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**The Face of a Green Leader? Analysing Xi Jinping's  
Ideological Legitimation Strategies in Speeches to Domestic  
and International Audiences**

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## Abstract

Ideology is not often credited in analyses of leadership legitimation. Whether they be democratic or autocratic, a president's legitimacy is commonly attributed primarily to their performance. In the case of Chinese president Xi Jinping, however, ideology's relevance should not be underestimated: with the publication of *Xi Jinping Thought* in 2017, he further validates comparisons between his and Mao Zedong's ideological and propagandistic styles and the continued relevance of ideology in Chinese politics. This thesis investigates the role of ideology in Xi's presidential legitimation, focusing specifically on green leadership: through comparative critical discourse analyses between general and environmental elements of his domestic and international speeches, it studies which legitimating strategies are employed and what these say about Xi's leadership identity. Using different strategic narratives towards different audiences, Xi's speeches reveal two overarching yet increasingly assertive ideological legitimation strategies: stressing his role as the nation's ideological father domestically, whilst internationally emphasising his role as leader of the developing countries and alternative to the United States' leadership. This international role bleeds into his approach to environmental governance, for which Xi similarly promotes his environmental ideology from a position of opposition to the developed countries.

*Keywords:* critical discourse analysis, Xi Jinping, green leadership, ecological civilisation, ideological legitimation, presidential rhetoric

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## List of Abbreviations

CPC	Communist Party of China
NYA	New Year Address
plen. mtg.	plenary meeting
PRC	People's Republic of China
Sess.	Session
<i>Thought</i>	<i>Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era</i>
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UN GAOR	United Nations General Assembly Official Records
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
US	United States
WEF	World Economic Forum

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## Introduction

The year 2022 has been an important year for Xi Jinping: at the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), he has started his third term as the country's general secretary, after the 40-year-old constitutional limit of two terms for presidents was removed in 2018. In 2023, therefore, he will most likely not step down as president and remain China's international representative. As head of state of the world's second-largest economy,<sup>1</sup> Xi has an influential voice: in his analysis of 'The Xi Jinping Doctrine of China's International Relations,' Feng Zhang asserts Xi's publications 'represent the most authoritative Chinese views on international affairs today.' 'No other leader since Mao Zedong has received [as] elevated [an] intellectual and propagandistic treatment' as Xi,<sup>2</sup> he argues.

A significant part of this intellectual propaganda has focused on sustainable development and the environment.<sup>3</sup> Over the past decade, it appears Xi has not only consolidated his domestic position as chairman but has also worked on his image as a green world leader. Currently, the country is both the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases and producer of the most renewable energy sources.<sup>4</sup> Whether China can be considered a green leader consequently remains a subject of debate,<sup>5</sup> but there are expectations for the future and

1. Justin McCurry and Julia Kollewe, 'China's Economy Is Now the World's Second Largest', *The Guardian (UK)*, 14 February 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/feb/14/china-second-largest-economy>.

2. Feng Zhang, 'The Xi Jinping Doctrine of China's International Relations', *Asia Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019): 9–10, <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2019.0029>.

3. For a recent analysis of this environmental propaganda, see Benjamin R. Young, 'Why Xi Jinping Has Lofty Visions of Green Mountains: China's Environmental Rhetoric Is Rooted in Party History', *Foreign Policy*, 25 May 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/25/xi-jinping-green-mountains-china-environmental-policy-rhetoric/>.

4. For an overview with detailed visualisations of these numbers, see Jin Wu and Karoline Kan, 'The Chinese Companies Polluting the World More Than Entire Nations', ed. Sharon Chen, Dan Murtaugh, and Jane Pong, *Bloomberg News*, 24 October 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2021-china-climate-change-biggest-carbon-polluters/>.

5. Cecilia Han Springer et al., 'Ask the Experts: Can China Become a Global Green Leader?', *LSE*, 1 November 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/cff/2021/11/01/ask-the-experts-can-china-become-a-global-green-leader/>.

developments in Chinese environmental policies are followed across the globe. Nonetheless, Xi's environmental discourse, particularly with a focus on its legitimating function and ideological aspects, has received little scholarly attention.

This study will comparatively analyse Xi Jinping's discourse in domestic and international speeches over time, to investigate what strategies he has used to gain legitimacy. Central to this analysis is the following research question: *what role does ideology play in Xi Jinping's presidential discourse to construct and legitimise his identity as a green leader?* Using a critical discourse analysis, the thesis will compare ideological legitimisation strategies between audiences and subjects. Ideology is thus understood to be an important part of Xi's discursive strategy: the thesis will argue that his speeches employ an increasingly assertive ideological legitimisation strategy with different 'faces' for different audiences, to solidify both his international and domestic identity as a world leader. To facilitate comparison between Xi's domestic and international discursive development, this analysis only covers Xi's career during his presidency, between 2013–2022. Being the first Chinese president since Deng Xiaoping to publish his personal ideology during his presidency and see this incorporated into the CPC's constitution,<sup>6</sup> Xi seems to take on an especially significant ideological role. Within its limited scope, this research therefore focuses solely on discourse by Xi Jinping, not analysing statements by Chinese politicians more generally. Due to his influential position, however, Xi's discourse is likely followed by his administration. As Yayoi Kato argues, 'Xi's ideological line' is fundamental for the operation of ideology in public discourse: he 'sets the rules of the game.'<sup>7</sup>

### *Academic and societal relevance*

Answering the central question of this thesis is not only relevant for international environmental cooperation and scholarship on presidential rhetorical legitimisation, but also for an

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6. See Tom Phillips, 'Xi Jinping Becomes Most Powerful Leader since Mao with China's Change to Constitution', *The Guardian (UK)*, 24 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/24/xi-jinping-mao-thought-on-socialism-china-constitution> for an interpretation of the significance of this moment.

7. Yayoi Kato, 'Two Faces of Ideology: Double-Edged Functions of Ideology in the Reform Discourse Under Xi Jinping', *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 49, no. 2 (2021): 156, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868102620933899>.

understanding of green leadership and recent geopolitical affairs more widely. China's commitment to sustainable development is widely taken to be crucial to achieving climate goals. With Xi further expanding his influence both domestically and internationally, it is important to consider the legitimating aspects of his words through the cultural and ideological history his discourse system is grounded in. By focusing on ideological rather than performance legitimisation through discursive means, this thesis adds to scholarship on both presidential legitimacy and soft power through 'strategic narratives' rather than public diplomacy, a concept that has been put forward in international relations in recent years.<sup>8</sup> In addition, through comparing Xi's discursive legitimising strategies to domestic and international audiences over time, this thesis will contextualise Xi's words on the climate and hence further understanding of his environmental commitments and rhetorical legitimisation tactics.

More broadly, such insights can inform analyses of his vision for the role of China on the world stage. Chinese global leadership would have far-reaching effects on international affairs: Rachel F. Madenyika and Jason G. Tower describe the growth of China's involvement in world affairs over the past decade as 'dramatic' and stress the need for dialogue with the Chinese discourse on global affairs, to avoid an otherwise impending confrontation. Xi aims for China to 'become a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence,'<sup>9</sup> through 'peaceful development' and by 'foster[ing] new thinking on common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security.'<sup>10</sup> This means we should expect international value systems to be challenged and see sustainability as an area of particular

8. Lutgard Lams, 'Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping', *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23 (2018): 388, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-9529-8>.

9. Xi Jinping 习近平, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era: Report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China* (Beijing: Xinhua 新华社, 2017), 25, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c\\_136725942.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm); the Chinese original of this report is listed separately in the bibliography, as Xi Jinping 习近平, *Xí Jìnpíng: Juéshèng Quánmiàn Jiànchéng Xiǎokāng Shèhuì Duóqǔ Xīn Shídài Zhōngguó Tèsè Shèhuì Zhǔyì Wěidà Shènglì—Zài Zhōngguó Gòngchǎndǎng Dì Shíjiǔ Cì Quánguó Dàibiǎo Dàhuì Shàng de Bàogào* 习近平: 决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告 [Xi Jinping's Report to the 19th National Congress of the CPC] (Beijing: Xinhua 新华社, 2017), [http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content\\_5234876.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm).

10. Xi Jinping 习近平, *Report to the 19th National Congress*, 22.



relevance for this to happen. A detailed analysis of Xi's communication over time can provide valuable insights into whether and how he is executing his vision for a more assertive China and challenge our ways of thinking about sustainability. Moreover, with international environmental leadership as an explicit Chinese goal, this thesis will provide the necessary re-evaluation of the concept of green leadership to the Chinese scenario.

### *Structure*

To answer its research question, the thesis will be organised in chapters corresponding to different sub-questions, preceded by a methodological chapter. This methodological chapter, called 'Methodology: Lucid Waters, Lush Mountains, and Green Leaders,' will elaborate on the historiography of the thesis, as well as its theoretical framework and methodology. Importantly, the theoretical framework will outline the central theses of *Xi Jinping Thought*, focusing primarily on his ideological ideas regarding the environment; definitions of green leadership and narrative legitimisation strategies employed by the CPC's leadership will be discussed as well. This will inform and contextualise the methodological and theoretical design of the thesis.

The chapters that follow are primarily divided by the sources they analyse. The second chapter, 'The Domestic Face of Xi Jinping: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the New Year Addresses,' is domestic and analyses Xi's New Year Addresses; this is followed by an international chapter that analyses a selection of international speeches. Both chapters will answer the same questions for their respective source material: *how did ideology feature in Xi Jinping's general and environmental discourse between 2013-2022 to construct and legitimise his presidential identity, and did this change over time?* To structure this analysis, the chapters are divided into sections, one of which analyses Xi's overall legitimisation strategies and ideological terminology throughout the speeches, and one of which deals specifically with environmental discourse. Diachronic differences will be pointed out throughout the respective sections and their contextualisation and interpretation will be dealt with in each chapter's conclusion.

Starting in the third chapter, 'The International Face of Xi Jinping: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Xi's International Speeches,' the domestic results will be compared to Xi's legitimisation strategies and use of ideology in international speeches. After the separate analyses of the different speeches are complete, the conclusion will give room to further compare,

contextualise, and interpret the results. It will point out what different faces Xi Jinping puts on, when and where he does so, and how. This will allow for a reflection on possible reasons behind these choices and the existence of a patterned strategy, which can be compared to findings in other studies of Xi's soft power. The conclusion will also consider to what extent Xi's 'faces' can be called those of a green leader and what this might mean for global environmental governance, discuss the limits of the research of this thesis, and offer suggestions for further study.

## I. Methodology: Lucid Waters, Lush Mountains, and Green Leaders

Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.

– Xi Jinping, ‘A New Starting Point for China's Development’<sup>11</sup>

Some of the key phrases or ‘buzzwords’ that populate Xi Jinping’s climate discourse were coined even before the start of his presidency in 2013. Using these phrases repeatedly in his speeches, propaganda, and other publications, they are memorable staples of Xi’s political legacy. At times, they also function as key concepts in *Xi Jinping Thought*, the ideological system Xi introduced in 2017.

To analyse what legitimating roles ideology plays in Xi Jinping’s discourse, the section ‘Historiography: Rhetorical Legitimation and Environmental Discourse in China’ reviews scholarship on Xi’s ideological and legitimating rhetoric, revealing the importance of phrases such as the above. As green leadership is a particular focus here, this section also overviews studies of Chinese environmental narratives, covering a wide range of scholarship for lack of specific research into this thesis’s topic. Notable relationships and differences between these studies are pointed out, as well the position of the current study within the literature.

After outlining preceding academic work, several central concepts are discussed in more detail in the theoretical framework: *Xi Jinping Thought*, ecological civilisation, legitimation,

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11. Amongst others, this phrase appears in Xi Jinping, ‘Gòujiàn chuàngxīn, huólì, liándòng, bāoróng de shìjiè jīngjì 构建创新、活力、联动、包容的世界经济 [A New Starting Point for China's Development: A New Blueprint for Global Growth],’ transcript of speech delivered at the Opening Ceremony of the B20 Summit, Hangzhou, China, September 3, 2016, [http://www.g20chn.org/dtxw/201609/t20160904\\_3341.html](http://www.g20chn.org/dtxw/201609/t20160904_3341.html), and [http://www.g20chn.org/English/Dynamic/201609/t20160909\\_3414.html](http://www.g20chn.org/English/Dynamic/201609/t20160909_3414.html). Original text: 《绿水青山就是金山银山》 Whilst the above translation is most often used in recent years, a more literal translation is ‘green mountains and clear water are as good as mountains of gold and silver,’ which is used in the B20 speech’s translation.

green leadership, and the theoretical instruments of this thesis—such as discourse and strategic narratives. The final section of this chapter translates the findings from existing theory and literature into a framework for the discourse analysis, with which the research question is answered in the chapters to follow. In short, this chapter overviews concepts and histories, whilst explaining how these have led to the thesis’s research design.

## 1. Historiography: Rhetorical Legitimation and Environmental Discourse in China

Chinese narratives on the climate problem are receiving increasing attention, as is Chinese climate policy.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, this attention has predominantly been devoted to narrative sources other than the head of state. Several framing studies have been conducted, which mostly focus on Chinese newspapers;<sup>13</sup> their results show that in recent years, the topic has increased in media prominence. Yeheng Pan, Michaël Opgenhaffen, and Baldwin Van Gorp, for example, diachronically overview climate discourses in the CPC’s flagship newspaper the *People’s Daily* from 1995–2018, pinpointing 2007 and 2015 as ‘two historical hallmarks’ in terms of attention to the climate.<sup>14</sup> The main change over time they found to be the replacement of climate as a hindrance to economic growth, with the climate as ‘an opportunity for healthier and more

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12. See Iselin Stensdal, ‘Chinese Climate-Change Policy, 1988-2013: Moving on Up’, *Asian Perspective* 38 (2014): 111–35; Aamodt Solveig and Iselin Stensdal, ‘Seizing Policy Windows: Policy Influence of Climate Advocacy Coalitions in Brazil, China, and India, 2000-2015’, *Global Environmental Change* 46 (2017): 114–25, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2017.08.006>.

13. Lei Xie, ‘The Story of Two Big Chimneys: A Frame Analysis of Climate Change in US and Chinese Newspapers’, *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 44, no. 2 (2015): 151–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2015.1011593>; Jingjing Han, Shaojing Sun, and Yanqin Lu, ‘Framing Climate Change: A Content Analysis of Chinese Mainstream Newspapers From 2005 to 2015’, *International Journal of Communications* 11 (2017): 2889–2911, <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/6011>.

14. Yeheng Pan, Michaël Opgenhaffen, and Baldwin Van Gorp, ‘China’s Pathway to Climate Sustainability: A Diachronic Framing Analysis of People’s Daily’s Coverage of Climate Change (1995–2018)’, *Environmental Communication* 15, no. 2 (2021): 198, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2020.1817766>.

sustainable economic development.’<sup>15</sup> However, the focus on economic development, technology as the answer, and the polluter pays idea remained prevalent throughout the years.<sup>16</sup> Pan, Opgenhaffen, and Van Gorp mainly point to an economical explanation for these frames, saying the ‘approach . . . fits in with the development trajectory of an authoritarian emerging economy.’<sup>17</sup> Other studies have instead placed more emphasis on how China’s trajectory fits its cultural context, comparing China’s framing of environmental issues with that of European countries or the United States.<sup>18</sup>

Despite a consensus on the influence of Chinese leadership in shaping these narratives, the little attention spent hereon is not exclusive to research on China’s environmental narratives: as mentioned in the introduction, Kevin J. Calderwood made a similar observation about the environmental discourse of American presidents.<sup>19</sup> Even more broadly, Junyan Jiang and Zhaotian Luo remark that scholarship on ‘authoritarian politics has devoted most of its attention to institutions rather than individuals.’<sup>20</sup> Although they do not study leaders’ discourse, they study Chinese provincial leaders’ evaluations and assert that contrary to the popular belief that autocratic regimes always beget autocratic leaders, both autocratic and conciliatory leadership styles are common in China.<sup>21</sup> Yet studies of political leaders remain sparse, especially in the case of China: in a 2016 article, Ting Su asserts that whereas ‘leaders’ speech has been an

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15. Pan, Opgenhaffen, and Van Gorp, 189.

16. Pan, Opgenhaffen, and Van Gorp, 198–99.

17. Pan, Opgenhaffen, and Van Gorp, 189.

18. See Daojiong Zha, ‘Energy Security in China-European Union Relations: Framing Further Efforts of Collaboration’, *Contemporary Politics* 21, no. 3 (2015): 308–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2015.1061246>; Olivia Gippner, ‘Framing It Right: China–EU Relations and Patterns of Interaction on Climate Change’, *Chinese Journal of Urban and Environmental Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2345748114500031>.

19. Kevin J. Calderwood, ‘Discourse in the Balance: American Presidential Discourse About Climate Change’, *Communication Studies* 70, no. 2 (2019): 236, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2019.1572636>.

20. Junyan Jiang and Zhaotian Luo, ‘Leadership Styles and Political Survival of Chinese Communist Party Elites’, *Journal of Politics* 83, no. 2 (2021): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1086/710144>.

21. Jiang and Luo, 2.

important research topic for discourse analysis’ and especially for critical discourse analysis, ‘there is few related research on *Chinese* leaders’ speech.’<sup>22</sup>

A possible cause of this development might be the foregrounding of ideological language in these speeches, taking away from other narratives and arguments that newspapers and official documents describe more prominently. Yet in a collection of five articles on the functions of ideology, propaganda and political discourse in China between 2012 and 2017, Ondřej Klimeš and Maurizio Marinelli conclude ideology is widely understood to be and remains ‘at the core of the PRC’s political system.’<sup>23</sup> Ideology is an important method for legitimisation in China: Kato notes that whilst scholars disagree about the definition of ideology, its function as a legitimating device is well-established.<sup>24</sup> To understand the ways in which Xi might construct and legitimise his reputation and cast himself in a leading role, the ideological elements in his speeches will therefore be important indicators. Moreover, as the Chinese Dream ascribes this ambition of global leadership to the entire country, Xi’s speeches can serve as a case study of the discursive methods and narratives likely to be used by members of his administration. As Kato argues, ‘Xi’s ideological line’ is fundamental for the operation of ideology in public discourse: he ‘sets the rules of the game.’<sup>25</sup>

Studies that do analyse the discourse of Xi Jinping, have thus far not taken an ideological angle. Ting Su conducts a positive discourse analysis on a speech by Xi from 2015, a technique that focuses on characteristics such as the speaker’s attitude and level of audience engagement.<sup>26</sup> Because of this focus on diplomacy rather than legitimation, ideological and cultural-historical elements were not analysed, nor was environmental discourse a focus of study. Vemund Aaskjær Braathen did focus on environmental narratives, conducting a critical

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22. Ting Su, 1, emphasis added.

23. Ondřej Klimeš and Maurizio Marinelli, 315.

24. Kato, ‘Two Faces of Ideology: Double-Edged Functions of Ideology in the Reform Discourse Under Xi Jinping’, 137.

25. Kato, 156.

26. Ting Su, ‘Positive Discourse Analysis of Xi Jinping’s Speech at the National University of Singapore under Appraisal Theory’, *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 7, no. 4 (2016): 1, <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0704.22>.

discourse analysis on the securitisation of both Chinese environmental policy as well as speeches and notes from Xi Jinping's book series *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China I and II*.<sup>27</sup> To answer the question of when and how the climate is securitised in Chinese governmental discourse, ideology is touched on briefly.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, the source of the CPC's political legitimacy is identified as the development process:<sup>29</sup> sustainable development, Braathen argues, is presented as a necessary defence against the threat climate change poses to the PRC's continued socio-economic development. Yet as this argumentation is used as a justification for government 'interventions in people's ways of life' and the continued leadership of the CPC, Braathen concludes this narrative mainly protects the CPC's 'core interest' of 'regime survival.'<sup>30</sup>

By identifying development rather than ideology and rhetoric as the main source of legitimacy, Braathen is part of a trend that Heike Holbig noted is prevalent amongst both Chinese and non-Chinese researchers, who widely apply the notion of performance legitimacy to China:<sup>31</sup> rather than ideological warfare or propaganda, it is assumed the performance of a regime determines its legitimacy, through its actions and achievements. Yet Kerry Ratigan notes performance legitimacy raises a paradox: whilst it is 'an accessible source of legitimacy for non-democracies,'<sup>32</sup> the difficulty of maintaining good performance can undermine this legitimacy when it is heavily relied on. Nevertheless, Ratigan finds this paradox does not seem

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27. Vemund Aaskjær Braathen, 'Constructing Climate Change as the Enemy of the State and l'État c'est Moi: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Contemporary Environmental Policies in China' (Master's thesis, The Arctic University of Norway, 2020), 27–31, <https://munin.uit.no/handle/10037/18823>.

28. Braathen, 56, 61.

29. Braathen, 58.

30. Braathen, 58.

31. Heike Holbig, 'Whose New Normal? Framing the Economic Slowdown Under Xi Jinping', *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23 (2018): 360, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-9539-6>.

32. Kerry Ratigan, 'Riding the Tiger of Performance Legitimacy? Chinese Villagers' Satisfaction with State Healthcare Provision', *International Political Science Review* 43, no. 2 (2022): 260, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120927482>.

applicable to the CPC's leadership;<sup>33</sup> their trustworthiness does not seem tainted by inconsistent performance. As this study explores ideological legitimation instead, it helps with filling the gap on ideological legitimation and clarifying the inapplicability of the performance legitimacy paradox to China. Building on the understanding that ideology remains central to China's political system, it is important to bridge studies of Xi's ideological thought with those of environmental discourses and political legitimation.

As the CPC's leadership ambitions are not constrained to the PRC, Chinese officials do not only have to legitimate their leadership to their own population. Lutgard Lams details Xi's 'key visions on propaganda work,' which as early as 2013 advocate global promotion of the Chinese Dream to spread 'good information about China,' a strengthening of efforts to 'develop overseas publicity and spread China's voice,' and the 'build[ing of] a discourse system' with 'new concepts, criteria, and expressions that will fit both the domestic and the international environment.'<sup>34</sup> In her analysis of the strategic narratives that have been put into practice during Xi's presidency, she identifies several specific characteristics of this international project. Firstly, in promoting the Chinese identity and accompanying narratives on global issues, the CPC undermines value universalism, at times by voicing aims such as decolonisation to correct Western 'imperialist prejudice,' an example that Lams identified in Chinese academia.<sup>35</sup> She also identifies the collaborative 'Community of Common Destiny' narrative of global order as 'Xi's novel foreign policy signature,' highlighting the tension between China's insistence on both its peacefulness and right to defend its sovereignty.<sup>36</sup> Whilst aiming for a single discourse system to employ both nationally and internationally, therefore, Xi's CPC still uses unique strategic narratives and methods in its international endeavours. Where Lams's paper classifies and describes strategic narratives, however, this thesis will use a critical discourse analysis to see to what extent such strategic narratives are represented in Xi's language. Focusing on ideological legitimation and environmental discourse, allows this study to both test the

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33. Ratigan, 260.

34. Lams, 'Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping', 393.

35. Lams, 396.

36. Lams, 397–99.



appositeness of these findings to Xi's personal speeches and contextualise the strategic narratives' link to ideology and legitimacy.

## 2. Theoretical Framework: True Leadership and the Birth of the Ecological Civilisation

### *Ideology: Xi's Thought and the Ecological Civilisation*

To understand what role ideology plays in Xi's environmental discourse and legitimation, it is first important to look at this ideology in more detail. In his report to the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC in 2017 Xi introduces his *Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era (Thought)*;<sup>37</sup> state media afterwards started preceding this title with his name, hence giving birth to *Xi Jinping Thought* for short. As Hou Qiang describes in his article for Chinese state newspaper Xinhua, the theory 'builds on and further enriches Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, and the Scientific Outlook on Development,'<sup>38</sup> the final two in that list being concepts that were introduced by Xi earlier during his presidency. A crucial innovation of Xi's *Thought* concerns Deng Xiaoping's 'socialism with Chinese characteristics': this economic doctrine, the last theory to be added to the CPC Party Constitution until then, has now 'entered a new era.'<sup>39</sup> Xi defines what this means during his opening speech to the congress: 'The Chinese nation, which since modern times began had endured so much for so long, has achieved a tremendous transformation: it has stood up, grown rich, and is becoming strong; it has come to embrace the brilliant prospects of

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37. Hou Qiang, 'CPC Creates Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era', *Xinhua* 新华网, 19 October 2017, [https://web.archive.org/web/20171018195301/http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/19/c\\_136689808.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20171018195301/http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/19/c_136689808.htm).

38. Qiang.

39. Xi Jinping 习近平, *Report to the 19th National Congress*, 1. As described in the bibliography (footnote 8), the Chinese original of this report is listed separately in the bibliography.

rejuvenation.’<sup>40</sup> Crucial to fulfilling this main goal of national rejuvenation, this Chinese Dream, is the realisation of the two centenary goals:

finish building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the time the Communist Party of China marks its centenary [in 2021] and to build China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious by the time the People’s Republic of China celebrates its centenary [in 2049].<sup>41</sup>

In short, Xi’s ideological theory takes the CPC’s last constitutionalised ideology and modernises it, by declaring the PRC’s development has reached a new phase and introducing goals and dreams befitting this ‘new era.’

Many of *Xi Jinping Thought*’s central ideas had been around before this official 2017 introduction; some of these were his own, yet many others are credited to other Chinese thinkers and leaders. Ecological civilisation is one such concept, having been introduced in the political landscape by Xi’s presidential predecessor Hu Jintao,<sup>42</sup> who in turn adapted the concept from environmental scientists.<sup>43</sup> Through this inheritance, ecology has been on Xi’s agenda from the start of his presidency as part of his so-called five-sphere integrated plan, which aimed to ‘promote coordinated economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological advancement.’<sup>44</sup> Yet whilst not a personal invention, environmental management continued to grow in prominence during Xi’s presidency. Maurizio Marinelli notes that in the 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan that was published in 2016, ecological civilisation ‘was presented both as the key national governance strategy and China’s way of contributing to the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development

40. Xi Jinping 习近平, 9. Again, the original Chinese report is listed separately in the bibliography.

41. Xi Jinping 习近平, 21.

42. The most notable of these is Ye Qianji, who has been writing about the concept since the 1980s. For a complete genealogy on ecological civilisation, see Maurizio Marinelli, ‘How to Build a “Beautiful China” in the Anthropocene. The Political Discourse and the Intellectual Debate on Ecological Civilization’, *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23, no. 3 (2018): 372, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-9538-7>.

43. Marinelli, 365.

44. Xi Jinping 习近平, *Report to the 19th National Congress*, 1.

Goals.’<sup>45</sup> Marinelli also remarks that under Xi, discourse changed from the ‘construction’ (jiànshè 建设) of an ecological civilisation, to its ‘advancement’ (tuījìn 推进).<sup>46</sup> This suggests a new stage of development, despite Marinelli’s conclusion that there had not been a significant change in practice. Despite not having coined ‘ecological civilisation,’ therefore, Xi does appropriate and redefine the term’s usage.

Because of this, Xi’s definition of the concept during the 2017 National Congress speech is understood by some to be its ‘most authoritative definition.’<sup>47</sup> Embedding the theory in his new *Thought*, Xi introduced the section with this description:

The modernization that we pursue is one characterized by harmonious coexistence between man and nature. [ . . . ] We should, acting on the principles of prioritizing resource conservation and environmental protection and letting nature restore itself, develop spatial layouts, industrial structures, and ways of work and life that help conserve resources and protect the environment.<sup>48</sup>

Xi frequently summarises the above as ‘harmony between man and nature,’<sup>49</sup> which is presented as its central objective. In so doing, the PRC should come to be ‘harmonious, and beautiful’ by its centenary in 2049.<sup>50</sup> This narrative of a ‘Beautiful China’ (Měilì Zhōngguó 美丽中国) again is an introduction by Hu Jintao from a 2013 speech,<sup>51</sup> yet has grown to become one of Xi’s top-25 most used catchphrases by 2016.<sup>52</sup> More generally, the usage of catchphrases

45. Marinelli, ‘How to Build a “Beautiful China” in the Anthropocene. The Political Discourse and the Intellectual Debate on Ecological Civilization’, 372.

46. Marinelli, 378.

47. Sibó Chen and Yuezhī Zhao, ‘Ecological Civilization: A Blindspot in Global Media Coverage of China’s Environmental Governance’, *Environmental Communication* 16, no. 2 (2022): 197, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2021.1981419>.

48. Xi Jinping 习近平, *Report to the 19th National Congress*, 45.

49. Xi Jinping 习近平, 20. For similar phrasings, see p. 45, 47.

50. Xi Jinping 习近平, 16; emphasis added.

51. Hu Jintao 胡锦涛, *Firmly March on the Path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive to Complete the Building of a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects: Report to the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, trans. China.org.cn (Beijing: China.org.cn, 2012), [http://www.china.org.cn/china/18th\\_cpc\\_congress/2012-11/16/content\\_27137540.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/18th_cpc_congress/2012-11/16/content_27137540.htm).

has become a defining feature of Xi's governance style. Both Lams and Holbig discuss the usage of 'slogans' or 'hot phrases' as a 'hallmark' strategy of Xi's propaganda machine,<sup>53</sup> with regular articles published on Xi's recent buzzwords in Chinese state media.<sup>54</sup> Xi thus further popularises and defines ecological civilisation, distinctively through the usage of catchphrases.

Nonetheless, Xi's ideological work is better characterised as an overarching philosophy than a precise plan. Although the 2017 report lists four steps to achieving harmony between man and nature and elaborates on these,<sup>55</sup> the greatest level of detail is found in ideas such as 'clean energy' or creating 'management agencies.'<sup>56</sup> As such, several Chinese academics expand on possible realisations of the framework *Xi Jinping Thought* established.<sup>57</sup> This

52. Cao Lei 曹磊, Wang Wei 王威, and Hu Chengyuan 胡程远, 'Shíbā Dà Yīlái, Xí Jìnpíng Cháng Shuō de 25 Gè Rè Cí (Fù Shìyì) 十八大以来, 习近平常说的 25 个热词 (附释义) [Xi Jinping's Most Used Key Phrases, Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (With Explanations)]', *Rénmín Ribào Kèhù Duān 人民日报客户端 [People's Daily]*, 14 November 2016, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?\\_\\_biz=MjM5MjAxNDM4MA==&mid=2666144215&idx=1&sn=e2d1d59464ca568ab2a619e859dca11e&chksm=bdb248948ac5c1828eba421ed1a2967ecec2eafe743eadcb8eadc78ee8efcd7f7555ad70f1b4&mpshare=1&scene=5&srcid=11150z7TokcM8TsgeHtlweQ3#rd](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MjM5MjAxNDM4MA==&mid=2666144215&idx=1&sn=e2d1d59464ca568ab2a619e859dca11e&chksm=bdb248948ac5c1828eba421ed1a2967ecec2eafe743eadcb8eadc78ee8efcd7f7555ad70f1b4&mpshare=1&scene=5&srcid=11150z7TokcM8TsgeHtlweQ3#rd).

53. Lams, 'Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping'; Holbig, 'Whose New Normal? Framing the Economic Slowdown Under Xi Jinping', 347–49, both discuss the usage of 'slogans' or 'hot phrases' as a 'hallmark' strategy of Xi's propaganda machine.

54. See '2019 Nián Xí Jìnpíng Dài Huǒ de Shí Dà Rè Cí 2019 年习近平带火的十大热词 [Xi Jinping's Ten Hottest Buzzwords in 2019]', *Huáyīn Shì Rénmín Jiǎncháyuàn 华阴市人民检察院*, 7 January 2020, [http://www.sn.jcy.gov.cn/wnshy/xyd/202001/t20200110\\_153679.html](http://www.sn.jcy.gov.cn/wnshy/xyd/202001/t20200110_153679.html); zhangjunpan007 et al., 'Xīn Chángtài: Xí Shì Rè Cí Zhī Yī 新常态: 习式热词之一 [New Normal: One of the Xi-Style Buzzwords]', in *Baidu 百度*, 7 July 2021, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/新常态/15901376>; Cao Lei 曹磊, Wang Wei 王威, and Hu Chengyuan 胡程远, 'Shíbā Dà Yīlái, Xí Jìnpíng Cháng Shuō de 25 Gè Rè Cí (Fù Shìyì) 十八大以来, 习近平常说的 25 个热词 (附释义) [Xi Jinping's Most Used Key Phrases, Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (With Explanations)]'.

55. Xi Jinping 习近平, *Report to the 19th National Congress*, 45–47.

56. Xi Jinping 习近平, 45–47.

57. See Jiahua Pan, 'Preface', in *China's Global Vision for Ecological Civilization: Theoretical Construction and Practical Research on Building Ecological Civilization*, trans. Dan Wu (Springer and China Social Sciences Press, 2021), v–viii; Geping Qu, 'Some Gains from Learning Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization', in *Beautiful China: 70 Years Since 1949 and 70 People's Views on Eco-Civilization Construction*, ed.

vagueness is also noted by Marinelli, as problematic to a clear distinction between ecological civilisation and sustainable development.<sup>58</sup> Yet whilst the central idea of development without depleting our resources and thereby compromising future generations resonates with both, ecological civilisation is a notably more encompassing theory than sustainable development. Marinelli argues ecological civilisation ‘gives much more depth to the concept of “sustainable development,”’ by stressing the importance of ‘both ecological and social justice’.<sup>59</sup> not only future generations should be kept in mind, but a respectful and harmonious relationship towards nature, too. Notwithstanding the lack of detail in *Xi Jinping Thought*, it environmentally differs from sustainable development in its motivations for sustainable behaviour.

### *Green Leadership*

Analysing what strategies Xi employs to construct and legitimise himself as a green leader, requires defining the concept of green leadership. Robyn Eckersley asserts there are two ways International Relations have studied leadership to date: ‘work on hegemony and work on different leadership types in international negotiations,’<sup>60</sup> the latter of which would include Jiang and Luo’s study discussed above. However, she argues a problem with both these ways is the lack of ‘overlap between them’ and of ‘agreement on the distinctive features of leadership’ that connect ‘leaders and followers.’<sup>61</sup> Eckersley’s definition of leadership consequently reads as follows:

a type of social interaction whereby one or more parties (the leaders) exercise asymmetric influence in guiding, attracting or negotiating the consent or acquiescence

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Jiahua Pan et al. (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2021), 129–35, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-6742-5> for recent contributions to this discussion.

58. Marinelli, ‘How to Build a “Beautiful China” in the Anthropocene. The Political Discourse and the Intellectual Debate on Ecological Civilization’, 372.

59. Marinelli, 373.

60. Robyn Eckersley, ‘Rethinking Leadership: Understanding the Roles of the US and China in the Negotiation of the Paris Agreement’, *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 4 (2020): 1178, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120927071>.

61. Eckersley, 1178.

of other parties (the followers), either directly or indirectly via institutions, in ways that enable or facilitate collective action towards the achievement of a common purpose in a given community.<sup>62</sup>

When applied to global environmental governance, Eckersley specifies this community as being ‘the community of 196 parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).’<sup>63</sup> Adopting Eckersley’s definition, this thesis will not understand hegemony—which is partly based on coercion—as synonymous with leadership, but rather define the latter as based on consent, therefore requiring legitimation to build up a following.<sup>64</sup> The definition also excludes pursuit of leadership for the sole purpose of leadership, as a sufficient condition to qualify. It is therefore insufficient for China to be the largest investor in renewables, to be considered the leader of this field. Rather, this would primarily require other members to recognise China’s leadership role and thus be willing to follow their example or lead in potential negotiations. Because of this, domestic political authority frequently is an important ingredient for global leadership, as it is generally not in the interest of negotiators to support agreements which they believe cannot be upheld by their initiator, due to a lack of domestic support. To be a green leader, therefore, entails winning consent for one’s actions and proposals towards the achievement of climate goals in the community of global environmental governance.

### *Ideological Legitimation*

As discussed above, ideological legitimation is often neglected yet especially relevant in the case of a Chinese president. Whilst there is no academic consensus regarding a definition of ideology, this thesis will follow Holbig’s adaptation of Michael Freeden’s definition of political ideology: ‘a wide set of decontested, mutually defining political concepts, which compete over public policy plans through competition between political actors for control of political

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62. Eckersley, 1184.

63. Eckersley, 1185.

64. Eckersley, 1183–84.

language.<sup>65</sup> *Xi Jinping Thought*, as specified above, thus qualifies as one such set of concepts, on the basis of which public policy plans are defined. Kato states the connection between ideology and legitimation is widely accepted by scholars;<sup>66</sup> in her paper, she argues that a Chinese ‘party leaders’ job is redefining ideological lines, infusing new values in the public.’<sup>67</sup> This means that ideological legitimacy, to follow Dingxin Zhao’s definition, ‘include[s] any value-based justifications of the state power.’<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, ideological legitimacy is scarce in discussions of Chinese legitimation. In Ratigan’s description of the paradox of performance legitimacy, she states that the CPC historically ‘relied on performance legitimacy’ in its times of economic reform; in her explanation for the CPC’s resistance to this paradox, she does not consider ideological propaganda. Rather, she explains this through a combination of ‘low expectations’ and ‘hierarchical trust,’<sup>69</sup> the latter denoting the idea that whilst local politicians may perform badly at policy implementation, the central government deserves less blame, as their policies are well-intended.<sup>70</sup> Ratigan’s paper indicates performance alone might not be sufficient to explain political legitimacy in China. Besides, where her study does not consider ideology to play a role, there is scholarship that does: in her essay on ‘the Economic Slowdown Under Xi Jinping,’ Holbig found that ‘the active employment of ideological means’ can and has altered how economic performance has been perceived.<sup>71</sup> In a similar vein, Lams notes that besides

65. Holbig, ‘Whose New Normal? Framing the Economic Slowdown Under Xi Jinping’, 342.

66. Kato, ‘Two Faces of Ideology: Double-Edged Functions of Ideology in the Reform Discourse Under Xi Jinping’, 137.

67. Kato, 156.

68. Dingxin Zhao, ‘The Mandate of Heaven and Performance Legitimation in Historical and Contemporary China’, *American Behavioral Scientist* 53, no. 3 (12 November 2009): 418, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209338800>; This definition is also followed by Myunghee Kim and Xiongwei Cao, ‘Linking Global Leadership to Domestic Legitimacy: Comparative Analysis of Perceptions of Xi and Obama’, *Social Science Quarterly* 102 (2021): 1642/43, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13045>.

69. Ratigan, ‘Riding the Tiger of Performance Legitimacy? Chinese Villagers’ Satisfaction with State Healthcare Provision’, 273.

70. Ratigan, 269.

71. Holbig, ‘Whose New Normal? Framing the Economic Slowdown Under Xi Jinping’, 342.

legitimation through proper governance, ‘the Leninist mentality of securing orthodox narratives is still present under Xi.’<sup>72</sup> This thesis will summarise that practice with the term *ideological legitimation*, hence facilitating the study of its employment in Xi’s speeches.

### *Strategic Narratives and Discourse: A Careful Choice of Words*

Strategic narratives are a relatively new concept. Lams notes the intention behind political narratives and the structures of meaning they provide has been receiving increasing attention, which she calls ‘a “discursive turn” within the IR discipline.’<sup>73</sup> The term ‘strategic narratives’ has been introduced to describe this type of discourse,<sup>74</sup> logically complementing a social constructivist position: identities are understood as constructed and meanings as fixed through discourse and politics, with legitimacy as a vehicle for acquiring ideational power.<sup>75</sup> They share a lot of similarities to Ervine Goffman’s framing theory,<sup>76</sup> although strategic narratives look at ‘a larger geographical and temporal scale.’<sup>77</sup> They ‘are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors.’<sup>78</sup> In this sense, strategic narratives are especially suitable

72. Lams, ‘Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping’, 402.

73. Lams, 388.

74. Lams, 388.

75. Michael Barnett, ‘Social Constructivism’, in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 157.

76. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 1986), [https://urup.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Erving\\_Goffman\\_Bennett\\_Berger\\_Frame\\_Analysis\\_BookFi.pdf](https://urup.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Erving_Goffman_Bennett_Berger_Frame_Analysis_BookFi.pdf).

77. Steven Livingston and Jack Nassetta, ‘Framing and Strategic Narratives: Synthesis and Analytical Framework’, *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 38, no. 2 (2018): 102, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2018.0020>.

78. Alister Misikimmon, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, quoted in Livingston and Nassetta, 102.



to the transnational geopolitical reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in which global technology has blurred the boundaries between national and international political narratives. As Lams's analysis exemplifies, this conceptual lens neatly fits Xi Jinping's approach to propaganda: with its explicit aim of creating a discourse system that functions both internationally and domestically, Xi's discourse is transnational at its core. Being grounded in the ideology of his predecessors and consisting of projected ideals for the future, moreover, *Xi Jinping Thought* also has the temporal transcendence required for the concept of strategic narratives to apply.

Since they centre on ideas and language, strategic narratives can be studied through discourse. Although different methods of discourse analysis have been introduced throughout the years,<sup>79</sup> a critical discourse analysis is most suitable. The technique, introduced by Norman Fairclough,<sup>80</sup> draws on the work of Michel Foucault. He understood discourse as a 'linguistic system that orders statements and concepts' and has 'political implications,'<sup>81</sup> of which legitimisation is an example. With the goal of deconstructing these relations, a critical discourse analysis is 'a theory and method – for studying language in its relation to power and ideology.'<sup>82</sup> In Fairclough's words: 'The power to control discourse is seen as the power to sustain particular discursive practices with particular ideological investments in dominance over other alternative (including oppositional) practices.'<sup>83</sup> This means that through controlling language, people can propagate a political ideology over its alternatives. For uncovering ideological legitimisation and the presence of strategic narratives such as those from *Xi Jinping Thought*, such a conceptual lens is particularly appropriate.

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79. An example of a method of analysis that has been introduced in recent years is the positive discourse analysis, which has been put forward by J. R. Martin. Rather than approaching discourse deconstructively, this theory focuses on constructive analysis and characteristics such as audience engagement and attitude. In her analysis of a speech by Xi in Singapore, Ting used this technique to analyse the techniques he uses to meaningfully connect with the audience. In a lot of ways, positive discourse analysis takes the opposite approach from a critical discourse analysis.

80. Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, Longman Publishing (London and New York: Longman, 1995).

81. Lene Hansen, 'Poststructuralism', in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 170.

82. Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 1.

83. Fairclough, 2.

### 3. Methodological and Analytical Framework

The concepts and definitions described above have led to a methodological and analytical framework, that this section elaborates on. To analyse *what role ideology plays in Xi Jinping's presidential discourse to construct and legitimise his identity as a green leader*, the thesis mainly employs a critical discourse analysis. Combined with a content analysis and references to background literature, this is used to deconstruct Xi's speeches and draw out the ideological references these contain. Importantly, the original Chinese speeches are used where possible and Chinese translations of all Xi's citations in the analysis are provided in footnotes. Although the author's fluency in Chinese does not permit a full critical discourse analysis without the benefit of English translations, it does suffice to conduct the content analysis on the Chinese text and nuance the accuracy of the provided translation where needed. Speeches are divided into chapters by the audience they chiefly address and are analysed first in their entirety, before dealing specifically with environmental discourse afterwards. As such, the environment's priority and role within Xi's ideological legitimisation strategy can be studied in context. In line with Lam's findings, *Xi Jinping Thought* is understood as a set of strategic narratives employed towards legitimisation; the strategic narratives identified in her article are incorporated in the framework of analysis, which the second half of this section discusses in more detail. First, the following paragraphs introduce the primary sources used in each chapter.

#### *Primary sources*

As *Xi Jinping Thought* is presented as a unified whole with the environment an integrated element, the selected speeches have a general character and consequently facilitate analysis of the topic's comparative role and importance in Xi's ideological legitimisation strategy. The domestic part of the analysis in the second chapter, therefore studies Xi's New Year Addresses. These speeches are annually delivered by the PRC's president on December 31, a tradition that Xi inherited from his predecessors and has continued every year since December 31, 2013. They are characterised by having a largely fixed structure: each address reflects on

the past year's achievements and provides vision and direction for the future,<sup>84</sup> with a clear unifying purpose.<sup>85</sup> Because of this, the New Year Addresses showcase which issues received the most importance and provide an important opportunity for legitimation. Although Xi follows in the footsteps of his predecessors in many respects, his New Year Addresses are innovative in others: besides being shared in Chinese-language newspapers and on radio and television, Xi's speech is subtitled and streamed on English-language media services, including YouTube and Facebook channels.<sup>86</sup> Despite the accessibility of the speeches to foreign audiences being thus increased, however, Xi's New Year Addresses remain mainly directed at a broad domestic audience. Together with their fixed structure and annual delivery, which facilitates comparison over time, this makes the New Year Addresses particularly suitable for an analysis of the role of ideology in green leadership legitimation.

For the international speeches in the third chapter, Xi's statements at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2015, 2020 and 2021 provide the central source material. At the UNGA, Xi's primary audience of diplomats, world leaders, and international media, will likely lead him to say that which he considers most pressing to emphasise to the international community; as a rare occasion, these moments are significant for China's global public image. As Xi has only read three speeches at the UNGA, often sending his Vice President and Foreign Minister Wang Yi instead, this selection has been supplemented with other speeches to ameliorate conditions for diachronic analysis: Xi's 2014 address at the United Nations

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84. Jiawei Zhang, 'National Image Construction of New Year Addresses by Xi Jinping from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor: A Corpus-Based Study', *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation* 5, no. 6 (22 June 2022): 141, <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.6.16>; Alfiya R. Alikberova, Stefana I. Vukadinovich, and Rasilya R. Nurmieva, 'New Year Address as a Genre of Political Discourse: Political and Linguistic Research (On the Material of Chinese President Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping)', *Journal of Sustainable Development* 8, no. 5 (2015): 81, <https://doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v8n5p80>.

85. Alikberova, Vukadinovich, and Nurmieva, 'New Year Address as a Genre of Political Discourse: Political and Linguistic Research (On the Material of Chinese President Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping)', 84.

86. Yan Wu, Richard Thomas, and Yakun Yu, 'From External Propaganda to Mediated Public Diplomacy: The Construction of the Chinese Dream in President Xi Jinping's New Year Speeches', in *Public Diplomacy and the Politics of Uncertainty*, ed. Paweł Surowiec and Ilan Manor, Palgrave Macmillan Series in Global Public Diplomacy, 2021, 40, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54552-9\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54552-9_2).

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) headquarters in New York, his opening address at the B20 summit in 2016, speeches at the UN office in Geneva and World Economic Forum in 2017, a speech at the 2018 Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan, and at the 2019 G20 Summit in Osaka. These speeches have been selected by process of elimination, based on the variety of countries represented in the audience, the generality of their message, and their comparative importance in both English and Chinese search results. This was done to ensure the selected speeches are as general, international, and momentous as possible, which increases their comparability to the UNGA addresses. Both speeches from Xi's 2017 visit to Switzerland are included: whereas the World Economic Forum speech was an important international press moment yet distinctively economic, the speech at the UN office in Geneva received less international attention yet was similar to the UNGA addresses in format and content.

### *Analytical Framework*

The analysis of these speeches has been divided into several steps, that progressively work towards answering the research question and sub-questions. To analyse *how ideology featured in Xi Jinping's general and environmental discourse between 2013–2022 to construct and legitimise his presidential identity*, a content analysis will first be used to identify counts of key phrases in each speech. As established above, these are a distinctive signature of Xi's propaganda strategy and often strongly connected to his ideology; noting when, how often, and which key phrases are used, can hence indicate important themes and propagandistic trends for each speech. Besides key phrases, the content analysis will also count the amount of singular first-person pronouns that Xi uses. In their analysis of Xi's New Year Addresses, Yan Wu, Richard Thomas, and Yakun Yu note Xi's innovative method of addressing negative news from the past year, using first-person pronouns to profile 'himself as a pragmatic leader capable of assertively handling development challenges.'<sup>87</sup> Combined with a critical discourse analysis that pays attention to the way these first person pronouns are used, therefore, an overview of the counts of first-person pronouns in each speech can be used towards an answer to the second sub-question, whether *this changed over time*. Trends in the usage of 'I' and 'me' will be

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87. Wu, Thomas, and Yu, 46.

combined with critical readings on their connection to ideological legitimation. Since the speeches have a general character, a third element of the content analysis will determine a percentage of environmental discourse for each speech, to study what part the climate plays in each speech and how this fluctuates over time.

Next to this content analysis, a critical discourse analysis is needed to reach a solid answer to the research question. It will pay specific attention to where and how ideology features as a strategic narrative, how Xi legitimates his presidency, and how he discusses the environment when not using ideology. Both implicit as well as explicit legitimations of Xi's presidency will be noted. Directly, these are descriptions of Xi's leadership activities or status, or the presentation of achievements such as ideology or policy as his own. The more indirect characteristics of Xi's leadership legitimation are grounded in strategic narratives identified by Lams. The first is an implicit critique of value universalism through promotion of Chinese values and culture, most notably Xi's 'Community of Common Destiny' narrative.<sup>88</sup> Secondly, a narrative of global cooperation, used as juxtaposition to the 'old zero/sum model associated with a Western Cold War mentality,'<sup>89</sup> will be noted where present. As these are both distinctively multilateral narratives, they are of particular relevance to the international speeches. Lastly, as Xi has set out to create a new discourse system for both domestic and international audiences, his usage of specific Chinese terminology will be noted: building on the observation that Xi critiques value universalism, using newly created language rather than existing, non-Chinese terminology can also be indicative of an adopted leadership role.

As with Xi's legitimation of his presidency, the analysis of ideological elements will consider both direct and indirect indicators. For the former, paraphrases of ideological ideas and theories qualify, as well as the overall alignment of the text with this ideology. For environmental discourse specifically, descriptions of the beauty of China or ornate natural imagery will also be seen as implicit ideological references, as these are characteristic of the 'Beautiful China' narrative outlined above. By combining findings from both this critical discourse analysis and the content analysis, patterns in Xi's usage of ideology towards

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88. Lams, 'Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping', 397–99.

89. Lams, 397.

presidential identity legitimation and construction can be established. As overarching patterns are studied before looking at the environment more closely, the importance and role of Xi's green leadership legitimation can be contextualised, as well as the role of ideological elements therein.

## II. The Domestic Face of Xi Jinping: A Critical Discourse

### Analysis of the New Year Addresses

‘Ladies and gentlemen, comrades and friends.’<sup>90</sup> With these words, Xi Jinping seemingly starts his first New Year Address (NYA) in precisely the same way as his predecessors.<sup>91</sup> Yet, he does so from his Zhongnanhai office; allowing his viewers to see his desk in ‘the central headquarters for the CPC and the State Council of China’ is revolutionary.<sup>92</sup> traditionally, very little of the private or daily lives of Chinese presidents is made public, in contrast to their Western colleagues. In providing the unprecedented view from the presidential office, Xi thus evokes the practices of Western heads of state.<sup>93</sup>

Xi has clearly spent time rethinking the NYA and experiments with its format during his decade as paramount ruler of the PRC. As an important televised tradition in the PRC, in which the president relates the past and future year’s important moments to a primarily

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90. Xi, NYA (2013). Footnote references to primary sources are shortened; full bibliographical information is included under ‘Primary Sources’ in the bibliography. When citing from a Chinese primary source, I have included the English text from the translated version that is referenced in the bibliography in the text. Comments regarding the accuracy of this translation, as well as the original text (without phonetic transcription), are provided in the footnotes, in the format demonstrated below. Original text: 《女士们，先生们，同志们，朋友们》

91. See Jiang Zemin 江泽民, ‘Jiāngzémín Xīnnián Hècí: Gòngtóng Cùjìn Shìjiè de Héping Yǔ Fāzhǎn 江泽民新年贺词：共同促进世界的和平与发展 (2001-12-31) [Jiang Zemin’s NYA: Jointly Promote World Peace and Development (31 December 2001)]’, *Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó Zhù Ōuméng ShǐTuán 中华人民共和国驻欧盟使团 [Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the European Union]*, 27 February 2004, [http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/chn/jbwzlm/zlk/zl1/200402/t20040227\\_8416087.htm](http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/chn/jbwzlm/zlk/zl1/200402/t20040227_8416087.htm); Hu Jintao 胡锦涛, ‘Guójiā Zhǔxí Hú Jǐntāo Fābiào Èr Líng Yīsān Nián Xīnnián Hècí 国家主席胡锦涛发表二〇一三年新年贺词 [President Hu Jintao Delivers 2013 NYA]’, *Zhōngguó Gòngchǎndǎng Xīnwén Wǎng 中国共产党新闻网 [Chinese Communist Party News Network]*, 1 January 2013, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/0101/c64094-20067824.html>.

92. Wu, Thomas, and Yu, ‘From External Propaganda to Mediated Public Diplomacy: The Construction of the Chinese Dream in President Xi Jinping’s New Year Speeches’, 40.

93. Wu, Thomas, and Yu, 41–42.

domestic audience,<sup>94</sup> the speeches are significant opportunities for legitimation and hence useful to this study. This chapter will dissect the annual speeches—delivered during his first two terms as president, from 2014 to 2022—the results of which are organised in three sections. ‘The Big Picture: An Evolving Presidential Identity’ will start by overviews findings regarding Xi’s overall leadership legitimation, where ‘Green Leadership Legitimation: Environmental Discourse’ relates these findings to the environment, specifically.

This allows the conclusion to answer this chapter’s sub-question: *how did ideology feature in Xi Jinping’s general and environmental discourse in the New Year Addresses between 2013-2022 to construct and legitimise his presidential identity, and did this change over time?* The analysis chiefly indicates a gradual increase in personal, assertive, and ideological leadership legitimation over time, most notably between Xi’s first and second presidential term.

## 1. The Big Picture: An Evolving Presidential Identity

Focusing first on ideological legitimation through the entire length of the nine New Year speeches, the increasing degree to which Xi describes himself in his leadership role is striking. Whereas this barely features in the speeches before 2018, from that year onwards it becomes a standard and increasingly lengthy section. In it, Xi describes his meetings with foreign leaders or participation in international summits, which in 2018 reads as follows:

I also participated in some of the world’s important multi-lateral meetings. In the beginning of 2017, I attended the Davos World Economic Forum and delivered a speech at the UN Headquarters in Geneva. Then I participated in other events including the G20 Summit and the APEC summit. On different occasions, I exchanged views with relevant parties, and all of us agreed to work together to build a community with a shared future for mankind, so as to benefit people all over the world.<sup>95</sup>

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94. Alikberova, Vukadinovich, and Nurmieva, ‘New Year Address as a Genre of Political Discourse: Political and Linguistic Research (On the Material of Chinese President Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping)’; Zhang, ‘National Image Construction of New Year Addresses by Xi Jinping from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor: A Corpus-Based Study’.

95. Xi, NYA (2018). Original text: 《我还参加了一些世界上的重要多边会议。今年年初，我出席达沃斯世界经济论坛年会，并在联合国日内瓦总部作了讲话，后来又出席了二十国



Throughout this citation, Xi elaborately chronicles his global leadership activities and their importance, as he similarly does in the other NYAs since 2018. Whereas the 2015 to 2017 speeches also contain descriptions of the ways in which ‘we enhanced our cooperation and exchanges with countries in the world,’<sup>96</sup> Xi seems careful not to elevate himself there and speaks of ‘we’ or ‘Chinese leaders,’<sup>97</sup> with the sole exception of one sentence detailing a handshake in 2016.<sup>98</sup>

In their comparative analysis of the NYA by former president Hu Jintao in 2013 and Xi Jinping in 2015, Alfiya R. Alikberova et. al. conclude that both leaders ‘often equate themselves to [the compatriots]’ and ‘do not uplift themselves.’<sup>99</sup> Xi’s elaborate account of his personal accomplishments in 2018 is a break with this habit, at a time characterised by several historic breaks with tradition: it is delivered on the last day of 2017, just months after *Xi Jinping Thought* has been added to the CPC’s constitution and has Xi thus follow in Mao Zedong’s footsteps, as Mao is the only other leader who ‘has been honoured in such a way while still alive.’<sup>100</sup> A few months after the 2018 NYA’s delivery, during the National People’s Congress, the country’s constitution is amended to include Xi’s *Thought* and the presidential term limit is removed,<sup>101</sup> further consolidating his power. The changes to the NYA mirror these ideological and political developments and hence appear to be deliberate.

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集团领导人峰会、亚太经合组织领导人非正式会议等。在这些不同场合，我同有关各方深入交换意见，大家都赞成共同推动构建人类命运共同体，以造福世界各国人民》

96. Xi, NYA (2015). Original text: 《我们加强同世界各国的合作交往》

97. See Xi, NYA (2015); Xi, NYA (2016); Xi, NYA (2017). Original text: 《我们》和《我国领导人》

98. Xi, NYA (2016).

99. Alikberova, Vukadinovich, and Nurmiava, ‘New Year Address as a Genre of Political Discourse: Political and Linguistic Research (On the Material of Chinese President Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping)’, 84.

100. Phillips, ‘Xi Jinping Becomes Most Powerful Leader since Mao with China’s Change to Constitution’.

101. Stephen McDonnell, ‘China’s Xi Allowed to Remain “President for Life” as Term Limits Removed’, *BBC News (UK)*, 11 March 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-43361276>.

In a similar vein, the usage of singular first-person pronouns increases dramatically in 2018; before, Xi would more often speak from the collective perspective of ‘us’ or ‘China.’<sup>102</sup> Counts of the usages of I/me/myself (wǒ 我) and my/mine (wǒ de 我的) for each speech, are overviewed in *Figure 1* below. Its results show that apart from 2021, first-person pronouns have more than doubled since 2018. The 2021 oddity’s most likely explanation is the pandemic, a new topic that both that year’s as well as the 2022 address have to make room for and that presents a challenge to Xi’s legitimacy ever since its inception.<sup>103</sup> As established in the methodology, Wu, Thomas, and Yu remark Xi’s pronoun-use is part of a distinguishing legitimating strategy he employs.<sup>104</sup> Although Xi remains ‘careful to attribute [China’s achievements] to ordinary Chinese people’ in his 2019 speech, Wu, Thomas, and Yu argue that ‘[b]y using first person pronouns, he not only aligns his own position with that of the people, but he also positions himself on behalf of the CPC as responsible for implementing the changes.’<sup>105</sup> By balancing the usage of both an inclusive ‘we’/‘our country’ and a personal ‘I’ perspective, Xi therefore draws attention to his role in the country’s achievements without explicitly crediting himself or positioning himself above the common people.

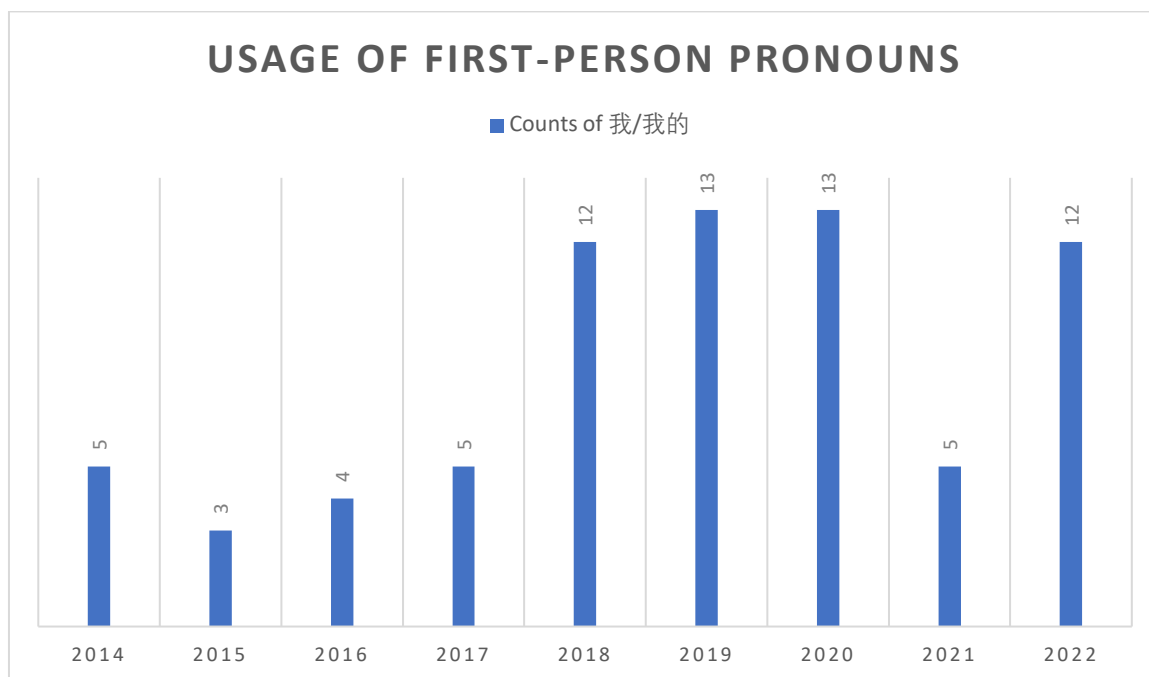
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102. In Chinese, this would be 《我们》 or 《我国》, the latter of which is notable because the characters separately translate to ‘my/our’ and ‘country,’ yet when used together are only understood in a collective way, as ‘our country’ or ‘China.’

103. For a publication discussing Xi’s legitimacy in light of the pandemic, see Eyck Freymann and Yanzhong Huang, ‘Xi Won’t Yield Over Zero-COVID Pressures: The Chinese Communist Party Will Crack down Rather than Risk Losing Control’, *Foreign Policy*, 8 June 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/08/xi-china-zero-covid-policy-ccp-pressures/>.

104. Wu, Thomas, and Yu, ‘From External Propaganda to Mediated Public Diplomacy: The Construction of the Chinese Dream in President Xi Jinping’s New Year Speeches’, 46.

105. Wu, Thomas, and Yu, 46.



*Figure 1.* The usage of first-person pronouns, as counted in the NYA each year. (SOURCE: FIGURE BY THE AUTHOR.)

This projection of commonality yields an insight into the leadership identity Xi is constructing. It is especially apparent in the 2022 speech, when he says: ‘The concerns of the people are what I always care about, and the aspirations of the people are what I always strive for. Having worked in the countryside myself, I know precisely what poverty feels like.’<sup>106</sup> Stressing his ordinariness and understanding of life’s hardships is here used as a legitimating technique: because of his insights into the needs and wants of the underprivileged, he has their interests at heart and can represent them as leader. Words like these can be categorised as

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106. Xi, NYA (2022). Original text: 《民之所忧，我必念之；民之所盼，我必行之。我也是从农村出来的，对贫困有着切身感受》 The original text here emphasises Xi’s time in the countryside more than the official translation. A more literal interpretation of 《我也是从农村出来的，对贫困有着切身感受》 would be: ‘I also came from the countryside and have first-hand experience of poverty.’

populist rhetoric;<sup>107</sup> this is not often discussed in detail,<sup>108</sup> yet Holbig does make mention of ‘Xi’s populist image in the political sphere.’<sup>109</sup> This places Xi in an interesting category of Chinese leaders, considering the two previously discussed styles Jiang and Luo identified on the provincial level: a conciliatory leader is characterised as ‘*prudent, humble, careful, and comradely*,’<sup>110</sup> which are qualities that Xi also brings to the fore in his speeches. Xi’s use of first-person pronouns, increasingly juxtaposing ‘I’ and ‘we’ perspectives since 2018, thus indicate Xi presents and legitimates himself as a conciliatory rather than an autocratic leader.

Importantly, these developments do not only go accompanied by the publication of Xi’s *Thought* late 2017, but also by explicit references to this ideology in his NYAs. The passage cited in the first paragraph is an example of this, as it mentions the building of ‘a community with a shared future for mankind.’<sup>111</sup> Part of the wider trend discussed before, this phrase has

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107. Cas Muddle and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6, [https://www2.daad.de/medien/mudde\\_rovira\\_kaltwasser\\_2017\\_populism.pdf](https://www2.daad.de/medien/mudde_rovira_kaltwasser_2017_populism.pdf), define populism as ‘a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.’ Although they ‘position populism first and foremost within the context of liberal democracy,’ (p. 1) their definition of populism shares a lot of elements with Chinese indigenous populism. On that topic, see Perry, cited in footnote 107.

108. A notable exception is Elizabeth J. Perry, ‘The Populist Dream of Chinese Democracy’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 4 (2015): 910, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002191181500114X>, who discusses the populism of the Chinese understanding of the word democracy and also discusses Xi’s intentions ‘to appeal to pervasive populist sentiments among PRC citizens.’ She does this by tracing the Chinese ‘indigenous populist tradition.’ (pp. 905 – 906)

109. Holbig, ‘Whose New Normal? Framing the Economic Slowdown Under Xi Jinping’, 348.

110. Jiang and Luo, ‘Leadership Styles and Political Survival of Chinese Communist Party Elites’, 2.

111. Xi, NYA (2018). Original text: 《人类命运共同体》

been introduced by Hu Jintao in 2012,<sup>112</sup> yet by 2016 is one of Xi's most-used buzzwords;<sup>113</sup> by 2018, it is embedded in his ideological work, becoming 'central to the notion of "Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy" (Xí Jìnpíng wàijiāo sīxiǎng 习近平外交思想).'<sup>114</sup> The *People's Daily* in 2016 explains 'it denotes the need to balance the reasonable concerns of other countries with the pursuit of one's country's interests, and promote the common development of all countries when striving for one's country's development.'<sup>115</sup> Since 2016, Xi uses the term precisely once in each NYA, nearly always at the end of the speech and often in its last paragraph;<sup>116</sup> this shows the term's careful positioning both through its consistency and placement, as the end of a speech is often considered to be most memorable.

This case exemplifies Xi's ideological referencing via key phrases, which grows more elaborate over time. As mentioned before, Xi's key phrases have become a 'hallmark' of his leadership style,<sup>117</sup> often being embedded explicitly in his *Thought*. The variety of key phrases

112. Stella Chen, 'Community of Common Destiny for Mankind: Rénlèi Mìngyùn Gòngtóngtǐ 人类命运共同体', in *The China Media Project (Zhōngguó Chuánméi Yánjiū Jìhuà 中国传媒研究计划)*, 25 August 2021, [https://chinamediaproject.org/the\\_ccp\\_dictionary/community-of-common-destiny-for-mankind/](https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/community-of-common-destiny-for-mankind/).

113. Cao Lei 曹磊, Wang Wei 王威, and Hu Chengyuan 胡程远, 'Shíbā Dà Yīlái, Xí Jìnpíng Cháng Shuō de 25 Gè Rè Cí (Fù Shìyì) 十八大以来, 习近平常说的 25 个热词 (附释义) [Xi Jinping's Most Used Key Phrases, Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (With Explanations)]'.

114. Chen, 'Community of Common Destiny for Mankind: Rénlèi Mìngyùn Gòngtóngtǐ 人类命运共同体'; as discussed in the historiography, Lams identifies this as Xi's strategic narrative on foreign policy: Lams, 'Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping', 397–99.

115. Cao Lei 曹磊, Wang Wei 王威, and Hu Chengyuan 胡程远, 'Shíbā Dà Yīlái, Xí Jìnpíng Cháng Shuō de 25 Gè Rè Cí (Fù Shìyì) 十八大以来, 习近平常说的 25 个热词 (附释义) [Xi Jinping's Most Used Key Phrases, Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (With Explanations)]' The translation provided here is my own. Original text: 《指在追求本国利益时兼顾他国合理关切, 在谋求本国发展中促进各国共同发展》.

116. Xi, NYA 2016; Xi, NYA 2017; Xi, NYA 2018; Xi, NYA 2019; Xi, NYA 2020; Xi, NYA 2021; Xi, NYA 2022. Only in 2018, 2021 and 2022 was 'community with a shared future for mankind' not placed in the last paragraph: since 2021, its new position seems to have become the third to last paragraph.

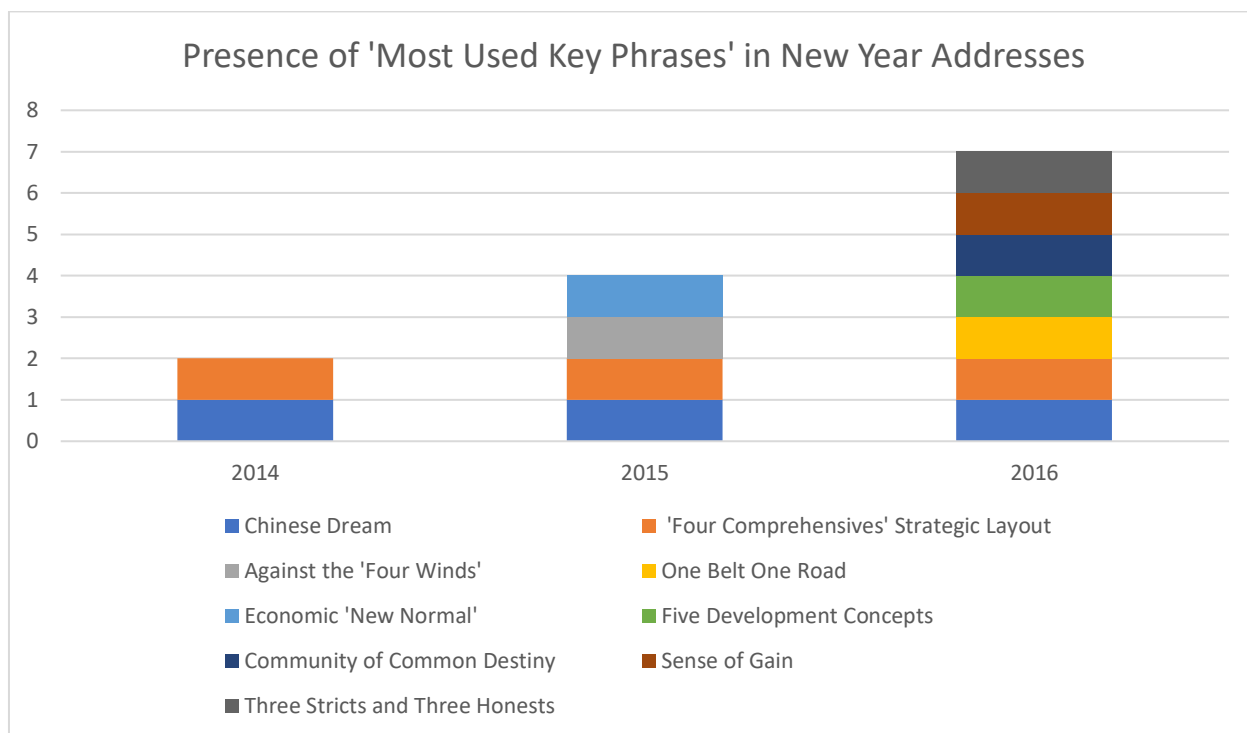
117. Lams, 'Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping', 387.

in Xi's NYAs from 2014-2016 is recorded in *Figure 2* below, through comparing each speech against the *People's Daily's* list of Xi's '25 most used phrases' from 2016.<sup>118</sup> Phrases not represented in this figure did not appear in any of the three addresses. Because of the list's 2016 publication, only the first three NYAs were cross-checked against the list; the steady growth of Xi's variety of key phrases, especially in light of the introduction of his *Thought* in 2017, reduce the reliability of the 2016 list for later years. Already in these first three years before publication of his ideology, however, the results indicate a steady annual increase in the variety of key phrases represented. As Lams asserts the phrases 'cumulatively contribute to the all-encompassing official doctrine of "Xi Jinping Thought,"'<sup>119</sup> this overview of the years before its publication shows the preparations towards this ideology before it got its name. Moreover, as most key phrases do not represent original inventions by Xi, their presentations as such constitute propagandistic appropriations of ideology that towards his legitimation.

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118. Cao Lei 曹磊, Wang Wei 王威, and Hu Chengyuan 胡程远, 'Shíbā Dà Yīlái, Xí Jìnpíng Cháng Shuō de 25 Gè Rè Cí (Fù Shìyì) 十八大以来, 习近平常说的 25 个热词 (附释义) [Xi Jinping's Most Used Key Phrases, Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (With Explanations)]'. The original Chinese versions of each term that were used in the analysis, are: Chinese Dream (中国梦), 'Four Comprehensives' Strategic Layout ("四个全面"战略布局; mentions of the four objectives themselves also qualified here. These are: comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society, comprehensively deepen reform, comprehensively govern the nation according to law, and comprehensively strictly govern the Party, or 全面建成小康社会, 全面深化改革, 全面推进依法治国, 全面从严治党), Against the 'Four Winds' (反"四风"; consecutive mentions of all 'Four Winds' also qualified here. These are: formalism, bureaucracy, hedonism, and extravagance, or 形式主义, 官僚主义, 享乐主义和奢靡之风), One Belt One Road (一带一路), Economic 'New Normal' (经济新常态), Five Development Concepts (五个发展理念; again, the consecutive mention of the concepts qualified also. These are: innovation, coordination, greenness, openness, and sharing, or 创新、协调、绿色、开放、共享), Community of Common Destiny (命运共同体), Sense of Gain (获得感), and Three Stricts and Three Honests (三严三实).

119. Lams, 'Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping', 387.



*Figure 2.* Presence of the “25 most used key phrases” between 2012-2016, as identified by the *People’s Daily*,<sup>120</sup> in NYAs by Xi Jinping. Phrases not included in this figure were not mentioned in any of the respective NYAs. (SOURCE: FIGURE BY THE AUTHOR.)

Next to these ideological slogans, Xi’s increasingly assertive emphasis on himself also shows in his cultural-historical references. Through cultural and historical references, Xi can insert himself into traditions of both the CPC and the country, thus establishing his leadership and legitimacy. Xi’s 2022 address, amongst others, contains a myriad of them: in both the third and fourth paragraph, the ‘100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China’ is discussed, with the latter continuing as follows: ‘I have referred to Chairman Mao’s conversation with Mr. Huang Yanpei at his cave-dwelling in Yan’an, and the importance of carrying out bold self-revolution so as to gain the historical initiative.’<sup>121</sup> Here, Xi explicitly

120. Cao Lei 曹磊, Wang Wei 王威, and Hu Chengyuan 胡程远, ‘Shíbā Dà Yīlái, Xí Jìnpíng Cháng Shuō de 25 Gè Rè Cí (Fù Shìyì) 十八大以来, 习近平常说的 25 个热词 (附释义) [Xi Jinping’s Most Used Key Phrases, Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (With Explanations)]’.

121. Xi, NYA (2022). Original text: 《我曾谈到当年毛主席与黄炎培先生的“窑洞对”, 我们只有勇于自我革命才能赢得历史主动》

references his previously formulated interpretation of a historical moment in CPC history: in it, Mao and Huang Yanpei discuss the dynastic cycle, the problem of the rise and fall of dynasties that Mao believed could be ‘dealt with once and for all,’ whilst Xi in a January 2018 speech argues and is since repeating that continuous ‘self-revolution’ is needed to combat ‘internal erosion.’<sup>122</sup> Whilst previous speeches similarly mark historical national anniversaries,<sup>123</sup> contain ancient Chinese sayings,<sup>124</sup> or quote thinkers such as Sun Tzu or poet Du Fu,<sup>125</sup> Xi does not before reference one of his own speeches. His doing so here is again indicative of a progressively assertive emphasis on himself.

Another trend that shows in Xi’s cultural-historical references, is the steady increase in the ideological content of Xi’s NYAs, especially when comparing his first and second term. Anniversaries that are explicitly ideological do not feature at all until 2017, for example, after which the only year in which they do not feature is 2019. In the last three years, moreover, Xi also includes references to patriotic songs and declarations:<sup>126</sup> in 2020, for example, he remembers the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC by saying ‘[a]ll of China was arrayed in red with proud smiles on all faces as the song “My Motherland and I” played throughout the streets and alleys.’<sup>127</sup> By mentioning the colour red, Xi here connects the description of this national holiday to the CPC; the increased appearance of these patriotic songs and declarations, moreover, is in line with the increase in ideological content between Xi’s first and second term. All in all, this growing amount of both ideological as well as personal emphasis in his speeches, especially when comparing Xi’s first and second presidential term, show their connectedness as a legitimating strategy. Whereas reflecting on the past year is a fixed element of the NYA,

122. Adam Ni, ‘Dynastic Cycle and Shadows of the Past over Xi’s China’, *The China Story*, 14 August 2020, <https://www.thechinastory.org/dynastic-cycle-and-shadows-of-the-past-over-xis-china/>.

123. See Xi, NYA (2015); Xi, NYA (2016).

124. See Xi, NYA (2017); Xi, NYA (2018).

125. Xi, NYA (2017); Xi, NYA (2018).

126. Xi, NYA (2020); Xi, NYA (2021); Xi, NYA (2022).

127. Xi, NYA (2020). Original text: 《大江南北披上红色盛装，人们脸上洋溢着自豪的笑容，《我和我的祖国》在大街小巷传唱》



the personalised way Xi incorporates them places much more emphasis on his role in China's history of poets, thinkers, and leaders. These cultural-historical references, key phrases, wider ideological references, use of first-person pronouns, and descriptions of leadership activities, altogether shape the role ideology plays as a progressively overt method of ideological legitimisation for Xi's personal leadership identity.

## 2. Green Leadership Legitimation: Environmental Discourse

Having overviewed several of Xi's strategies towards ideological leadership legitimisation in his NYAs, the question arises whether he also uses these to portray himself as a green leader. To this end, this section looks more closely at the environmental discourse the NYAs contain. *Figure 3* overviews the counts of two environmental narratives for each address,<sup>128</sup> as well as the extent to which they discuss the environment expressed in percentages. After a low point in 2019, this percentage has been on a distinct incline; the dip around 2018–2019 stands in opposition to these years' increased numbers of other aspects discussed before, such as the usage of singular first-person pronouns. As this push in legitimisation seems intended to support Xi's abolishment of the presidential term limit and ideological constitutionalising, lower amounts of environmental discourse in these years may indicate Xi does not consider this subject to be most beneficial to his legitimacy when compared to others. Nonetheless, the overall increase and continuous inclusion of the topic, indicate its uninterrupted prominence in Chinese politics and society during Xi's presidency.

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128. In counting the Beautiful China narrative, mentions of the word beauty 美 were counted rather than the full phrase 'Beautiful China,' which did not appear in the speeches. Since the concept of Beautiful China is to strive for beauty in several areas, this included 美好, 美满, 美轮美奂, 壮美亮丽 和 壮美 when discussing such areas. On the contrary, mentions of ecological civilisation counted only the appearance of the term 'ecological' 生态.

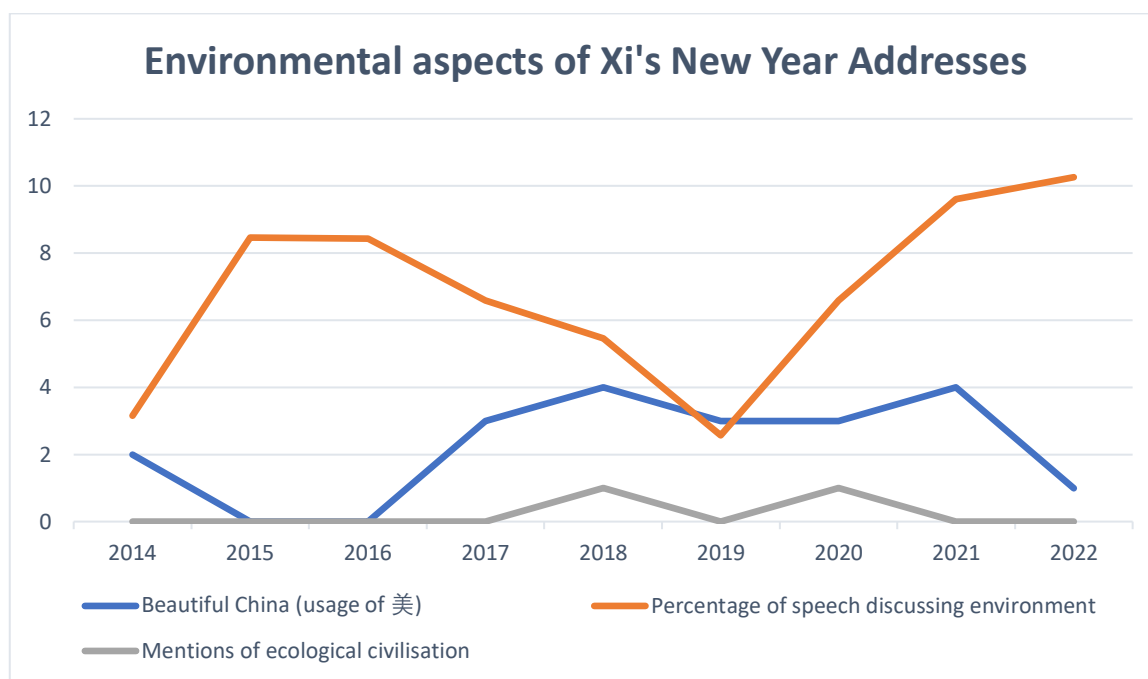


Figure 3. Environmental aspects of Xi's NYAs. (SOURCE: FIGURE BY THE AUTHOR.)

Besides, although the total amount of words may be relatively low around 2018, the opposite is true for the degree to which this discussion is ideological. Mentions of ecological civilisation only feature in 2018 and 2020, and the Beautiful China narrative also appears structurally from 2017 onwards, with a peak in 2018. Until then, it does not appear in the speeches at all, save for one mention of Xi's 'hope that all of us can . . . make this world a beautiful home to us all' during his first address in 2014.<sup>129</sup> Since the Beautiful China discourse is one of Xi's key phrases included in the 2016-article by the *People's Daily*,<sup>130</sup> this is remarkable. Whilst Xi never contradicts what would later become his official *Thought* on ecological civilisation during his first term, early references stress the importance of combating pollution in a way that is not necessarily associated to himself or his ideology. The speeches

129. Xi, NYA (2014). Original text: 《我真诚希望，世界各国人民在实现……努力把我们的赖以生存的地球建设成为共同的美好家园》

130. Cao Lei 曹磊, Wang Wei 王威, and Hu Chengyuan 胡程远, 'Shíbā Dà Yǐlái, Xí Jìnpíng Cháng Shuō de 25 Gè Rè Cí (Fù Shìyì) 十八大以来，习近平常说的 25 个热词（附释义） [Xi Jinping's Most Used Key Phrases, Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (With Explanations)]'.

make mention of an important water diversion project in 2015, participation in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2016, and the appointment of ‘river chiefs’ to guard against pollution in 2017.<sup>131</sup> Besides the Beautiful China narrative in 2014 and 2017, first-term speeches therefore discuss specific efforts to combat pollution in a pragmatic manner without ideological undertones, which changes in the second term.

This break between the first and second term is also notable in terms of Xi’s tone, which grows more assertive, similar to the findings in the first section. The 2018 speech presents environmental matters much more comprehensively and authoritatively than in preceding years: Xi starts by saying ‘the ecological environment has gradually improved’ in his second paragraph and revisits the topic in the last two paragraphs,<sup>132</sup> a positioning close to start and finish that signals its relative importance. He says:

At present, various sides . . . [are] looking forward to China expressing its stand and attitude. The world is one big family. As a responsible major country, China has this to say: China will resolutely uphold the authority and status of the United Nations, . . . keep its promises on global climate change, . . . and always contribute to the building of world peace and global development, and the safeguarding of international order. The Chinese people are willing to work together with people of various countries in opening up a beautiful future of greater prosperity and tranquility for mankind.<sup>133</sup>

This radically breaks with the preceding years: rather than describing domestic anti-pollution projects or China’s commitment to the sustainable development goals, *international* affairs and *global* environmental governance specifically are presented as areas in which China’s voice is influential. Moreover, the last sentence speaks of a ‘beautiful’ 美好 future, inviting other countries to participate in realizing a vision from the then newly published *Xi Jinping Thought*, rather than the other way round. Despite having a lower percentage of environmental discourse compared to the years before, the 2018 speech therefore discusses the climate much more authoritatively.

131. Xi, NYA (2015); Xi, NYA (2016); Xi, NYA (2017).

132. Xi, NYA (2018). Original text: 《生态环境逐步改善》

133. Xi, NYA (2018). Original text: 《当前，各方对人……期待中国表明立场和态度。天下一家。中国作为一个负责任大国，也有话要说。中国坚定维护联合国权威和地位，……信守应对全球气候变化的承诺，……始终做世界和平的建设者、全球发展的贡献者、国际秩序的维护者。中国人民愿同各国人民一道，共同开辟人类更加繁荣、更加安宁的美好未来》

As is the case for the speeches overall, this goes accompanied by an increased emphasis on Xi's personal leadership. In the final paragraph of the 2018 address, Xi stresses his individual leadership on environmental governance by declaring: 'I understand what concerns the people the most includes . . . the environment.'<sup>134</sup> Where Xi's annual inclusion of the topic in the speeches also showcases his awareness of environmental concerns, this is not overtly linked to his personal leadership before. In this example, on the other hand, Xi explicitly professes his personal understanding of the societal significance, thus enhancing its legitimating function. Again, this is done in a conciliatory style: Xi aligns himself with the people and his understanding of their concerns. Whilst not every following year is as explicit as this 2018 example, Xi continues to include the Beautiful China narrative; he does so not only through the word 'beauty' as represented in figure 3, but also through lavish descriptions of Chinese scenery,<sup>135</sup> which are being used in national propaganda campaigns as well.<sup>136</sup> As such, Xi indirectly evokes his ideological narratives through such references, thus increasingly highlighting his personal leadership using Beautiful China, ecological civilisation, and declarations of international influence.

Throughout the years, the tone not only becomes more authoritative but also more congratulatory, explicitly linking the climate to global leadership. Rather than describing a natural disaster or sacrifices by citizens as in 2015, 2016, and 2017,<sup>137</sup> Xi's 2020 and 2021 addresses proclaim that '[e]verything is flourishing across our motherland' and '[w]e also defeated severe flooding.'<sup>138</sup> There thus is a progression towards more discussion of successes and away from opportunities for improvement concerning environmental governance, changing the tone in discussions of the subject to one that is more self-congratulatory. Although a brief

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134. Xi, NYA (2018). Original text: 《我了解人民群众最关心的就是……环境等方面的事情》

135. For examples of the latter, see Xi, NYA (2020); Xi, NYA (2022), and to a lesser degree Xi, NYA (2017) and Xi, NYA (2019).

136. Young, 'Why Xi Jinping Has Lofty Visions of Green Mountains: China's Environmental Rhetoric Is Rooted in Party History'.

137. Xi, NYA (2015); Xi, NYA (2016); Xi, NYA (2017).

138. Xi, NYA (2020), original text: 《祖国各地一派欣欣向荣的景象》; Xi, NYA (2021), original text: 《我们还抵御了严重洪涝灾害》

mention of ‘people in disaster-stricken areas’ returns in 2022,<sup>139</sup> this overall difference in tone between the years 2014-2017 and 2018-2022 is striking. This is reminiscent of Marinelli’s remark on Xi’s change from ‘the construction’ of an ecological civilisation to its ‘advancement,’ which is another linguistic alteration that suggests progress. Marinelli stresses this is not represented in actual progress towards climate protection,<sup>140</sup> which would entail this alteration is a strategy to evoke a false sense of progress. Yet, Marinelli denotes this development takes place ‘during the first term of Xi Jinping’s Presidency;’<sup>141</sup> where the NYAs do similarly demonstrate an increasing sense of accomplishment, this change is most visible between the first and second term.

Xi also starts linking the topic to global leadership explicitly. In 2021, he ends his discussion of the pandemic by relating it to the environment: ‘People from all over the world should join hands and support each other to early dispel the gloom of the pandemic and strive for a better “earth home.”’<sup>142</sup> This is remarkable, as it suggests Xi aims to associate international environmental cooperation with cooperation regarding the pandemic, which explains the steady increase in the amount of environmental discourse since 2021. Earlier in the 2021 speech, Xi emphasises his personal role in meeting with other world leaders to ensure such cooperation, hence emphasizing his leadership. As both are issues that depend on international cooperation for their success, Xi can use a narrative of international leadership towards leadership legitimization on both issues. In their analysis of legitimacy in China, Myunghee Kim and Xiongwei Cao argue that global leadership is indeed linked to domestic legitimacy: having experienced fast growth, Chinese people ‘strongly feel the heightened status of China in [sic]

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139. Xi, NYA (2022). Original text: 《受灾群众》

140. Marinelli, ‘How to Build a “Beautiful China” in the Anthropocene. The Political Discourse and the Intellectual Debate on Ecological Civilization’, 378.

141. Marinelli, 378.

142. Xi, NYA (2021). Original text: 《世界各国人民要携起手来，风雨同舟，早日驱散疫情的阴霾，努力建设更加美好的地球家园》 The word 早日 has been translated as ‘early,’ yet can be understood here to mean ‘as soon as possible.’

the global stage and give credit to their leader.’<sup>143</sup> On the whole, therefore, the role of ideology in environmental discourse progresses in a similar way to this role in Xi’s NYAs overall, although this environmentally happens more explicitly through connection to a narrative of global leadership.

### 3. Conclusion

Overall, the critical discourse analysis demonstrates a progression in Xi’s NYAs, moving away from the format of his predecessor to an increasingly personal, assertive, and ideological style. Throughout the NYAs, Xi increasingly used his ideology to construct and legitimise his presidential identity. In this development, 2018 seems to have been a landmark year, following the publication of Xi’s *Thought* and shortly preceding the constitutionalising of this ideology and removal of the presidential term limit. This comes to the fore in both Xi’s general discourse, as well as his environmental discourse specifically.

In the speeches in their entirety, this shows in Xi’s descriptions of leadership, usage of singular first-person pronouns, key phrases, cultural historical references and emphasis on Xi’s personal accomplishments. Although this results in increasingly overt propagation, Xi accompanies these strategies with a continued emphasis on his understanding of and connection to the common people. This is reminiscent of populism and suits the conciliatory leadership style, that Jiang and Luo described is commonly thought to be untypical amongst autocratic leaders.

The environmental discourse strategies are not far removed from the above: Xi legitimates his environmental governance through usage of ideology, an assertive tone, and increasing emphasis on his personal leadership in a conciliatory style. Furthermore, the climate is an area in which Xi increasingly emphasises success and accomplishment, as well as his international leadership. By using the ideological terminology with which he is associated and stressing his own leadership activities and vision in his NYAs, Xi thus presents himself as a leader with international influence in several areas, one of which is the environment.

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143. Kim and Cao, ‘Linking Global Leadership to Domestic Legitimacy: Comparative Analysis of Perceptions of Xi and Obama’, 1645.

### III. The International Face of Xi Jinping: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Xi's International Speeches

[M]ajor country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics aims to foster a new type of international relations and build a community with a shared future for mankind.

– Xi Jinping, *Report to the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress*<sup>144</sup>

Besides speeches such as the NYAs, which mostly target a domestic audience, Xi has also frequently spoken at large international gatherings. To answer how Xi uses ideology to legitimise his environmental leadership in his speeches, it is important to differentiate between these audiences, as their motivations for going along with his leadership will differ. Whether Xi's approaches differ with his audiences, will be analysed in this chapter. Although Xi, both in his *Thought on Diplomacy* and early comments on propaganda as discussed in the historiography, stresses the need to develop propaganda that works both domestically and abroad, this research presumes there are differences in the way Xi addresses his different audiences.

This chapter will analyse Xi's international legitimisation strategies, using his three speeches at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), delivered in 2015, 2020, and 2021. To cover the other years, complementary sources were used improve continuity for some aspects of the analysis: Xi's 2014 address at the UNESCO headquarters, his opening address during 2016's B20 summit, speeches at the UN office in Geneva and World Economic Forum in 2017, a speech at the 2018 Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan, and his address at the 2019 G20 Summit in Osaka. The chapter again starts by analysing the main methods of ideological

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144. Xi Jinping 习近平, *Report to the 19th National Congress*, 17. As first mentioned in the introduction, the original Chinese report is listed separately in the bibliography's literature section. Original text: 《明确中国特色大国外交 要推动构建新型国际关系, 推动构建人类命运共同体》 Note that the emphasized 要推动 literally translates as 'should push/promote' rather than 'aims to foster.'

legitimation Xi demonstrates in these speeches throughout the years, before comparing this to his words on the environment specifically in the second section and drawing conclusions in the chapter's final section. In so doing, this chapter will analyse how ideology features in Xi Jinping's general and environmental international discourse between 2013-2022 to construct and legitimise his presidential identity, and whether this changed over time.

## 1. The Big Picture: Leader of the Opposition

There are many differences in the way Xi uses ideology towards leadership legitimation between his NYAs and his international speeches, of which the engagement with other leaders' approaches is especially prominent. In every analysed speech, Xi repeatedly stresses the importance of abandoning zero-sum games and battles for hegemonic power,<sup>145</sup> which he summarises as 'the Cold War mentality.'<sup>146</sup> As discussed in the historiography, Lams also noted the dismissal of this 'old' and 'Western' diplomacy as a strategic narrative specific to Xi's administration,<sup>147</sup> as does Chen, who adds that such Chinese accusations of 'selfish and narrowly political conduct' are most 'notably [targeted at] the United States.'<sup>148</sup> Whilst the

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145. Xi, UNGA (2015); Xi, B20 (2016); Xi, UN Geneva (2017); Xi, WEF (2017); Xi, Boao (2018); Xi, G20 (2019); Xi, UNGA (2020); Xi, UNGA (2021). Only Xi's 2014 address at UNESCO is excepted here. The addresses at the WEF and the G20, which more narrowly centre on economics, phrase this in terms of 'protectionism' and 'unilateralism' rather than 'zero-sum' and 'hegemony.' As in the previous chapter, footnote references to the primary sources are shortened and provide the original Chinese text in case of citations. Kindly note that bibliographical information of the UNGA speeches is categorised under 'UNGAOR' rather than 'Xi Jinping.'

146. Xi, UNGA (2015); Xi, B20 (2016); Xi, UN Geneva (2017). Interestingly, Xi also uses this phrase in a 2022 speech at the Council of Heads of State of the regional Eurasian Shanghai Cooperation Organisation or SCO (bibliographical information added under 'primary sources' in the bibliography), asserting this type of bloc politics is 'resurfacing.' He says: 《冷战思维和集团政治回潮》 (emphasis added on 回潮, which is more literally translated as the 'resurging' or 'retrogression' of ideology, thus having a negative connotation).

147. Lams, 'Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping', 397.

148. Chen, 'Community of Common Destiny for Mankind: Rénlèi Mìngyùn Gòngtóngtǐ 人类命运共同体'.



words ‘zero-sum game’ or ‘hegemony’ did not appear in any of the NYAs,<sup>149</sup> they feature explicitly in each international speech, particularly those at the UN, such as when addressing the UNGA in 2021: ‘We need to advocate peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom, which are the common values of humanity, and reject the practice of forming small circles or zero-sum games.’<sup>150</sup> Xi juxtaposes his vision and value-system to its alternative, which he identifies and summarises as the Western Cold War mentality.

The Chinese substitute that Xi consequently presents in his international addresses, makes up the ideological core of his *Thought on Diplomacy*: the community of a common destiny. As discussed in the previous chapter, the community of shared future – which used to be translated as the community of a common destiny yet was altered in 2017 for its teleological and expansionist connotations<sup>151</sup> – was a term introduced by Xi’s predecessor Hu Jintao in 2012, becoming one of Xi’s buzzwords by 2016.<sup>152</sup> Under Xi, its meaning broadened from ‘interconnectedness’ to include the opportunity China’s rejuvenation presents for global prosperity and the need to promote reform of the system of global governance.<sup>153</sup> The ‘common values of humanity’ from the citation above are a keyword summary of the value system envisioned for this community. ‘Peace and development’ or ‘peaceful development’ in particular,<sup>154</sup> is incessantly presented as China’s path and something the entire world would

149. Hegemony (霸), Cold War (冷战), and zero-sum game (零和博弈), all did not appear in the NYAs.

150. Xi, UNGA (2021). Original text: 《我们要大力弘扬和平、发展、公平、正义、民主、自由的全人类共同价值，摒弃小圈子和零和博弈》

151. Chen, ‘Community of Common Destiny for Mankind: Rénlèi Mìngyùn Gòngtóngtǐ 人类命运共同体’.

152. Cao Lei 曹磊, Wang Wei 王威, and Hu Chengyuan 胡程远, ‘Shíbā Dà Yǐlái, Xí Jìnpíng Cháng Shuō de 25 Gè Rè Cí (Fù Shìyì) 十八大以来，习近平常说的 25 个热词（附释义） [Xi Jinping’s Most Used Key Phrases, Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (With Explanations)]’.

153. Chen, ‘Community of Common Destiny for Mankind: Rénlèi Mìngyùn Gòngtóngtǐ 人类命运共同体’.

154. Xi, UNESCO (2014); Xi, UNGA (2015); Xi, UN Geneva (2017); Xi, Boao (2018); Xi, G20 (2019); Xi, UNGA (2020); Xi, UNGA (2021), original text: 《和平与发展》; Xi, UNGA (2015); Xi, B20 (2016); Xi, UN Geneva (2017); Xi, Boao (2018), original text: 《和平发展》 Xi’s

benefit from. The embodiment of their importance is found in the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund,<sup>155</sup> which Xi announced in his 2015 UNGA speech and which was launched in 2016 through annual Chinese donations.<sup>156</sup> To contrast with the Western and selfish zero-sum games, Xi in his speeches promotes his vision for a community of shared future for mankind, presented most frequently as one of peace and development.

The community of a common destiny for mankind was eventually adopted by *Xi Jinping Thought*, yet the core of Xi Jinping's diplomatic ideology is to 'build a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation,'<sup>157</sup> which the international speeches emphasise. This ideological core reflects the change in meaning the term community of a common destiny for mankind underwent under Xi: cooperating with China is mutually beneficial or 'win-win,' and the 'new type of international relations' describes China's ambition to innovate global governance away from the Cold War mentality towards common prosperity. In *Figure 4*, the presence of five central terms associated with *Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy* in speeches by Xi is illustrated; as speeches from varying platforms and lengths were included, the results were standardised to a value per 3000 words.<sup>158</sup> The original speeches were used to count the terms in Chinese, as translations are at times inconsistent. Peace and development both appear much more frequently than the more particular and ideological terminology; as such their results are represented separately, on the secondary vertical axis. Whilst some values dropped below one

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2017 address at the WEF is a notable exception here, only making one mention of the word 和平 (peace).

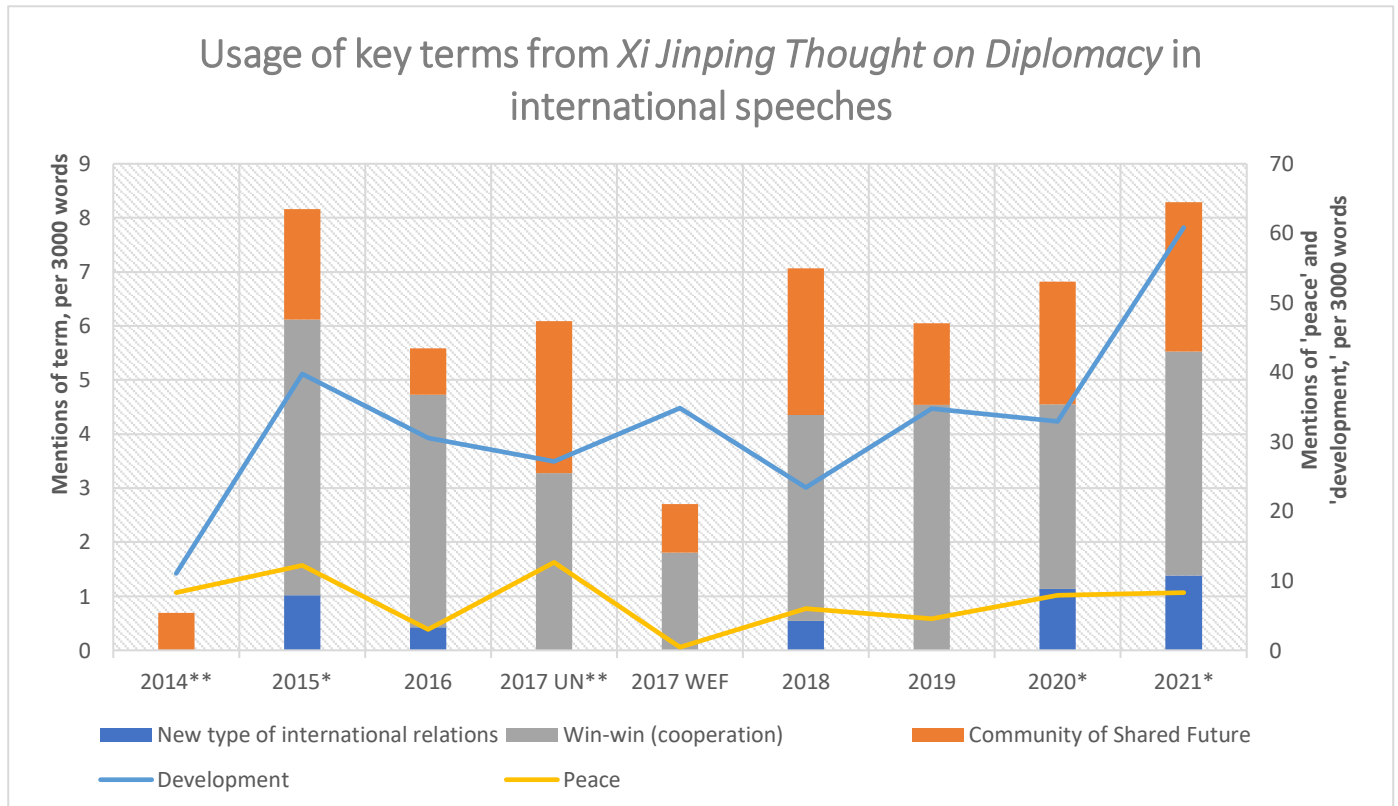
155. 'Peace and Development Trust Fund', United Nations (website), accessed 29 December 2022, <https://www.un.org/en/unpdf>.

156. Xi, UNGA (2015); 'Peace and Development Trust Fund'.

157. Study Times, 'Build a New Type of International Relations Featuring Win-Win Cooperation: --China's Answer to the Question "Where Are the International Relations of the 21st Century Heading" By Wang Yi Minister of Foreign Affairs People's Republic of China', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, 1 July 2016, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/wjbz\\_663308/2461\\_663310/201607/t20160701\\_468628.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/201607/t20160701_468628.html).

158. Because the average speech length of the three UNGA addresses is 2584 words, as the nearest thousand, 3000 was chosen as the value to standardize the results to. Furthermore, the other speeches had lengths ranging from 1983 to 6980 words, so 3000 was relatively close to the general middle. As such, the results deviate as little from their original values as possible, especially the UNGA speeches.

after the length correction, where displayed the terms were mentioned at least once. The frequency of the usage of these key terms demonstrates the continuous presence of Xi's personal diplomatic ideology in his international speeches.



*Figure 4.* Usage of key terms from *Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy* in international speeches, rescaled to a value per 3000 words. Speeches at the UNGA are marked with an asterisk; speeches at other UN bodies are marked with double asterisks. Original text: new type of international relations (新型国际关系), win-win or win-win cooperation (共赢/合作共赢), community of shared future (命运共同体), development (发展), and peace (和平). (SOURCE: FIGURE BY THE AUTHOR.)

Besides demonstrating that Xi repeatedly mentions key terms from his personal ideology, the results above also demonstrate that rather than a gradual increase, usage of these terms fluctuates through the analysed years and platforms. Although 2022 features higher numbers of ideological vocabulary than 2014, it nonetheless scores much lower than several previous years. For the 2014 speech, the absence of the innovations that would later characterise Xi's foreign policy and the presence of only the term that is credited to his predecessor, suggests that Xi's diplomatic ideology may have still been in development at the time. Another possible explanation could be the intention to introduce these innovations at the UNGA, rather than the UNESCO headquarters where the 2014 speech was delivered. The UNGA addresses are

exemplary of Xi's adjustments to his speeches depending on the platform they are delivered at, in several ways: firstly, they contain larger amounts of diplomatic ideological terminology than the other speeches and of 'new type of international relations' in particular. In 2020 Xi first discussed the pandemic, which explains why that speech scores lowest of the three. Yet secondly, they also feature terms that seem to be reserved especially for the platform: the word 'democracy,' for example, is mentioned at least once at every UNGA address,<sup>159</sup> outside of which it has only been mentioned once in the 2016 speech.<sup>160</sup> Rather than displaying an increase in ideological terminology over time such as is the case domestically, therefore, Xi's international speeches fluctuate in ideological content, depending on factors such as the audience in question.

In so doing, Xi seems to consider not only the principles of his platform, yet also the frame of reference of an international audience, which peaks in 2017. As the abandonment of community of *common destiny*, a more semantically accurate translation of the term than its replacement *shared future*, demonstrates, Xi's administration alters the translations of the words he uses based on the connotations they internationally have—a practice that has drawn the attention of academics.<sup>161</sup> In all cases where the translation's source was specified for the speeches analysed here,<sup>162</sup> the English translations were provided by the Chinese delegation. This accommodation to the global frame of reference also shows in the cultural and historical references the speeches contain. Where these references are Chinese, the translation introduces

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159. Xi, UNGA (2015); Xi, UNGA (2020); Xi, UNGA (2021). Original text: 《民主》

160. Xi, B20 (2016).

161. For a detailed side-by-side study of this phenomenon between the Chinese original and French version of one of Xi's books, see Kevin Henry, 'The State of Translation in China: Appraisal of the French Version of President Xi Jinping's The Governance of China', *CLINA: Revista Interdisciplinaria de Traducción, Interpretación y Comunicación Intercultural* 5, no. 1 (30 June 2019): 11, <https://doi.org/10.14201/clina2019511126>; Tanina Zappone, 'Translating Xi Jinping's Speeches: China's Search for Discursive Power between "political Correctness" and "External Propaganda"', *International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies*, no. 22 (2018): 253–71 does a study on the Italian translation of the same book, having worked on this translation herself.

162. This was the case for Xi, UNGA (2020); Xi, UNGA (2021). It is not uncommon for delegations to provide their own English interpretations of speeches at international organisations; in these UNGA records, several other delegations are detailed to have done so.

them as such, in contrast to the Chinese original text: ‘As an ancient Chinese [saying] goes.’<sup>163</sup> Yet more strikingly, Xi also references Western concepts and thinkers, such as ‘Don Quixote’s lance’ in 2020.<sup>164</sup> In the 2017 speeches in Switzerland this is most notable, however, with references to Red Cross founder Henry Dunant in both speeches, the ‘Thucydides trap’ and Hermann Hesse in Geneva and Charles Dickens and the ‘Swiss army knife’ in Davos.<sup>165</sup> References to the CPC and its history, on the other hand, are scarce in the international speeches,<sup>166</sup> especially when compared to the NYAs. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that whilst references to Chinese sayings did not feature as described above after 2018, all four mentions to the CPC were made from 2017 onwards; the decrease of non-political Chinese wisdoms and increase of references to communism is indicative of a subtle progression towards more ideological legitimation. This use of cultural references is significant in Xi’s discourse: Perry asserts that an ‘emphasis on Chinese cultural identity is at the heart of Xi Jinping’s China Dream.’<sup>167</sup> It is notable, therefore, how both the provided translations of terms as well as the words and references that are chosen, are adjusted to the addressed audience.

Yet whilst Xi adjusts his vocabulary to his audience, their conveyance of his ideological message does not waver. Relying more on relatively neutral language such as ‘peace’ and ‘development’ rather than ideological buzzwords, the way these are used reveals their meanings cannot always be taken at face value. The term democracy, included almost exclusively in the UNGA speeches, exemplifies this. Xi repeatedly promotes democracy at the UNGA, as the citation from the first paragraph showed, yet this ought not to be understood as an electorate political system in the style of ‘Western liberal democracy.’ Katja Drinhausen explains the CPC

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163. Xi, UNGA (2015). The Chinese text does not introduce the saying, rather moving straight to the idiom in quotation marks: 《“大道之行也，天下为公。”》 Other examples of this disparity in translation are found in Xi, UNESCO (2014); Xi, B20 (2016); Xi, UN Geneva (2017); Xi, WEF (2017); Xi, Boao (2018).

164. Xi, UNGA (2020). Original text: 《堂吉诃德……长矛》

165. Xi, UN Geneva (2017), original text: 《“修昔底德陷阱”》; Xi, WEF (2017), original text: 《瑞士军刀》

166. The following exceptions apply: Xi, UNGA (2021) references the centenary of the CPC; Xi, WEF (2017) mentions the leadership of the CPC.

167. Perry, ‘The Populist Dream of Chinese Democracy’, 909.

understanding of the term is grounded in ‘Marxist-Leninist ideology’ and has been a party mission since its founding, as a ‘collective and consensus-oriented ideal of democracy under centralised party leadership [which] is juxtaposed to the confrontational, competitive style of Western democracy.’<sup>168</sup> The Chinese top-down system of a single ruling party that allows internal voting mechanisms and other methods to let the majority steer its course to some degree, is thus understood as democratic under the CPC definition, which Elizabeth J. Perry describes as a ‘decidedly populist understanding of the concept.’<sup>169</sup> Another example of terminology with a contested understanding is Xi’s presentation of China as ‘the largest developing country in the world,’<sup>170</sup> a status that is often questioned.<sup>171</sup> Using seemingly neutral terminology targeted towards his audience, Xi therefore challenges its definitions through his ideological applications of them.

In addition to these semantic differences, the way these differences are fleshed out grows bolder and more explicit over the years. Drinhausen notes that ‘[e]mboldened by successes’ regarding its economy and zero-covid policy, ‘the Party-State increasingly presents [their understanding of democracy] as the superior model internationally.’<sup>172</sup> This confidence is visible in the UNGA addresses also, where Xi in 2021 states: ‘Democracy is not a special right reserved to an individual country, but a right for the people of all countries to enjoy. Recent developments in the global situation show once again that military intervention from the outside

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168. Katja Drinhausen, ‘Democracy: Míngzhǔ 民主’, in *The China Media Project (Zhōngguó Chuánméi Yánjiū Jìhuà 中国传媒研究计划)* 中国传媒研究计划, Decoding China Project, 31 August 2021, [https://chinamediaproject.org/the\\_ccp\\_dictionary/democracy/](https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/democracy/).

169. Perry, ‘The Populist Dream of Chinese Democracy’, 903.

170. Xi, UNGA (2020). Original text: 《世界上最大的发展中国家》

171. See Philippe Benoit and Kevin JianJun Tu, ‘Is China Still a Developing Country? And Why It Matters for Energy and Climate’ (New York, NY: Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), 23 July 2020), <https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/research/report/china-still-developing-country-and-why-it-matters-energy-and-climate>; David M. Lampton, Jeremy Wallace, and Björn Conrad, ‘Is China a Developed Country?’, *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, China Power Project, accessed 30 December 2022, <https://chinapower.csis.org/is-china-a-developed-country/>.

172. Drinhausen, ‘Democracy: Míngzhǔ 民主’.

and so-called democratic transformation entail nothing but harm.’<sup>173</sup> This comment seems directly targeted at the United States’ pullback from Afghanistan earlier that year, criticising what Lams described as ‘Western cultural imperialism.’<sup>174</sup> She concludes that ‘China is differentiating itself from US-centric ideologies’ in several domains, ‘to ensure a continuation of China’s autonomy, unity and identity and to present an alternative global governance model.’<sup>175</sup> Xi’s aforementioned statement is symptomatic of this, yet more critical than differentiating: its first sentence suggests that, by enforcing their version of democracy upon another people, the US takes away that people’s right to self-governance and hence behaves undemocratically. Consequently, it is exemplary of Xi’s increasingly explicit ideological warfare.

Another way in which this increasing ideological differentiation shows, is through Xi’s lack of individual foregrounding, with 2018 being a significant exception. Xi’s usage of first-person pronouns in his international speeches is overviewed in *Figure 5* below, again rescaled to accommodate for differences in length to a value per 3000 words. Contrary to the domestic trend, the figure shows a slight decrease in the usage of first-person pronouns in international speeches between speeches before 2018 and speeches after 2018. That year is a standout year, as it was for the NYAs; parallel to the publication of Xi’s personal ideology and the removal of the presidential term limit, the speech in question was published and appeared in stores across China.<sup>176</sup> Although the Boao Forum for Asia has ‘29 member states’ and is modelled after the World Economic Forum,<sup>177</sup> the speech thus seems to have been planned to be used as a vehicle

173. Xi, UNGA (2021). Original text: 《民主不是哪个国家的专利，而是各国人民的权利。近期国际形势的发展再次证明，外部军事干涉和所谓的民主改造贻害无穷》 Although 专利 is here translated as ‘special right,’ ‘patent’ would be a more literal translation.

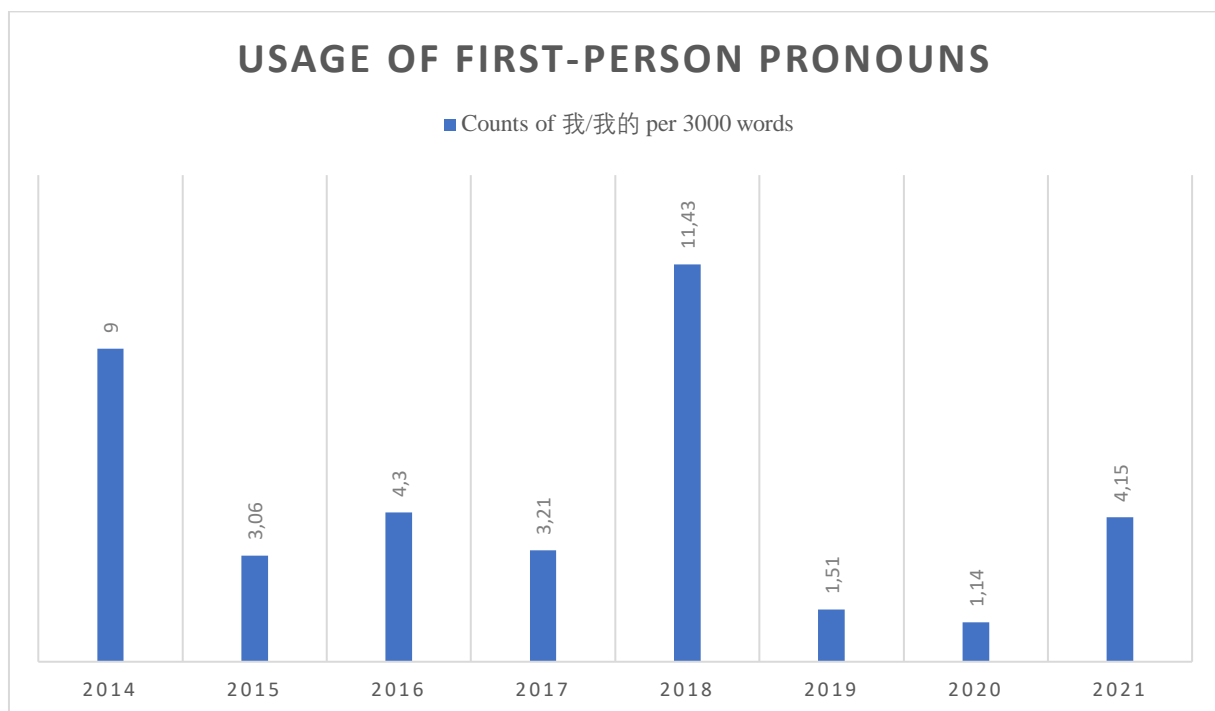
174. Lams, ‘Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping’, 407.

175. Lams, 396.

176. yan, ‘Xi’s Speech at 2018 Boao Forum Published’, *Xinhua 新华网*, 13 April 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/13/c\\_137109386.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/13/c_137109386.htm).

177. ‘About BFA: Overview’, Boao Forum for Asia (website), 20 December 2020, <https://english.boaoforum.org/newsDetail.html?navId=1&itemId=0&permissionId=118&detailId=2090>.

for domestic propaganda. This also explains its high amounts of ideological terminology, recorded in *Figure 4*. Since the international introduction of his discourse strategy and ideology in 2015, however, Xi's use of the first-person displays a subtle decrease over the years, despite this exception. As the usage of the first-person is more common internationally, this suggests Xi is using pronouns to further highlight the differences between himself and his colleagues. In comparison, American presidents averaged to a total of 29 times I/my/me/mine per speech at the UNGA,<sup>178</sup> where Xi averages to 2 for his UNGA addresses. Xi thus uses first-person pronouns to highlight his conciliatory leadership style, which further challenges the leadership style of his Western colleagues.



*Figure 5.* The usage of first-person pronouns as counted in the speeches each year, rescaled to a value per 3000 words. For the 2017 value, data from the World Economic Forum and UN Office were averaged. (SOURCE: FIGURE BY THE AUTHOR.)

## 2. Green Leadership Legitimation: Environmental Discourse

178. Counted and averaged by the author in the UNGA addresses of Barack Obama in 2014, 2015, and 2016, Donald Trump in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020, and Joseph Biden in 2021 and 2022. Full bibliographical information for these speeches is included under 'Primary Sources' in the bibliography.



As with the domestic speeches, the way ideology is used regarding environmental leadership legitimation runs largely parallel to the general ideological leadership legitimation methods observed in the speeches: Xi presents his environmental leadership as an innovative alternative to that of Western powers, increasingly emphasizing the superiority of this Chinese governance system. When discussed, the environment is presented as an example of the applicability of Xi's holistic innovation regarding international affairs, or as an example of China's commitment to this strategy. In 2015, Xi asserts: 'All members of the international community should work together to build a sound global eco-environment,' describing this as a 'common endeavour' that 'is vital for humankind's future,' after which he 'urge[s] developed countries to fulfil their historical responsibilities, honour their emission-reduction commitments and help developing countries mitigate and adapt to climate change.'<sup>179</sup> In stressing the need for cooperation towards a better future and the historic accountability of developed countries, Xi echoes his larger ideological narratives. Without mentioning ideological terminology explicitly, his words are reminiscent of buzzwords such as community of shared future, win-win cooperation or his opposition to the zero-sum game of the Cold War mentality. Six years later, Xi emphasised China's commitment to the 'harmony between man and nature' by introducing new emission targets and announcing they 'will step up support for other developing countries.'<sup>180</sup> Whereas discussion of the environment in 2015 was more descriptive of Xi's outlook on global governance, its discussion in 2021 places more emphasis on China's actions towards this common future. As part of a holistic narrative on international affairs, the environment is thus used to further stress the differences between the Chinese and the Western approaches to global governance.

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179. Xi, UNGA (2015). Original text: 《国际社会应该携手同行，共谋全球生态文明建设之路》《关乎人类未来》《敦促发达国家承担历史性责任，兑现减排承诺，并帮助发展中国家减缓和适应气候变化》 'Common endeavour' is not included in its Chinese original, as it is not mentioned there. Rather than 'play its part in this common endeavour,' Xi announces China will continue making its own 贡献 or 'contribution.' Another point to note is that rather than 'vital for,' 关乎 is typically translated as 'related to.' In several ways, the translation here is thus worded more strongly than its Chinese equivalent.

180. Xi, UNGA (2021). Original text: 《人与自然和谐共生》《将大力支持发展中国家》

In a similar vein to the NYAs, no gradual pattern can be observed in the percentage of the speeches discussing the environment over the years. *Figure 6* overviews several environmental elements of Xi's international speeches, rescaled to values per 3000 words and analysed in the Chinese originals of the speeches. In 2014 the environment was not explicitly discussed, where the UNGA addresses again use markedly higher amounts of ideological terminology than the other speeches. This suggests Xi specifically uses that platform to present his ideological vision, which considering the UN's history of preventing war by establishing and upholding common ideals is no illogical choice.<sup>181</sup> Xi repeatedly stresses the similarities of the ideology he stands for and the mission of the UN and China's historic commitment to it,<sup>182</sup> which further underscores Xi's usage of the platform as a vehicle to enhance the legitimacy of his leadership and ideology. As was the case in the NYAs, moreover, Xi discussed the environment at notably higher lengths in 2020. In this case, however, the connection to the pandemic is very explicit: 'COVID-19 reminds us that humankind should launch a green revolution,'<sup>183</sup> Xi starts his discussion of the topic that year. As significant as the year 2018 is for Xi's ideology more generally, moreover, both the NYAs as well as the international speeches contain no remarkably high amounts of environmental ideology, which suggests the topic was not considered to weigh as heavily towards domestic legitimation in 2018. Another observation that supports this is the absence of the buzzword ecological in the domestic speeches save for 2018 and 2020, whereas the buzzword was internationally mentioned at least once each year between 2015 and 2020, notwithstanding 2019's speech. Considering the overall

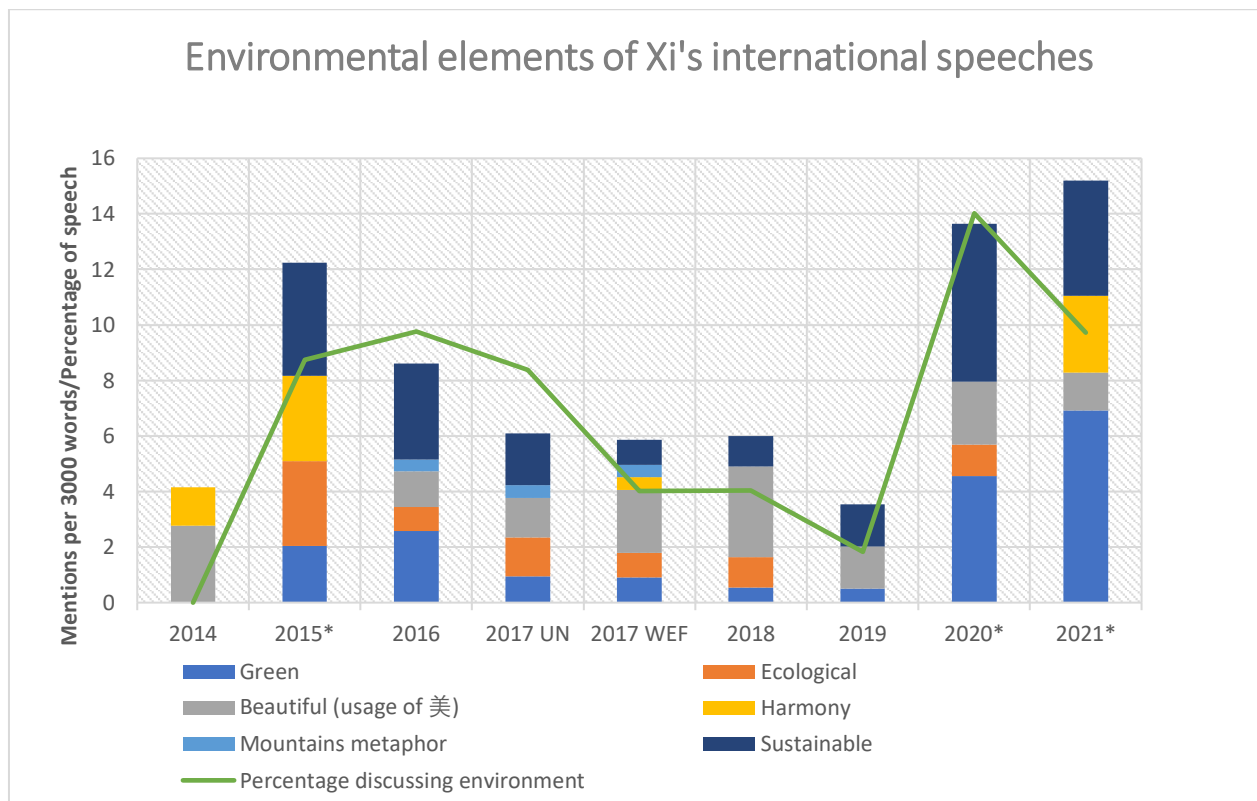
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181. 'History of the United Nations', United Nations (website), accessed 1 January 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/history-of-the-un>.

182. Examples of this can be found in all speeches to the UN, save the civilisation-themed UNESCO-speech: Xi, UNGA (2015); Xi, UN Geneva (2017); Xi, UNGA (2020); Xi, UNGA (2021). In 2015, Xi highlights the similarities between the UN Charter and his ideology as follows: 'We should renew our commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, so as to fashion a new kind of international relations with win-win cooperation at its core and to create an international community that realizes a shared positive future for all of humankind,' suggesting they lead to the same result. An example of the advocacy of China's historic commitment in that speech, is: 'China was the first country to put its signature on the Charter of the United Nations. We will continue to uphold the international order and system.'

183. Xi, UNGA (2020). Original text: 《这场疫情启示我们，人类需要一场自我革命》  
Emphasis added to note that rather than 'green revolution,' the Chinese translates to 'a self-revolution,' as the opening line of a paragraph on green development.

presence of ideological terminology is lower internationally than domestically, this is particularly significant. Influenced by Covid-19 and the perceived importance of the topic to his audience, therefore, the environment is discussed at varying lengths throughout the years.



*Figure 6.* Usage of environmental terms and percentages of the speech discussing the environment in international speeches. Counts of the mentions of terms have been rescaled to a value per 3000 words. Speeches at the UNGA are marked with an asterisk and elements recorded on the secondary vertical axis are marked with double asterisks. Original text: sustainable (可持续), mountains metaphor (lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets 绿水青山就是金山银山), harmony (和谐), ecological (生态), green (绿色), beauty (美). (SOURCE: FIGURE BY THE AUTHOR.)

The results also indicate that Xi uses fewer ideological terminology over the years, rather replacing such words with more general terminology: whilst ecological and the mountains metaphor feature less frequently, Xi more prominently uses terms such as green and sustainable. This is in line with the more general amounts of ideological terminology in his international speeches but runs opposite to the overall domestic trend, where increasing amounts of ideological buzzwords are used with the years. Although Xi's intentions were to create a discourse system that works both domestically as well as internationally, therefore, these results suggest that the international and domestic vocabularies have nonetheless started

diverging over the years. Using language that is less ideologically charged, however, Xi discusses his ideology at increasing lengths and in an increasingly explicit competition with its Western alternative.

### 3. Conclusion

After having analysed Xi's ideological legitimisation strategies towards a domestic audience in the second chapter, the analysis of speeches at international fora shows that Xi's approaches differ between audiences in several ways. Most importantly, where Xi's domestic political position leaves him without peers, his international speeches demonstrate an increasingly pronounced dialogue with his colleagues. Enlarging the contrast between his conciliatory leadership style and sparse use of first-person pronouns with the personal style of other global leaders, as well as repeatedly critiquing the Cold War mentality and presenting his ideological vision as an available alternative, are all strategies employed in this discussion.

Although the usage of more overtly ideological terminology would serve to further differentiate Xi's narrative from that of his colleagues, the presence of buzzwords slightly decreases between Xi's first and second term in office. The awareness of the negative connotations to some ideological terminology that inspired the alteration of 'community of a common destiny' might explain this choice, despite Xi's commitment to a discourse that would work in both the global and the national arenas earlier in his presidency. Nonetheless, whilst the terminology becomes less ideologically charged, ideology remains at the heart of Xi's legitimisation strategy in the international arena: translations are adjusted and semantic discussions on terms such as 'human rights,' 'democracy' and 'developing country' are reopened, whilst terms such as 'green,' 'peace,' and 'development' that do not carry ideological connotations, are used to convey the ideas from Xi's *Thought* instead.

The groundwork for this ideology on global affairs seems to have publicly been laid as early as 2015, when Xi first addressed the UNGA. Rather than the more economic language used at the World Economic Forum or B20 speeches, the UNGA is where *Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy* is most prominently promoted. Stressing the similarities between this idealistic global governance model and the founding mission of the UN further serves to underscore the leadership of its ideological father, whilst moreover providing another reason for using terminology that highlights these similarities and is less outspokenly ideological.

As is the case domestically, the lengths at which the environment is discussed waver throughout the years, seemingly based on the topic's presumed importance to the audience and factors such as Covid-19: the relative importance of the topic in Xi's first term and during the pandemic, suggests it is considered important to his leadership legitimation. This runs counter to the domestic trend, where the topic slowly seems to gain traction over the years. Whereas Xi domestically used the environment as exemplary of an area where he has international influence, Xi internationally uses the environment to make a different case: rather than demonstrating his influence, the environment is used to present the relevance of his global governance strategy of win-win cooperation, as well as his commitment to this goal.

## Discussion and Conclusion: The Image of a Green Leader?

Both in his domestic and international speeches, ideology plays an important role towards Xi's leadership legitimation and identity construction. At home, it is increasingly overtly featured to emphasise his role as the PRC's ideological father, through a growing variety in and number of references to his personal ideology and personal leadership: Xi's demarcation of the country's political ideology as his own, connects his name to the propagation and successes of those policies and the state of the country more generally. Internationally, however, Xi shows a different face: ideas from his *Thought* are presented as an alternative global governance model, with which the ideological hegemony of the West is challenged and debates on definitions and values are reopened. Contrary to the domestic diachronic progression, references to ideological terminology decrease in Xi's international speeches. Rather, Xi promotes his ideological values in a way that more closely resembles the language used at the UN or other international fora: instead of playing by his own rules as is possible at home, this signals Xi aims at changing international institutions from within. Notwithstanding the audience, however, there is a notable difference between speeches from Xi's first and second presidential term, chiefly visible as a heightened assertiveness. Environmental discourse largely mirrors these strategical patterns: ideology is used increasingly to legitimate, through evoking an image of global leadership at home and an image of leadership the developing countries internationally.

Yet, does this also mean Xi is becoming or might already be a green leader? Using Eckersley's definition of leadership, the first chapter established that to qualify as a green leader, a head of state would have to win consent for his actions and proposals towards the achievement of climate goals in the community of global environmental governance. The extent of support for Xi's environmental actions and proposals lay outside the scope for this thesis and is worth exploring further, which Eckersley's paper does for the 2015 Paris Agreement negotiations. Regarding these early years of Xi's presidency, her conclusion is that 'despite growing international expectations, China, unlike the United States, did not see its role as leading the world.'<sup>184</sup> As such, they did not jump into the power vacuum left by the US under

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184. Eckersley, 'Rethinking Leadership: Understanding the Roles of the US and China in the Negotiation of the Paris Agreement', 1178.

President Trump, due to a reluctance ‘to break ranks with’ their alliance of developing countries.<sup>185</sup> Xi’s discourse in international speeches support this: despite his growing assertiveness over the years, the analysis indeed shows him speaking not from a place of superiority and leadership, but rather one of criticism towards these leading developed countries; he promotes his ideology as a member of the opposition, a role that—thus far—has felt too comfortable to abandon.

Yet whilst Eckersley suggests that this can be partly credited to ecological civilisation being intended as ‘a vision for China, not the world,’<sup>186</sup> this research suggests otherwise. As part of his larger project of infusing the world with ‘new thinking’ on global governance and sustainability more specifically, the unique characteristics of ecological civilisation are promoted continuously in Xi’s international speeches, whether that be with or without explicit reference to its key phrases. Even more strikingly, his domestic speeches are much less consistent in this regard: the second chapter established that Xi’s environmental efforts are recurrently spoken of as commitments towards the international community, not immediately connected to the natural disasters that must be defeated at home. Rather, they are a subject that Xi uses to showcase his global leadership, which Kim and Cao found to be an important source of legitimacy. The percentual downtrend in domestic environmental discourse around 2018–2019, moreover, suggests that besides this instrumental role, Xi does not consider the subject most beneficial to his domestic legitimacy. As *People’s Daily* coverage of the environment—until at least 2018—maintained a focus on economic and technological development and held the developed countries primarily responsible,<sup>187</sup> this is perhaps unsurprising. In agreement with Pan, Opgenhaffen, and Van Gorp,<sup>188</sup> therefore, the environment seems to be regarded

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185. Eckersley, 1197.

186. Eckersley, 1194.

187. Pan, Opgenhaffen, and Van Gorp, ‘China’s Pathway to Climate Sustainability: A Diachronic Framing Analysis of People’s Daily’s Coverage of Climate Change (1995–2018)’, 198–99.

188. Notably Kim and Cao, ‘Linking Global Leadership to Domestic Legitimacy: Comparative Analysis of Perceptions of Xi and Obama’; Pan, Opgenhaffen, and Van Gorp, ‘China’s Pathway to Climate Sustainability: A Diachronic Framing Analysis of People’s Daily’s Coverage of Climate Change (1995–2018)’.

mostly from the position of a developing country. As leader of the developing countries, Xi can thus be perceived to exercise green leadership by holding the developed countries accountable; these are also climate goals that require consent on proposals, albeit climate goals of a different kind.

These roles and ambitions are reflected in Xi's most notable overarching categories of leadership legitimisation discourse: domestic and international. In both, Xi's language is symptomatic of his degree of authority: the domestic lack of competitors and increasing centralisation and solidification of his political power, are in sharp contrast to the hegemonic competition the Chinese president is involved in internationally. As discussed in the theoretical framework, political ideology is here understood to be 'a wide set of decontested, mutually defining political concepts, which compete over public policy plans through competition between political actors for control of political language.'<sup>189</sup> *Xi Jinping Thought's* all-encompassing nature indicates the extent of his domestic power, as his increasing control went accompanied by an increasing control over political language. Internationally, the more frequent use of concepts such as 'sustainability' that align closely with the mission of the UN, showcases that the competition over political language is very much ongoing there. In a similar vein, the domestic lack of criticism opposes Xi's international position, where ideological concepts such as ecological civilisation are frequently presented as 'a "misleading propaganda" storyline.'<sup>190</sup> Xi's employment of ideology towards leadership legitimisation in his speeches, therefore, is distinctly characterised by these two contexts.

A common denominator between both types of speeches, however, is their exemplification of the continued and increasing importance of ideology in Xi's legitimising strategy, which has implications for discussions of legitimacy in China. In agreement with authors such as Kato and Klimeš and Marinelli, ideology's centrality to Xi's politics is affirmed in both sets of analysed speeches; despite the relative scarcity of Xi's appearances at the UNGA that hindered a continuous diachronic analysis, ideological legitimisation proved sufficiently ubiquitous to be informative across contexts and platforms. More strongly so, this study points

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189. Holbig, 'Whose New Normal? Framing the Economic Slowdown Under Xi Jinping', 342.

190. Chen and Zhao, 'Ecological Civilization: A Blindspot in Global Media Coverage of China's Environmental Governance', 205, study the portrayal of ecological civilisation in English-language media.



to a steady increase in the decisiveness of its deployment. Towards the legitimacy gap that Ratigan describes, therefore, ideological legitimation is a plausible factor, worth considering alongside the attitudes of Chinese people and the CPC's decentralised governance structure that she identifies. As Ratigan's study focused on the dynamic between the Chinese local and central governments, however, an interesting subject of further study could be the extent to which ideology is used towards legitimation in the lower levels of CPC leadership. When analysing China's legitimacy on a national and especially an international level, on the other hand, it is important to consider that the ideological strife to achieve the global leadership of the Chinese Dream is in full swing: the centenary goal of 'foster[ing] new thinking on . . . security' is to be achieved by 2049.<sup>191</sup> As Xi's ideological line is to be followed by the rest of his administration, ideology's role should not be underestimated in studies of legitimacy in China.

Although previous research shows this is not always the case, ideology is often implied in these studies, which suggests the issue may be semantic. Braathen's analysis of securitisation in Chinese environmental policy and the words of Xi Jinping, for example, asserts the 'appeal to class struggle and ideology soon failed as a source of legitimacy during Deng Xiaoping' and has since been replaced by 'the development process,'<sup>192</sup> hence performance. Whilst appearing different, her explanation of this dynamic as a promise 'for the future' that justifies 'complete authority' resembles the role of Xi's ideology as recorded here.<sup>193</sup> This is most likely caused by different understandings of the beginning and end of political ideology, which in China has long modernised from Marxism-Leninism to a socio-economic revolution more suitable to the 'new age' it finds itself in.<sup>194</sup> A comparative analysis of the extent to which other world leaders rely on political ideology, therefore, would be interesting to pursue.

Regardless of this semantic disunity, the role ideology plays in Xi's presidential discourse to construct and legitimise his identity as a green leader is difficult to ignore. Attention to the ideologies Chinese representatives globally express and defend is important,

191. Xi Jinping 习近平, *Report to the 19th National Congress*, 22.

192. Braathen, 'Constructing Climate Change as the Enemy of the State and l'État c'est Moi: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Contemporary Environmental Policies in China', 56, 58.

193. Braathen, 58.

194. For a more elaborate discussion of this, see Kim and Cao, 'Linking Global Leadership to Domestic Legitimacy: Comparative Analysis of Perceptions of Xi and Obama', 1641.

as well as attention to the answers of their international colleagues; in this, the environment is a competition with particularly pressing implications. The critical discourse analysis of Xi's speeches has yielded a detailed look at the topic's priority and placement within Xi's overall language and leadership: both domestically and internationally, climate discourse is employed instrumentally, its role dependent on the point it is being used to make. The role of ideology in Xi's green leadership legitimation cannot be separated from his overall legitimising practices, therefore. The findings also draw out how despite an expressed intention to 'build a discourse system' with 'new concepts, criteria, and expressions that will fit both the domestic and the international environment,'<sup>195</sup> Xi Jinping's language progressively drifts further apart between audiences. This increased tailoring of discourse is one of the ways in which, internationally, Xi's vision for a more assertive international role for China and its values is executed. Active engagement in this global discussion of rules and values is important to avoid miscommunications and conflicts. As legitimacy is a vehicle for acquiring ideational power, the Chinese influence on the phrasings of international declarations and bodies, amongst others, suggests the country has already gained some.<sup>196</sup> In pursuit of their centenary goals, the employment of ideology towards such leadership legitimacy will likely only grow larger, both within and outside of environmental discourse.

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195. Lams, 'Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping', 393.

196. For a recent study on the extent of this influence, see Shing-hon Lam and Courtney J. Fung, 'Mapping China's Influence at the United Nations', in *14th Annual Conference on the Political Economy of International Organization (PEIO)* (Oxford: Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, 2021), [https://www.peio.me/wp-content/uploads/PEIO14/PEIO14\\_paper\\_140.pdf](https://www.peio.me/wp-content/uploads/PEIO14/PEIO14_paper_140.pdf).

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## PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

### **Fraud and Plagiarism**

Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:

- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations.

The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism



entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.

Name: **Ayla Elisabeth Maria Berg**

Student number: **2369826**

Date and signature: **January 8, 2023**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ayla Elisabeth Maria Berg', written over a horizontal line.

Submit this form to your supervisor when you begin writing your Bachelor's final paper or your Master's thesis.

Failure to submit or sign this form does not mean that no sanctions can be imposed if it appears that plagiarism has been committed in the paper.