

HANDLING WITH LEGITIMACY CRISIS OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY: HOW IS THE PROMOTION OF CONFUCIANISM RELATED WITH THE LABOUR PROTEST LEVELS?

Ligita Šarkutė

Vytautas Magnus University,
V. Putvinskio st. 23, 44212 Kaunas, Lithuania

Jiabin Song

Vytautas Magnus University,
V. Putvinskio st. 23, 44212 Kaunas, Lithuania

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Abstract. *This article aims to shed light on the problem of Confucianism's role in strengthening the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. After 40 years of economic reform, contemporary China is by and large functioning as a quasi-capitalist state, however, due to the lack of protection of the labour class, the conflicts between the workers and their employers have created a legitimacy crisis for China's authoritarian regime and forced it to seek alternative means to strengthening its legitimacy apart from its orthodox communism ideology and the coercive measures. In this article, the researchers try to answer the abovementioned question by examining the correlation between the coverage of Confucianism (the frequency of messages related to Confucian ideas) in the Chinese Communist Party's biggest state-owned newspaper People's Daily and how Chinese people acknowledge the regime as rightful, which is expressed via Chinese labour protest levels. The vector autoregressive (VAR) modelling results revealed that in the period between 2011 and 2019, the Chinese Communist Party used Confucianism as one of the instruments to build and strengthen the regime's legitimacy whereby it can pacify the dissatisfaction of the labour class. Further, considering that many authoritarian regimes shared a similar approach of using the dominant religion or culture to enhance their legitimacy during crises, the findings of this research could also open a new avenue for further comparative studies on these authoritarian regimes' discrepancies using the same approach.*

Keywords: *Confucianism, Chinese Communist Party, legitimacy, labour protests, China.*

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *konfucianizmas, Kinijos komunistų partija, legitimacija, darbuotojų protestai, Kinija.*

Introduction

The past studies of the relationship between the use of Confucianism as the instrument for the Chinese regime's legitimacy building and the Chinese labour class issue remain scarce, meanwhile, these two subjects are more often than not being studied separately. In a general retrospection, the scholars who study the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (hereinafter: CCP) are interested in the factors like the principles and ideas of Confucianism (Sung 1999; Yang 2007; Brady 2012; Chai, Chai 2013; Chu 2013; Wu 2014; Wu 2015; Ford 2015; Bruce, Shen, Yan 2017; Walton 2018; Wang, Nahm 2019; Li 2020; Gao 2022, Huang, 2022) but their studies are rarely related to the Chinese labour class issue without the political significance. As well, the scholars who concentrate their efforts on the Chinese labour class issue (Kim 2014; Lee 1996; Strudler 2008; Perry 2010; Woods, Lamond 2011) have adopted Confucianism into

their elaboration though, but they scarcely move beyond the economic-cultural sphere into the political domain, therefore, the question of the labour issue's implication for the CCP's legitimacy change is remaining unanswered.

After taking these precedent studies into account, the researchers reached two insights that need to be addressed: 1) The past studies on Confucianism mainly concentrate on political philosophy or political ideology aspects through different discursive approaches. They have proven many grounded conclusions, however, there is yet to generate solid systematic evidence to account for the argument that CCP has its rationale to promote Confucianism rather than pinning their arguments upon the discursive analytic results. 2) By now the study on the linkage between Confucianism as the instrument for the CCP's legitimization policy and the Chinese labour protests that reflect the decline of the CCP's legitimacy is still absent.

To fill this gap, in this article, the researchers intend to demonstrate a systematic connectedness between these two phenomena through modelling their dynamic correlation. The method used is the vector autoregressive (VAR) modelling. The main aim of this article was to analyse the correlation between the promotion of Confucian ideas by the CCP and the frequency of labour protest levels. The scientific problem lies in the main research question is whether the coverage of Confucianism in the state-owned media is related to the stronger legitimacy of the CCP. In reaching our aim, three tasks are accomplished by the researchers in this article: a) to uncover the dynamics of the Confucianism coverage changes in the CCP's propaganda system – this is accomplished by exhaustively sampling the past seven decades (1946-2019) the CCP's biggest state-owned media *People's Daily's* articles; b) to reveal the dynamics of the Chinese labour protest level changes as the negative proxy for the CCP's legitimacy during the period 2011-2019 – these data are extracted and processed from the *China Labour Bulletin* (中国劳工通信) dataset; c) to establish a VAR model so as to test their dynamic correlation. As a result, the researchers found that during the 2011 to 2019 period, there was a mutual impact at a significant level between the changes in Confucianism coverage in the CCP's *People's Daily* and the changes in the Chinese labour protest level. Considering that the continuous decline of the CCP's legitimacy indicated by its labour protest level's incessant increase in the recent decades while the increases of Confucianism promotion in its propaganda system during the same period, the connectedness between the two phenomena presented in this article reveals the necessity of the Confucianism for the CCP's legitimization as well as its effectiveness level in the pacification of the Chinese labour issue.

Theoretical background and research methodology

“You can do many things with bayonets, but it is rather uncomfortable to sit on them.”

Prince Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord

Every government requires a certain level of legitimacy to maintain their governance lest the opposition uses the social grudge sentiment to bog them down into domestic turmoil or even an eruption of civil war. In contemporary China, the CCP has been known for its notorious apparatuses' suppressive methods, nevertheless, it also has been incurring more and more difficulties in legitimizing its single-party system since the economic reform in 1978. The challenges for the authoritarian regime are multifaceted – some come from its intelligentsia in the political domain (i.e., from both the very ends of the political spectrum that the nostalgic Maoists on the left and the radical nationalists on the right, along with the fading voices of the political reformists in the middle between the two), some come from the entrepreneurs in the country economic system's private sector, as well as the grieved religious groups and the different ethnic minorities. However, as political crises emerge, the most severe issue for the CCP regime is always situated in the Chinese labour force issue. The reason is trifold:

1. As a politically important social class, the proletariat blue-collar workers in China are not just theoretically the “foundation” of the CCP's supporters, but due to the group *de facto* being the majority of the

Chinese population in the country thus occupying the lion's share in the Chinese society¹. Therefore, their attitude toward the CCP will politically determine the latter's survival as well. For instance, in 2019 there were 290.77 million Minggong (i.e., the migrant peasants whose occupations are different physical works) working in the urban area, in the same year the total number of Chinese laborers in the urban area was 442.47 million which denotes merely the blue-collar workers from the backward rural areas have already occupied 65.7% of the total labour force in the urban area, and if this figure plus the blue-collar workers originated from the urban population their percentage will be undoubtedly much bigger.²

2. As a social group, albeit there is a lack of agencies such as NGOs or labour unions for them to collectively express their voice, seemingly the Chinese labourers are socially atomic individuals distant from each other culturally. However, the homogeneous attributes shared by the Chinese labourers (e.g., high urban living pressure, low income, harsh working environment, etc.) are making the group as a whole susceptible to any injustice labour event incurred by its members, thereby transforming the group's sentimental grievance into a societal insecurity³.
3. As a cultural group, the Chinese labourers are *de jure* occupying the "moral high ground" according to the orthodox communism ideology⁴ when the issue comes to the treatment and struggle of labourers, it becomes a self-defeating effort for the CCP to subvert such political actions in the ideological and public discourse.

Therefore, the high political stake caused by the blue-collar workers as an unstable majority in the Chinese population, the imposition of discipline upon them cannot merely come from the repressive methods as the CCP has sophisticatedly used to enforce obedience upon other societal groups. An alternative to supplementing the coercive measures in tackling this issue is needed, and in this article, the researchers assume that the CCP has found it in the form of Confucianism, and this assumption is based upon four arguments:

- From the philosophical perspective, Confucianism *per se* is neatly fitting with the relationship between the governing CCP's functionaries and their governed subjects like the ordinary Chinese workers, because it matches the form of supervisor-subordinate relationship (i.e., the "Junzi (君子)" – "Baixing (百姓)" relationship) in accordance with Confucianism. Further, by distastefully replacing this power relationship with an ethic-relationship – namely, the loyalty here is sugar-coated with a moral rationale – the workers should be loyal to the CCP functionaries' command not because the latter has the force over them⁵, rather it is because the latter possesses some *a priori* virtuous merits superior to them

¹ See: The State Information Center (Administration Center of China E-government Network), *A Study on The New Development of The Labor Market amid the Stabilization Policy*, February 24, 2022, <http://www.sic.gov.cn/News/455/11304.htm> (accessed: August 14, 2023).

² It is not saying that other Chinese societal groups like the middle class in the urban area are not important in terms of legitimacy of a Chinese regime like the CCP. The political significance of the labor class lies in their objective political energy and subjective recalcitrant characteristics that can affect the political system's stability. In comparison with them, the other Chinese societal groups like the middle class are not just small in number, but their "golden sheep" mindset – a metaphor used by Caligula on Julius Silanus – made these wealthy urban inhabitants become an object of contempt rather than of apprehension for the CCP. The aftermaths like the 2015 Tianjin Explosions and the 2021 Jingguang North Road Tunnel Floods, etc. have repeatedly proven the political effectness of the Chinese middle class regardless of what sorts of mismanagements or injustices imposed by the CCP, therefore they do live up to their reputation for being the "shitizen (屁民)" in the present-day Chinese satire.

³ An interesting analysis of this issue, see: Xie, H. "The Conflict without Vested Interest: The Analysis of The Motives and Logic behind The Chinese Collective Protest." *Academic Journal of Zhongzhou*, no. 2 (2014), <https://www.aisixiang.com/data/73444.html> (accessed: August 14, 2023).

⁴ The first sentence in the first paragraph of the CCP's Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party is "The Chinese Communist Party is the pioneer of the Chinese labor class (中国共产党是中国工人阶级的先锋队)". See: Communist Net. *The Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party*, October 22, 2022, <https://www.12371.cn/special/zggcdzc/zggcdzcqw/> (accessed: August 14, 2023).

⁵ E.g., Mao's assertion that "Regime/political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." – Wang C., *The Studies of Maoism Regime*. (Beijing: History of Chinese Communist Party Publishing House, 1997), 15.

(or put differently, the CCP's trick here regarding the loyalty (忠誠) of the governed ones is using an argument derived from the Confucianism's "benevolence (仁)"⁶ as one of a person's four inner will (四端)⁷ instead of the ancient Chinese Legalism's "power/status (勢位)"⁸ as the external restraint on the person). Further, by adding some fiery pictures of the future paradise such as the CCP's manipulation of some Confucianism concepts like the "Great Community (大同社會)" which is derived from the *Book of Rites*' "great path (大道)" idea⁹, these simple-minded Chinese plebeians are expected to take the bait¹⁰.

- From a political perspective, Confucianism also could be regarded as one of the relevant instruments of political socialization helping to strengthen the legitimacy of the CCP. After the 1997 promulgation of the new law on Inciting Subversion of State Power (煽動顛覆國家政權罪) and then one year later the establishment of the Great Firewall (GFW)¹¹ on the Chinese Internet, by the end of the 20th century the CCP has already thenceforth turned China's cyberspace¹² into a panopticon (Foucault 1977: 195-308; Gordon 1980: 146-165). However, in order to have a political stabilization effect or a ubiquitous discipline, mere punishment is not working but must be complemented with gratification as a two-way system. This political end necessitates the socialization that uses Confucian ideas to cultivate a social normalization process and results in an internalization of the Chinese individuals who are targeted by such a policy. By applying Foucault's interpretation of strategy (Foucault 1982: 793) it could be stated that the behavioural pattern of the CCP designates for the insubordinate subject (i.e. the labour class) and the selected Confucian norms are used as the means to attain the desired level of political socialization. In this process, the CCP widely uses the state-owned media for these tasks, as aforementioned that the deprivation of the free and open political discourse on the cyber public space has already been completed in advance through localization of the internet (i.e., the result of information filtering by the GFW), and coercive punishment of opposite discourses under the well-designed new law.
- From a historical perspective, since 1949 the CCP took power in mainland China the status of Confucianism has been gradually changing in the past seven decades. The researchers divide these changes into four different periods according to the CCP's official narratives in its controlled media: 1) the first stage started in 1949 when the CCP took over the sovereignty of mainland China, Confucianism was

⁶ See: Confucius, *The Analects (5th Century BC), Chapter XXII: Yan Yuan*.

⁷ "The feeling of commiseration is the origin of benevolence; the feeling of shame and dislike is the origin of righteousness; the feeling of modesty and complaisance is the origin of propriety; the feeling of approving and disapproving is the origin of wisdom (惻隱之心，仁之端也；羞惡之心，義之端也；辭讓之心，禮之端也；是非之心，智之端也)" - Meng Ke, *Mengzi (3rd Century BC), Chapter: Gong Sun Chou I*.

⁸ "Thus, being a saint or a sage is not enough to subdue the masses, whereas the power/status is enough to subdue the saints and the sages (由此觀之，賢智未足以服眾，而勢位足以誦賢者也)" - Han Fei, *The Critique of Power (3rd Century BC)*.

⁹ "When the Great Path is prevalent in the world, everyone is adhering to justice, the merit ones are supported to lead, the society is decent and harmonious, <...> such a situation is called 'Great Unity' (大道之行也，天下為公。選賢與能，講信修睦，<...> 是謂大同)" - Dai Sheng (ed.), *Book of Rites (1st Century BC), Chapter IX: The Conveyance of Rites*.

¹⁰ Or, in a still blatant way, like the argument from the New Confucianism (新儒家) works advocate that "He (i.e., Confucius) also suggests that common people have intellectual limitations" (Bell 2010: 167). However, since the classical era – even long before the advent of representative democracy – people in the West know there is a principal-agent problem in their relationship with the government (or, "moral hazard", as the film character Gordon Gekko explains to the old lady in the 2010 Hollywood movie *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* that "Moral hazard means somebody takes your money and he is not responsible for it."), therefore, doesn't it to be a more logical option for the "intellectual deficit people/public" to prefer a stupid supervisor to a smart one for their leadership in case there is an interests conflict between them in the distribution of the country's public goods originating from their own hard-working taxes?

¹¹ Designed to block Chinese citizens' access to the uncensored internet information via technical censorship measures.

¹² Before that the public space had long been constantly under surveillance while the mass media were all controlled by the regime, therefore the news outlets on cyberspace, like social media, were the only possible discourse field for Chinese public opinion. Hence, for attaining the panopticon effect (or, to create the information island) the CCP needs the GFW to control the external inflow of information from international cyberspace, meanwhile, the new *Inciting Subversion of State Power Law to curb the internal spontaneous information from the domestic cyberspace*.

initiatively being severely suppressed among other “reactionary cultures (反动文化)” during Mao’s era and had been perceived as antagonistic ideology towards the new regime¹³; 2) the second stage is marked by a period of cultural neglect, Confucianism was largely being ignored by the Chinese society amid the early economic reform period’s *laissez-faire* milieu (i.e. approximately from 1980s till the beginning of 1990s); 3) then the third stage, when the Confucianism as a cultural phenomenon had been gradually becoming a salient subject in the Chinese society’s public discourse as well as been discussed in the official media during Jiang and Hu’s era (i.e. 1993 - 2012)¹⁴; 4) and the final stage which began from Xi’s success ascending to power in 2013 whose policy made the Confucianism become national culture once again, thenceforth it has been officially promoted and playing a major role in his national rejuvenation narrative.

- From a comparative perspective, there are pronounced evidences that many authoritarian regimes apply a similar approach banking themselves on a once dominant religion or culture during their legitimacy crisis as the CCP does with Confucianism. Such similarity can observe in Putin’s kleptocratic regime revitalized the Russian Orthodox Church after the democracy-inclined Patriarch Aleksii II’s death for underpinning its declining domestic support (Robinson 2019: 183-214), or the charades like Saddam Hussein’s out-of-the-blue religious zeal for the Sunni Islam after his secular Ba’ath regime military venture on Kuwait went south and the Shi’a intifada ensued (Rohde 2003: 715), etc. Apart from horizontal comparison, vertically in Chinese history, the barbarian regimes like the Jurchen after they conquered China had also tried to use the Han nation’s Confucianism to legitimize their occupation, which to some degree did work¹⁵, many renowned Han intellectuals refused to serve the heterogeneous sovereign nevertheless¹⁶. Taking into account that the communist ideology *per se* is heterogeneous to the Han people’s political culture, hence, under the auspices of the historical lesson, the recourse to Confucianism is undoubtedly a feasible approach for the CCP to adopt in enhancing its legitimacy.

Therefore, as the *Mos Maiorum* for the ancient Romans, Confucianism as the set of ancient Chinese social norms derived from numerous records and studies of Confucian ideology also retain its socialization potential in Chinese society¹⁷. The key issue or inquiry here is about how to measure this Confucianism promotion’s effectiveness in changing the Chinese people’s attitude towards the CCP’s regime, namely, to examine how and to what degree the relevant CCP’s legitimation policies are affecting its legitimacy.

Apparently, the operationalization for answering this inquiry requires two phenomena as empirical evidences that can be observed and refined for the two key concepts/variables: the CCP’s Confucianism promotion policy and the CCP’s legitimacy. In this article, the researchers will use the tendency change of articles related to Confucianism in the CCP’s biggest state-owned media *People’s Daily’s* coverage as a

¹³ Such as “Destroy the Four Old (破四旧)” in 1966 and “The Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign (批林批孔运动)” in 1974. For a more comprehensive analysis see: Wang, H., *Legalism and Anti-Confucianism in Maoist Politics* (Institute of International Relations, 1975).

¹⁴ The most significant event which implied the official attitude changes towards Confucianism was a huge Confucius statue placed in Tiananmen Square before it was removed on April 20th 2011 (the statue had been presented in the Square around 100 days period). See: “The 9.5 Meter High Confucius Statue Is Placed in The Front of The National Museum as A New Cultural Landmark in Tiananmen Square,” China News Service, January 11, 2011, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/131781.html> (accessed: 2023 06 28).

¹⁵ Accompanied by economic entices as well as social privilege conferrals – similar to the buy-off policy as the “Honorary Citizen” adopted by Tsar Nicholas I’s occupation regime in Eastern Europe after the fall of the November Uprising. See: Zasztowt L., *Melting Puzzle: The Nobility, Society, Education and Scholarly Life in East-Central Europe (1800s-1900s)* (Warszawa: Studium Europy Wschodniej, 2018), 71-82.

¹⁶ For example, the Late Ming Dynasty’s “Three Masters of Confucianism (明末三大儒)” - Huang Zongxi (黄宗羲), Gu Yanwu (顧炎武), and Wang Fuzhi (王夫之) were all against the Jurchen alien occupation throughout their rest lives after the fall of Ming Dynasty.

¹⁷ According to O. Yang Ray’s 2018 article that traditional values, as well as the state-controlled media and striking economic records, are often expected to drive the attitudes, and these values usually refer to the sense of guardianship stemming from Confucianism. Such philosophy implies that people define the relationship with authority as hierarchical in China, obligating them to respect and follow authority.

proxy for the former, and use the tendency change of the Chinese labour protest levels from the *China Labour Bulletin* dataset for the latter. Then the above inquiry will be divided into two interconnected research questions: 1) how does the CCP use Confucianism as the instrument for legitimacy building through its propaganda system's media as a socialization means to manage its legitimacy crisis embodied in the form of labour protest; and 2) in turn, to check its effectiveness degree, *ceteris paribus*, of doing that. The approach the researchers choose to answer these two questions is to establish a VAR model to test the two variables' correlation in the nine-year period between 2011 and 2019.

As to the research resources the two variables: the chronological changes of the articles related to Confucian ideas that appeared in *People's Daily* are presented in *Figure 1* and the frequency of Chinese labour protests from the *China Labour Bulletin* is presented in *Figure 2*.

The "adjusted" frequency denotes that bases on the benchmark of the 1946-1956.6.31 edition, the sum of articles related with Confucian ideas in the later editions' will be multiplied by a modifier (i.e., the modifier = the total pages of 1946-1956.6.31 edition / the total pages of the new edition) to reflect their proper weight in the media coverage during the same unit of time (i.e., the chronological edition changes in *People's Daily* see: Annex 3).

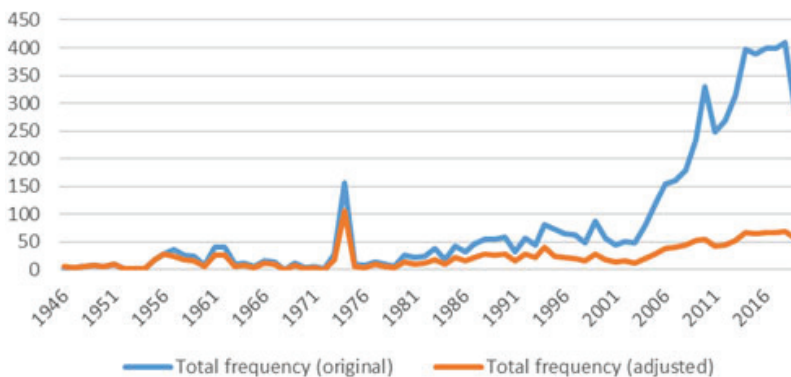


Figure 1. Total annual frequency of the articles related with Confucian ideas in *People's Daily* in 1946–2019

Source: *People's Daily*.



Figure 2. The frequency of Chinese labour protests in 2011–2019

Source: *China Labour Bulletin*.

Data and model

To explain the spread of Confucian ideas and principles by the CCP to curb the increasingly tense situation in the domestic labour environment that has been jeopardizing its legitimacy, the researchers use two research sources: the *People's Daily* (人民日报) newspaper and the *China Labour Bulletin* (中国劳工通讯) dataset. The correlation between the coverage of Confucianism (the frequency of messages related to Confucian ideas) in the CCP's biggest state-owned Chinese newspaper and how Chinese people acknowledge the regime as rightful, which is expressed via Chinese labour protest levels in the period between 2011 and 2019 (i.e., before the pandemic started, since 2020 that all the public gathering/protests were prohibited), is analysed using the VAR modelling.

The sampling of the coverage of Confucian ideas, principles and other related attributes was done by calculating the total number of articles in the *People's Daily* mentioning Confucian ideas each month, the total monthly data sample pool contains 108 cases in the period 2011-2019. This monthly frequency of the coverage of Confucian ideas in the biggest state-owned newspaper, used for the CCP propaganda, is the proxy for measuring how the Confucian ideas are used as an instrument of political socialization helping to strengthen the legitimacy of the CCP.

The labour protest levels are identified from the *China Labour Bulletin* dataset. Because of the severe censorship of Chinese social media and the coercive measures of the CCP regime's Social Stabilization System (维稳系统) as well as the lack of NGOs activities, the public opinion in China is largely suppressed and thus remains obscure for its observers. As well, as a rational choice outcome from the individual calculation, for the ordinary Chinese who want to express their grievance against the party's governance through either protesting in public or writing a censure post on social media, the costs for the person are quite the same. However, due to political protest in China is absolutely resulted in iron-fist suppression, labour protest has thus become the only possible civil resistance form in China. Therefore, in this article, the researchers use political behaviour to be the proxy of political preferences (namely, the higher protest level in a period denotes the lower CCP's legitimacy in the same period).

These data available in the *China Labour Bulletin* dataset are protest case data arranged in chronological order with rich attributes (such as "actor type", "settlement type" etc.). There are 12,384 labour protest cases in total that took place in China between 2011 and 2019 period, for transforming these data into the monthly protest level time-series data as a unified variable (i.e., the main purpose here is to make the protest time-series data have the same unit of time with the *People's Daily's* monthly data for following VAR model test), the following procedure, described below, was adopted by the researchers:

- Each labour protest case in the daily data is assigned a value from 4-point scale: the case with 1-100 protestors (coded as "protest level 1"), the case with 100-1000 protestors (coded as "protest level 1 multiplied by a 10 modifier"), the case with 1000-10000 protestors (coded as "protest level 1 multiplied by a 100 modifier"), and case with 10000+ protestors (coded as "protest level 1 multiplied by a 1000 modifier"). A few "unknown" cases are subsumed into the 1-100 value scale. The sum of these cases' values is the proxy of the daily data's protest level.
- The sum of these daily data's total protest level in the same month is assigned as that month's monthly protest level. For example, on June 1st, 2019 5 labour protests happened in China (i.e., from case no. 11611 to case no. 11615), four of them with a scale between 1-100 protestors participating and one case with a scale between 100-1000 participants. Then, the calculation of this day's daily protest level is $(4 * 1) + (1 * 10) = 14$, and the sum of June 1st and the rest 29 days' protest level in the same month is June 2019's monthly protest level.

The intention of the researchers to establish the VAR model of the correlation between the monthly labour protest levels in China and the monthly frequency of the coverage of Confucian ideas in the biggest state-owned newspaper raised two questions: 1) whether and to what degree the increasing of domestic labour protest levels will lead to the CCP's propaganda system to broadcast more messages related with

Confucian ideas in its biggest state-owned newspaper the *People's Daily*, and 2) in turn, whether and to what degree these messages in *People's Daily* works in terms of pacifying the Chinese labour protests?

After data processing and analyses using the VAR modelling two autoregressive distributed lag (ADL) equations are formulated:

1. $\text{pdfad1}_t = \text{constant} + a_{11} * \text{pdfad1}_{t-1} + a_{12} * \text{pdfad1}_{t-2} + a_{13} * \text{pdfad1}_{t-3} + a_{14} * \text{pdfad1}_{t-4} + a_{15} * \text{pdfad1}_{t-5} + b_{11} * \text{protestlvd1}_{t-1} + b_{12} * \text{protestlvd1}_{t-2} + b_{13} * \text{protestlvd1}_{t-3} + b_{14} * \text{protestlvd1}_{t-4} + b_{15} * \text{protestlvd1}_{t-5} + \varepsilon_{1t}$
2. $\text{protestlvd1}_t = \text{constant} + a_{21} * \text{pdfad1}_{t-1} + a_{22} * \text{pdfad1}_{t-2} + a_{23} * \text{pdfad1}_{t-3} + a_{24} * \text{pdfad1}_{t-4} + a_{25} * \text{pdfad1}_{t-5} + b_{21} * \text{protestlvd1}_{t-1} + b_{22} * \text{protestlvd1}_{t-2} + b_{23} * \text{protestlvd1}_{t-3} + b_{24} * \text{protestlvd1}_{t-4} + b_{25} * \text{protestlvd1}_{t-5} + \varepsilon_{2t}$

Description of the variables used in VAR modelling are presented in table 1 and the test result of the ADL equations of VAR modelling using *Gretl* software's output are presented in appendix 1 and appendix 2.

Table 1. *Description of the variables used in VAR modelling*

Variable	Description
<i>pdfa</i>	Monthly frequency of articles related with Confucian ideas in the <i>People's Daily's</i> (due to the edition changes since the beginning of 2019, the page size of the <i>People's Daily</i> has been reduced from 24 pages to 20 pages (the monthly frequency value for 2019 period was multiplied a modifier 1.2 to reflect its weight commensurate with the 2011-2018 period). The values of this variable reflect the immediate changes in the coverage of Confucianism in the biggest state-owned Chinese newspaper.
<i>pdfad1</i>	The first difference of the “pdfa” variable which is the monthly change from the previous month's value ($\text{pdfad1}_t = \text{pdfa}_t - \text{pdfa}_{t-1}$). The values of this variable reflect the changes in the tendency and dynamics of the coverage of Confucianism in the biggest state-owned Chinese newspaper.
<i>protestlv</i>	Monthly labour protest level in China identified from the <i>China Labour Bulletin</i> database. The values of this variable reflect the immediate changes in the Chinese labour protest levels.
<i>protestlvd1</i>	The first difference of the “protestlv” variable which is the monthly change from the previous month's value (i.e. $\text{protestlvd1}_t = \text{protestlv}_t - \text{protestlv}_{t-1}$). The values of this variable reflect the changes in the tendency and dynamics of Chinese labour protest levels.

Interpretation and implications of the VAR modelling results

The first ADL test result from the VAR modelling shows that every 1 unit's increase in the 5 lags' variable “protestlvd1” has a 0.00414879 unit's positive impact on the variable pdfad1 at a statistically significant level (p-value = 0.0246). That means during the nine-year period of analysis, if the Chinese labour protest levels' monthly change (i.e., its tendency) increases by 1, then 5 months later the monthly change in the number of articles related to Confucian ideas in the *People's Daily* will be increased by approximately 0.004. For example, the labour protest level in October of 2011 (i.e. 1248) had increased by 1,524 levels from the previous month January of 2013 (i.e. -276), then 5 months later apart from other effects, it will add roughly six articles related with the Confucian ideas (i.e. $1524 * 0.00414879 = 6.32275596$) in March of 2012 *People's Daily* coverage's total eight articles related with the Confucian ideas monthly change from the previous month (i.e. from decreasing 2 articles in February of 2012 to increase 6 articles in March of 2012).

The second ADL test result from the VAR modelling shows that every 1 unit's increase in the 5 lags' variable “pdfad1” has a -11.6049 unit's negative impact on the variable “protestlvd1” at a statistically significant level (p-value = 0.0342). That means during the nine-year analytic period if one article related to

Confucian ideas increases in the monthly change in the number of articles in the *People's Daily* will roughly pacify or deescalate the Chinese labour protest levels' monthly development with an 11.6 level decrease after 5 months. For instance, there were 19 articles related to Confucian ideas increasing in August of 2013 *People's Daily* monthly coverage (i.e., a monthly increase of 10 articles) from the previous month (i.e. 9 articles decreased monthly in July 2013), then 5 months later apart from other effects, it will lower roughly 220 level's labour protest level monthly change (i.e. $19 * - 11.6049 = -220.4931$) in the January of 2014 (i.e. -468) from the previous month's value (i.e. +323).

In summary, the VAR model test outcome indicates that during the period between 2011 and 2019, the legitimacy crisis caused by the Chinese domestic labour protests increase did prompt the CCP regime to promote Confucian ideas and principles through its controlled media as an instrument to pacify the labour class and strengthen the regime's legitimacy. In turn, the promotion of Confucian ideas in the biggest state-owned newspaper *People's Daily* did have some effects on deescalating the tension caused by labour protests in China. The endogeneity here can be largely ascribed to the omitted factors such as coercive apparatuses' functioning regarding the law enforcement or the Party's suppression agencies like the Armed Police Force (武警部队) (i.e., this unit does not under the purview of the Chinese government Ministry of Public Security's law enforcement department, but it is a hybrid military institution directly controlled by the CCP's Central Military Commission (CMC) whose main task is to secure the regime domestically), or the possible synergetic effects of the other media actors like *Xinhua News Agency*, or the public schools' curriculum¹⁸ controlled by the regime.

Further, the legitimacy of a regime shows how it is accepted by people as rightful and is a very important issue in democratic states. Therefore, free and fair elections and frequent public opinion polls that provide a constant measurement to reflect the government support level are indispensable in a democracy. However, none of these legitimate means of measuring the government' legitimacy are being used in authoritarian regimes like China and that leads to the fact that many of the political analysts use speculative arguments on the CCP's regime's legitimacy level, which by and large remain only conjectures. For resolving this conundrum, given that the direct extraction of the genuine public opinion of the Chinese society is hardly possible or at least hardly unbiased¹⁹, the model we proposed uses the data of the Chinese labour protests as a negative proxy to reflect the CCP's legitimacy level in the analytic period. Such a conversion of the political behaviour of the Chinese people into their political preferences allowed us to quantitatively measure the dynamics of the CCP's legitimacy level change in the nine-year period of analysis.

According to the data presented in this article, it can be assumed that the official image of Confucianism has been risen from the bottom up to a salient positive position among the official narratives. Nevertheless, it is needed to point out that Confucianism is still remaining the opposite of the communism in

¹⁸ Generally speaking, the contemporary Confucianism education in public school's courses is like other "patriotic education" which mainly serves as an alternative form of loyalty indoctrination for the CCP regime, however, simultaneously the private schools in China are inadvertently aligning themselves with the CCP's policy in this regards whose curricula are mostly for the sake of promoting Confucianism. For a more comprehensive analysis see: Wang, 2023.

¹⁹ For instance, foreign institutions are prohibited from directly conducting political surveys in China, and even the recent Chinese Public Opinion survey conducted by Harvard Ash Center has to cooperate with "a leading private research and polling company in China" – however, is there any private political related survey company can be really free from the CCP's Ministry of State Security of the People's Republic of China (MSS)'s constant monitoring or the threats of the CCP's ambiguous laws like the *Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China*'s Article 398 and *Law of the People's Republic of China on Guarding State Secrets*'s Article 9, Clause 7? The rule of lenity hasn't ever existed in the CCP's lexicon after all. See: Cunningham E., Saich T. & Turiel J., "Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time," *The Roy and Lila Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation*, July 2020, https://ash.harvard.edu/files/ash/files/final_policy_brief_7.6.2020.pdf (accessed: August 18, 2023). & Crimes of Dereliction of Duty, Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China § Article 398 (1997). Access via Internet: http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Law/2007-12/13/content_1384075.htm (accessed: August 18, 2023) & "Other matters that are classified as State secrets by the State secret-guarding department. Secrets of political parties that conform with the provisions of the preceding clause of this Law shall be State secrets. (经国家保密行政管理部门确定的其他秘密事项。政党的秘密事项中符合前款规定的,属于国家秘密。)" - Scopes and Categories of State Secrets, Law of the People's Republic of China on Guarding State Secrets § Article 9, Clause 7 (2010) Access via Internet: https://www.gov.cn/jfjfg/2010-04/30/content_1596420.htm (accessed: August 18, 2023).

terms of ideology. As well, the CCP *per se* is only interested in those Confucian attributes which can be pragmatically served as instruments to socialize and internalize the regime's subjects with loyalty so as to get through the legitimacy crises it is confronting. The rationale behind this pragmatic attribute of Confucianism in the CCP's actions to maintain its legitimacy is fourfold:

1. In the ideological domain, the demise of the regime's charismatic authority following Mao's death has created an ideological vacuum in Chinese society that there is no other political leader in the Party who can once again establish a cult of personality and evoke the public's enthusiasm to support the regime;
2. Because Mao hasn't ever tried to have a routinization of his charisma (Weber 1947: 334-342) into a rational-legal authority as his legacy, meanwhile, his son died in the Korean War that ended the possibility of transforming his charismatic authority into a traditional one like the Kim Il-sung did in North Korea;
3. The coercive suppression policies in China are not just expensive in terms of public finance²⁰ but also harm the economic development due to lack of public support for the suppression – repression can impose obedience but it jeopardises productivity at the same time after all;
4. Confucianism as a belief system, as presented in the previous discussions in this article, we can find elements which can be interpreted and successfully used to internalize the Chinese people to become loyal to the ruling party²¹.

Therefore, based on the VAR model test presented in this article, it can be assumed that all (or at least one of these) four reasons mentioned above prompted the CCP which lacks the patrimony of legitimacy from its first-generation leadership, to use Confucianism as an instrument to underpin its fading legitimacy.

Conclusions

The correlation between the tendency of Chinese labour protest levels and the tendency of the Confucian ideas and principles promotion in the CCP regime's owned media, identified by the vector autoregressive modelling in this article, revealed that the CCP uses Confucianism as one of the instruments to build the regime's legitimacy and to pacify the dissatisfaction of Chinese people. The analysis also showed that the legitimacy crisis faced by the CCP regime is being tackled using the promotion of Confucian ideas when trying to pacify the increasing labour protests. This is how the CCP is essentially trying to alter the Chinese people's cognitive structure by employing propagandistic means, whereby the Party can change its subjects' moral reasoning even in the case that the content *per se* – the unjust treatment of the labour class – has not changed. However, the question of whether the CCP is moving to a promotion of a Confucian-nationalist narrative, thereby seeking to marginalize or even replace its communist stance in the public media which till today it remains a public consciousness among its 96 million Party members – either as continuous disciplining effects or as an internalized belief – indeed needs further studies.

²⁰ For instance, in the year 2020, the annual Public Security Budget (公共安全支出) was 1 412 billion Yuan which was even bigger than that year's National Defense Budget (国防支出) consisting of 1 291 billion Yuan. See: Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China, September 17, 2021.

²¹ For example, some tenets of Confucianism such as Three Fundamental Bonds: the lord is his retainer's paragon, the husband is his wife's paragon, the father is his son's paragon (三綱 - 君為臣綱、夫為妻綱、父為子綱。) is a social norm to cultivate a political culture regulating the people's behavior in their life. From a perspective of political ideology, its implication can be theoretically interpreted as due to the ethical merits possessed by the supervisors (e.g. such as the CCP regime's functionaries be depicted as Confucianism theory's "Junzi (君子)" – a sort of erudite, self-discipline intellectual) the subordinates (e.g. the ordinary Chinese people like those in the labour class be depicted as Confucianism's "Baixing (百姓)" – the commoners, plebeians who are thought to be lacking proper knowledge of their country and thus with little sense of responsibility for the country) ought to follow their commands.

Furthermore, from a comparative perspective, the CCP's Confucianism promotion *per se* as a legitimation policy there are perceivable similarities in using the dominant religion or culture as a strategy to salvage the government's legitimacy shared by other authoritarian regimes (e.g., such as Saddam Hussein started frequently visiting the Sunni Islam mosques after his secular Ba'ath regime suffered the military fiasco in the Gulf War, or Putin's kleptocratic regime revitalized the Russian Orthodox Church after Patriarch Aleksii II's death for underpinning its declining domestic supports, etc.). Therefore, apart from this article's findings, a comparison study between these authoritarian regimes' similar legitimation policies thereof could be a fruitful development that will complement the discipline's scholarship concerning these authoritarian regimes' legitimacy studies.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. The test result of the VAR modelling: ADL equation (1)

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VAR system, lag order 5
OLS estimates, observations 2011:07-2019:12 (T = 102)
Log-likelihood = -1126.0729
Determinant of covariance matrix = 13311074
AIC = 22.5112
BIC = 23.0774
HQC = 22.7405
Portmanteau test: LB(25) = 90.5383, df = 80 [0.1973]

Equation 1: pdfadl

      coefficient      std. error      t-ratio      p-value
-----
const          0.0485396         0.859800         0.05645      0.9551
pdfadl_1       -0.530957          0.102640        -5.173       1.36e-06 ***
pdfadl_2       -0.554904          0.108570        -5.111       1.76e-06 ***
pdfadl_3       -0.541914          0.111776        -4.848       5.11e-06 ***
pdfadl_4       -0.327659          0.110263        -2.972       0.0038 ***
pdfadl_5       -0.0965262         0.0990257       -0.9748      0.3323
protestlvd1_1  0.000835985        0.00185793       0.4500       0.6538
protestlvd1_2  0.00263802         0.00191827       1.375       0.1724
protestlvd1_3  0.000404254        0.00183506       0.2203      0.8261
protestlvd1_4 -0.00173563         0.00190538      -0.9109      0.3647
protestlvd1_5  0.00414879         0.00181454       2.286        0.0246 **

Mean dependent var -0.009804      S.D. dependent var 10.77262
Sum squared resid  6852.684      S.E. of regression  8.677800
R-squared          0.415349      Adjusted R-squared  0.351102
F(10, 91)         6.464853      P-value(F)         1.84e-07
rho               -0.041699      Durbin-Watson      2.058231

F-tests of zero restrictions:

All lags of pdfadl      F(5, 91) = 8.6287 [0.0000]
All lags of protestlvd1 F(5, 91) = 2.4545 [0.0392]
All vars, lag 5         F(2, 91) = 2.9835 [0.0556]

```

ANNEX 2. The test result of the VAR modelling: ADL equation (2)

Equation 2: protestlvd1

	coefficient	std. error	t-ratio	p-value
const	-4.45917	46.8600	-0.09516	0.9244
pdfadl_1	-6.64113	5.59400	-1.187	0.2382
pdfadl_2	-1.53070	5.91719	-0.2587	0.7965
pdfadl_3	-8.40160	6.09189	-1.379	0.1712
pdfadl_4	-5.59462	6.00944	-0.9310	0.3543
pdfadl_5	-11.6049	5.39700	-2.150	0.0342 **
protestlvd1_1	-0.536677	0.101259	-5.300	8.03e-07 ***
protestlvd1_2	-0.335403	0.104548	-3.208	0.0018 ***
protestlvd1_3	-0.412819	0.100012	-4.128	8.11e-05 ***
protestlvd1_4	-0.426481	0.103845	-4.107	8.75e-05 ***
protestlvd1_5	-0.118621	0.0988943	-1.199	0.2335
Mean dependent var	1.715686	S.D. dependent var	565.3564	
Sum squared resid	20354955	S.E. of regression	472.9491	
R-squared	0.369472	Adjusted R-squared	0.300184	
F(10, 91)	5.332358	P-value(F)	3.69e-06	
rho	-0.010038	Durbin-Watson	2.012200	

F-tests of zero restrictions:

All lags of pdfadl	F(5, 91) =	1.3280 [0.2594]
All lags of protestlvd1	F(5, 91) =	8.0567 [0.0000]
All vars, lag 5	F(2, 91) =	3.1702 [0.0467]

ANNEX 3. The People's Daily chronological edition changes

人民日报各时期的版次对照表:

时期	版数
创刊 - 1956.6.31	4版
1956.7.1 - 1979	4或6版
1980 - 1994	8版
1995 - 2002	12版
2003 - 2009.6.30	16版
2009.7.1 - 2009.12.31	20版
2010 - 2018	24版
2019 - 至今	20版

Source: People's Daily.

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Ligita Šarkutė, Jiabin Song

KAIP KINIJOS KOMUNISTŲ PARTIJA TVARKOSI SU LEGITIMACIJOS KRIZE: KONFUCIANIZMO PROPAGAVIMO SĄSAJA SU DARBUOTOJŲ PROTESTO LYGIU

Anotacija. Straipsnyje siekiama išsiaiškinti konfucianizmo vaidmenų stiprinant Kinijos komunistų partijos legitimaciją. Po keturiasdešimt metų trukusios ekonominės reformos šiuolaikinė Kinija iš esmės funkcionuoja kaip pusiau kapitalistinė valstybė, tačiau dėl darbo klasės apsaugos stygiaus kyla nemažai konfliktų tarp darbuotojų ir jų darbdavių, o tai gilina autoritarinio Kinijos režimo legitimacijos krizę ir verčia ją ieškoti alternatyvių priemonių ortodoksinei ideologijai ir prievartos mechanizms savo legitimacijai stiprinti. Šiame straipsnyje ieškoma atsakymo į minėtą klausimą nagrinėjant koreliaciją tarp konfucianizmo nušvietimo (su konfucianizmo idėjomis susijusių pranešimų dažnio) didžiausiame režimo kontroliuojamame Kinijos laikraštyje „People’s Daily“ ir to, koku mastu kinai pripažįsta režimą teisėtu, ką rodo darbuotojų protestų Kinijoje lygis. Koreliacija tarp konfucianizmo idėjų, principų ir kitų atributų, straipsnyje bendrai vadinamų konfucianizmu, nušvietimo leikraštyje „People’s Daily“ ir darbuotojų protestų lygio 2011–2019 m. laikotarpiu, buvo nustatyta naudojant vektorinės autoregresijos (VAR) modelį. Analizės rezultatai atskleidė, kad 2011–2019 metais Kinijos komunistų partija naudojo konfucianizmą kaip vieną iš priemonių režimo legitimacijai stiprinti ir darbo klasės nepasitenkinimui mažinti. Be to, atsižvelgiant į tai, kad daugelis autoritarinių režimų laikosi panašios strategijos dėl dominuojančios religijos ar kultūros pasitelkimo stiprinant savo legitimaciją krizių metu, straipsnyje aptariamo tyrimo išvagos gali būti naudingos tolesniems lyginamiesiems autoritarinių režimų specifikos tyrimams.

Ligita Šarkutė, associate professor and senior research fellow, Vytautas Magnus University, Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, Department of Public Administration, Kaunas, Lithuania

E-mail: ligita.sarkute@vdu.lt

Jiabin Song, master of political science, Vytautas Magnus University, Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, Kaunas, Lithuania

E-mail: jiabin.song@alumni.vdu.lt

Ligita Šarkutė, docentė ir vyriausioji mokslo darbuotoja, Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, Politikos mokslų ir diplomatijos fakultetas, Viešojo administravimo katedra, Kaunas, Lietuva

El. paštas: ligita.sarkute@vdu.lt

Jiabin Song, politikos mokslų magistras, Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, Politikos mokslų ir diplomatijos fakultetas, Kaunas, Lietuva

El. paštas: jiabin.song@alumni.vdu.lt

