

**THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S POLITICAL
CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE: CO-OPTING
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL FORCES
IN A ONE-PARTY STATE**

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Executive Summary

1. The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) is a quasi-government, quasi-civil organ that holds a full plenary session annually with that of the National People's Congress (NPC), together known as *lianghui*. This year, the CPPCC's plenary session will open on 3 March in Beijing.
2. The incumbent delegation composes of more than 2,000 members organized under 34 functional groups spanning political parties, associations, sectors by profession and so on. The CPPCC Standing Committee of 293 delegates meets more frequently and the body is further divided into nine special committees.
3. While the NPC is a rubber stamp that perfunctorily "legalizes" the decisions of state leaders, the CPPCC wields absolutely no institutional power in policy making.
4. Delegates may put forward proposals on a variety of issues to the government but it is up to the latter to decide if the proposals will be accepted. Adopted proposals, moreover, are not legally binding, and implementation has been fraught with difficulties owing to resistance from government authorities.
5. Under the provision of the Constitution of China, the CPPCC is also the principal institution through which China's eight non-communist or "democratic" parties cooperate with and provide consultation to the ruling Communist Party, whose supremacy is not to be challenged.
6. In the early days of the PRC's founding, the democratic parties and their personages were co-opted by the communist government to take up senior government positions. However, they were soon marginalized.
7. Considering its waning importance, diminishing roles and the arbitrariness in the adoption and implementation of delegates' proposals, it seems that the

CPPCC's *raison d'être* is to justify the CCP's claim that China is not a one-party state.

8. Nonetheless, in a one-party state such as China, the CPPCC may actually serve as a vital linkage between state and society. The crux is how to better translate feedback into policy that effectively reflects societal needs and sentiments.
9. Reform of the CPPCC, however, has come to a standstill. First, there has not been any progress towards turning the CPPCC into China's upper house, an idea mooted in the 1980s. Second, no efforts have been taken to adjust the existing functional groupings for better representation and reflection of emerging social groups and recent developments.
10. Today's CPPCC is stuck in a quagmire – transforming it into an upper house contravenes with the building of a political system with Chinese characteristics; stripping it of its official nature has met with strong resistance from the delegates themselves; yet disbanding it deprives the CCP of its façade of inclusiveness and “multi-party cooperation.” With no easy solution in sight, the status quo is likely to prevail.