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## **The construction of China's national interest: between top-down rule and societal ideas**

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# The Construction of China's National Interest:

Between  
Top-Down Rule  
and  
Societal  
Ideas



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The resurgence of strongman politics, typified by Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, has raised doubts about the influence of societal actors on authoritarian regimes' foreign policies. Despite tightening authoritarian rule, there are vibrant societal debates about foreign policy in China. Scholars have pinpointed influential societal actors and their channels of impact. However, the conditions under which these Chinese societal actors affect China's foreign policy remain elusive.

This dissertation analyzes how experts from Chinese foreign policy think tanks and International Relations scholars, the most probable societal influencers, shape the construction of China's national interest. It draws upon frame analysis and quantitative content analysis of official statements, think tank reports, and academic articles, revealing no perfect transmission belt between official and societal interests. The study argues that proximity to the state and state openness dictate societal actors' influence. This study also assesses changes in political institutions and state-society relations during Xi Jinping's era, uncovering shifts in state openness to societal input and distinctions between think tanks and scholars. These insights prompt a reassessment of societal actors' role in authoritarian regime foreign policy.