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The Chinese regime is a self-contained polity that is best described by selectocracy --- that is, a polity that selects officials by a centralized mechanism. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the selectorate; it is not just an organization, but more importantly, it is part of China's constitutional setup. The Chinese selectocracy is built on both China's long tradition of meritocracy and the CCP's own history. Its selection process is open, competitive and meritocratic. Effectively aided by other institutions, such as the People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultation Conference, the Chinese selectocracy can accommodate the idea of plurality and balance of power. As a result, it can be positioned as a legitimate and even liberal polity. The misunderstanding of the Chinese regime has been mostly caused by the "democracy narrative" that precludes the legitimacy of any form of governance other than democracy. China needs to construct a New Narrative that is commensurate with the spirit and practice of the Chinese selectocracy.

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1. Introduction

China's economic success since 1978 has caught world-wide attention. The prevailing explanation asserts that China's success has been brought about by economic reform and opening. A historical comparison between China after 1978 and China before 1978 supports this view. However, it does not stand the test of an international comparison. Most developing countries have either adopted or already had a market economy --- the goal of China's reform efforts --- and most of them have opened up to international trade and investment, but only a few of them have managed to grow as fast as China has. As a matter of fact, only 11 developing economies have managed to reach the level of high-income countries since 1960.¹ Reform and opening may have been necessary conditions for China's success, but they are certainly not sufficient.

Since the Global Financial Crisis, another view has emerged that attributes China's economic success to its mercantilist economic policy. This view sees China through the lens of state capitalism that is supported by an authoritarian government and state-owned enterprises. To a large extent, it aims not so much to explain China's success, but rather to assess how the regime would eventually fail. In the framework of the Beijing Consensus versus the Washington Consensus, the Chinese regime is often depicted as a model diametrically opposite to liberal democracy and free capitalism. Framed this way, the Chinese regime is almost automatically rendered illegitimate and any serious study of it is precluded.

There have been volumes of study on the Chinese political system, but few of them study it as an enduring polity.² One of the key reasons is that most researchers, domestic and international alike, and consciously or unconsciously, are dominated by the "democracy narrative" --- that is, viewing democracy as the only legitimate form of governance in today's world --- so they consider the Chinese regime to be either transitory or illegitimate. In contrast, this paper takes a more serious approach to

¹ Here high-income countries are defined as countries whose real per-capita GDP is higher than 45% of United States' real per-capita GDP. In the world, only 36 countries have a real per-capita GDP higher than half of the United States' real per-capita GDP. Data are from the Penn World Table 8.0.

² Two exceptions are Zheng (2010) who studies the Chinese Communist Party as an organizational emperor and Bell (2015) who studies the Chinese regime as a meritocracy.

studying the Chinese regime. It offers an explanation for the regime's constitutional framework, explaining how the regime works under this framework, and pointing out the contradictions that the regime needs to sort out.

Central to this paper's argument, the Chinese regime is defined as a selectocracy, a self-contained polity, different from democracy and autocracy, that has two distinctive features. First, it selects government officials through a centralized selectorate, i.e., the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). And second, the selectorate also controls the government. The first feature allows the regime, in an institutionalized manner, to perform one of the key functions of democracy, namely, selecting government officials. This implies that the CCP is not just an organization, but also an institution that is part of China's constitutional architecture. The second feature, however, sets the Chinese regime apart from democracy. It creates a party-state in which the CCP enjoys the dominant power. Because of the constitutional role of the CCP, its charter should be regarded as a part of China's constitution in practice along with China's written Constitution.³

As a part of China's constitutional architecture, the CCP has de-politicized its ideology and become disinterested toward societal conflicts when it deals with resource allocations among different sections of the population. De-politicization has been manifested at both the theoretical and organizational levels. At the theoretical level, the "Three Represents" allow the CCP to change from a proletarian party to an "all-people's" party; at the organizational level, the CCP has opened its door to people in all walks, particularly those in the intellectual and business communities. In the meantime, the CCP does not favor a particular social class/group when it distributes economic resources so its government is qualified as a "disinterested government" that is able to pay more attention to improving efficiency than gaining political support (Yao, 2013).

De-politicization has allowed the CCP to perform the role of an encompassing selectorate. Prior to 1978, the CCP held on to a narrowly-defined political basis. The emergence of an economically multi-layer and ideologically plural society has rendered this approach obsolete against the CCP's strong desire to remain legitimate. As an

³ Throughout this paper, we will use "Constitution" to refer to China's written constitution and "constitution" to refer to its constitution in practice.

encompassing selectorate, the CCP allows people who aspire for a government position, despite their ideologies and social roots, to join the party and move up the hierarchical ladder within the party-state. In addition, it has to take merits seriously when it promotes officials so the system can maintain credibility. Empirical studies have found that the ability to promote economic growth is a significant predictor for government officials' promotion at the county and city levels (Landry, Lü, and Duan, 2015; Yao and Zhang, 2015).

As such, the Chinese selectocracy is a self-contained polity with its own constitutional rules. The CCP plays the role of a selectorate and is constrained by its own charter and other national institutions such as the National People's Congress (NPC), China's legislative body, and the Chinese People's Political Consultation Conference (CPPCC), the equivalent to the British Upper House. Government offices are open to everyone who is willing to go through the selection process within the party. Officials have to compete on basis of merits to get promotion. That is, the Chinese selectocracy is open, competitive and meritocratic, satisfying some of the key elements of a legitimate polity. The CCP's legitimacy lays in its constitutional role in such a legitimate polity. This polity needs a centralized but encompassing selectorate; its name just happens to be Chinese Communist Party. Compared with democracy, the system has several distinctive features.

First, its selection process is very long, often costing a person's life time. A person has to enter the system at a young age and to compete with his peers in the next 30 years for higher-level positions. This is contrasted with democracy in which people can enter politics at almost any point of their life time. Second, related to the first point, the selectocracy puts more emphasis on ex ante selection than a democracy. Third, government officials in the selectocracy are motivated to perform ahead of their peers so they are more proactive than officials in a democracy. While accountability is the essence to judge a government official in a democracy, it is responsibility that plays the role in the selectocracy. Fourth, government officials in the selectocracy are often selected on a few criteria, particularly their ability to promote economic growth because economic growth is the most tangible measure of ability. As a result, the selectocracy is able to

implement more consistent, long-term inclined, but more monothetic policies than a democracy. This can be contrasted with elected officials in a democracy who often campaign and hold their offices on plural platforms that reflect the preferences of their constituencies.

The Chinese selectocracy is far from perfect; instead, it contains several serious contradictions. First, there are large gaps between its Constitution on paper and its actual implementation. The most significant of these is that people do not enjoy the rights of expression granted by the Constitution. This raises a serious question as to how the system is able to reflect ordinary people's wills, posing a final challenge to its legitimacy in a modern world. Second, the constitutional arrangements are far from perfect themselves. The division of labor between the CCP and various bodies of the state is not well delineated, and there is no practical institutional arrangement that subjects the CCP to serious monitoring. Third, there is a serious gap between the CCP's claimed ideology and its ideology in practice. Officially, the CCP is still a Marxist party, yet in practice it has greatly deviated from this claim. In addition, the mainstream discourse, often sanctioned by the CCP, is dominated by the "democracy narrative". Caught between the old Marxist narrative and the "democracy narrative", the CCP is in a clear difficulty to find a new narrative that supports its legitimacy.

Built on the analysis offered by this paper, though, this New Narrative is possible. The Chinese state is a selectocracy that has three distinctive features. First, it selects government officials through a centralized selectorate. Second, government officials' decisions are monitored by the NPC. Third, the selector of the selectorate is monitored by the CPPCC. The legitimacy of the CCP hinges on its role as the selectorate. The Chinese selectocracy inherits the Chinese tradition of meritocracy. In practice, it utilizes the CCP's organizational resources. As a result, political selection is open, competitive, and meritocratic. Realizing those properties, the system does not need to be coercive; instead, it can be made to protect personal liberty.

2. Neutralization of the CCP

De-politicization

De-politicization has been recognized as one of the distinctive features of the CCP in the reform era. To Wang Hui, one of the leading intellectuals in China, de-politicization hinders public deliberations and thus can lead to the concentration of power to the state (Wang, 2006). However, de-politicization has been both necessary and imperative for the CCP to maintain its legitimacy. At the end of the 1970s, China's top leaders realized that the CCP had failed the economic race with its capitalist rivals, particularly its arch enemy, the Kuomintang in Taiwan. The more pragmatic faction of the party, led by Deng Xiaoping, believed that Mao's radical ideology was the main obstacle for China to move toward a more pragmatic approach to develop the country. The third plenum of the 11th party congress marked a decisive moment for the party to wave farewell to Mao's radical legacy and to embark on a more pragmatic approach to its theoretical construct as well as to its way of developing the economy. Since then, the CCP's ideology has evolved in its interaction with the process of economic reform and social change in China.

The rural reform was a bottom-up reform initiated by peasants and local cadres. It succeeded not without ideological resistance. The driving force for both local experiments and the center's ideology to converge to family farming was the continuous successes of the intermediate reforms between collective farming and family farming. Drummed up by the success in the countryside, the CCP set out for urban reform in 1984. It is noteworthy that at that time the CCP's ideological position had not been changed in official documents. Then in October 1987 when its 13th national congress was held, the CCP formally announced the theory of "the primary stage of socialism". The congress also formally announced the CCP's new goal to "take the socialist road with Chinese characteristics". To a large extent, this was an acknowledgement of the rural reform and the newly started urban reform. However, the 1989 Tiananmen Square Event brought a major setback to reforms in China. It was Deng Xiaoping's South Tour in the spring of 1992 that re-opened the door for further reforms. In the same year, the CCP's 14th congress was held and pledged to continue on the socialist road with Chinese characteristics. A landmark change of the CCP's ideology happened in the third plenum

of that party congress, held in October 1993. The CCP announced that the aim of the reform was to build a socialist market economy in China. Compared with the “primary stage” theory, this new theory of a “socialist market economy” was not merely an acknowledgement of the reality, but served as a guideline for the economic reforms in the 1990s. Indeed, the toughest reforms --- the full-fledge abandonment of economic planning, structural adjustment, SOE privatization, social security reform --- all happened in the 1990s.

The reforms in the 1990s accelerated China’s pace toward a mixed ownership economy. Their outcomes were acknowledged in the 1999 revision of the Constitution, which states clearly that the private economy is an important part of the Chinese economy. Then in its 16th congress held in 2002, the CCP revised its own charter. The CCP no longer represents only the proletarians, but instead represents “the requirements of the advanced productive forces in China, the future direction of China’s advanced culture, and the essential interests of the vast majority of Chinese people.” This is the so-called “Three Represents”, Jiang Zemin’s major contribution to the CCP’s ideological shift. The CCP has since formally declared to become a party of the country instead of a party of the working class. In terms of what the CCP had done in the 1990s, this declaration was hardly new. The structural adjustment and SOE privatization in the 1990s had shown that the CCP had given up its role as the guardian of the working class’s interests. The “Three Represents” was a response to China’s changing social structure as well as a summary of what the CCP had done in the 1990s. It allowed the party to open its door to people from all walks regardless of their ideological stands and social roots.

The disinterested government

Together with the CCP’s ideological de-politicization, the Chinese government has become a disinterested government (Yao, 2013). A disinterested government is defined as a government that takes a neutral stand when conflicts of interests among different social and political groups arise. In other words, it is a government that does not consistently represent—and is not captured by—any social or political groups in the society. This does not mean that such a government is devoid of self-interests; quite to the contrary. It can not only have its own interests, but also be predatory toward society at

large. The key is that its predation is “identity-blind” in the sense it does not care about the social and political statuses of its particular prey. As a consequence, it is more likely to adopt growth-enhancing policies than is a government that consistently represents the interests of certain social or political groups.

A sketchy review of the major reforms and policy changes since 1978 confirms the assertion that the CCP/Chinese government has been disinterested. The key is that it has adopted selective and growth-enhancing policies. Those policies favor a certain groups because the favor would bring growth. However, the favor is not delivered to the same groups forever; when circumstances change, the party is ready to give favors to other groups.

The four special economic zones (SEZs) were set up to experiment with the capitalist system and served as China’s window of opening. They enjoyed tremendous preferential treatments including free land rights, tax cuts, and different labor laws. This was clearly a biased policy, but it was critical for China’s opening process. Then the rural reform clearly favored the farmers. It not only restored family farming, giving back partial land rights back to individual farmers, but also drastically raised the government’s purchasing prices of grain outputs. Although urban dwellers benefited from more supply of foods, farmers gained disproportionately from the reform. One clear piece of evidence is that the urban-rural income gap was narrowed from 2.7 times in 1978 to 1.8 times in 1984. However, farmers then basically disappeared in the CCP’s policy consideration until very recent times. In the 1990s, the party’s emphasis was shifted toward building a market economy. Privatization of SOEs became one of the central themes toward that goal. This time, SOE managers were favored, and workers were sacrificed. Between 1995 and 2005, 50 million SOE workers lost their jobs (Garnaut et al., 2005). Because the party still claimed to be a working-class party at the time, this move was remarkable. China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 then shifted the government’s favor to exporters and hurt the interest of farmers again. Farmers, particularly soybean and cotton farmers had to face cheap imports from abroad and had to undergo a painful transition. The Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao government shifted gears and began to offer remedies to the disadvantaged groups who had suffered in the 1990s. Farmers were

exempted of taxes; a new health care system was introduced in the countryside; the urban pension and medical systems were replenished; and a new labor law was introduced to offer more protection to workers. Today, the anti-corruption drive initiated by Xi Jinping, the current party secretary and president, can also be interpreted as a way for the party to remain disinterested. One of the drive's aims is to break the business-political alliances often found to characterize the cases of corrupt government officials. Those alliances split the party and posed the danger to allow the party captured by interest groups.

In summary, the CCP has neutralized itself since 1978 by de-politicizing its ideology and political basis and making the state a disinterested entity toward societal conflicts. De-politicization has laid the foundation for the Chinese selectocracy so that it is ready to accept anyone who aspires for a job in the party-state, regardless of his/her political conviction or social root. Being disinterested then has endowed the system with the ability to form consistent and potentially merits-based criteria to select and promote officials.

3. The CCP and the Constitution

In a liberal democracy, the state and political parties are separated. Political parties compete for offices by a preset procedure approved by the constituency (often through majority voting), and they are constrained by constitutional rules once they are in power. Extrapolating those ideas onto other kinds of polity, the prevailing political narrative in the West is that a polity is only legitimate when its ruling body obtains the consent of its citizens. As such, the Chinese system is definitely not a liberal democracy and is hardly legitimate. However, this narrative is framed by the idea of democracy and thus may preclude the variability of other forms of polity to provide governance and protect liberty in a country. If one deviates from the "democracy narrative", i.e., government officials should be installed by popular votes, then the scope of legitimate polities may be enlarged. A polity can be legitimate if citizens approve its form of governance. For example, a monarchy can be legitimate if citizens approve it through a free process or by historical precedency. This and the next section will show that the Chinese system shares several features of a legitimate polity. The current section will deal with China's constitutional setup, explaining in particular the relationship between the party and the

state; the next section will turn to the Chinese selectocracy's unique approach to political selection.

Contrary to a liberal democracy, in the Chinese system the CCP is not separated from the state; it is a party-state. This is not an invention of the CCP, though. The party-state can be traced back to Sun Yet-Sun's time when he re-organized the Kuomintang to model on Lenin's Bolshevik party. China adopted the legal framework of Western democracy when the Qing Dynasty fell. However, the country quickly became the battlefield of warlords who could easily overrule over party politics. Sun realized the weakness of peaceful politics and was determined to adopt the Bolshevik model. One of his moves was to build an army that belonged to the Kuomintang. Through the North Expedition, this army defeated most of the warlords. By 1927, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-Shek the Kuomintang was able to set up a party-state in which the Kuomintang monopolized the state apparatus. The CCP followed the Kuomintang model to build a new party-state when it obtained power in 1949. Relying on its past success, the CCP set up its grassroots organization in virtually every village and every urban unit, be it a local community, a school, or a factory. With this extensive network, the CCP was able to penetrate into virtually every corner of Chinese society, replacing the traditional social organizations founded on lineage and geographic ties.

At the central level, the 1954 Constitution, the first constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), granted the CCP the power to nominate candidates to the NPC for the key posts of the government, the State Council, in addition to its role of making decisions for the country. The CCP thus obtained the dominant power to rule China. However, this power was subject to some checks and balances. In particular, the CPPCC, a successor of the Political Consultation Conference that existed after the Japanese army surrendered and before the Civil War broke out, allowed other parties --- now the so-called eight democratic parties --- to participate in the political process and thus exert some checks on the CCP. In fact, some of the key government positions were taken by people who were not CCP members. In the first several years of the PRC, the Chinese party-state was characterized by a certain form of constitutional rule by which the democratic parties monitored and shared power with the CCP.

This all changed after the 1957 Anti-rightist Movement that effectively silenced the other parties and excluded them from the government. Now the Chinese party-state became truly the CCP's party-state. However, tension soon arose between the party and the government, particularly after Mao gave the country's presidency to Liu Shaoqi in 1959. Amidst this tension, Mao's own distaste for rigid bureaucracy also played a role. During the early years of Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Mao mobilized the mass to attack the party-state establishment, bringing the country toward the verge of collapse. After Lin Biao, Mao's officially designated successor, died in a plane crash on his way fleeing to the Soviet Union in 1971, Mao began to restore social and political order in the country. Although the 1975 revision of the Constitution reflected Mao's radical thoughts, the CCP's functional role set in the 1954 Constitution was retained. The Constitution was rewritten again in 1978 to soften Mao's radical influence. Again, the CCP's functional role was kept.

In 1982, another round of rewriting happened to the Constitution. This time, it was intended to become a permanent Constitution that would be only amended in the future. At the time, Deng Xiaoping, China's new leader, called for *dang-zheng-fen-kai* (the separation of the party and the government), drawing on the lessons learned in the first 30 years of the CCP's rule. The new Constitution reflected Deng's idea. The CCP's functional role was eliminated; the Constitution only mentions the CCP in its introduction. In the 1980s, *dang-zheng-fen-kai* was the direction of political reform. However, this was stopped after the 1989 Tian'anmen student movement. Since then, the party has effectively resumed its role in China's constitutional setup despite the Constitution has remained same as it was revised in 1982.

The first function of the party is to make major policy decisions for the country, as implied by the introduction of the Constitution that grants the party the right to lead the country. The government's role is to implement the party's decisions. However, "to lead" is a loose concept by legal terms. The 1982 Constitution was meant to limit the party's power, but in reality the party is everywhere.

The second function of the party is to recommend laws for the NPC. This was clearly reflected in the official decision reached by the 4th plenum of the 18th party congress, held in October 2014. It states:

“If law making involves major changes to the system or policies, they have to be reported to the party central committee to discuss and to make decision. The party central committee proposes to the National People’s Congress amendments to the Constitution which will be adopted according to the procedure stipulated by the Constitution.”

The above statement gives a clear answer to the question whether the party is over the law or the other way around. However, the party is not totally free to make any law in its own favor. In a globalized world, the CCP leadership cannot be immune of the influence of the liberal political discourse prevailing in the world; democracy, liberty and other catchy words frequently appear in its official documents. That is probably why the discussion of legitimacy often surfaces up within the party as well as in the society. Framing the Chinese system by the liberal discourse, it is hardly surprising that even high-ranking CCP officials are not sure about the legitimacy of the system.

The third function of the party is to select government officials. The party has retained this power despite it was taken out of the 1982 Constitution. This function allows the CCP to take up one of the key functions of democracy, thus merits more discussions. We will deal with it in the next section.

None of these three functions is governed by laws. The CPPCC’s power to constrain and monitor the CCP has been substantially weakened over time. However, the CCP’s decision making since 1978 has been more or less rational, as revealed by the review of the last section. The key is that the CCP is constrained by the Constitution and its own charter that sets procedures for decision making and political selection within the party. As several authors have pointed out (e.g., Jiang, 2015; Ke and Liu, 2015), the CCP Charter should be taken as part of China’s constitutional architecture because it fills the gaps left by the Constitution. As such, the party has become an institution as well as a governing entity. Being an institution, it is an integral part of the constitution, so it should not have any political color. That is, it cannot just serve the purpose of the CCP itself, but

should serve the purpose of society at large. To the extent that the CCP Charter sets rules for the CCP's decision making and political selection, which are part of China's constitutional setup, the CCP meets that requirement. Over the years, this has happened together with the party's process of de-politicization and becoming disinterested toward the society. Both ensure the neutrality of the party and give the party credibility to play a constitutional role.

4. The CCP as the Selectorate

Selectorate theory was proposed by Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003). A selectorate is a body of people that decide the office of government officials. Selectorate theory is useful because it allows researchers to apply a consistent concept across all sorts of polity. Every polity faces the problem of selecting government officials; the size of the selectorate very much determines which form it takes. In a democracy, the selectorate comprises all the citizens; in contrast, in a dictatorship it often comprises a handful people or families who are able to threaten the rule of the dictator. The nature of the selectorate shapes the incentive of the ruler because he has to cater to the needs of the people in the selectorate. In a democracy, the ruler is willing to provide public goods that benefit a large portion of the population; in a dictatorship, the ruler only needs to bribe the small number of people in a much smaller selectorate.

While its power to explain the resilience of the Chinese regime has been challenged (e.g., Gallagher and Hanson, 2013), selectorate theory is helpful for understanding political selection in China. Unlike in a democracy, government officials in China are not elected by the people; instead, they are appointed by the CCP. In return, they are held accountable to the party. In this sense, the CCP is China's selectorate. But there is a key difference between the CCP and a selectorate as defined by Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003): the CCP selects government officials not by its members, but by a set of institutions that were introduced in the early 1980s and have been perfected in the last 30 years. This difference is important because selected officials do not need to cater to any particular group of people; instead, they are only required to have confidence in the system and remain loyal to the party that is more an institution than an organization. That is, the selectorate is no longer a group of people who can potentially determine the fate of

the ruler, but an institution that governs the selection process. One implication of the selectorate theory is that in non-democracies the ruler survives by bribing the winning coalition in the small selectorate. In such a system, the exchange of favor rules; merit has no place. This may be true for most non-democracies, but does not apply to China, because in China the selectorate does not consist of people, but of rules that govern the selection process.

Political selection in China

As the review of the last section indicated, the CCP has begun to build rules for the selection and promotion of government/party officials. In 2002, they were formally summarized in the *Principles for the Appointment of Cadres* (ganbu renyong tiaoli). The document was revised in January 2014 and renamed *Working Principles for the Selection and Appointment of Party and Government Leading Cadres* (dangzheng lindao ganbu xuanba renyong gongzuo tiaoli, thereafter *The Working Principles*).⁴ In this new version, detailed principles are provided to govern the qualifications and selection procedures for party and government officials at all levels.

The first principle of *The Working Principles* states: “The party controls the cadre.” Other principles include: respecting both merit and virtue, emphasizing actual performance, maintaining an open and competitive process, following the rule of democratic concentration, and following the law. The party committee at various levels is in charge of the selection process on the ground. Typically, the organizational department of the party committee and the party secretary are the key decision makers for promotion. The organizational department first compiles a short list of candidates and then conducts interviews with them as well as their colleagues and subordinates. In more important cases, such as the decision for the appointment of the party secretary or the executive head, the organizational department may also invite newly retired officials to serve in the interview team. At the end of the process, the department submits a recommendation to the party committee. Although the decision for the final candidates should be made collectively among the committee members, the party secretary often has a larger say.

⁴ The whole text can be found at http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=N4F5oZoO05O-JgQNT-2I6EfJc6Tct4Ku0vffxV_mnC0tfqOhExamJgZCHai47m4Wt5VK2jxZ4VGOIwWMuOjK7K.

For officials in the government (the executive branch), once the names of candidates are decided, they will be subject to a vote in the local People's Congress. *The Working Principles* provides detailed guidelines for the selection process. It also states that promising lower ranking officials can be selected to the list of examination (kaocha) before they become candidates for a higher-level job. Detailed rules are stipulated for the examination process. Those selected into the list are often arranged to rotate in different localities at the same administrative level. *The Working Principles* also provides rules for exchanges of officials. In addition to the routine selection, open recruitment is another way to find and appoint government officials. This provides a short cut for people who want to enter the government after a career in the private sector as well as for government officials who want to move to a new job or who want to have a quick promotion. *The Working Principles* provides rules for open recruitment.

Therefore, procedure-wise, the CCP's selection and promotion system is highly institutionalized, separating the Chinese system from many other non-democracies, including its own past. Research suggests that institutionalization is a key factor that separates economically more successful non-democratic regimes from those less successful (Gehlbach and Keefer, 2011). China's economic success in its reform era may owe a lot to the CCP's institutionalization. Selection and promotion in the party was highly irregular in the Mao era although that function was guaranteed by the Chinese Constitution. It is in the reform era that the CCP began to institutionalize its selection and promotion system, despite the Constitution no longer sanctions it. Unlike in a democracy in which leaders are elected by popular votes, in China officials are selected by the CCP following a preset procedure. For that, selectocracy is an apt name for the Chinese system.

The Chinese regime is often seen as a closed and noncompetitive system, probably because of two perceptions. First, the regime is controlled by the CCP and excludes the participation of other parties. Second, joining the CCP requires that a person converts to the party orthodoxy ideology, thus excluding people who believe in a different ideology. Both are based on the belief that the CCP is a conventional political party. My earlier discussions have shown that this belief is wrongly based. The CCP no longer holds on to a cohesive ideology and it is open to people from all walks. The party allows people

representing different sections of the population to join and provides a platform for different interests to contest and compromise. The CCP has been melted into the state apparatus. The question that whether it monopolizes the power is dispensed.

However, openness of the Chinese selectocracy does have a significant difference from the openness offered by a democracy. In a democracy, people in theory can enter politics at any point of their life time and at any place; politicians thus can reach a glorious career height at a young age. In the Chinese selectocracy, people have to start at their young age if they decide to enter politics. It would take a long time for them to reach the top, if they are lucky at all.

Selection in the CCP starts with recruiting young people into the party. In the reform era, the party has spent more efforts to recruit students in elite universities (Walder, 2004). A fraction of the student party members enter the government by taking the civil servant exam. Then they start a long career inside the government competing with their peers for promotion. Some of them eventually reach a high position while most others end up in a mediocre position when they reach their retirement ages. At the central level, the standing committee of the politburo is the power center of the party. In recent times, most of its members have had experiences as a provincial party secretary. It is a default rule that a central leader needs to have local experiences. This makes political competition a life-long process, and age becomes a critical factor for an official's promotion. The retirement age is set for 60 years old for officials of vice-ministerial/vice provincial level or below and officials older than 56 years old are usually not to be promoted to the vice-ministerial/vice provincial level. For a young person who just enters the government, there are seven levels away to reach a vice-ministerial/vice provincial position. Promotion usually happens every five years. This means that a person drops out of the race once he/she misses one promotion.

From the perspective of political selection, therefore, the CCP is best seen as an institution that substitutes the election system in a democracy. In a democracy, politicians enter political competitions to win popular support from their constituency; in China, a person aspiring for a political career joins the party and starts as a player in a life-long elimination tournament. Because the party as a whole has given up a coherent ideology,

joining the party does not mean that a person has to convert to a certain kind of ideology. The difference between a politician in a democracy and an official in the Chinese selectocracy only lies in the kind of selectorate that each has to cater to: for the former, it is his constituency; for the latter, it is the party's selection criteria.

The role of merit

Loyalty to the party is definitely one of the criteria for selection. However, because the CCP is no longer a conventional political party, here loyalty is not asked toward a certain political ideology; nor is it asked so much toward an organization. Rather, it is asked toward the Chinese constitutional arrangement in which the CCP occupies a central place. From this perspective, the survival of the CCP's rule is probably misplaced even by the CCP's own narrative in which the CCP is still depicted as a political organization, not as an institution of China's constitutional setup. If the Chinese selectocracy obtains the consent of the Chinese people as a legitimate polity, then the loyalty toward the CCP is equivalent to the loyalty toward that polity.

In the literature, there are studies showing that political connections are important for promotion in the Chinese regime. For example, Shih, Adolph and Liu (2012) show that factional connections have been important to determine who can be an alternative central committee member in the CCP's central committee. Notwithstanding some of the technical issues associated with that study, the finding that political connections matter is hardly new even for a well-functioning democracy --- for instance, when a new president comes to office in the United States, usually more than 2000 official positions are refilled by people brought in by that president. The more interesting question is whether merit is one of the key selection criteria in the Chinese selectocracy. If it is not, then the Chinese selectocracy degenerates into a system of clientelism and becomes hardly legitimate. There are, however, studies finding that merits do matter for selection in the Chinese selectocracy. The first such study was Li and Zhou's seminal paper published in 2005 (Li and Zhou, 2005). They study how relative economic performance affects a provincial leader's probability of getting promoted to the central government. They find that if a province's average growth rate in an official's tenure is one standard deviation above the mean, this official's chances of getting promoted will be increased by 15%. Later studies,

however, find that once political connections with central government officials are controlled, economic performance loses its predictive power (e.g., Jia et al., 2015). In most studies, political connections are defined on the basis of collegueship and/or being alumni of the same university. This definition may suffer from two problems. First, most top leaders studied in a few elite universities, and second, most of the promotions to the central government happen in the coastal provinces. As a result, political connections are just an incidental cause for promotion.

Realizing the issues associated with provincial leaders, Yao and Zhang (2015) move down to study municipal officials. Taking a finer approach to measure an official's contribution to local economic growth, they show that more capable officials do enjoy higher probabilities of promotion among those aged 49 or above. Landry, Lü, and Duan (2015) take a more comprehensive approach to study how economic performance affects the promotion of officials at different levels of government. They find that the link between economic performance --- GDP and revenue growth --- and promotion is the strongest for county officials, significant for municipal officials, and insignificant for provincial officials. This order of significance probably makes sense in terms of the roles played by competence and loyalty in the Chinese selectocracy. To make the system work, a certain level of competence is required for officials who just enter the rank. After several rounds of selection, though, most of the officials who have got promoted are more or less equally capable. At this stage, loyalty becomes more important.

Viewed against the CCP's reorientation toward economic growth in the reform era, it is hardly surprising that officials' capability to develop the economy has become a key criterion for their promotion. Responding to the calls from the public, the CCP has also tried to introduce more comprehensive evaluation systems, adding other items to the list of evaluation. However, because economic growth is the easiest to measure, accordingly to the theorem developed by economists for the principle-agent problem in a multitask setting (Holstrom and Milgrom, 1991), it is not surprising to find that economic performance remains the major indicator that officials compete on.

The Chinese selectocracy's ability to reward merit sets it apart from other non-democracies. Although the kinds of merit are mainly related to officials' ability to

develop the economy, which separate the Chinese selectocracy from a democracy in which citizens' multi-facet welfare is taken care of, being able to reward merit provides aspiration for young people who want to enter politics and increases citizens' confidence in the system. Sociological studies have found that the idea of desert is widely held by the Chinese population (Zhang, 2013). Mapping this idea into the political arena, people naturally expect that more competent officials be rewarded and promoted in the system. The Chinese selectocracy meets this expectation and thus reinforces its legitimacy.

5. A comparison of Outcomes between Selectocracy and Democracy

The analysis in the previous sections has shown that the Chinese selectocracy not only is a self-contained polity, but also meets some of the key criteria of a legitimate polity, particularly openness, competitive, and rewarding merit. To better understand this polity, this section compares its outcomes with those of democracy, the benchmark polity for thinking about governance today. One of the reasons why democracy appeals to today's world is that it is consistent with the modern idea of self-determination. Being able to vote and speak out one's own mind, people feel that they are empowered. In addition, theorists have proven that the majority rule --- the principal decision rule of democracy --- is the only fair rule when the society tries to aggregate individual preferences to a social preference. However, the outcomes of democracy are not always desirable. In contrast, the Chinese selectocracy may not enjoy the same level of appeal that democracy has achieved, but may produce some desirable outcomes that democracy fails to produce. A comparison between those two polities thus can provide new insights to our understanding of governance.

Long-term career versus instant entry

The first comparison lies between the Chinese selectocracy's promotion of long-term career and democracy's freedom to allow for instant entry. The Chinese selectocracy requires that officials take a long-term view for their careers. They have to enter the system at a young age and then compete with their peers along the way to move up the hierarchy. In contrast, democracy provides "short cuts" for people who even have no

political experience to enter politics in a stage they believe suitable. Both systems have their advantages and disadvantages.

The most significant advantage of the Chinese selectocracy is that it promotes long-term vision among government officials. This is created by two forces in the system. First, the party needs to maintain a consistent set of criteria for promotion over time in order to stabilize the system. As a result, officials develop stable expectations regarding the relationship between their performances and chances to get promoted. A desirable outcome is that officials are less driven by opportunistic incentives; rather, they behave in line with the promotion criteria. Second, the Chinese selectocracy creates a conducive environment for reputation building. Competition for promotion is not a one-shot game, but a life-time endeavor. Reputation then becomes an important concern, particularly for those who aspire for high positions in the government.

Another advantage that the Chinese selectocracy enjoys is that officials improve their ability and accumulate credentials over time. Because they have a long time horizon, officials are willing to learn from their experiences and improve their ability (Le Borgne and Lockwood, 2004). The learning process is helped by the party's willingness to train young officials. The party deliberately sets up reserves for promising young officials. One important way to train them is to put them in different positions and different localities. In particular, they are often assigned with a leadership position at the county or city level so they can develop the skills to handle complex and multiple tasks that are required for a competent leader. With all their experiences, officials become confident national leaders when they reach high levels in the party/government hierarchy.

Built on the first two advantages, the Chinese selectocracy insulates government officials from the short-sighted demand from the populace. The monopoly of power enjoyed by the CCP certainly is important in this regard, but it is not sufficient to insulate the CCP from popular pressures. As noted above, one of the reasons that the CCP shifted toward economic growth at the end of the 1970s was the fear of popular revolt. The long sights fostered by the system are equally important. With the credentials acquired along their way up the hierarchical ladder, officials feel confident that what they are doing is good for the long-term benefits of society.

The disadvantages of the Chinese selectocracy, though, are equally significant. First of all, it does not encourage innovative officials to emerge from the system. Deviation from the norm is not rewarded. As a result, there is a risk that the system is left with mediocre officials in the end. In addition, the top leaders are often in their 60s when they assume office. They are molded by their past experiences and their mindset, usually formed when a person is in his 20s and 30s, may lag behind the time by decades. Their decisions may not reflect what the contemporary time requires.

However, mediocrity may be corrected by the incentive offered by economic decentralization. Notwithstanding a centralized political system, economically China is decentralized. An effective federal system has been in place governing the central-local relations since reform began in the late 1970s (Xu, 2011). Within this system, local officials are able and have incentives to initiate local experiments. To the extent that successful experiments are rewarded by the center, innovative officials can emerge from the system.

The advantages and disadvantages held by democracy are diametrically opposite to those of the Chinese selectocracy. Giving an opportunity to everyone at any time, democracy is able to constantly bring in new blood to the system. The United States, the most powerful country in the current world, has been able to produce three presidents who assumed office in their early 40s. Democracy thus can help build a dynamic society. The downside of democracy, though, is that officials are constantly under the pressure of elections. This has two negative effects on policy outcomes and politicians themselves. The first is that politicians have to bend to populist pressures to obtain votes. This often leads them to take short-sighted and opportunistic actions to please voters. The second is that elections reduce incumbent politicians' incentive to improve their abilities (Le Borgne and Lockwood, 2004). There is a loud complaint that the West lacks leaders today (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2014). The fundamental cause is perhaps the democratic spirit itself. "People rule" is not just a utopian ideal, but also increasingly pressed to become a practice.

Selection versus incentive

The second comparison is between the Chinese selectocracy's emphasis on ex ante selection and democracy's emphasis on ex post monitoring and provision of incentives. The Confucian tradition requires that the ruler demonstrate that he is virtuous and capable before he can claim rule on his subjects. Officials were first recommended by local elites in Han dynasty and then were selected by a formal exam between Sui dynasty and the late Qing dynasty. In addition, an evaluation system was set up to judge the performance of local officials in as early as Han dynasty (Deng, 1987). Officials who maintained a good record got promoted; those who failed the evaluation were sacked. Even today, most Chinese people do not believe that an official position is equivalent to an ordinary job. For them, only people with virtue and capability can assume key government offices. The Chinese selectocracy has inherited the Chinese tradition of meritocracy and assigns a paramount role to selection when it promotes government and party officials (Bell, 2015). The upside of this approach is that it is able to select the most capable people; the downside is that it tends to reject people who have innovative ideas but who have not accumulated enough credentials. In the end, the system is able to produce capable functionaries, but may not be able to find innovative leaders who can lead the country to adjust quickly to the changing world.

Democracy, on the other hand, opens its door to everyone who aspires for a political life. In a perfect environment where every piece of information about the candidates is open and everyone is informed, voters should be able to tell who is capable and virtuous to lead them. In reality, though, the environment is often imperfect, which allows less capable and opportunistic candidates to enter the race. Compared with the Chinese selectocracy, democracy is less capable with selection. That is why democracy has created all sorts of complex and delicate mechanisms to hold elected officials accountable. Constitutional rules with checks and balances put severe constraints on elected officials; the prospect of winning a second term then gives them a powerful incentive to work hard. The problem, however, is that strong reelection incentives may induce incumbent politicians to take opportunistic and distortionary actions (Nordhaus, 1975; Rogoff, 1990). A tension then rises between better selection and the provision of incentives. This tension dates back to the time of the American Founding Fathers when they debated about the good form of governance for the United States. In contemporary times, political and

economic theorists have established that strong office holding incentives can undermine the purpose to select more capable officials (Fearon, 1999; Maskin and Tirole, 2004). In an empirical paper studying a large dataset of Chinese city officials, Xi, Yao, and Zhang (2016) show that more capable officials have smaller responses to short-term promotion incentives than less capable officials.⁵ This result implies that selection is more important than incentives to motivate government officials. Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2014) have identified the challenges facing Western democracy and prescribed many useful remedies. However, they have missed the most important deficiency of democracy in contemporary times: its inability to produce trustworthy leaders. In this regard, the Chinese selectocracy provides useful lessons.

Responsibility versus accountability

The third comparison is between responsibility emphasized by the Chinese selectocracy on the one hand and accountability emphasized by democracy on the other hand. Confucian teaching requires that the ruler treat his subjects as if he were their parent. As the parent, the ruler has the responsibility to take care of his subjects even when his subjects are not aware of their own benefits of being taken care of. In modern-day China, the spirit of this approach to governing is preserved, although in the CCP's jargon it has been transformed into the slogan "serving the people". In essence, responsibility requires that government officials take proactive measures to improve people's quality of life. The upside of this approach is two-fold. On the one hand, government officials have no excuse to shirk; on the other hand, they are also empowered to take actions that they believe are necessary to improve people's welfare. To the extent that officials are capable and virtuous, this approach is likely to produce desirable results for the society. Its problem, however, is also two-fold. First, officials may not have the full virtue required by Confucius; self-interests can lead to the abuse of power when power is not fully checked. The recent anti-corruption campaign shows that this indeed has been the case. Second, government officials may not have the capacity to have a full knowledge of people's needs even if they are capable and virtuous. They are bounded by the

⁵ Short-term promotion incentives are those induced by the cycles created by the CCP's national congress. Promotions are more likely to happen in the year when the national party congress is held. Therefore, officials tend to generate higher growth rates when time approaches the next party congress.

information problem that Frederick von Hayek pointed out long time ago for the failure of the socialist planner.

Democracy solves the information problem by resorting to a political aggregator, usually the majority rule. The task left is to make elected officials implement what the aggregator has selected. That is why accountability is emphasized. Instead of calling elected officials to take proactive actions, democracy puts more weights on requiring elected officials to do what their constituency asks them to do. In a perfect political environment, this approach to governance imposes great constraints on elected officials so abuse of power is prevented. In a less perfect political environment, though, it may lose bite. There are abundant examples showing how democracy can fail in developing countries.

More desirable results can be produced if the Chinese selectocracy holds government officials more accountable to the people, or conversely, if democracy requires elected officials to take more responsibility. The introduction of responsibility is more urgent in developing countries because their political environments are much less perfect than in developed countries. This does not mean that developing countries should adopt the Chinese selectocracy; rather, they should reform their democratic institutions to allow responsibility to take a more prominent position.

Monotheticity versus plurality

Because selection is conducted by a single agency using a set of unified criteria, government officials in China tend to behave in the same way. While that makes it easier for the CCP to implement its policy, the danger of the ensuing monotheticity is that the system is prone to make mistakes if the whole bureaucracy heads in the wrong direction. Over-investment, blind-eyed pursuit of GDP growth, and neglect of the environment are all linked to the monotheticity of the system. More than that, the society may also become a prey and lose the plurality that truly characterizes a modern society. A democracy, in contrast, allows elected officials to implement diverse policies that their constituencies see fit. Local communities may have different concerns and their elected

officials need to reflect this diversity. In accordance, society can be more plural than in the selectocracy.

However, the selectocracy by its nature does not necessarily hinder plurality. First of all, it can change its selection process to select officials on a larger number of traits than just on their ability to develop the economy. Second, the selection process can be complemented by democratic mechanisms by which selected government officials are monitored by the people (see further in the next section). Third, the Chinese selectocracy can be made compatible with a liberal society. As we showed earlier, the imposition of a monothetic ideology is gone; a belief of a certain kind of ideology is no longer a prerequisite for a person to become a government official. Chinese society has become much more plural than before. There is no single social thought that can claim majority in the society; people have become more tolerant toward social deviants; and criticisms on government policy appear daily in newspapers and social media. There are still government controls and in many cases coercions. But as I will argue in the concluding section, they are results of the misunderstanding of the Chinese system both outside and inside China. In particular, they arise mostly because policy makers in China are misguided by the “democracy narrative”, so they are not able to realize the true sources of legitimacy of the Chinese selectocracy.

6. Legitimacy of the Chinese System

With the discussion carried out so far, it is the time for us to consider probably the most important question coming out of this paper: Is the Chinese regime a legitimate polity? I already touched this question in the previous sections. In this section, I would like to provide a fuller answer to it.

Legitimacy of the selectorate

The legitimacy of a polity can be studied along two lines. One is along the line of popular consent to see if the polity is able to obtain the consent of the people; the other is along the line of consequences to see if its outcomes are desirable. Both are important and indispensable. Without popular consent, a polity has to constantly face possible challenges from the populace. This is so even if the polity can deliver good results to its

population. For example, a benevolent dictator may be nice to his people, but that does not guarantee that his son will do the same. To use economists' jargon, one can say that a polity is not self-enforcing if it does not have the consent from its people. On the other hand, a self-enforcing polity can still be illegitimate if it does not deliver good governance results. Although it is still a debated subject, a legitimate polity in the modern world probably needs to deliver the following three things in the same time: first, its political selection is open and competitive, and rewards merit; second, people's will is represented in government decisions; and third, power is checked and the abuse of power is punished. The idea that a polity has to be open and competitive is evidently reflected in John Rawls's first principle of a liberal society: public offices are open to all citizens (Rawls, 1971). It defines the procedural legitimacy of a liberal polity. However, it is not enough. A polity cannot be legitimate if its outcomes constantly deviate from Aristotle's idea of desert. In the case of selecting government officials, this idea requires that more capable officials be selected and promoted. A polity cannot be legitimate either if it always goes against people's will, precisely because it will not obtain people's consent. In the same vein, people are not going to agree with a polity if it allows its officials to exercise arbitrary power against its citizens or humanity. An example in which a polity is self-enforcing but illegitimate is the Nazi regime. The Nazi got power in Germany through a democratic process and was generally supported by the German people in the course of its ascendance. But the atrocity it committed rendered it an illegitimate regime.

Democracy has done a good job to obtain popular consent. In a democracy, political selection is done by popular vote. In addition, elected officials are expected to carry out the will of the voter. That is, the power of selection and monitoring are both vested in the hands of the voter (of course, aided by the necessary institutions). If every person's opinions count equally, democracy is a natural choice should people be asked to choose the polity they would be living with. Note that the condition imposed on this claim is important. If instead only a few people's opinions count in political selection and decision making, democracy becomes inadequate. The legitimacy of democracy first and foremost comes from its promise that it treats everyone's opinions equally.

However, democracy, by its design, may not deliver good governance outcomes. At the theoretical level, the famous Arrow's Impossibility Theorem shows that a non-dictatorial social choice rule can produce contradictory outcomes. One of the reasons for this result is that the social choice rule is required to equally treat everyone's preferences, despite how wired they can be --- the essence of democracy. In reality, elected officials often have to bend to voters' short-term demand and ignore the society's long-term goals, hurting people in the long run.

In the Chinese selectocracy, selection and monitoring are separated; selection is done by the CCP, and monitoring is done by a mixed system. Let us leave monitoring alone for a while and consider selection first. Because people do not conduct selection, a natural question is whether people agree with the system. If one insisted on the principle that everyone's opinions count equally, it would be hard to argue that people would give their consent. However, the merit of a polity ultimately has to be tested by its outcomes. In this regard, other alternatives are possible. The alternative taken by the Chinese selectocracy is that the polity has to select competent and virtuous officials. The criteria to judge competence and virtue are embedded in the needs of the society as well as in the Confucian teaching, independent of the people who conduct the selection. Therefore, the selection can be conducted by a centralized agency. In current China, the CCP is that agency. This is the source of its legitimacy.

The difference between the Chinese selectocracy and democracy lies in their different starting points of political philosophy. While democracy starts with the idea that everyone's opinions count equally in the political process, the Chinese selectocracy starts with the conviction that a political process has to be designed to produce competent and virtuous officials. That conviction is deeply rooted in the Confucian teaching. The question whether the Chinese selectocracy is able to get the consent of the Chinese people is equivalent to the question whether Chinese people all submit to the idea of Confucianism. To answer this question requires assiduous political and sociological research. It is certainly beyond the scope of this paper and the ability of this author. The purpose of my discussion is to highlight the possibility of a new construct that allows good governance to be laid on non-individualistic foundations. The review I have

provided so far has shown that the Chinese selectocracy is able to deliver some good governance outcomes. In particular, its political selection is open and competitive, and rewards merit. The remaining questions are whether it reflects people's will in its decision making process and whether it places checks on power.

Accommodating plurality

The Chinese selectocracy has found a solution to the problem of political selection, but it needs to do a better job to reflect people's will in its decision making process. In a plural society, the definition of the social good has to be openly contested. In this regard, democracy has done a fairly good job. However, there is also a danger for democracy not to produce any consensus. The Chinese selectocracy offers an opportunity to find a balance in between. The opportunity is that the selection of officials and the monitoring of their decisions can be separated. While the selection is conducted by a centralized authority, the monitoring can be done by a popularly elected body. The People's Congress is such a body. As long as its delegates are elected by open and fair elections, the People's Congress, by constitutional design, can effectively monitor the decisions of selected officials. That is, the Chinese selectocracy can be made congruent with the idea of plurality if the CCP effectively implements the Chinese Constitution. Better than democracy, the Chinese system can reach a more delicate balance between a meritocratic leadership and the demand of ordinary people.

To achieve that balance, the Chinese constitution needs to be revised to provide mutual assurance for the CCP and the People's Congress. On the one hand, the Constitution needs to reintroduce the clauses of the 1954 Constitution that granted the CCP constitutional rights to nominate key officials in the government. More than that, the CCP should be granted a certain veto power for those rights. For example, if one of its nominees is not approved by the People's Congress, the CCP can nominate the person again and this time the People's Congress needs to have two-thirds supermajority to decline this nomination. The Constitution should also sanction the CCP's de facto right to nominate delegates to the People's Congress although there should be a limit on the proportion of candidates to be nominated by the CCP. On the other hand, the CCP should

adhere to its role of the selectorate and let the People's Congress to function as a platform for people's will to be represented and contested. This requirement has not gone beyond what the current Chinese Constitution has required. The Constitution reflects the CCP's own will; honoring the Constitution will only enhance its credibility.

Monitoring the selector

Ultimately, the Chinese selectocracy has to face the question: who will monitor the selector? The question is not posed to challenge the legitimacy of the CCP. As this paper has emphasized from the very beginning, the CCP is part of the Chinese constitutional architecture and therefore its legitimacy is automatically guaranteed by the form of governance that China has adopted. Rather, the question is posed to ask whether the CCP selectors can be held accountable if they have selected bad officials. In this regard, the CPPCC can play a larger role of monitoring. The CPPCC is defined by the Chinese Constitution as a united-front organization that allows the CCP to work with other democratic parties. The first plenary meeting of the CPPCC was held in September 1949. It "substituted the role of the national People's Congress, represented the will of the people in the country, and announced the establishment of the People's Republic of China." (Introduction, the CPPCC Charter) All the eight democratic parties participate in the CPPCC. Most of the delegates to the CPPCC are social elites representing different segments of the society. The CPPCC Charter grants the CPPCC the right to conduct political consultation and monitoring on important issues involving the state. Therefore, it is natural for the CPPCC to monitor the CCP's selection of government officials.

The reader will rightly infer that it inevitably requires power sharing within the Chinese party-state in order to introduce plurality and monitoring into the system. Can a party-state accommodate power sharing? The answer is yes because power sharing is necessary for the party-state to function well. The Chinese party-state is not a monothetic entity that always functions as a whole. Instead, it comprises of a constitutional setup, layers of government, and multiple agencies within the government. Decisions have to be delegated to individual government or party agencies. Like in a democracy, though, every decision involves multiple stakeholders who may have diverse interests. As a result, it is

not guaranteed that a decision will always carry out the will of the party-state. With the CCP cemented as part of the constitutional architecture, it is also possible to have power sharing without undermining the CCP's leadership role as the selectorate and the prime policy maker.

In summary, an ideal type of the Chinese selectocracy looks like the following: (1) the CCP functions as the selectorate; (2) the NPC provides the platform for people's will to be represented and contested; and (3) the CPPCC provides the checks and balances that are necessary to monitor the functions of the CCP. This type of polity provides the CCP legitimacy as well as strikes a balance between popular will and elitist mediation.

7. Conclusion: the Need for a New Narrative

I have showed in this paper that the Chinese selectocracy satisfies several important traits of a legitimate polity. This, of course, is not intended to evade the contradictions in the system. The Chinese selectocracy takes wisdom and organizational forms from two sources. One is Chinese tradition and the other is the CCP's own history of struggle and transformation. Those two sources are not always congruent with each other. In addition, amidst the global wave of democratization, an anxiety has been inevitably developed within China that questions the legitimacy of the Chinese selectocracy. Against this background, it is thus not surprising to find contradictions and weaknesses in the system. The most significant contradiction in the Chinese system is the gaps between the CCP's orthodox narrative, its aspiration and what it does in reality. The CCP's orthodox narrative still maintains that the party is a Marxist party. Established more than 90 years ago as a revolutionary party following the Marxist-Leninist teaching, the CCP has taken Marxism as a source of legitimacy. However, the turn to economic growth at the end of the 1970s signaled a new era for the party. Its task is no longer to destruct the old system, but to construct a new system that is able to offer prosperity to the Chinese people as well as to help China regain its greatness enjoyed in historical times. Marxism, how great a theory it might be, can offer little for the CCP to reach that goal. In practice, the CCP has to resort to two other sources to obtain wisdom. One is its own history. The CCP has learned lessons from its own successes and failures. One of the greatest lessons it has

learned is that the party has to be pragmatic in order to adapt to a changing world. It is only with the guidance of pragmatism that the party has been able to continue reforming itself as well as the economic system. Another source is Chinese tradition. Chinese culture is one of the most enduring cultures in the world and has made great contributions to human kind in the last 5000 years. In its revolutionary period, the CCP appeared as an anti-traditional force. Since 1978 when it turned to economic growth and the revival of the Chinese nation, the CCP has gradually turned back to Chinese tradition. The selectocracy has benefited from the CCP's own history and the meritocracy that was highly regarded in China's historical times.

The result, however, is a great gap between what the party claims in theory and what it does in reality. The announcement of the "Three Represents" in 2002 was an attempt to fill this gap. But it is not sufficient to provide a new theoretical foundation for the party. In fact, it is only an amendment to the long list of guiding theories appearing in the CCP's Charter. The Chinese system is constantly haunted by an internal split between its theoretical foundation and its practice. On top of that, the system has to face the external challenge of democratization. Democracy has become such a compelling idea that prominent CCP theorists have to acknowledge that "democracy is a good thing."⁶ The CCP is haunted by the "democracy narrative". It is widely recognized that the Chinese system is not a democracy, but CCP theorists are constantly challenged to prove how democratic the system is. But this only aggravates people's suspicion of the system, which ultimately weakens their confidence in the system's legitimacy.

China needs a New Narrative that is commensurate with the ideas held and practices taken by the Chinese selectocracy. As I have demonstrated in this paper, the Chinese selectocracy is open, competitive and meritocratic, several key elements of a legitimate polity. They provide the basis for the New Narrative. Human societies have had a long history of searching for the right mode of governance. Democracy was a 19th century result of the struggle between the commoners, particularly the working class, and the elites in Western Europe (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2000). China does not have that experience. Instead, the CCP has not only established the system, but also tried to

⁶ See Yu Keping's blog at <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/12388.html>.

improve the life of the commoners. With this unique history, China is trying to find its own way toward a liberal polity. Forcing the “democracy narrative” onto every country will not always achieve the desirable results; the chaos after the Arab Spring, particularly the ensuing refugee problem, has rung the bell for the blind push for democratization.

The Chinese selectocracy is deeply rooted in China’s long history of meritocracy (Bell, 2015). Despite the debate, China was definitely one of the most dynamic ancient societies in terms of upward social mobility. More importantly, China was the only ancient society that had a meritocratic system to allocate official positions; all other major societies had hereditary systems. In a very early stage of civilization, China solved one of the most demanding tasks facing human societies, i.e., how to select competent officials (Qian, 2001/1952). The CCP does not need to be shy to claim that it has inherited China’s meritocratic tradition. The New Narrative can find a firm philosophical and social foundation in that tradition. In addition, the Chinese Constitution guarantees democratic participation through the NPC and multi-party monitoring through the CPPCC. The CCP derives its legitimacy from its role as the selectorate and decision maker of the country. Implementing the Constitution will only enhance its legitimacy.

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