

**Asien aktuell**

## **Bürgerrechte und Zivilgesellschaft in China: Diskursive Rechtfertigungsstrategien im Schatten parteistaatlicher Hegemonie**

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### **Summary**

Over the past few years the international media has reported on the increasing suppression of civil rights activists in China, with the crackdown severely reducing the space for the formulation of civil rights and civil society positions. Against this background this article examines discursive strategies used by members of the New Citizens' Movement — a civil rights movement that has taken shape since 2010 and that first developed an online presence in 2012 — to justify their claims. Based on an analysis of video interviews with activists conducted since June 2010 and on selected documents of the New Citizens' Movement, it is argued that the various discursive strategies employed over time have posed different degrees of challenge to the Chinese Communist Party's power. Beside references to concepts such as "civil society" and "civil rights," it is particularly the claims of "historic renewal" and "a religious mission" raised by a few activists in the early years of the movement that seem to have provoked the Party's harsh reaction. With discursive spaces now narrowing, the activists appear to have adapted their strategies of justification. Over time they have referred more and more frequently to "constitutionalism" and "the rule of law", topics that were also prominent on the party-state's agenda in 2014 — appearing alongside other references to the official discourse used by the activists, which are becoming more pronounced. This change in strategy still allows some activists to voice their claims; that despite the fact that the discursive space for civil rights positions is continuously narrowing.

**Keywords:** China, civil rights, civil society, rule of law, New Citizens' Movement

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