Party-centered Governance in China:
Comparative Perspective

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The Approaches to Chinese Political Studies

(1) The theory of state-society relation.

The political parties don’t take the central stage in the relations between state and society and therefore have not attracted much attention from the academia and mass media. Some scholars studies the party-state under the Communist leadership and only treated the Communist Party as some kind of auxiliary attachment to the state.
(2) The theory of democratic transition

Because the democracy is simply defined as a procedural way in which political leaders are selected through multi-party competition by the people they govern, the Communist leadership has always been seen as an obstacle to the democratic transition in China.

In other word, only after the end of the Communist leadership and the collapse of the CPC can the democratization occur in China.
(3) The theory of governance

Since the theory of governance emphasizes the cooperation and coordination between many different actors such as the state and society, government and market, the public and private, the organization and individuals, the political parties have at most been seen as one of many actors and their role has been marginalized in Chinese politics.
The CPC as the central actor in Chinese politics

It is important and imperative to introduce the party-centered approach in order to better understand the dynamics and process of Chinese politics. Just as some political scientists called to bring the state back in, some China experts called to bring the Party back in and tried to place the CPC in the center of Chinese political studies.
The Changing Patterns of Governance in China

The Qin Dynasty was short, but opened the new chapter of emperor-centered governance in Chinese history. The following Han dynasty continued the Qin system of government and the Han emperors gradually established a firm and highly centralized government supported by the Confucian ideology that was respected and adopted as official and orthodox value system by the later dynasties.

The pattern of emperor-centered governance remained same for nearly two thousand years.
After the Qing Dynasty ended its rule in the 1911 revolution, the traditional political order came into chaos and the emperor-centered governance was replaced by the warlord-centered governance in China.

Although the Nationalist Government under the leadership of Kiang Kai-shek reunified the whole China, there were constant and continual military and political struggle between different local military forces until 1949 when the Communist Party defeated the Nationalist Party and came to power.
Party-centered governance

After the end of “Cultural Revolution”, the Communist Party and the State have been restored and rebuilt; the party-building and state-building have been promoted with great efforts.

While the power and function of the People’s Congress have been strengthened, its status and influence have been enhanced, and a new pattern of the Communist Party-state relations emerged in which the two authorities of party and state coexist and their relations are more institutionalized.
The Overall Leadership of the CPC during Xi’s New Era

In contrast with Deng Xiaoping’s ideas about the separate function and structure of the Communist Party and State, General Secretary Xi has called for the overall leadership of the CPC at all areas.
Members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee

Li Keqiang
Li Zhanshu
Wang Yang

Wang Huning
Zhao Leji
Han Zheng
Xi’s leadership: the extreme rightist or leftist?

Some insist that Xi’s leadership tends to be more authoritarian and represents some kind of return to the Maoist period, even on the verge of personal dictatorship.

Many scholars think that Xi’s leadership has given rise to a cleaner and more efficient government and represents the revival of the Communist tradition, especially the mass line and popular democracy.
I try to argue that the party-centered governance based on the rule of law and popular democracy has been emerging under Xi’s leadership during the past years.
Xi Jinping Thought on the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era

“Four Comprehensives”

(1) Comprehensively construct a moderately prosperous society

(2) Comprehensively deepen reform

(3) Comprehensively build a state based on the rule of law

(4) Comprehensively govern a party based on the strict party discipline
First, establishing the Central Leading Groups/Commission for Deepening Overall Reforms.

In March 2018, the leading group is transformed to be the committee, which called the Central Leading Commission for Deepening Overall Reforms.

In March 28, Xi Jinping presided over the first meeting for the Central Leading Commission, attended by the deputy leaders Li Keqiang, Wang Huning and Han Zheng, the latter two of whom are the newly promoted members of the Standing Committee of the CPC.
Secondly, revitalizing and reinventing the structure and function of the Leading Party Group in the state apparatus, the state-owned enterprises and social organizations.

A meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee on May 29, 2015, passed a regulation stressing the need to strengthen the Party's role in state organs and non-Party units.
Thirdly, strengthening the leadership of Xi Jinping as the Party’s Core Leader (hexin). Like his two predecessors, Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, Xi is General Secretary of the party, commander-in-chief of the armed forces and head of state.

Xi Jinping has been accepted and confirmed as the Core Leader of the CPC at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee in October, 2016.
Fourthly, deepening reforms of Party and state institutions so as to establish a Party and state institutional function system that is well conceived, fully built, procedure based, and efficiently functioning.

A primary task of deepening reform of the Party and state institutions is to strengthen the CPC's leadership in every sector.
After experiencing trial and error, the CPC has successfully established itself as a central leading force in Chinese politics, and contributed greatly to the rapid rise of China during the past decades.

Especially, the CPC with Xi Jinping as the core leader has now been exercising overall leadership at all areas in every part of the country. Since the CPC has been playing a central role in the governance of China, the party-centered governance has emerged as a new pattern of governance from comparative perspective, quite different from the state-centered governance or society-centered governance.
While the CPC exercises the overall leadership and plays the central role in the governance of China, the Party has embedded itself into the state structure and exercise its overall leadership within the institutional framework of state power, thus consolidating the institutional foundation and strengthening the legal guarantee for the Communist leadership.

Therefore, the party-centered governance is a golden combination of the Communist leadership, people’s democracy and rule of law, which perhaps will present a new type of political civilization in the future.
Thank You !