the early 1990s respectively. But they rarely treat the CCP as more than the assumed and elusive source of power behind the state. When they do examine the Party’s role, it is often in the limited (and therefore problematic) sense that Carl Minzner⁴ has found to be common in studies of Chinese law, “depict[ing] the Party as an external force intervening in...institutions and processes.”

In the study of one-party systems more generally, the relationship between party and state is largely “left blank.”⁵ With a number of important exceptions⁶ this is also the case in studies of the Chinese political system. Studies on the influence of the CCP on the state and vice versa are few, creating a lack of research “out of kilter with the weight of the issue in practice.”⁷ Work focusing on the Party, state *and* society is even more rare.

The critical problem at the heart of current scholarship is a failure to differentiate between Party and state. It is for this reason that the rich body of literature developed over four decades on the state-society relationship does not, in its existing form, enable us to notice, interpret, and explain crucial dimensions of, and changes in, the relationships between Party, state and society. Without correcting the elusiveness (or absence) of the Party in existing conceptualizations, we cannot fully understand the dynamics of governance, or the implications of changes over time; nor can we theorize them.

To begin unravelling and explaining the CCP’s relationships with social and state actors, we must first recognize the different elements of the “party-state,” deconstructing this catch-all concept.⁸

Once the concept is debunked, neither state nor Party can be treated as a monolith. Wu has remarked that “the Party” is an “empty” concept until given substance by its parts.⁹ Schurmann’s classic study called for attention to its

“ideology and organization.”¹⁰ Zhou, Gu and Song and Wu stress the centrality of informal institutions to the Party’s operations.¹¹ Only by examining the substantive elements of “the Party” – formal and informal, rules and structures, personnel, and ideology and discourse—can we begin to incorporate “the Party” into our conceptual framework. This must be matched by a similarly granular account of state.

We then need to examine these different dimensions in terms of their multidirectional relationships, examining not only institutions and actors but the agency at play between them.

In short, what we are arguing for is a major conceptual shift that not only brings the Party in¹² but that examines it in relation to state *and* society. Obviously, such an agenda cannot be achieved in one paper. Here, we argue the need for this shift and tentatively explore possibilities for pursuing it.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: the next section examines how scholars have theorized the state-society relationship in the post-Mao one-party system. Section 3 analyzes the challenges to, and sets out the argument for, debunking the “party-state” concept. Section 4 presents our own research, which peels back the layers of “the Party,” showing how it can be examined as a multilayered, multidimensional actor; and zeros in on a specific policy field to scrutinize the relationships in closer detail, revealing dynamics of the state-society relationship that are obscured when the Party is overlooked or subsumed under the “Party-state.” Section 5 concludes with findings on how to proceed in bringing the Party in when theorizing the state-society relationship in a one-party system.

2 Theorizing the State-Society Relationship without the Party?

For four decades, scholars have used conceptualizations of the “state-society relationship” as a way to understand and explain social and political changes in the post-Mao one-party system. In the late 1980s and 1990s scholars examined a burgeoning sphere of social organizing, examined the relationship of these organizations to the state, and debated the implications of such phenomena for democratization.¹³

Much of this literature focused on the society dimension of the relationship. Scholars explained what they found to be porous boundaries¹⁴ or an intermediary realm¹⁵ between society and state, and examined the inventive techniques used by social actors to survive, navigate government controls,¹⁶ and participate in policy processes.¹⁷ This literature, which often applied the concept of civil society, questioned how (or why) under an authoritarian state, such a sphere of non-governmental actors was emerging; whether these actors were meaningfully autonomous; and whether they might, ultimately, limit the

power of “the state.” Such work was premised on the notion that observed changes could have a democratizing effect on the political system.

An accompanying literature, driven by skepticism about the potential for autonomous organizations, focused on state mechanisms used to shape and contain social organizing, eliminate space for it, or render it impotent as a check on state power. This work often drew on the concept of corporatism.¹⁸ Unlike the civil society thesis, it did not speculate as to the potential transformation of the political system.

As both literatures grew and it became apparent that, in practice, reforms to the economy were not being matched by similarly substantive political reforms, a new wave of literature emerged. It skillfully combined and critiqued the civil society approach and corporatist explanations by closely scrutinizing and theorizing the complex interplay between society and state. These studies developed the notion of a contingent symbiosis;¹⁹ state-society codependency;²⁰ and the capacity of the “party-state” to use a flourishing non-governmental sector to bolster, and not undermine, the one-party system.²¹

Not all of this literature entirely overlooks the Party. Some scholars, when using the “party-state” construct, rather than neglecting the Party, may actually be de-emphasizing the “state.”²² In some studies, the Party is not entirely left out but is not actively brought in—the different roles, institutions, incentives, or even nature of the Party as compared to the state may be assumed or considered but not explained. Jessica Teets, for example, argues convincingly that “consultative authoritarianism” emerged after the introduction of civil service reforms in the 1980s.²³ Those reforms dramatically shifted incentive structures from a focus on political loyalty (a Party priority) to one on state performance (a state concern), driving officials to turn to society in a search for policy innovations. Though the argument does not treat “Party” and “state” separately, it derives from observations of the different imperatives at play and a shift in the balance between them.

Patricia Thornton made the important first step of explicitly treating the Party and the state separately when examining their relationships to society.²⁴ We examine her description of “the advance of the Party and the retreat of the state” below.

Other scholars of the state-society relationship, particularly those writing in Chinese, pay close attention to the broader political atmosphere shaped by Party doctrinal documents, adaptations to discourse, and policy documents.²⁵ These scholars, perhaps unsurprisingly, though clearly aware of the centrality of the Party in shaping the state-society relationship, still tend to discuss the “state” when theorizing this relationship. Some, while not referring explicitly to the Party, allude to the different functions or operational concerns of the state

as compared to those of the Party. Liu Peifeng, for example, when explaining recent trends, argues: “the relationship of state and society is being reconfigured; the main trend is that state administration is receding while politics is getting stronger.”²⁶

What Liu’s vaguely worded “strengthening of politics” does that Thornton’s seemingly conclusive “advancing Party, retreating state” does not, is create vital space for scrutinizing and interpreting the interplay between Party, state and society without precluding certain lines of inquiry. To be sure, Liu’s essay is not all so abstract: it carefully details concrete steps taken by the national state legislature, functional state departments, and the Party’s Central Committee Office vis-à-vis social organizations. Though he does not state this explicitly, it is the *interaction* between state and Party regulations and policies that is core to his analysis. By contrast, the “advancing Party, retreating state” pattern, with its unidirectional verbs, preempts further exploration of the different institutions, ideas, and actors involved and the potentially multidirectional, multidimensional influences that they might have on each other.

Yongdong Shen, Jianxing Yu and Jun Zhou have, in contrast, produced some of the only work to date to treat Party, state and society separately while also detailing evidence of the agency of social actors.²⁷

The incorporation of “the Party” into the state-society relationship is not just a matter of spotting trends in Party versus state influence under one particular leader or of noting increased numbers of Party cells. While it might be intuitive to simply triangulate Party, state and society in order to correct the Party’s normalized omission, we argue against rushing to create broad typologies or propose basic triangular frameworks that do little more than tag “Party-” onto “state-society.” Such frameworks, proposed before this new research agenda has had time to develop, would risk further obfuscating important dimensions and limiting its possibilities. Hence, we suggest that the first step must be to distinguish clearly between the Party, the state, and society—their different roles, functions, and operating habits, as well as institutions and actors. Only then can we begin to examine how they interact with each other. We begin with the “party-state” — a conceptual construct that is deeply entrenched in scholarship on Chinese politics and one that is hard to crack open.

3 Prizing Open the Party-State: Tracing Systemic Silencing and Revisiting Existing Insights

The relationship between Party and state is central to the PRC’s political system. In the course of PRC history, it has been at the heart of bold but inconspicuous attempts to change or adapt that system. In this section, we give

a brief overview of this historical process in order to show how the Party-state relationship has, within the system itself, been delegitimized as a subject of debate. We note the challenges this presents for our current agenda, then draw attention to useful existing insights. First, we set out some basic considerations and definitions.

In China's one-party system, separation (or division of labor)²⁸ between different Party and state agencies (or individuals) is not clear, consistent or unchanging. Party and state structures, regulatory systems, personnel arrangements, operating priorities (e.g. political versus professional), forms of institutional manipulation,²⁹ and working methods (e.g. political campaigns) differ from period to period. There can also be different rules (formal or informal) at the same time in different parts of the system.

The difficulty of cracking open the compound noun "party-state" is compounded by the complexity of its composite elements. The identity of the Party alone is complex, ambiguous, arguably contradictory, and known to change in important ways over time.³⁰

Crucial to digging beneath ambiguous allusions in Party discourse to concepts like "Party leadership" and "Party building," is the duality of the CCP's identity.³¹ The Party is as at once "revolutionary vanguard" and "governing party."³² At times one part of this identity is emphasized over the other and sometimes the two are in tension, but never can one completely negate the other because the Party's "legitimizing claims"³³ depend upon both.

This means that in the context of one-party rule, the discourse of the sole-governing party in one period cannot overtly contradict what came before. In practical terms, for instance, calls for "strengthened Party leadership" at one time—say, under Zhao Ziyang—might mean something very different to identically worded calls at another time. Such identically worded calls can be underpinned by entirely contradictory visions of the Party's identity and its role vis-à-vis the state. In short, any attempt to understand the Party and its relationship to state and society must take seriously "the Party's" nature and dual identity.

This paper draws its definition of "state" from actual state structures and from Chinese literature on the Party-state relationship.³⁴ We use "state" in a broad sense to refer to a) the "state power organs" (国家权力机关 *guojia quanli jiguan*), b) the "administrative organs" (行政机关 *xingzheng jiguan*), and c) "judicial organs" (司法机关 *sifa jiguan*). The military (军事机关 *junshi jiguan*) could be included in this list though it can also be regarded separately as one of three "big tightly interlocked systems" of Party, state and military.³⁵ Our focus is on the "administrative organs," which includes the national and local government and their functional departments. This is not because the Party's

relationships with the other elements of the state are less important (work has begun on probing the relationship between the Party and the people's congresses the judiciary and the military).³⁶ It is to narrow our focus enough to offer the depth and detail needed to be useful.

Silenced within the system

Though the Party-state relationship is at the heart of Chinese politics, since the political reform agenda unveiled in the 13th National Party Congress Report (in 1987) was quietly abandoned after 1989,³⁷ this relationship has rarely been openly discussed by the Party itself in anything but the vaguest of terms.

This silence, we argue, is precisely because of the importance of the relationship to the system's sole party: to its retention of power and its approaches to governing.

In that 1987 report, Zhao Ziyang had announced that "Party-state separation" (党政分开 *dangzheng fenkai*) was key to political reform. Thirty years later, Wang Qishan declared that Xi has "cleared up a hazy understanding" on Party-state separation. Wang claimed that while, over the years before Xi, the topic had not been overtly discussed, or had been discussed covertly through re-framing, various forms of separation had been pursued in practice. Wang's message was that this must stop.³⁸

For a brief period between 1978 and 1989 top leaders and the Party-run media engaged in a protracted, artful, semi-public debate about that relationship. This used "cultural creativity" and "cultural positioning"³⁹ for the public⁴⁰ and tailored arguments for the leadership.⁴¹ In what is viewed as a landmark speech on political reform, in August 1980, Deng Xiaoping underlined the need to "solve the problem of a lack of separation between Party and state (党政不分 *dangzheng bufen*) and the Party taking the place of the state (以党代政 *yidang daizheng*)."⁴²

Though Deng spoke often of the need for separation his speeches suggest that his main aim was to increase efficiency.⁴³ Zhao's speeches, in contrast, occasionally revealed a desire to create substantive checks on power. Zhao argued, for example, that if the Party continued to take on the state's executive work, the lack of Party-state separation would negate its ability and right to carry out oversight on that work: "you can't conduct oversight on yourself."⁴⁴

Throughout the 1980s, through local pilot initiatives, the debate was combined with, and given momentum by, concrete steps to implement Party-state separation in practice. Even at the central level, attempts were made (and enshrined in the 13th Congress Report) to create some Party-state separation by requiring the dissolution of Party groups (党组 *dangzu*) inside state

departments, the dissolution of “parallel Party departments” (对口部门 *duikou bumen*) serving the same functions as state ones, and the creation of a professional state civil service.

These attempts to reconfigure, delimit and define the relationship were mostly abandoned at the end of the 1980s with the event of demonstrations around the country and their violent suppression in Beijing. Some were not only abandoned but were harshly denounced as a cause of weakened Party leadership.⁴⁵ Steps already taken were undone and new measures were introduced to create greater integration.⁴⁶ “The ‘separation’ path had not been successfully opened up” and with a few rare exceptions, this marked the end of overt official public discussion on the subject.⁴⁷

Thus, although top leaders had once argued that correcting the Party-state relationship through separation was imperative, it was dropped abruptly but quietly from the central-level agenda and all but disappeared from official discourse.

A gradual silencing has been worked into the official narrative leaving the related formulations and leading figures forgotten. They are no longer part of official discourse or of the habits of thought cultivated through discourse, documents, symbolic rituals, and imagery.

A similar trend has gradually unfolded beyond the speeches of leaders, permeating laws and regulations, popping up in propagandizing banners, and seeping into everyday life. This is facilitated by intrinsically vague terms like “Party-state” (党政 *dang-zheng*) and “Party-state-military-people-educators” (党政军民学 *dang-zheng-jun-min-xue*). Such obfuscating language, characteristic of the Party,⁴⁸ side-steps the need, and blunts our ability, to think clearly about to whom or what they refer.

With the place of the Party vis-à-vis other actors now rarely discussed in any depth or with any clarity, these relationships not only go unquestioned but become almost unquestionable.

Missed moments for a new research agenda: revisiting existing insights

We too, as researchers of Chinese politics, have perhaps become too used to vague expressions of “Party leadership,” such that it is common for studies of Chinese political and social phenomena to overlook or downplay something so fundamental to understanding their dynamics. The work of Zheng Shiping, which should be described as “seminal” but regrettably is not, merits quoting at length:

The compound noun party-state usually brings us more confusion than convenience. As an analytical tool, the party-

state concept is inherently a problematic one, because it often *blurs rather than reveals* the structural conflicts that beset the Party organization and the state institutions. By accepting the party-state assumption, we are led to believe that the organizational interests of the Party and the state institutions *not only coexist but are one and the same thing.* ⁴⁹ (our emphasis)

In the study of Chinese politics, it is generally accepted that the important decision-making processes in the system are “dominated by the leading Party bodies.”⁵⁰ But “domination” cannot occur without interaction between Party and state, and the imperatives of the two cannot always be the same.

Inside officialdom, despite silence on fundamental issues (unchecked power, for example), reference is made to certain dynamics of the Party-state relationship. In political and policy processes it is recognized to cause direct tensions between “political” and “professional” imperatives. This is expressed in official discourse as the “Two Skins” problem (“两张皮”问题 “*liangzhangpi wenti*”): problems occur when Party building and leadership are, like a layer of skin, peeled away from professional functions (业务 *yewu*) instead of forming an integrated whole.

While the Party might have “a natural tendency to subordinate the state to itself” the state is “not a helpless actor”; the state can “draw its power from its own ‘field’ of administration..., such as [its] professionalism, administrative knowhow and governance, which can hardly be claimed by the Party.”⁵¹ Hence, at times when Party and state functions have become more distinct “the Party has a feeling of having been stripped of power, and along comes the return to Party-state oneness.”⁵² In other words, separation and re-intermingling can happen in cyclic-type movements, with the former succumbing to the latter.

The identity of the Party means it cannot simply envelop the state and govern directly as the Party; to do so would be to relinquish its claim to legitimacy. But not doing so means the Party must find a way to work *via* the state that results in effective governance. This also applies to society, given the Party’s identity as “vanguard” and supposed closeness to “the people.” The crux of the Party-state relationship can be understood as tension between legitimacy and efficiency.⁵³ In short, it is *through* state and society agencies and actors that the Party must operate. Collapsing Party and state into one obscures this core dynamic of the one-party system.

Yet the work of Lieberthal and Oksenberg,⁵⁴ which for decades has shaped our understanding of China’s policy processes, all but overlooks the Party-state relationship, acknowledging that its failure to explain the Party’s role “is the

single most serious limitation to the study.”⁵⁵ They cite as a reason “our written sources and Chinese informants revealed little about the role of the Party.”⁵⁶

From this we can draw basic lessons: we need to actively seek sources that help us to understand Party roles, looking in the right places (not just in state policy documents but in Party “opinions”; not just in laws but in Party regulations and not just in reports of state meetings but in notices on their internal Party group meetings). We need to scour for evidence of the Party’s role (just because there is silence on the relationship does not mean it is unimportant); and, since political discourse can be both telling and misleading, we must question everything we find in historical context.

Below, we select a number of key Party documents to give an example of how this might be done in practice. Our aim in doing so is to demonstrate one possible approach and to illuminate dynamics that would, without finding a meaningful place for the Party, remain obscured.

4 Changing the Way We Think about the State-Society Relationship: A Multilayered Approach to the Party and its Interplay with State and Society

To bring the Party into our analysis in a way that helps us to understand the complex relationships between Party, state and society requires a multi-layered approach to “the Party.” Such an approach should take the Party’s nature and identity into account and would, ideally, account for *formal institutions* (e.g. the Party Charter, regulations and documents; structures and organizations; formal meetings); *informal institutions* (e.g. the timeframes and rhythms of informal norms that interplay with formal institutions⁵⁷ and informal practices⁵⁸); *ideology* (in the sense elaborated by Sorace as that which “guarantees identity”⁵⁹); *discourse* (as central to how Party, state, and societal actors interact); and *actors* (e.g. Party members; rank-and-file cadres; leading cadres, and Party leaders).

Peeling back the layers of “the Party”

Our first step was to select a central-level Party document—judged to be important due to the pattern of similar documents as detailed below—and examine it in its historical context. In March 2018, the Central Committee issued the *Plan on Deepening Party and State Agency Reform* (hereinafter “Party & State Reform Plan” or “the Reform Plan”).⁶⁰ This was a plan for combined Party and state agency restructuring and a reapportioning of roles. The Party & State Reform Plan is unprecedented in the history of the post-Mao one-party system.

Though before it, there were six previous rounds of *state* agency reforms,⁶¹ only one of those sought to overhaul the Party-state relationship. The 1988 plan made Party-state *separation* a basic underlying principle—a principle that was

dropped with the “silencing” discussed above.⁶² All five other plans have basically reshuffled functions among agencies *within* the state or devolved state roles to society.

In stark contrast, the 2018 Party & State Reform Plan pursues Party-state *integration* (党政融合 *dangzheng ronghe*)⁶³ and shuffles roles and functions *between* Party and state. It seeks to fundamentally change the relationship between Party and state, enabling Party bodies to swallow up entirely, envelop parts of, or penetrate certain state agencies and take over some core state functions.

We analyzed the Reform Plan as a whole to alert ourselves to possible adjustments to the Party, state and society relationships, then, based on what we found, selected key examples of policies that are initiated or affected by it (the Reform Plan contains broad, overarching policies, which are to be acted on through further, more specific, policy documents or adjustments to existing regulations). This allowed us to probe for potential concrete implications for the relationships. We sketch out two such examples below.

First, the Reform Plan announces that all civil servants are to be placed under direct Party management by merging the State Civil Servants’ Bureau into the CCP Central Organization Department.⁶⁴ The implications of this policy, which is a sharp volte-face on the trend begun by Deng Xiaoping toward state management of civil servants, can be closely traced through subsequent changes to Party regulations, state law (the Civil Servants’ Law, amended in late 2018) and state policy documents. Changes such as the prioritization of “political quality” in the assessment of civil servants reveals a “politicization” of civil servant management.⁶⁵ Hence, examining these regulations, laws and policy documents alerts us to a shift apparent across the structures (which body – Party or state – manages such personnel), regulations (who drafts them, what they say, and what language they use to say it)⁶⁶ and mechanisms (what, for example, incentive mechanisms prioritize) that all influence civil servants’ behavior.

Second, the Reform Plan institutes a so-called “organic melding” of, on the one hand, internal Party oversight and discipline inspection and, on the other, state organ oversight and supervision.⁶⁷ It does this by establishing an expansive system of supervision commissions under a newly formed state National Supervision Commission (NSC). To understand this better we can examine the NSC’s own documents and its insertion into the 2018 amended state Constitution. This establishment of a new state system of agencies enables the *Party* to “investigate those answerable to [it]...irrespective of their Party status” and “markedly expand[s] the Party’s capacity to control various sectors of society.”⁶⁸ As Susan Finder argues, a consequence is that “the entire legal

framework for disciplining public servants...is changing” with “discipline being further harmonized with the politically oriented disciplinary process.”⁶⁹

Since both of these changes—the Party taking over the state’s direct management of civil servants and the creation of new supervision agencies—are introduced through the Party document but instituted through state mechanisms (the amendment of the state Civil Servants’ Law and the establishment of the NSC through the state Constitution), could we have skipped the initial step of searching and analyzing the Party document (the Reform Plan) and analyzed only those of the state? We believe the answer to be “no,” because to do so would have been to miss or only partially understand these changes.

The Party tends to obscure the nature of its systems, particularly regarding its relationship to the state, but referring directly to its own documents is one way to garner more information. For example, on the Party’s absorption of the state’s agency for civil servant management, the Reform Plan reads: “the State Civil Servants’ Bureau shall be merged into the Party Central Organization Department. The Party Central Organization Department shall, to the outside, *retain the label* of the State Civil Servants’ Bureau” (our emphasis). Likewise, on the supervisory bodies, the Reform Plan reads: “an NSC shall be established, it shall set up office jointly with the Party Central Commission of Discipline Inspection...and operate one working agency *with two organ names*” (our emphasis).⁷⁰ While the relationships between Party and state are being deeply affected through a melding of agencies, functions, and cohorts of personnel, the identities of those new agencies and systems will, at the bidding of the Party, be obfuscating. It is only in the Party’s own documents that this becomes evident.

In the above process we selected and analyzed a key central Party document in historical context, examined the policies and principles contained in it, and sought out examples of policies changed by it to understand its implications for the Party-state relationship. The process focused on a Party document directly related to the state. This is what we can refer to as an “outward facing” Party document—one that seeks to influence a field “outside” the Party itself. Such Party documents are common, crucial, and can be found in all fields.

We can repeat the above process of documentary analysis using “inward facing” Party documents to further probe the relationships in question.

In 2013, a plan was issued to reshape the Party through systematic, sweeping changes to the Party’s internal framework of rules, regulations, and codes: the *Central Committee Five-Year Plan on Intraparty Regulation Formulation Work (2013–2017)* (hereinafter “the Plan”). Since the Party must function *through* state and social structures, bodies, and personnel, the Plan, though “inward facing” still alters its relationships to non-Party actors.

The Plan states that regulations will be formulated on Party groups (党组 *dangzu*). Party groups are key mechanisms through which the Party dominates decision-making in non-Party (including state) organizations. They work from inside “state organs, people’s organizations, economic organizations, cultural organizations” and other bodies at the county level and above.⁷¹ In 1987, the 13th Party Congress Report had attempted to abolish them, using the rationale that because “they are responsible to the Party committees that approved their establishment” they are “not conducive to the integrated-ness and efficacy of the state’s work.”

Again, a historical perspective is vital in helping us to pinpoint important documents. The Party group mechanism was established in 1945 and yet, except for three short articles in the Party Charter, they have never been formally institutionalized through intraparty regulations. Hence this move initiated by the Plan was significant and warranted further attention.

In 2015 Party group regulations – the *CCP Party Group Work Regulations (for Trial Enforcement)* – were introduced, “filling a gap” after 70 years.⁷² In 2019, the regulations were amended and reissued.

Both versions delineate concrete requirements and responsibilities for Party groups, their members, and the higher-level Party organizations that approved their establishment. They alter incentive and penalty structures for people in leading positions inside state agencies⁷³ and prompt approving Party organizations of Party groups to supervise them more actively and regularly, thus strengthening the supervision that Zhao had proclaimed in 1987 to be detrimental to the work of the state.

Party group members can, under the new regulations, be held accountable for failures in a list of tasks that is at once both concrete and detailed and in places vaguely worded. A member can be held accountable for “not diligently carrying out their responsibilities for strictly governing the Party, leading to their unit’s Party organizations becoming enfeebled and lax and Party building becoming weakened.”⁷⁴ What will be deemed “diligent,” “enfeebled” and “weakened” is left open. Though such wording has been used generally in the Party for decades, with concepts and expectations shifting over time, and a lack of clarity on how such responsibilities are measured, how can Party group members be sure such that such loosely defined work is not weak under their watch? This demands that individuals internalize and judge for themselves vague Party language and shifting standards. With the newly codified shadow of unfathomable judgement and accountability hanging over their heads,⁷⁵ Party group members *inside the state* who are charged with making key decisions on policy are likely to do more to *demonstrate* themselves as being “diligent” in “strengthening Party building” in their respective state departments.

As the structures and functions discussed above change, Party organizations are also taking on a more direct role in drafting laws and policies. The PRC one-party system has long used documents as its main communicative device rather than law. Shi Tianjian pointed out that “by nature, documents are imprecise and vague in their language.”⁷⁶ The vague nature of

documents enables bureaucrats...to interpret policies...according to their own preferences." The increasingly direct role of Party organizations in drafting laws and policies not only enables interpretation; it demands it.

What happens when the vague Party language of its own documents crosses the boundaries into laws and state policies? Christian Göbel and Thomas Heberer have highlighted the replacement of clearly defined policy outcomes with the "need to decode,"⁷⁷ which demands a kind of tacit understanding of civil servants. Vague Party language and concepts increasingly seeping into state law and government policy must be interpreted by state implementors. The pressure to do so is compounded by the direct management and supervision and the changing incentive and penalty structures contributing to a "political atmosphere" in which the need to abide by current Party demands and err on the side of caution has grown.

How do these findings relate to the "state-society" relationship? As we discussed above, the Party must, given its nature and need to preserve its legitimacy claims, work *through* state and social organizations and actors. Peeling back the Party's layers lays bare 1) direct shifts in incentive and penalty structures, 2) increasingly direct Party management and supervision, and 3) a bleeding of vague Party discourse into state documents, all of which contribute to 4) an altered political atmosphere in which actors must navigate all of the above. These changes seep from top to bottom through tiers of intertwined agencies as well as for individual personnel.

This approach enables us to discern and analyze *specific* patterns and changes in the relationships between Party and state that influence the state-society relationship from the Party *through* the state. Without bringing the Party in, even if such patterns and changes were perceptible, they would be inexplicable.

On the flip side, it alerts us to the *reliance* of the Party on such forms of influence through the state, and, as a result, the specific channels and methods that become potential spaces for agency.

Finally, it enables us to discern and analyze *overarching* changes in the relationships between all three.

Narrowing the focus to a specific policy field: social organization management

We now turn to a specific policy field to enable us to examine the need for this shift in the research agenda in a concrete policy setting. We chose the field of "social organization management" because it has been the focus of a rich literature on the "state-society relationship." As we discussed above, there has long been a debate among scholars (and practitioners) about the potential of social organizations to act independently of the state, to check its power, and to potentially lead to political change. As we illustrate below, in a one-party state, considering changes in the "state-society" relationship without finding a meaningful place for the Party is likely to lead to a view that is at best partial

but may also be misconceived. We begin with an introduction to the chosen policy field which is necessary to our analysis.

“Social organization” (社会组织 *shehui zuzhi*) is Chinese political jargon. It is difficult to pin down since it has at least two overlapping meanings which only sometimes, through context, are distinguishable.⁷⁸ Our focus here is its first meaning, roughly: organizations that are non-governmental, non-profit, and, sometimes, membership based. “Social organization management” is a policy field that, since the first steps to create it in 1988,⁷⁹ has been under the portfolio of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA). Sun Weilin, former head of the MoCA’s Department for Social Organization Management, described the management system as “the state-society relationship manifested in a concrete form...belonging to the superstructure, including the political and the ideological.”⁸⁰

Between the beginning of the post-Mao period and the mid-1980s, the authorities made little attempt to institutionalize control over non-governmental organizations. The General Principles of Civil Law, promulgated in 1986, introduced “societies” (社会团体 *shehui tuanti*) as a form of legal person. Societies typically originated from or were linked closely to the state or the Party.

At the heart of social organization management is the right of freedom of association and its protection or impediment. This right, which appeared in the 1982 Constitution, was explicitly raised by Zhao Ziyang’s 13th Congress Report in 1987. That report called for work to quickly begin on formulating a law on the freedom of association. The State Council put the MoCA in charge of drafting work and created a drafting group. But after the violent crackdown on protests in the summer of 1989, official discussion on this right was dropped along with the Congress Report’s political reform agenda.

With this, instead of an overarching Party-led push to protect (albeit limited) freedom of association, a patchy, ad hoc state-headed “management system” was built up with rules and regulations often added in response to events perceived to be a political threat. The events of 1989 “put an end to a loosely scattered form of management characterizable as *laissez faire*.”⁸¹

Before this, in relation to social organizations, the authorities were focusing on economic development and international trade. The State Council issued the PRC’s first ever regulations on social organizations just before and after the crackdown—the *Measures on Foundation Management*⁸² of September 1988 and the *Temporary Measures on Foreign Chambers of Commerce*⁸³ of June 1989. A third, added quickly in October 1989—the *Regulations on the Registration and Management of Societies*⁸⁴—focused not only on the economic but also on the social.

A decade later, after a mushrooming of not-yet-state-managed social organizations, the state amended its regulations on societies (1998) and foundations (2004) and created a new state-legitimated form of social organization—the citizen-run non-enterprise unit (hereinafter “citizen-run unit”) (1998).⁸⁵

At this point, the Party’s Central Organization Department joined forces with the MoCA to issue the 1998 *Notice on Strengthening Societies’ Party Building Work*,⁸⁶ and at the next opportunity,⁸⁷ in 2002, the Party Charter was amended, to add societies to the list of types of organizations that, on fulfilling the criterion of having three full Party members, should set up internal primary-level Party organizations.

Thus by 1998 there were three main types of social organizations regulated by state documents. But there was no (publicly known) institutionalized measure disallowing other forms of associating. An incident in 1999 involving the Falun Gong, perceived by the leadership as a political threat (Chan 2004), likely contributed to changing this. In 2000 the MoCA issued the *Temporary Measures on the Banning of Illegal Citizens’ Organizations*⁸⁸ which essentially made all forms of unregistered social organizations illegal.

This overview raises questions about the “advancing Party, retreating state” pattern suggested to describe the Party, state and society relationship. We find several assumptions to be problematic.

First, in existing work, the “advancing Party, retreating state” pattern draws an equivalence between *general* state downsizing and *specific* Party “advance.”⁸⁹ It is based on the argument that the state was downsized in the late 1990s, while the Party was bulked up inside social organizations.

The state was indeed being “streamlined.” But, as illustrated by the 1998 State Council Reform Plan—a reform plan like that examined above, though it shifted roles between state and society not Party and state—the 15 state departments abolished were mostly related to trade and industry. This reform was accompanied by the rise in importance of industry associations—a type of “society,” and therefore a social organization subject to “social organization management” by the state.

Thus, certainly, the state reform relinquished some state powers and resources to society. But these changes did not simply *reduce* the state’s role vis-à-vis society; it *changed* it. Instead of directly managing certain areas of trade and industry, the state was now charged with managing the associations that regulated (or, perhaps, manipulated) trade and industry. As business was empowered, so too were industry associations and the task of social organization management recently added to the MoCA’s portfolio became more important and complex.

This was not an “advancing” Party and a “retreating” state (and a society without agency); it was a complex reshuffle between Party, state, and society involving changing state roles, increasing social organization (industry association) roles, and efforts by the Party to work in new ways through each (as shown by the joint Party-and-state 1998 *Notice on Strengthening Societies’ Party Building Work* and the inclusion of societies in the Party Charter). With state functions devolved to social organizations, the Party *relied* on state agencies both to manage social organizations and, *through that management*, to facilitate the Party’s own building within them. This is a key dynamic of the interplay between Party, state and society that is not captured by the “state-society relationship *or* the “advancing Party, retreating state.”

Shortly after this, then Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin introduced the notion of the “Three Represents,” allowing businesspeople into the Party. This reminds us that the influence in the interplay between Party and society was not unidirectional.

The second assumption is that the Party’s “advance,” by setting up organizations inside social organizations, was somehow part of a predesigned grand strategy “to fill the gaps left by the withdrawal of the state.”⁹⁰ This suggests that the Party was able to choreograph steps to withdraw the state and insert itself in its place.

Our overview above showed a very different part of the picture: both state and Party bodies were issuing or adapting documents in an ad hoc fashion in response to developments and incidents that the system of Party and state control was unprepared for and that triggered official concern. It might be that there was a combination of both up-front strategizing (e.g. in the case of industry associations) and responding after the fact (e.g. in the case of actions taken after events in 1989 and 1999 vis-à-vis civic organizing). Hence, in bringing the Party in, it is necessary to create approaches and conceptual frameworks that allow for multiple cause-effect combinations to be observed and examined.

A third issue becomes salient only when we consider informal institutions: in this case, the norms that emerged surrounding state management of social organizations. The regulations on banning certain organizations stipulated that any “unregistered” organization “acting without authorization...in the name of a society or citizen-run unit” was an “illegal citizens’ organization.” The MoCA and its local departments were charged with ordering the dissolution of such organizations. Yet vast numbers of organizations that, by this state definition, were “illegal” – often referred to outside officialdom as “grassroots NGOs” – were operating without being shut down. State non-implementation was the norm; sporadic implementation was a supplementary habit. Unable or

unwilling to register,⁹¹ an estimated 8 million⁹² social organizations existed in this grey social space beyond state control.⁹³ Instead of shutting them down, the state agency in charge for the most part let them be. They existed in a large informal-institutional loophole.

Here, the state neither “entered” nor “retreated.” Its influence was significant, since these social organizations’ inability to gain state-legitimated status denied them basic legal rights and protections and stunted their growth. Yet crucially, since quasi-legally⁹⁴ they did not (or should not) exist, they could not be treated as belonging to the category of organizations pressed to undertake “Party building.” In other words, for the Party to build cells and other forms of influence in social organizations it first needs the state to recognize them as legitimate. State non-implementation resulted in Party building being unfeasible in a large number of the most autonomous social organizations – something we cannot spot or explain without considering the interplay between Party, state and society.

Contrasting sharply with this is “Party building” in social organizations today. Under Xi Jinping, a bold multidimensional Party building initiative has been initiated and woven into an overarching agenda to change the Party, state and society relationships and transform the way China is governed. With this Party building initiative, the CCP has sought to actively enter, grow from within, influence, and work through social organizations, and, where that is not possible, to expunge the space for their survival. This is facilitated by, and impossible without, 1) stronger and diversifying state roles and 2) the abovementioned intensifying, codified, and political-loyalty-prioritizing Party grip on state agencies and actors to prompt state implementation. We examine this Party building initiative before concluding.

Around 2015, when the Party Central Committee Office issued an *Opinion on Strengthening Party Building Work in Social Organizations (for Trial)*⁹⁵ (hereinafter “the Opinion”) and other Party documents on social organizations, an accompanying spike occurred in the issuance of similar state documents. The centerpiece of the latter was the *Charity Law of the PRC*, introduced in 2016.

That law was ten years in the making,⁹⁶ but the Party-state relationship during its embryonic form was very different to that when it was promulgated.

While law holds greater weight than state regulations in the legal hierarchy, enforcement is still the responsibility of state agencies like the MoCA and its local departments. Due to the changed Party-state relationship and the internal Party overhaul detailed above, the decision-making Party groups in those state agencies and the civil servants charged with implementation are today subject to pressures very different to those of a decade ago.

Key points from the Opinion on social organization Party building

illustrate the multi-dimensionality and multi-directionality of relationships between Party, state and society that demand a rethink of the “state-society” relationship.

The Opinion called for “integrating the Party’s work into the processes of social organization operations and development.” Its approach is clear: “the oneness of *Party leadership* and *social organizations’ self-government according to law*” (our emphasis). In contrast with the period when the norm was for state non-implementation, the Party seeks to rely more effectively on the state to enforce state documents (and now law) to register and regulate social organizations. Only with this can social organizations be made possible sites of Party building and the space for survival for others be expunged.

Though the Party is reliant on the state to achieve social organization Party building, its reliance is not passive: the Party’s steps, examined above, to change the Party-state relationship are an active attempt to ensure that the state agencies and actors on which the Party relies fulfil their roles.

The Party relies on state agencies for many things vis-à-vis social organization. For example, the Opinion calls on state agencies (including “civil affairs, judicial, finance, tax, education, health, family planning, business and commerce departments, etc.”) to provide professional training in their respective fields of expertise to social organization Party affairs personnel. The Party does not rely on the willingness of state agencies to facilitate social organization Party building in this way; it warns that those not doing well enough will be held accountable.

State actors will be assessed on social organization Party building. The Opinion calls for the formulation of assessment criteria on social organization Party building and for explicit incentives and punishments. Inside state departments, social organization Party building is to be made an “important part” of assessment for “leading groups” (领导班子 *lingdao banzi*) and “leading cadres” (decision makers on state departments’ policies).

The Opinion calls on the Party organizations of state agencies to share their physical spaces and resources to facilitate social organization Party building activities.

Financially, too, the state-society relationship fails to explain the complexity of these relationships: how is all this Party building to be paid for? The Opinion states that social organizations should add Party building costs to their list of management costs and add it to their company tax-free income allowance (meaning that income the state would have taken from society is diverted to the Party).

A striking example of interplay between Party, state and society that cannot be captured by the “advancing Party, retreating state” or the “state-society

relationship” is that of attempted Party influence on the state via social organizations. The Opinion seeks to turn selected social organization leaders and core staff members into Party members, to choose social organization Party secretaries from among the social organization’s leadership, and then to recommend these Party secretaries as deputies to the state’s people’s congresses.

The Opinion sets out the duties of Party organisations that are embedded in or have grown from within social organizations. This includes controlling their “political orientation” by implementing and propagating Party decisions; doing “political thought work”; and carrying out Party self-building by turning the social organization’s people into Party members and “serving them.” Party “services,” “psychological guidance,” and “human concern” are to be used to show social organization staff the benefits of having a Party organization embedded in their social organization, tucking education into services, and strengthening the “appeal and influence” of the Party organization.

The professional expertise of the social organization is to be drawn on to provide specialist voluntary services, enabling society to enjoy good-quality services provided in the Party’s name through the vehicle of the social organization.

This shows a small selection of the diverse forms and different directions of influence in interplay between Party, state and society that are only observable if we bring the Party in.

Assuming, as we believe we should, that social organization leaders and staff (including Party members) and state agency civil servants (including Party members) all have agency, each of the examples listed above create potential spaces or processes of interaction for multidirectional influence between Party, state and society. None of these spaces and processes can be fully understand without finding a meaningful place for the Party in our analysis.

It also shows that without using the state as facilitator, the Party could not: bring all social organizations into the fold, regulate them, and extinguish the space for any left out; make them into legitimate sites—locked into a bureaucratic web—for Party building; create competition and a regulatory environment that encourages the professionalization of social organization services that can then be offered to society in the Party’s name; train Party personnel in areas of state expertise to enable them to influence the social organization’s management from within; and turn state and society’s resources (such as re-routed taxes) into resources for Party building. In other words, we cannot understand the relationship of the Party to society if we do not understand it in relation to the Party’s relationship to the state. Equally, we cannot understand the relationship of the state to society without

understanding it in relation to the Party's relationship to the state.

This assertion is strengthened if we factor in the changes examined in the previous section on the Party-state relationship. Those changes press and incentivise the state's civil servants to prioritize Party concerns in decision-making and implementation. They threaten supervision-backed accountability measures on failure to do so. Without those striking changes to the Party-state relationship, the changes that this Party Opinion attempts to make to the Party, state and society relationships would likely be enforced by state actors in more partial and sporadic ways.

5 Concluding Thoughts

For years, scholarship on the "state-society relationship" in the context of China's one-party system has focused on "state" and "society," leaving the "Party" out. Sometimes this was based on the belief that the "state" can be understood as a "party-state." When "the Party" has been brought in, it has usually been done in a way that is too limited to probe the deep and pervasive implications of the Party's role in the "state-society relationship." This hampers the ability of scholars using "state-society relationship" conceptual frameworks to spot key dynamics of and explain the interplay between different actors and to theorize change over time.

To address this, we have proposed a new agenda, to develop and use approaches that 1) examine *multiple layers and dimensions of Party roles* whilst taking seriously the Party's nature and identity; 2) enable us to spot and examine *multidirectional and multidimensional interplay* between players and actors; 3) examine *formal institutions* in light of *informal institutions* and with an eye to considering *actor agency*; and 4) consider historical context and/or trace development over time to alert us to misinterpretations and misleading assumptions.

We argue that premature, general typologies should be avoided until much more has been done to understand the relationship between the Party and the state. We cannot understand patterns or changes in the state-society relationship without understanding patterns or changes in the Party-state relationship, but this has long been a blind-spot not only in work on the "state-society relationship" but on Chinese politics and society in general. At this point, to simply tag "the Party" on to the "state-society" without picking apart and dissecting the "Party-state" relationship would risk producing misleading or narrowing conceptual frameworks.

We conclude with a number of considerations that might underpin the development of such new approaches. First, the central Party under Xi has taken traceable, concrete steps, both in overarching national-level structures and policies and in specific policy fields, to change the relationship of the Party

and state. These have cascaded down to the lower levels and seeped into the “political atmosphere.” However, the centrality of the Party-state relationship to the political system goes back to the founding of the PRC. Care is needed to avoid overlooking the complexity of the “pre-Xi era” relationship when stressing changes being observed today.

Second, the “advancing Party-retreating state” pattern is a descriptive snapshot of observed trends and should not be mistaken for an analytical framework. Treating it as such would oversimplify and blur more than it would enable us to scrutinize and clarify.

Third, when finding a place for the Party, while a granular approach is necessary, it also is crucial to think about formal and informal institutions, and discourse and ideology. The nature of the Party is such that to ignore these dimensions risks creating further hidden and misleading assumptions.

Fourth, as Shen, Yu and Zhou have demonstrated through the rich detail of their account of Party, state and societal interaction related to industry associations, with non-Party member association heads being encouraged to join the CCP and “professional” association activities being dressed up as “Party building,” the agency of actors belonging to each – and sometimes more than one – of the spheres cannot be ignored.⁹⁷

Fifth, asking the right questions is key: should we look primarily at increasing or decreasing levels of Party/state activity in society? Or should we seek to understand *how* Party, state and society are interacting with each other?

Sixth, the language that we use might help or hinder a research agenda seeking to elucidate and not obscure the complex dynamics at play. This begins with questioning the “party-state” construct but also goes beyond it. Just as Shue and Thornton, writing about Chinese governance, argued the need for new metaphors that allow us to understand “multiple directions of flow,”⁹⁸ in probing Party, state and society relationships the language used has potential to reveal or obscure. Party-led political discourse propagates the notion of “fully covering” (全覆盖 *quan fugai*) social organizations. Replicating this in our own language of analysis risks recreating the cognitive framing of the Party. For example, instead of “covering” or “absorbing” it might be more accurate to discuss Party efforts as attempts, in multiple ways and from multiple directions, to “enter and operate *through*” state and social organizations. Discursively creating the notion that the Party can absorb entire organizations and their people obscures the agency of those people and conceals the Party’s reliance on them to operate.

Notes

- ¹ See Lieberthal and Lampton (2018): 29.
- ² Beginning from the end of what Roderick MacFarquhar (1991) called the “interregnum” following Mao’s death.
- ³ See Deng 2011:13.
- ⁴ See Carl Minzner 2009:59.
- ⁵ See Przeworski & Lü 2016.
- ⁶ See Barnett 1967; Brødsgaard and Zheng 2004; Minzner 2009; Wang 2015, 2019; Zheng 1997; Zheng 2010.
- ⁷ See Wang 2019.
- ⁸ See Zheng 1997.
- ⁹ See Wu 2012.
- ¹⁰ See Schurmann 1973.
- ¹¹ See Zhou, Gu and Song (2014) and Wu (2015).
- ¹² See Brødsgaard and Zheng 2004.
- ¹³ See Deng 2011; Yu 2002.
- ¹⁴ See Gallagher 2004.
- ¹⁵ See Huang 1993.
- ¹⁶ See Saich 2000.
- ¹⁷ See Mertha 2009.
- ¹⁸ See Unger and Chan 1995.
- ¹⁹ See Spires 2011.
- ²⁰ See Hildebrandt 2013.
- ²¹ See Teets 2014; Zhang 2018.
- ²² We thank an anonymous reviewer for making this important point.
- ²³ See Teets 2014.
- ²⁴ See Thornton 2013.
- ²⁵ See Liu 2018; Wu 2018.
- ²⁶ See Liu 2018:26.
- ²⁷ See Yongdong Shen, Jianxing Yu and Jun Zhou (2020).
- ²⁸ This is sometimes used in political discourse to skirt around the more fundamental issue of separation.
- ²⁹ See Wu 2015.
- ³⁰ See Duan 2019.
- ³¹ See Snape 2019.
- ³² See Zhang 2019.
- ³³ See Sorace 2017.
- ³⁴ See Li 2005.
- ³⁵ See Guo 2013:136.
- ³⁶ See Chao (2004) on the people’s congresses, Finder (2018) on the judiciary, and Shambaugh (2004) on the military.
- ³⁷ Though on 31 May 1989 Deng stressed the importance of maintaining the appearance that reform was to continue (“The 13th Congress report was passed rby a National Congress, not a

word can be changed”) (see Deng 1998:488), steps began quickly to silently sideline the Report’s political reforms (see Snape 2019).

³⁸ See Wang 2017:14.

³⁹ On cultural positioning see Perry (2012).

⁴⁰ See, for example, Duan 1984; People’s Daily 1984; Ye 1985.

⁴¹ See, for example, Zhao 1988:1470.

⁴² See Deng 1994:321.

⁴³ See, for example, Deng 1988:1051.

⁴⁴ See Zhao 1988:1470.

⁴⁵ See People’s Daily 1989; Wang 2019.

⁴⁶ See Wu 2012.

⁴⁷ See Wang 2019.

⁴⁸ See Link 2013; Schoenhals 1992.

⁴⁹ See Zheng 1997:11–12.

⁵⁰ See Heilmann & Shih 2017:75.

⁵¹ See Zheng 2010:29.

⁵² See Zhu 2019.

⁵³ See Wang 2019.

⁵⁴ See Lieberthal and Oksenberg (1988).

⁵⁵ Ibid: 21.

⁵⁶ Today, there is much faster, easier access for scholars working on these issues than anything conceivable when this earlier work was undertaken.

⁵⁷ See Wu 2015.

⁵⁸ See for example Zhou, Gu and Song 2014.

⁵⁹ Sorace (2017:10–11) draws on Althusser, explaining ideology as “functioning as an assemblage of practices that shape people’s everyday habits of speech and dispositions.” This is also useful in understanding the Party’s own identity and the ideology that “guarantees” it.

⁶⁰ 《深化党和国家机构改革方案》.

⁶¹ In 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2013.

⁶² The 1988 plan’s immediate successor, in 1993, dropped the principle of “Party-government separation” and altered that of “state and enterprise separation” adding “functions and responsibilities.”

⁶³ See Yun 2018.

⁶⁴ See Central Committee 2018: Article 10.

⁶⁵ See Li 2019.

⁶⁶ Discursive changes can be found within these documents, such as a bleeding of the vaguer, politicized discourse characteristic of Party documents into those of the state.

⁶⁷ See Central Committee 2018: Article 1.

⁶⁸ See Laha 2019.

⁶⁹ The authors thank Susan Finder for sharing this from her forthcoming paper.

⁷⁰ See Central Committee 2018.

⁷¹ See Central Committee 2017.

⁷² See Yao and Li 2015.

⁷³ Usually the top 3–7 leaders in, for example, a state agency. The Party group secretary is typically also the main person in charge of the unit’s leadership body (领导班子 *lingdao banzi*).

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- ⁷⁴ See Central Committee 2015: Article 30.4.
- ⁷⁵ Regulations now also institute life-long accountability so that Party leaders can be held accountable after retirement or leaving a post.
- ⁷⁶ See Shi 1997:12.
- ⁷⁷ See Göbel and Heberer 2017:474.
- ⁷⁸ The second meaning covers enterprises that are not “state-owned.” Occasionally the policies and other documents examined here also include this latter sense.
- ⁷⁹ This is when a government department inside a ministry was set up for the purpose of managing social organizations.
- ⁸⁰ See Sun Weilin (2011:5).
- ⁸¹ Ibid: 21.
- ⁸² 《基金会管理办法》.
- ⁸³ 《外国商会管理暂行办法》.
- ⁸⁴ 《社团登记管理条例》.
- ⁸⁵ 《民办非企业单位登记管理暂行条例》 (*Temporary Regulations on Registering and Managing Citizen-Run Non-Enterprise Units*).
- ⁸⁶ 《关于加强社会团体党的建设工作的通知》.
- ⁸⁷ The Party Charter is the Party’s most basic institution; the power to amend the Charter rests with the National Party Congress (Party Charter, 2017: Article 20.4); a National Party Congress is convened every five years.
- ⁸⁸ 《取缔非法民间组织暂行办法》.
- ⁸⁹ See Thornton 2013.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid: 2.
- ⁹¹ See Wang & Liu 2007.
- ⁹² See Wang & He 2004.
- ⁹³ See Xie 2004.
- ⁹⁴ This was all codified in state regulations, below laws in the legal hierarchy.
- ⁹⁵ 《关于加强社会组织党的建设工作的意见（试行）》.
- ⁹⁶ See Liu 2018:28.
- ⁹⁷ See Shen, Yu and Zhou (2020).
- ⁹⁸ See Shue and Thornton (2017:31).

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