

Ideology, Organization, and Party Norms

Chinese tradition, from its fusion of moral and political systems to the social emphases on family hierarchy in all levels of Chinese life, remains a constant factor in determining how contemporary China has been shaped culturally, philosophically, sociologically, intellectually, and economically and has exerted profound influence on today's Chinese politics as well as the CCP's high-ranking leaders. However, the acknowledging of traditional Confucian influence on the contemporary Chinese communist elite is by no means a suggestion that Marxism and Leninism, as their own philosophies, have not had a unique influence on China's intellectual and political development in the twentieth century. While both Chinese and Western components played a significant role in Mao's thoughts and behaviors, it was ultimately traditional Chinese culture, in Stuart Schram's observation, that acted as the predominant influence on Mao's political persuasions, and it was evident at the time that Mao's "deepest emotional tie is still to the Chinese nation."¹ This is a sentiment manifested in not only Mao's straightforward writing style and his deference to prolific Chinese history and classical thought, but also in his personal interest in Chinese primary sources and their focus on the politics, philosophy, history, literature, and poems of Chinese classical thought. Compared to other influential CCP theorists, such as Qu Qiubai, Wang Ming, and Bo Gu, Mao was more concerned than they about dissecting and isolating useful elements of Marxist and Leninist thought in order to tailor their philosophies uniquely for China as a nation to transform the very substance of Marxism in order to adapt it to Chinese conditions.²

The birth of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was the consequence of scholarly inspiration among Chinese intellectuals who witnessed the violence and transformative power of the Russian revolution, an inspiration sustained

¹ Stuart R. Schram, "Chinese and Leninist Components in the Personality of Mao Tse-tung," *Asian Survey*, vol. 3, no. 6 (June 1963), pp. 272–273.

² Stuart R. Schram, *Mao Zedong: A Preliminary Reassessment*, p. 35.

and brought to fruition by a growing disdain for the monolith of Western imperialism. Leninism found its place as the edifice of a vanguard party dominated by the dedicated and disciplined revolutionary elite that projected an image of imaginary unity by celebrating the diverse interests of the people. Learning from the Soviet Union, the CCP established a system of one-party dictatorship in the name of the proletariat over other “classes” in the period of socialism that, in theory, ultimately came to evolve into a fully communist society. In the CCP, Mao established himself as an omnipotent figure who could successfully wield both robust formal authority and informal personalistic and charismatic power. The rise of Mao contributed greatly to his talents and ability to develop the Chinese communist movement and bring forward his vision for China’s future. Additionally, he rescued the CCP and the Red Army from nearly complete destruction in the Long March and successfully consolidated his power by winning the support of key factions in the party and unifying the communist armed forces in the late 1930s and the early 1940s. Ultimately, Mao led the CCP to defeat the Nationalist Army in the civil war at the end of the 1940s, a final path to the eventual formation of the PRC. Through this evolution of the CCP, one of the most important accomplishments that Mao achieved was to develop an appealing ideology that blended traditional Chinese political thought, Marxist social analysis, and Leninist proletarian vanguard theory into a singular political practice.

Deng Xiaoping’s ideological contribution to the CCP was evoked by his concerns about the legitimacy of the CCP during the reform era. Deng’s theory focused on the necessity of economic reform under the CCP political dictatorship enshrined by the four modernizations and the Four Cardinal Principles. Deng borrowed Mao’s tenet of “seeking truth from facts” to justify his pragmatic policies and ambitious programs of economic and military modernization, insisting that “building socialism with Chinese characteristics” would not compromise the orthodox communist ideology. In the post-Deng era, the CCP leaders have been technocrats instead of revolutionaries and economic growth and institution building have in some sense compromised previous notions of economic liberalism and political authoritarianism. In the wake of the growing domestic challenges of rampant corruption, pervasive unemployment, rising crime, and rural unrest, the CCP’s control over society has seen a progressive decline and its traditional instruments of control – propaganda, coercion, and political organization – have lost their power as instruments of discipline among the party members. On top of tremendous internal challenges, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet bloc and its repercussions had forced the third- and fourth-generation leaders to initiate a series of changes in China’s red trajectory. Among these were additional modifications to the orthodox ideology, the institutionalization of the “collective leadership” principle, and the expansion of party membership into all sectors of society including private entrepreneurship. As a result of these developments, all post-Deng leaders,

including the fifth-generation leadership headed by Xi Jinping, have made the effort to maintain economic growth, improving the living standards of the people, and promoting prosperity and stability for the survival and legitimacy of the CCP.

This chapter examines key components and principal features of the ideologies, institutions, and norms that have played significant roles in influencing CCP politics. It focuses specifically on the ideology, organizational structure, and operational dynamics of the CCP throughout the evolution of the party. The CCP leaders have consistently upheld the idea of “unity of theory and practice,” meaning that policy implementation must always be informed by ideological considerations and feasibility in practice. Inspired by both a communist party-state built on a Soviet model and by the legacy of imperial bureaucratic government, the party elite sought to construct a powerful and coherent party-state backed up by a unifying communist ideology. This chapter analyzes the various mechanisms and instruments of political and social controls developed by the CCP, and it investigates basic guiding principles upon which the party has relied to promote cohesion, guide social attitudes, and to reshape political practices of the party elite.

COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY AND THE POLITICS OF IDEOLOGY

The Bolsheviks saw communist ideology as the basis for creating a new social order, “a utopia which represented human endeavor at its highest.”³ Building on the roots, communist ideology may be viewed as “a systematic body of goals, ideas, and assumptions shared by the elites and affecting their attitudes and behavior.”⁴ However, ideology is more than a manifesto; it is a dynamic creature, and communist ideology did not enter a vacuum when it found its way into Chinese political and intellectual thought. Ideologies and their interactions have been continuously reshaped, refashioned, and reinterpreted by different generations of leadership. A pattern has emerged where each party general secretary of a new generation of leadership creates a revised iteration of previous ideologies as the party’s theoretical guideline. As the emperor in traditional China was required to consistently follow the established Confucian orthodoxy, Confucian ideology created and preserved a tradition throughout eras of imperial dynasties. The ideological monopoly of Confucianism naturally played a crucial role in establishing a framework that structured and reinforced coherence between the beliefs and practices of the emperor and his bureaucracy, a heritage of unity that ultimately became fertile soil for the new seeds of communist thought.

As Marxism-Leninism provided little for the early CCP leaders to use in reality because the CCP was ordered by the Comintern to establish a united

³ Steve Phillips, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*, p. 125.

⁴ Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Communist Political System*, p. 64.

front with the Nationalist Party that represented mainly the interests of landlords and businessmen but not the interests of the Chinese proletarians, Chen Duxiu's failure to establish a "theory" that could guide the CCP's revolution contributed partially to the lack of experience in adapting foreign ideology into a Chinese context and partially to the interference of the Comintern that tried to control the CCP while Chen strove to keep its independence throughout his tenure. Under the Comintern's tutelage following the dismissal of Chen Duxiu, Marxism-Leninism was imposed as the ultimate guide to Chinese practices. However, the party suffered severely under what Mao named "Left opportunist lines" opened by Qu Qiubai, Li Lishan, and Wang Ming.⁵ The unsuccessful application of Marxism and Leninism into Chinese society, along with the failure to establish a consistent and applicable ideology in the Chinese communist movement, contributed to the frequent splits in the party leadership that led the Chinese revolution to a low ebb. The CCP leadership was eventually forced to move from Shanghai to the Jiangxi base areas in order to escape being destroyed by the secret police of the ruling nationalist government.

For a communist regime, ideology is a principal tool in control, as coercion is a normal and regular behavior in keeping the party and society unified under the communist vision. As a result, in CCP elite politics, the legitimacy of a leader in commanding the party is built largely on his ideological credentials. Mao himself learned this reality about communism when he was emasculated by a loss of power following the party's retreat to the Jiangxi base area and the continual influence of Moscow on the CCP's operations. Consequently, Mao struggled as he sought the support of Stalin, but he simply did not have the ideological credentials of a communist. Mao's emphasis on the studies of Marxist and Leninist theories following the Zunyi Conference was one of his first attempts to establish himself as the ideological authority in the CCP.

Communism shaped the course of the Chinese revolution before 1949, the socialist construction after the founding of the PRC, and China's reform in the post-Mao era, as events that led to Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought becoming the ideological orthodoxy of the CCP. Marxism and Leninism were embraced by Chinese intellectuals at a time when China was weak and deterioration spread throughout the economy along with politics and society as a whole. While Marxism existed on the premise that social issues were inextricably tied to economic and political policies and offered "a unified explanation of the diverse problems internal to Chinese society," Leninism was concerned with the implications of imperialism; it viewed imperialism as the "highest state of capitalism" that "permitted the relation of internal problems to imperialist activities in China."⁶ Together, Marxism and

⁵ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong wenji* [Collected work of Mao Zedong], vol. 7, p. 133.

⁶ Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution*, p. 47.

Leninism were a tag-team ideological force that could theoretically tackle the problems China was facing from any angle.

Communist ideology is a systematic set of ideas and beliefs all fueled by the notion of a continued role for the state in matters of social, political, and economic life, an arrangement that necessitates continued justifications of its legitimacy. Although Marxism-Leninism has been revered as the undisputable official ideology of the CCP, all CCP leaders – Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping – have in some way modified it for their political needs and for the climate of China's economy and social life during their respective periods of rule. While different political and economic realities triggered these types of adjustments in official ideology, Chinese culture, philosophy, and intellectual traditions were always available to play a crucial role in defense of whatever modifications were deemed necessary.

Unlike others, however, Mao Zedong sought to create a theory on politics, organization, and a strategy of the revolutionary struggle to process a communist revolution in an overwhelmingly rural society. In his essay "On Contradiction," Mao "instrumentalizes Marxist theory as a guide to analyze empirical conditions in society, and reaffirms the possibility of revolutionary transcendence through a theoretical grasp of social and political contradictions in their most empirical manifestation."⁷ As Mao's political philosophy is influenced by the dialectical materialism of Marx and Lenin, a theory "incorporates the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism into specific practice in China,"⁸ according to Mao. Compared with other CCP leaders, the most important and unique contribution that Mao made in the development of the CCP ideology was perhaps what Brantly Womack has described as "the unity of theory and practice" as the basic principle of Mao's political thought.⁹ While Mao made the attempt to utilize Marxism-Leninism in Chinese practice, he attempted to blend some important principles and concepts of Marxism-Leninism with traditional Chinese ideas and philosophy to form a new theory that could solve the problems in China.

The resulting theory of Mao Zedong Thought includes the following key components. The *mass line* (*qunzhong luxian* 群众路线) is the principle of so-called democratic centralism balanced with encouragement of mass participation through the form of support for revolutionary actions and party-initiated political campaigns. The notion of *seeking truth from facts* (*shishi qiushi* 实事求是) was not so much a tenet of empiricism as it was a reassessment of dogmatic approaches to politics and society, fueled by the expectation that the public's interests remained paramount. The *united front* (*tongyi zhanxian* 统一战线) tactic was used by Mao as a device to seek support against the major outside enemies of the CCP as well as his primary intra-party rivals. These rivalries were less related to factional alliances of traditional China and more to

⁷ Ibid., p. 135. ⁸ Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Mao Zedong wenjie*, vol. 8, p. 339.

⁹ Brantly Womack, *The Foundations of Mao Zedong's Political Thought, 1917–1935*, p. xii.

matters of the expedience found in temporary unity among different interests. Unconstrained by rigid ideologies or “truths,” Mao used the “major contradiction” (*zhuyao maodun* 主要矛盾), the “secondary contradiction” (*ciyao maodun* 次要矛盾), the “non-antagonistic contradiction,” and the “antagonistic contradiction” to define his “friends” and “enemies” under different circumstances. Once a primary enemy was identified as an antagonistic and major contradiction, all other players in politics at that time including less damaging enemies (secondary antagonistic contradictions) would become potential and temporary allies on the road to destroying the primary enemy.

Class struggle was another key component of Mao Zedong Thought that was not only both ontological reality and epistemological inquiry but also theoretical justification for a series of political campaigns. Mao viewed Marxism-Leninism as a “philosophy of struggle” and insisted that the party must “talk about class struggle every year and every month.”¹⁰ While Marx viewed class consciousness as the product of social relations, Mao was convinced that consciousness could change outside those relations. For Mao, class consciousness was determined in part by one’s attitude. If education and class struggle could change that consciousness, per Zweig’s observation of Mao’s radical ideas, “then through propaganda and mobilizing progressive forces China’s backward society, opposition classes, and limited proletariat need not slow down the advent of the revolution.”¹¹

As the old official ideology, Marxism-Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought, no longer offered a central ideology to guide the political and economic activities of the CCP, the CCP leaders in the post-Mao era have started to flirt with “new” ideological principles as a cohesive and convincing set of normative values to justify the legitimacy of the current system. Instead of abstract theories for proletarian revolution and spiritual enrichment, this new ideology has a new focus on nationalism, patriotism, political stability, and economic prosperity. The so-called Deng Xiaoping Theory is related to ideological principles such as the Four Cardinal Principles, “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” “socialist market economy,” and other specific ideas on reform. The Deng Xiaoping Theory consisted of four notable components. First, economic reform launched by Deng Xiaoping was tasked with removing Maoists and New Leftists who opposed Deng’s use of capitalist elements in economic reform, along with remedying growing social inequality and the degradation of the party’s integrity. A key component in these efforts was the spirit of “emancipating the mind and *seeking truth from facts*,” indicating the need not only to “liberate” the thoughts of the party and its members from the

¹⁰ Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Mao Zedong nianpu, 1949–1976* [A chronicle of Mao Zedong, 1949–1976], vol. 5, pp. 151–152.

¹¹ David Zweig, *Agrarian Radicalism in China, 1968–1981*, p. 22.

rigid and outdated communist ideology but also to turn focus away from ideology and instead wholeheartedly strive for China's "four modernizations."

As the second component in Deng Theory, China needed to promote the "Four Cardinal Principles," the chief of which was the mandate to *uphold CCP leadership*. The legitimacy of the CCP rule in China was not based on the election that had been exercised by Western democracies but rather by what Deng had vaguely described to be the "historical choice" for the CCP's leading position. For the third component of his theory, Deng insisted that the CCP's leadership was indisputable and he believed that China's economic development should attempt to emulate the successful experience of Western industrial nations based on free market and capitalism because China was still in the "primary" or "initial stage" of socialism and still needed to borrow from many aspects of capitalism. The last component was *building socialism with Chinese characteristics*, an ideological guideline meant to insist on the distinctive Chinese way of developing a state-controlled market economy with market resources and regulatory policies, navigated and directly administrated by the state under the total control of a single party rather than by the Western process of multiparty democracy and free-market transactions.¹²

Although the CCP in the post-Mao era faced a "crisis of faith" as a result of these enemy attitudes toward communism, Jiang Zemin considered ideology to be a useful mechanism for setting a public agenda as well as an opportunity to make his own contributions to the canon.¹³ Realizing the continued importance of a formal ideology to an enduring political system, Jiang created the so-called "Three Representations" (*sange daibiao*) that aimed to establish the vanguard role of the party as a representation of the most advanced force of production. Because this ideology was a source of the leadership's legitimacy, Jiang relied on it not only to reinforce his institutional authority and ability to define the ideological framework but also to build a "cult of personality" and continue his influence over the system after he retired from the post of general secretary.¹⁴ The following economic development inevitably led to increased social differentiation and a corresponding differentiation of social interests. The CCP needed to not only understand the new situation and face the challenges it presented but also play a dominant role in the development of economic progress, technology, and culture as the primary mediator among these diversifying interests.

One of the key components in the "Three Representations" was Jiang's attempt to establish a consensus in the party in terms of how to categorize the reemergence of the growing upper class during China's economic reform,

¹² Ping Zheng and Richard Scase, *Emerging Business Ventures under Market Socialism: Entrepreneurship in China*, p. 43.

¹³ Lowell Dittmer, "Leadership Change and Chinese Political Development," p. 915.

¹⁴ Joseph Fewsmith, "The Evolving Shape of Elite Politics," in *The Nature of Chinese Politics*, Jonathan Unger (ed.), p. 266.

people who were considered enemies of the CCP during the Chinese revolution and people about whom Mao was highly concerned throughout his tenure. When Deng stated that “getting rich was glorious” and he “allowed a part of the population to get rich first,” he didn’t resolve the theoretical issue presented by the question of whether this growing class of the populace was fit for membership within the party elite, or whether they were still untrustworthy as perceived enemies of communism. To remedy this concern, Jiang’s “Three Representations” rejected a class-based approach to politics and stated that “the amount of wealthy ones cannot be taken as the standard for judging an advanced element or a laggard.” The rich, along with the PRC’s rapidly expanding middle class of private business owners and venture capitalists, came to represent society’s “advanced productive forces” because they made “the contribution to developing the socialist productivity and other socialist causes.”¹⁵ This new social strata composed of private entrepreneurs, managers and technical personnel employed by foreign companies, professionals, and intellectuals, from Jiang’s perspective, not only had to be treated as members among the “people” but also were to be revered as the “most advanced productive forces” and the most dynamic forces in China’s economic development. Overall, Jiang intended to change the nature of the CCP from a “revolutionary party,” the vanguard of proletarian revolution against the class enemies, to a “governing party” that protected the population and represented all people who were engaged in China’s economic development.

Along with Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao proposed the “Scientific Outlook on Development” (*kexue fazhan guan*) as the guiding ideology, appealing to greater attention on social and environmental problems in order to create a harmonious society. While Jiang Zemin paid primary attention to promoting the incentives for all social groups to contribute to China’s spectacular growth, Hu emphasized popular support and was therefore particularly concerned about inequitable income distribution among people and regions, the socio-economic downsides of China’s economic development, and the increasing social conflicts and protests by disadvantaged social groups such as workers and farmers. Since economic modernization was still a top priority, Hu asked for “comprehensive, balanced, and sustainable” development that focused on the interests of the people such as protecting the environment and guaranteeing that the poor had access to education and health care and a balanced development between not only regions but also between urban and rural areas, economic and social developments, man and nature, domestic and international priorities, and personal and collective needs. But if such development could be understood as equivalent to growth in GDP at the cost of social cohesion, environment, and efforts against inequality, the goal for a harmonious society would suffer and the legitimacy of the CCP in ruling China would be undermined. Hu attempted

¹⁵ Jiang Zemin, *Jiang Zemin wenxuan*, vol. 3, pp. 286–287.

to create an ideology that incorporated some Confucian humanistic ideas into development in order to create more palatable economic reform, an appealing idea at a time when China mainly followed an unrestrained economic growth model that brought about rampant corruption, moral degradation, growing social problems, a widening gap between rich and poor, and widespread environmental crises. Traditional notions of Confucian harmony were borrowed by Hu Jintao to keep inharmonious social disorder from slowing material progress.

Xi Jinping has a similar set of ideological directives called the “four comprehensives” that sum up his agenda and summarize the CCP’s efforts to build a prosperous society. While Xi emphasizes the party’s efforts to strengthen its own leadership and crack down on corruption, he also seeks a balance among the CCP’s effective rule, economic growth, social justice, rule of law, and overall clean governance. To a certain extent, the “four comprehensives” aim to develop the “Three Representations” through substantially more concrete and specific policy from economic policy (promotion of prosperity), political policy (improvement of governance), administrative policy (deepening reform), and institutional policy (promotion of the rule of law). The “four comprehensives” consequently serve to clarify Xi’s ambiguous “China Dream” of national rejuvenation, a fuzzy concept that aims to motivate the Chinese to realize prosperity, happiness, and China’s place in the world.

Xi Jinping’s “China Dream” is related to both domestic and international components. Domestically, the CCP needs to continue its economic reform and improve its image to ensure the support of the Chinese people after having suffered a crisis of public confidence due to corruption, economic stagnation, and growing social problems. Internationally, China needs to maintain unity, independence, and political stability so that it can regain its pre-eminent position in the world with a strong cohesion of nationalism and patriotism. Xi’s “China Dream” therefore attempts to promote nationalism, patriotism, historical glorification, and the ancestral cultural pride of Confucianism as forces aimed to legitimize the rule of the CCP during China’s movements away from more than a century of humiliation and exploitation by foreign powers and into a new era of growth and economic independence.

The “China Dream” doctrine has become a propaganda campaign that serves to establish an ideological framework that justifies the continual rule of the CCP. One of the most prominent features of the “China Dream” idea is the synthesis of an official communist doctrine with the carefully crafted interpretations of Chinese heritage and Confucian values that remain at the core of China’s political and social identity. For Xi Jinping, blending the “China Dream” with Confucianism helps provide compelling ethical motivations to support the regime and inspires the Chinese people to participate in the party’s cause. Because communist ideology required significant maintenance during and after Mao’s era in order to hold favor with public opinion, the creation of a new ideology such as the “Three Representations,” the “Scientific Outlook of

Development,” or finally the “China Dream” remains an important step for the party to create its own narratives to justify its legitimacy. With the introduction of state-controlled capitalism in China’s economy, leaders in every generation have attempted to develop a similar set of legitimizing ideas that move beyond growth, materialism, and global status toward building institutions that can manage pluralism – a massive rural-to-urban transition, growth of a significant middle class, and development of institutions anchored in popular support that transcend simple economic-oriented performance-based legitimacy.¹⁶

The ideological development from one generational leader to another reflects a trend in which the party chiefs attempt to distinguish one generational leader from another so that they can declare their legitimacy as heads of the CCP. The rise of Mao after the Zunyi Conference in January 1935 provided the opportunity for him to establish ideological unity within the CCP, and “Mao Zedong Thought” was formally accepted as the new orthodoxy of party ideology. This successfully consolidated his authority in the party and allowed him to organize the party into an effective and unified political power. In the 1950s, Mao introduced “constant revolution under the proletariat dictatorship,” a justification of constant political campaigning and mass mobilization to purify the people and build a new socialist society. Ideology continued to be a useful tool in shaping policy, but its use also necessitated a defense against previous iterations of similar ideology, as seen in the shift from Mao’s class-struggle emphasis to Deng’s reform-oriented focus. After Deng replaced Hua Guofeng to take charge of the CCP, he had to reject key parts of the inherited Maoist orthodoxy and make attempts to restore the legitimacy of the CCP through economic reforms by revising communist ideology as needed. Deng did this by linking his version to China’s prosperity and the enhancement of Chinese confidence in the world, even though he did not remove Mao Zedong Thought as the guiding ideology of the party. Even so, for Deng, most ideas in the “Mao Zedong Thought” such as class struggle, continuing socialist revolution, and “preferring socialist weeds to capitalist seedlings” were seen as issues that would contribute nothing to his reform ideology but continuing ideological confusion and conflict.

The politics of ideology is also related to how a certain ideology has been officially named. While the “Mao Zedong Thought” and “Deng Xiaoping Theory” indicate a comprehensive system, similar to Marxism and Leninism, the “Three Representations” and the “Scientific Outlook on Development” imply only a certain contribution that a certain party chief such as Jiang or Hu has made to the party ideology and guiding principle. Awarding the ideology introduced by a party chief with a “thought” or “theory” links closely to whether a party chief has firmly established his status as the “core” of the leadership. Less than nine months after Xi Jinping was formally

¹⁶ David M. Lampton, *Following the Leader: Ruling China, from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping*, p. 77.

“honored” as the “core” leader at the Sixth Plenum of the Eighteenth Party Congress held in October 2016, the party internal media signaled a new development of party ideology titled as “Xi Jinping Thought.” “Xi Jinping Thought,” according to the *Dangjian yanjiu*, was “a series of Xi’s important speeches that formed a series of interrelated and interpenetrated new ruling ideas, thoughts, and strategies” and these new ruling ideas, thoughts, and strategies “further enrich and develop the scientific theories of the party.”¹⁷ Xi’s role has been clearly distinguished from those of both Jiang and Hu, and Xi has received the same status as Mao and Deng in terms of his contribution to party ideology, indisputable power enjoyed, high-degree elite respect and compliance, and historical position. In March 2018, “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” was officially incorporated into China’s constitution, following Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and Deng Xiaoping Theory.¹⁸

Ideologically driven policy continued to play a role after this consolidation, as it did in the maintenance of all previous regimes. The function of ideology in the post-Deng era, as Zheng Yongnian observes, has declined in overall use and ideology has been used to “elicit party cadres and government officials to identify with the top leadership, orient their behavior, and prevent their deviation from the leadership’s guidelines.”¹⁹ As a result, ideology for each post-Deng party chief has been more related to the different identities of each party general secretary rather than a systematic body of goals and ideas. Zheng terms it as “ideational identity,” which refers to an ideational mark associated with a particular political leader.²⁰ In order to “create” differences that could distinguish one from another, a party general secretary may manipulate some ideas by using various terms and descriptions to form a tautologically “new” ideology that inevitably becomes inconsistent with those of his predecessors following the generational succession. Most ideological systems are not completely consistent anyway, but few were so blatantly contradictory as Chinese communism was in the reform period.²¹ Compared with traditional imperial political systems that were upheld by a unified and consistent politicized Confucianism, the lack of unity and consistency of the Chinese communist ideology during most times has been one of the major sources of confusion and even endless intra-party conflicts.

¹⁷ Benkan bianjibu, “Zai dangde chuangxin lilun weida qizhi xia kuobu qianjin” [Taking great strides under the great banner of the party’s innovation theory], *Dangjian yanjiu*, no. 7 (2017), pp. 19–23.

¹⁸ See *Xinhua*, February 26, 2018.

¹⁹ Zheng Yongnian, *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor: Culture, Reproduction and Transformation*, p. 83.

²⁰ Ibid. ²¹ Julia Knong, *The Political Economy of Corruption in China*, pp. 117–118.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND ITS LIMITATIONS

The political system of the PRC has been profoundly influenced by both imperial Chinese and Soviet systems because both share several characteristics: centralized control and administration, the utilization of ideology to buttress the legitimacy of the system, the rejection or suppression of private interests and/or organized opposition to the state, and the promotion of competition among various bureaucracies in order to maximize control by the top leaders.²² The ultimate vision of Chinese communism was a structure dominated by one person whose policy was faithfully implemented at all levels of society, both by compliance and through the use of propaganda and coercion.²³ The “collective leadership” in which power is shared by individuals or factions becomes an alternative when a strong leader is not available or an appointed party chief fails to win the confidence of the party elite. For a traditional ruler, his legitimacy came from not only his moral and charismatic characteristics but also from his political skills and techniques in controlling the scholar-officials and the bureaucracy. The authority of a communist leader, in contrast, is related to his institutional position combined with the granted power in monopolizing control over the party affairs, secret police, and propaganda. Compared with a traditional ruler, in other words, a communist leader relies more on the party organization and control over the institutions in charge of security, propaganda, discipline, and appointment and promotion of the high-ranking leaders to consolidate his power and establish his domination in the leadership.

A formal party-state apparatus based on a hierarchical and centralized party is in theory run by a disciplined and an ideology-equipped vanguard. Compared with a party in traditional authoritarian regimes in which there was a limited governmental power into society and its programs, the party-state of the PRC relies on communist ideology, although it has been modified significantly and constantly over time, as the legitimate source of the CCP's rule. After the CCP took over the government from the Nationalist Party in 1949, the party-state atomized the old social structure and replaced it with a highly politicized and centralized structure under the party leadership and control. As special organizations were established for virtually every important major social group in China – peasants, urban workers, women, youth, students, each major religious group, and intellectuals as well as all important subgroups of China's intellectual and cultural elite – China's political system was transformed into a modern totalitarian polity, which, in contrast to traditional authoritarianism, intervened in virtually every aspect of China's social life.²⁴ However, there are significant differences between the CCP elite

²² Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform*, 2nd edition, pp. 171–172.

²³ Lampton, *Following the Leader*, p. 81.

²⁴ A. Doak Barnett, *China's Far West: Four Decades of Change*, p. 635.

and the Marxist-Leninist version of a communist vanguard. For Marx, the role of the vanguard was not to preach “the truth” but to “participate” closely in the process of class struggle and help the proletariat find, through its own historical practice, the ideal path to communist revolution.²⁵ The Leninist concept of the “vanguard” is related to the leaders of the exploited proletariat and the working class, not merely their representatives, following the principle of dictatorship of the proletariat, democratic centralism, and bans on factions.

In the CCP elite politics, formal rules, compliant procedures, and standard operating practices have been introduced not only to ensure stability and consistency but also to create a check on factional politics caused by informal personal interactions that could undermine the cohesion of the party. A central component of Chinese political culture, as David Lampton points out, “is the fear of *luan* or chaos, the fear of being rudderless and vulnerable in a predatory world.”²⁶ Institutionalization was pushed by Deng and his reform coalition to routinize and promote predictable processes that were deemed indispensable to the success of China’s modernization, and which sought to prevent any possible recurrence of disorder and “leftist” deviation in development, as well as to guard against the concentration of dictatorial authority that Mao had achieved.²⁷ Formal rules and procedures were employed to reinforce age limits, term limits, and step-by-step promotions. Many important decisions reflect the consideration of stability such as the succession of leadership, which is processed through a long and consensus-based consultation and negotiation where top positions are determined in advance before the candidates are formally appointed.

Formal organizations exist in abundance at the highest levels of both the CCP and the PRC structures. The members of the Politburo as the elite largely rely on the top organizations to which they are assigned to exert their control and influence in the party and state. Although party organizations in China were created throughout the entire system and penetrated into all levels, the PRC is a highly personalized system embedded in a complex organizational matrix and it even “has been far less institutionalized as a political system than was the imperial Chinese government.”²⁸ The members of the leadership, such as those in the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), are assigned certain responsibilities for distinct fields of work based on a *functional area of work* and a *degree of specialization*.²⁹ Power at the top of the Chinese political system has been highly concentrated in a small number of individuals who have wielded ultimate authority in the executive, legislative, and judicial spheres.³⁰ Although the CCP emphasizes the vital role that the “core” leader plays in

²⁵ Michael Löwy, *The Theory of Revolution in the Young Marx*, p. 136.

²⁶ Lampton, *Following the Leader*, p. 57.

²⁷ Alice L. Miller, “Institutionalization and the Changing Dynamics of Chinese Leadership Elite,” in *China’s Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy*, Cheng Li (ed.), p. 62.

²⁸ Lieberthal, *Governing China*, p. 206. ²⁹ Ibid., p. 211. ³⁰ Ibid., p. 214.

promoting the efficacy and cohesion of the leadership, the system pays great attention to empowering other members of the leadership to start subjective initiatives and develop their own creativities in the process of decision-making. The CCP differs from the Soviet Union under Stalin where the leadership and the Politburo were nothing more than convenient assemblies that gave legal force to Stalin's will. He constantly used terror to silence his real and imagined rivals. By promoting a "cult of personality" in the Soviet media and arts, Stalin established absolute authority and he was worshiped as a genius as an architect, a poet, a military commander, and a linguist.

Despite China's economic reform through a successful exercise of national capitalism in the post-Mao era, China structurally remains a communist party-state – a Leninist system designed to pursue social transformation through elite planning and subsequent mass compliance. In a dual party-state structure, the communist party plays the leading role in the political system while the state is responsible for organizing the representatives to support the party and pass laws and implement them. The combined function of the party and the state with the denial of any moral and spiritual authority independent of official ideological doctrine reinforces the domination and control over Chinese society. Oftentimes, the party takes responsibilities itself or it duplicates a role that is supposed to be the responsibility of the state if it wishes. Immediately after the CCP took over China in 1949, the party-state proceeded to build a modern totalitarian system in which the party succeeded in rapidly imposing a structure capable of controlling and mobilizing the mass of ordinary people, and the party committees and branches reached to the lowest level of society and penetrated all existing social organizations.³¹ In the post-Mao era, the party-state has been significantly transferred by removing the CCP from economic control over organizations, creating democratic elections at grassroots levels, and allowing managers and leaders of private enterprises into the party ranks. China's pursuit of modernization and openness to the world has brought about some significant changes: its economy and society have become more complex, with greater functional specialization and social differentiation creating a richer diversity of interests.³²

Since Deng Xiaoping launched China's economic reforms at the end of the 1970s, China has seen a growing tendency toward institutionalization of policy-making processes, leadership turnover and succession, and a reinforcement of the party's discipline. This institutionalization was initiated to promote economic growth, but in a noninstitutional way, and it took place during a time when none of the CCP leaders including Deng Xiaoping had absolute power like Mao had during the disastrous Cultural Revolution. Despite growing domination of the leadership since the mid-1980s, Deng never

³¹ Barnett, *China's Far West*, pp. 620–621.

³² Lucian W. Pye, "Jiang Zemin's Style of Rule: Go for Stability, Monopolize Power and Settle for Limited Effectiveness," in *The Nature of Chinese Politics*, Jonathan Unger (ed.), p. 212.

achieved the level of status that Mao did during his tenure, even as “mother in law,” as Zhao Ziyang once noted. As a result, institutionalization based on “collective leadership” became an alternative for the party leadership to seek coexistence rather than domination through force and coercion. When the era of charismatic leaders ended after Deng Xiaoping and the collective leadership was taken over by relatively colorless technocrats, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao continued institutionalization through institutional channels to maintain growth and stability,³³ even though the “rules” and “regulations” were not always in their favor as political actors.³⁴

The trend toward institutionalization has become a prominent feature in post-Mao politics as the driving force for institutionalization is derived from the implementation of reform programs introduced by Deng Xiaoping. These programs focus on routinizing the political and policy-making processes, installing consensus-based decision-making procedures to undo the concentration of arbitrary authority that was exercised by Mao, restoring the organizational discipline in the party, and establishing age and term limits in officials’ promotions and retirements. The system of so-called “collective leadership,” a crucial aspect of the institutionalization of the CCP political process in preventing the overconcentration of power in individual leaders, reinforces the process of decision-making through debate, negotiation, compromise, consultation, and voting among the members of the leadership.³⁵ Institutionalization in the post-Deng era facilitates several channels for the expression of diverse interests and views in the policy-making process and therefore discourages the pursuit of interests through personal ties and factionalism.

Growing institutionalization has become possible due partially to the change of dynamics within the informal politics in the CCP leadership. The separation of formal and informal politics in analyzing the CCP elite is difficult because the operations of formal institutions often rely on informal personalistic maneuvers and informal politics often taking place within the formal institutions. In the post-Mao era, formal institutions, written regulations and rules, and party norms have increasingly played an important role in elite politics. Factional competitions have been less violent and bargaining for leadership cooperation and competition has dominated elite politics in the post-Deng eras. Additionally, the increasing tendency for the technocracy to take important positions in top party and state leadership has further promoted

³³ Zhiyue Bo, “The Institutionalization of Elite Management in China,” in *Holding China Together: Diversity and National Integration in the Post-Deng Era*, Harry J. Naughton and Dali L. Yang (eds.), p. 71.

³⁴ Joseph Fewsmith, “The 18th Party Congress: Testing the Limits of Institutionalization,” in *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 40 (Winter 2013).

³⁵ Jing Huang, “Institutionalization of Political Succession in China: Progress and Implications,” p. 85.

institutionalization where norms and rules change to favor technocratic interests.

Institutionalization has also been encouraged because, unlike times prior, the process of institutionalizing political power allows leaders to consolidate their influence and cultivate personal ties and patronage under a framework that is legal. In addition, increasing political pluralism and relatively growing transparency, combined with more openness in the media, promote institutionalization measures because previous members of the elite would often face pressure for their continued interference in leadership affairs after leaving their posts. The development of institutionalization inevitably undermines these strictures, allowing those in power to cultivate their influence through personal ties to the incumbent leaders and his staff.

However, political institutionalization in the post-Mao era cannot be overestimated. Although rules for standardizing promotional procedure have been stipulated, these rules are mainly “hard requirements” (*ying zhibiao*, 硬指标) such as requirements for education and training and universal regulations for age limits and minimum or maximum service terms. For example, these “hard requirements” have been institutionalized in guiding the appointments and promotions of the PLA officers. Since Deng launched the reform at the end of the 1970s, more than 2,000 regulations for recruitment, training, education, the age of an officer, time and position for each officer in their career track at each level, and active duty regulations on career progressions have been introduced to push the PLA’s regularization and institutionalization.³⁶ Compared with the military politics under Mao’s era, career progressions and promotion during the period of reform have increasingly become more transparent and thus more predictable. “Soft requirements” (*ruan zhibiao*, 软指标) are related to job competence, political reliability, loyalty to the party, talent and ability, outstanding ethical conduct, and prominent performance achievement, all of which are defined, decided, and approved by one’s superiors or higher level leaders. These “soft requirements” certainly play the crucial role in determining who will move on and who can be lucky enough to be awarded “fast-track” promotion when they reach age limits or service limits at a certain level.

Also, the limitations of institutionalization have consequently become evident for the process of leadership succession throughout the post-Mao reform. There has been no institutionalization in regulating the competition for power and there has been no clear rule in choosing a “core-in-waiting.” Under a system in which there is an absence of a dominating political figure similar to Mao and Deng, and there is a “more transactional system-maintenance type of leader” and “more norm-constrained figures who are

³⁶ Elizabeth Hague, “PLA Career Progressions and Policies,” in *The “People” in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China’s Military*, Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner (eds.), p. 238.

primus inter pares within a collective group,” new methods for leadership selection and succession are needed not only to regulate the competition of party elite for power but also to provide legitimacy to the new leadership.³⁷ These methods and sets of rules are established to ensure that the competition for power within the elite remains a process that stays under control and does not threaten the system itself.³⁸ Political institutionalization in China had further showed some weaknesses after decades of collective leadership prior to the rise of Xi Jinping. Although the collective and depersonalized leadership style based on growing institutionalization had contributed to China’s economic success, the CCP faced tremendous challenges when the party chose its fifth-generation leaders: a growing crisis of faith in communist ideology, the party’s failure in disciplining its members and containing corruption, a prolonged slowdown of China’s economy, the widening gulf between rich and poor, the increasing unrest, and moral degradation of society.

Despite its limitations in CCP elite politics, institutionalization has been encouraged by the party to regulate leadership politics through a set of established and widely accepted rules and standard operating practices that regulate decision-making among the party elite. In fact, the tendency toward institutionalization in the post-Deng era has facilitated a significant level of stability in this way. However, the tendency toward institutionalization could be viewed at most as institutional innovation itself in Chinese politics.³⁹ Joseph Fewsmith has observed that two important personnel arrangements initiated by Jiang Zemin in 2002 indicated some limitations on the degree of institutionalization: The first was the blatant expansion of the PBSC from seven to nine members, an effort undertaken by Jiang to keep tabs on his successor, Hu Jintao; the second was the following decision for Jiang to grant two additional years to himself as the CMC Chairman.⁴⁰ Teiwes argues that moves such as these indicate that Jiang Zemin’s authority “rests largely on a combination of office and political skill, a situation not unlike ‘normal politics’ in other political systems.”⁴¹ Although political retirement has become a new norm in the post-Mao era, it is not a norm that is rigidly applied to the party chief, as seen in Jiang’s actions undertaken to exert his own will on the fourth-generation leadership under Hu Jintao. The retired party chiefs always tend to arrange for their trusted followers to be present within the party’s decision-making organs, such as the PBSC and the Politburo, in an

³⁷ Lampton, *Following the Leader*, pp. 53, 59.

³⁸ Rod Wye, “China’s Leadership Transition,” in *Charting China’s Future: Domestic and International Challenges*, David Shambaugh (ed.), p. 26.

³⁹ Joseph Fewsmith, *The Logic and Limits of Political Reform in China*, p. 39.

⁴⁰ Joseph Fewsmith, “Elite Politics: The Struggle for Normality,” in *China Today, China Tomorrow: Domestic Politics, Economy, and Society*, Joseph Fewsmith (ed.), p. 158.

⁴¹ Frederick C. Teiwes, “The Problematic Quest for Stability: Reflections on Succession, Institutionalization, Governability, and Legitimacy in Post-Deng China,” in *China under Jiang Zemin*, Hung-mao Tien and Yun-han Chu (eds.), p. 75.

attempt to check and control their successors. As another example, Jiang Zemin's crucial role in choosing members of the PBSC and the Politburo for both the fourth and the fifth-generation leadership reflected his continued and powerful influence on the party even after his official position had ended. Hence, there is still no truly institutionalized procedure for the total transfer of power.⁴²

Like the high-ranking civilian officials, the army leaders have been less constrained by institutional rules and regulations. While career promotion largely depends on education and job performance and follows a relatively transparent process in lower level PLA units, upward mobility of leading PLA officers still greatly relies on mechanisms of political reliability, personal loyalty, historical background with powerful and influential incumbent or retired leading generals, and the quality of *guanxi* network. Whereas the PLA has made an effort to set up regulations and rules for promoting the PLA officers at lower levels (under deputy regiment), there is little evidence to suggest the PLA has regularized and institutionalized upward mobility of high ranking generals. Arguably, this may partially contribute to the continued influence of traditional Chinese political/social norms in which morality and attitude trump "technical" competence. This may be also caused by the nature of political interaction or process in the high command in which, as Lowell Dittmer points out, "informal politics plays an important part in every organization at every level, but the higher the organization the more important it becomes" because "the tasks to be performed are relatively unstructured, the area of discretion large, personal judgment crucial, the demand for quick decisions great, and secrecy imperative, informal politics prevails."⁴³

There have been complaints recently from public media about the age and term limits. When Deng Xiaoping launched economic reform in the late 1970s, he needed a large number of educated young cadres to play roles as vanguards. However, the leading positions in the party, state and army were occupied by a large number of aging and less educated revolutionary cadres. Deng had to force them to retire by imposing age and term limits. Hence, the age and term limits were imposed to accomplish certain tasks by certain time limits; the limits put on today's officials' appointments or promotions because of their ages, according to official media, are "not only unfair but also unreasonable."⁴⁴ It is fair to say that the institutionalized rules and regulations are not necessarily the best rules and regulations to benefit the party and the country but rather the compromises within the party elite and intra-party interest groups or factions under certain circumstances and at certain times.

⁴² Ibid., p. 76. ⁴³ Lowell Dittmer, "Modernizing Chinese Informal Politics," pp. 21–22.

⁴⁴ Xu Yaotong, "Pojie ganbu 'tianhua ban' kunju youlai yu zhengzhi tizhi gaige" [Solving the dilemma of 'ceiling' for cadres' promotion relies on the reform of political system], in *Renmin wang*, March 2, 2010, <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/11058344.html> (accessed on July 30, 2017).

Under a system without a paramount leader and rule of law, post-revolutionary-generation leaders such as Jiang and Hu had to rely on limited institutionalization to manage their day-to-day operations as political rulers. Despite the absence of strong personal power during the early period of Jiang's leadership and the almost entire tenure of Hu's leadership, the emphasis of collective leadership and institutionalization of party rules and procedures were thought to be able to help Jiang and Hu establish and consolidate their political power. For example, after the third-generation leader Jiang Zemin was appointed as party chief, he promoted institutionalization to consolidate his primacy in the decision-making structures, coordinate interests and policy preferences among the political elites, and stabilize leadership relations in the policy decision-making process. At the same time, institutionalization was pushed by Jiang to consolidate his control over the PLA, which included promoting a younger and better-educated officer corps on the basis of professional expertise, frequently rotating top military personnel in major military regions to prevent senior officers from developing personal power bases, and establishing a more effective and capable People's Armed Police to take over all duties in civilian affairs from the PLA to disconnect the PLA commanders from local authorities.⁴⁵ In addition, institutionalization was promoted by new-generation leadership successors to limit the interference of their predecessors and the retired senior veteran leaders who handed over their power to the younger-generation bureaucratic leaders while maintaining their informal influence.

The collective leadership during the reform era in which the party chief stood as first among equals rather than as paramount leader had mainly served to seek common interests and reach win-win situations regulated by limited institutionalization and based on compromise and negotiation. Many high-ranking leaders were concerned that the collective leadership system created by Deng to promote adaptability and resilience had turned into a system in which the party officials sought exchanges of interest and mutual protection, often at the cost of party principles and discipline. There was doubt about the collective leadership because it neither followed the rule of law (although there was limited institutionalization) nor did it have the power of a paramount leader who could single-handedly enact reform and control corruption in his tightly knit cabal of followers. Some of the CCP and its government officials, especially the second-generation reds, have perceived today's CCP and bureaucracy as flocking to serve the party and the Chinese people because they failed to inherit a spirit of revolutionary sacrifice from the "elder revolutionaries."

⁴⁵ Huang, "Institutionalization of Political Succession in China," pp. 87–88.

REVOLUTION AND ITS LEGACY

“Iron Discipline,” Supervisory Organs, and Politics

One of the most important influences exerted by communist ideology and practice in China has been its emphasis on discipline for its organizations and members. The “iron discipline” is a powerful notion that the party has employed to control its members and ensure compliance with the party’s missions and objectives. The “iron discipline” also implies that an individual party official is not allowed to challenge or even question the decisions made by the party leadership or the paramount leader. Traditional scholar-officials were obligated to voice their concerns or differences whenever they believed that the ruler did not follow the Way and to provide their suggestions and advice to guide the ruler. In communist China, however, individual high-ranking party leaders must suppress their own desires and opinions and adjust their own positions to accommodate the party and its paramount leaders. In communist ideology, especially in Leninism and Stalinism, individual members were considered tools of the party who were expected to unconditionally comply with the commands of the top party leaders. In addition, the communist party relied on a web-like system of organizational controls to make sure that leadership members were loyal to the party because, as Joseph Stalin stated, “iron discipline in the party is impossible without unity of will and without absolute and complete unity of action on the part of all members of the party.”⁴⁶ The party-state made extensive efforts to influence the political attitudes and behaviors of not only the party elite but also the population. The top party elite are not even supposed to check the system – they are either part of the system that makes decisions in a collective leadership or they are the unconditional followers of the paramount leader.

While iron discipline facilitated the process of decision-making and the implementation of leadership’s decisions, a lack of tolerance of different approaches and options often discouraged political actors around the leadership, and the rigidity of the iron discipline often created results that were difficult to remedy in this way. In addition, debate was not allowed and factions were banned as the leadership members were compelled to silence their concerns or opinions. For example, almost all top party leaders were compelled to endorse Mao’s radical GLF under the pressure to unconditionally follow the Chairman and “keep up” with Mao’s steps. The party elite themselves were also forced to keep silent under the “iron discipline” and they were expected to not only to show their faith in the party’s policy but also safeguard Mao’s image as a flawless and “forever correct” sage ruler when the GLF only brought disaster, famine, and economic dislocation on an unprecedented scale. It was only when

⁴⁶ Joseph Stalin, quoted from Bernard K. Johnpoll in *A Documentary History of the Communist Party of the United States: The Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945*, p. 185.

the GLF had all but destroyed the legitimacy of the CCP and the regime faced a crisis of survival, that Mao was finally willing to allow the party to change course and “correct” previous measures – even this was done under the pretense that Mao’s vision had simply not yet gone far enough.

Although personal ties play an important role in elite politics, individual loyalty to the party remains an absolute because it concretely ties one’s ethics and moral obligation to one’s political actions. No matter how close personal relationships are and how strong the cohesion of a faction can be, a high-ranking party official will be abandoned if he or she becomes a perceived enemy of the party. The case of Zhang Guotao, one of the most powerful party leaders and head of the Fourth Front Army during the 1930s, reflects a pattern of how a party official tailors personal loyalty to both an individual leader and to the party as a system. When Mao and Mao’s followers in Yan’an targeted Zhang, Zhang’s subordinates and the military generals in the Fourth Front Army bravely stepped out to protect Zhang. Xu Shiyong, a high-ranking army official in the Fourth Front Army, even organized a group of party officials and army leaders of the Fourth Front Army to use force in order to rescue Zhang Guotao who was put in house arrest in Yan’an – a clear sign that showed their disapproval with the CCP leadership under Mao, whom they perceived to be “persecuting” their leader. After Xu was arrested when the rescue plan was divulged to the wrong people, Xu even tried to attack Mao when Mao visited him in jail to persuade him to surrender.⁴⁷ However, once Zhang Guotao defected to the Nationalist Party, he immediately became the enemy of key high-ranking party and military leaders in the Fourth Front Army who had been his trusted followers in the past. This similar pattern can be found in the case of Lin Biao. Few of his trusted followers preserved their loyalty to Lin, and Lin himself did not even expect that his followers would go with him to the Soviet Union if he told them of his plan to flee China and run to the Soviet Union. This pattern remains in the reform era. When Guo Boxiong was accused of corruption, almost all of his trusted followers such as Fang Fenghui immediately made a clean break from him and pledged loyalty to the fifth-generation leadership headed by Xi Jinping.

Disciplinary enforcement has been a key component of the party’s operations in the CCP. Disciplinary organizations not only enforce organizational discipline but also launch anti-corruption campaigns against party officials. They set up rules and regulations, conduct investigations, impose penalties and engage in moral and ideological education. In the Mao era, the CCP disciplinary organizations were instrumental in pushing campaign-style rectifications and political campaigns were launched mainly to reinforce intra-party discipline and absolute obedience to the party. An unspoken mechanism at play here was the role of “mass supervision,” a community-watch

⁴⁷ Hong Xuezhi, *Hong Xuezhi huiyilu*, pp. 128–136; *Zhongguo xinwen wang*, August 31, 2009, www.chinanews.com/cul/news/2009/08-31/1842176.shtml (accessed on November 13, 2017).

environment where disciplinary offices encouraged the populace to monitor and criticize party officials in order to root out corruption wherever it appeared.⁴⁸ Under Deng's leadership, the powers of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection were enhanced due to its leading role not only in disciplining party officials and imposing the party's ideological control on its members, but also in cracking down on corruption that had become rampant following China's rapid economic growth. However, the powerful CCDI is a double-edged sword given that its power is immune from checks and has become a *de facto* interest group susceptible to corruption itself.

The CCDI has been increasingly involved in the leadership's politics and it has become a key party organization that is mainly used by the incumbent leader against political rivals. Using these disciplinary and supervisory organs to purge political rivals and consolidate power has not been an open secret that is practically standard operating procedure, a condition for guaranteeing that the new leader will have the means to create and solidify political power. Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao used the CCDI, albeit with some restraint, in order to defend themselves against political rivals in the party leadership who challenged their authority (as with the cases of Jiang's initiative against Chen Xitong and Hu's tactics against Chen Liangyu). However, Xi Jinping has relied on the CCDI not only for political survival but also as a consistent avenue to consolidation of his power.

The growing power of the CCDI has become evident since Xi became the CCP chief. Besides its power in disciplining party members at all levels, the CCDI branches also penetrate into other party organs including the Central Committee's General Office, Organization Department, and Propaganda Department. Most importantly, Xi relied on the CCDI and its anti-corruption campaigns to purge his political rivals and undermine their influence wherever necessary. When Xi formally replaced Hu Jintao in 2012, Xi understood that some powerful and influential party and army veterans would be tempted to make him into another Hu Jintao despite the overwhelming expectation for him to establish himself as a strong leader in disciplining party members, to rebuild faith in the CCP rule, and to crack down on rampant corruption.⁴⁹ In the PLA where Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou had dominated the army leadership, Xi Jinping was not treated seriously and was regarded as a figurehead like his

⁴⁸ Xuezhong Guo, "Controlling Corruption in the Party: China's Central Discipline Inspection Commission," in *The China Quarterly*, no. 219, (September) 2014, p. 599.

⁴⁹ For example, Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou attempted to make Xi a figurehead. The *PLA Daily* (*Jiefangjun bao*) accused Guo and Xu for "severely ruining the party unity, undermining the creativity, cohesion, and fighting force of the party, and damaging the CMC chairman responsibility system." Guo and Xu "claimed their loyalty to the party and follow the party's command while ignoring the CMC chairman, promised to the CMC chairman and showed their positions with high voices while never did anything, and avowed their loyalty to the CMC chairman while secretly accumulating public wealth and leaving the ways open." See the *Jiefangjun bao*, December 22, 2016.

predecessor Hu Jintao. Although Jiang Zemin and Zeng Qinghong played key roles in making Xi replace Li Keqiang as Hu's successor, they expected to control Xi due partially to Xi's political and personal ties with them during Xi's career and due partially to their conviction that Xi would be compelled to return the favor in the future.

The evidence shows that Xi's initiative to consolidate his power immediately after he took over the CCP was to target Zhou Yongkang, the former domestic security czar. Zhou was the key political ally of Bo Xilai, Xi's political rival who attempted to replace him. Zhou also provided the strongest opposition in the decision-making of the Politburo Standing Committee for purging Bo Xilai due to Bo's fall after his police chief and former ally Wang Lijun sought refuge in the US consulate in Chengdu. In addition, Zhou had remained a powerful influence in the security organizations through his trusted followers who were taking the important positions in those areas.⁵⁰ The CCDI has played a vanguard role in targeting Xi's political rivals and consolidating Xi's power in the top leadership. The types of anti-corruption campaigns launched by Xi and operated by the CCDI have been core political weapons that have helped Xi (1) achieve public support that has not only enhanced the legitimacy of the regime but also promoted the political and social stability of the country, (2) consolidate power and enhance Xi's authority over the party, (3) establish dominance in the party leadership and undermine the influence of other powerful factional groups such as the Shanghai Gang, the CYL faction, and the senior retired veterans, (4) purge political rivals and place Xi's trusted followers in key positions, and (5) shift the public focus on the growing tension between the party and the population due to the party officials' abuse of power and corruption.

It should be noted that implementing economic reform creates a paradoxical relationship with the anti-corruption campaigns as economic reform would be limited with the growing intensity of any anti-corruption campaign. The unprecedented scope and intensity of the anti-corruption campaigns launched by Xi have partially paralyzed many organizations of the CCP bureaucracy as with the case of the Shanxi Party Committee where eight out of thirteen leadership members were placed under investigation when Xi reorganized the Shanxi Party Committee. Xi would not slow down the pace of the anti-corruption campaign if his political rivals were not removed. So far, an overwhelming atmosphere under which nobody dares to break Xi's "political rules" (*zhengzhi guiju* 政治规矩) has been created, at least in the beginning stages of containing corruption as Wang Qishan described.⁵¹ It is

⁵⁰ The conversations of Zhou Yongkang and Bo Xilai were recorded secretly by Wang Lijun. The conversations regarding Zhou's commitment to support Bo Xilai as a replacement for Xi reportedly outraged Xi.

⁵¹ Wang Qishan has set up a roadmap for the CCDI's initiative against the rampant corruption in China: the anti-corruption campaign would make officials "not dare to be corrupt," then "not want to be corrupt," and finally "not be able to be corrupt." However, he has not been optimistic

also possible that such campaigns never find a conclusion, as growing tension in the leadership, economic slowdown, and rising social problems provide endless reasons to insist that corruption is the real problem in China's political arena.

Xi's strategy has so far focused on keeping a high-profile drive to root out malfeasance and corruption by targeting both tigers (high-ranking officials) and flies (lowly bureaucrats), as Xi reiterated in his "zero-tolerance" stance, where he vows to keep "waving high the sword against corruption" and "fastening the cage of regulations." However, the crackdown on the top leadership is selective as the purge has mainly been used to target specific political rivals who have challenged Xi's authority while those who support him or who do not challenge him, such as Li Peng and Wen Jiabao, appear untouched (at least at the moment). For the corrupt retired or incumbent high-ranking leaders who helped him in the past and do not become a threat to his leadership, Xi would very likely keep them untouched; but their children, relatives, and trusted followers would not be immune from investigation, demotion, or even imprisonment if Xi deems it necessary. Xi's strategy is to weaken their influence and, if they are still powerful and influential, force them to withdraw from the political arena altogether. For those who have enjoyed positive reputations and images domestically and internationally, Xi would prefer to besmirch their reputations and make them infamous by releasing their secret bank accounts and scandals to the media, such as with the case of Wen Jiabao.

Even if Xi does not put them in jail, their political influence will significantly decline as a result of continued attacks on their reputations. As they have to withdraw their interference in the fifth-generation leadership and even do their best to ingratiate themselves with Xi, Xi is eventually able to consolidate his power. For some high-ranking leaders who seemed not to pose a threat to Xi's authority but have remained untrustworthy to him, Xi and Wang Qishan have often targeted their children, spouses, and/or relatives, a gesture that intimidates these high-ranking officials and sends a message to them that they will not be targeted if they cooperate with Xi's administration as with the cases of Wen Jiabao, Li Peng, and He Guoqiang whose spouses or children were investigated.⁵² Similarly, the CCDI attempted to undermine the influence of the CYL officials by imprisoning Ling Jihua and investigating and purging many high-ranking officials with a CYL background, such as Yuan Cunqing, Qin Guangrong, Luo Zhijun, and Qiang Wei. Some of the disgraced CYL cadres are

because the CCDI cannot claim victory in the first stage of making officials "not dare to be corrupt" yet.

⁵² BBC, November 5, 2012, www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese_news/2012/11/121105_wen_family_wealth_probe.shtml (accessed on November 14, 2017); VOA, February 23, 2015, www.voachinese.com/a/news-hk-family-of-he-guoqiang-implicated-in-massive-fortune-grabbing-20170418/3814919.html (accessed on November 14, 2017).

even tied to Li Yuanchao, such as Zhao Shaolin, former secretary general of the Jiangsu Party Committee when Li was the party secretary.

The CCDI as a party organ has been traditionally controlled by the Politburo headed by a paramount leader. The Politburo's control over the CCDI, unlike its role as an independent watchdog, ensures not only the absolute power of the party leadership but also the limited scope of any political purge against the high-ranking leaders before it even begins. The process varies according to the government or party-ranking member accused but the winding layers of bureaucracy administer the same effect – total insulation from outside forces. Before any case related to officials at or above the level of vice-minister or deputy governor is investigated in the post-Deng era, it must first be approved by the CCDI Standing Committee. The CCDI's historical lack of independence from the party leadership continues to dominate the operating principle and philosophy of the party's disciplinary organizations.

For example, the CCDI Standing Committee must first report to the Politburo Standing Committee and obtain approval to investigate certain cases. Generally, the acceptance of a case involving officials at the deputy provincial or vice-minister level must have approval of all members of the Politburo Standing Committee.⁵³ During the Mao era and most of the Deng era, disciplinary organizations such as the CCDI were less involved in elite politics than they were in the post-Deng era and they were not granted much power in the leadership power struggle because the paramount leader was able to dominate through his formal authority, charisma, influence, and personal power. In the post-Deng era, the lack of personal power and charisma has forced the party leaders to rely primarily on their formal positions when struggling or competing for power. Control over high-level party organizations such as the CCDI becomes crucial for incumbent leaders to seek domination in the top leadership and consolidate their power. It is in this way that the CCDI has increasingly played an important role in post-Deng politics.

Xi Jinping has so far been the most aggressive and effective party leader in relying on the CCDI to purge his political rivals and consolidate his power while greatly trying to crack down on government corruption and bolster the regime's legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese people. The so-called “collective leadership” in which members of the Politburo and the influential retired veteran leaders reach consensus on the fate of corrupt high-ranking officials often becomes an obstacle for Xi's anti-corruption initiatives against high-ranking cadres. Thus, the general pattern in purging a high-ranking leader is to target his or her trusted followers first in whom an important breakthrough can be found. If Xi and Wang Qishan expected difficulty in obtaining the endorsement from the powerful and influential incumbent or retired leaders against a particular target, the need for an investigation into the followers of the targeted high-ranking official would be a first step to starting their initiative.

⁵³ Guo, “Controlling Corruption in the Party,” p. 9.

The case of Zhou Yongkang indicates how Xi and Wang successfully forced the endorsement from the powerful incumbent and retired leaders against Zhou Yongkang.

Zhou Yongkang had worked in Sichuan as the party secretary for three years from 1999 to 2002, and he built a personal network to not only ensure his political dominance but also continue his political influence and financial gains. Li Chuncheng who was Zhou's trusted loyalist and mayor of Chengdu during Zhou's tenure in Sichuan became the first target. The breakthrough was seen when it was discovered that Dai Xiaoming, head of Chengdu Industrial Investment Group Corporation, had bribed Li Chuncheng and Li's wife and children. Li was accused of seeking profits for others in exchange for bribes and Li's case also became entangled with that of Liu Han, a mining business tycoon and an associate of Zhou Bin, the eldest son of Zhou Yongkang. The same pattern of weeding out corruption could be found in the investigation and arrest of Guo Yongxiang (former governor in Sichuan), Jiang Jiemin (former chief of China's biggest oil firm), and Li Dongsheng (formerly China's top cop). At the same time, the CCDI imprisoned a number of business tycoons who had bribed Zhou and those who were most close to Zhou such as his son Zhou Bin and daughter-in-law Huang Wan, his brother Zhou Yuanqing, and personal secretaries Ji Wenlin and Yu Gang.⁵⁴ Xi and Wang Qishan would eventually use a large amount of "evidence" that linked Zhou Yongkang to his corrupt loyalists in order to force the Politburo and the retired senior veterans to endorse a disciplinary investigation against Zhou. A similar pattern can be seen in Hu Jintao's effort to purge Chen Liangyu. The Shanghai Gang led by Jiang Zemin gave up Chen Liangyu only after Hu presented evidence of Chen's "crime" through the course of three cases that tied Chen's loyalists with corruptions: the corruption case of Zhang Rongkun, a legendary business tycoon, with its linkage to Qin Yu, Baoshan district mayor in Shanghai; the case of Zhu Junyi, the head of the Shanghai Social Security who was charged with the so-called Shanghai Social Security Fund embezzlement scandal; and the discipline violations of Wang Chengming and Han Guozhang, president and vice president of Shanghai Electronic Group, respectively.⁵⁵

"Seeking Truth from Facts"

Pragmatism, the principle of "seeking truth from facts," is a critical component of the CCP's operational code as it influences party leaders, most notably, Mao and Deng Xiaoping. Mao and Deng utilized pragmatism to conquer ideological dogmas and defend their theories from the communist orthodoxy. Mao's

⁵⁴ *Renmin wang*, November 28, 2014, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2014/1128/c1001-26113096-3.html> (accessed on November 14, 2017).

⁵⁵ Zhong He, "Chen Liangyu bei chachu de qianqian houhou" [Before and after Chen Liangyu's investigation], *Lianzheng liaowang*, no. 11 (2006), pp. 12–14.

championing of the Rectification in Yan'an was to establish his ideological authority against what he called the dogmatic application of Marxist-Leninist theory to reality. For Deng, the reform must reorient the communist ideology that had been based on animosity against capitalism and the theory of class struggle. While pragmatism is consequently a strong Chinese characteristic, its principle was derived from a materialist conception of dialectics that Hegel, Marx, Engels, and Lenin set out to establish in the Marxist-Leninist theory of knowledge (epistemology).⁵⁶

Post-Mao leaders relied on the spirit of Confucianism to reinterpret Marxism-Leninism to link them with the “mandate” of the CCP by claiming that Marxism-Leninism facilitated China’s economic reform and promoted China’s economic prosperity. The key components of Marxism-Leninism were not designed to reconcile with China’s national capitalism. In Deng Xiaoping’s theory, he questioned how socialism and market reform could coexist, which precisely aligns with China’s anachronistic ideological orientations, obsessed nationalism, and strong desires for improving living standards, the latest furor raging throughout the nation. Since Deng Xiaoping launched economic reforms, communist ideology has gradually lost its appeal, as “the contents of the official ideology became less coherent, more divisive, more inconsistent in application and less persuasive.”⁵⁷ The principle of “seeking truth from facts” justifies the policy initiatives made by the CCP leaders if their policy initiatives are inconsistent or contradictory to Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, even the ideologies created by their predecessors.

Mass Line

The communist “mass line” has been an effective method and mechanism for achieving policy objectives, and political and social control. The “mass line” for the CCP meant that “in all practical work of our party, all correct leadership is necessarily from the masses to the masses” and consisted of moral and political guidance from the top leaders to party cadres. The party would be successful if it were to incorporate the views of the masses into its political formulations and policy positions and if it were to test these policies out among the masses.⁵⁸ Mao claims that “the people, and the people alone, are the moving force in the making of world history,” implying that the CCP would be unable to succeed without the support of the people. Liu Shaoqi further theorized the CCP’s version of the “mass line” in the Four Mass Standpoints: the party and its

⁵⁶ Jeanne Boden, *The Wall behind China’s Open Door: Towards Efficient Management in China*, p. 24.

⁵⁷ Graham Young, “The Chinese Communist Party under Deng Xiaoping: Ideological and Organizational Decay,” in *China in the Post-Deng Era*, Joseph Y. S. Cheng (ed.), p. 113.

⁵⁸ Lawrence R. Sullivan, *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Communist Party*, p. 180.

members (1) must serve the people and view it as their ultimate goal, (2) must have total accountability to the people, (3) must have faith in the people to emancipate themselves, and (4) must learn from the people.⁵⁹ The CCP's version of the "mass line" implies CCP effort to promote not only the population's support of but also the population's participation in the party's programs, campaigns, and initiatives.

Compared with Lenin, who relied solely on the revolutionary intelligentsia of Communist party members to pursue socialism, Mao's concept of the "mass line" was fundamentally different from that of Lenin as China's emphasis remained focused on the support and participation of the population and the grassroots of party organizations, though the Chinese leader did not reject the critical role of the party, nor did he impart to the worker and peasant masses anything remotely comparable to political sovereignty. The CCP's version of the "mass line" also differs from the traditional concept of Confucian benevolence of political rule that focuses on the ruling elite's commitment, dedication, and responsibility to take care of the people through protecting and promoting the improvement of people's lives including their spiritual happiness, physical safety, and economic well-being. In traditional Chinese political thought influenced by Confucianism, the "mandate" of the ruling class cannot be established unless the ruler proves his right to his mandate through action that will win the recognition and approval of the people. In other words, the ruler and the scholar-officials must fulfill their duty to protect the people and achieve social stability and economic prosperity, which will benefit the people, and guide and educate the people to achieve moral perfection, ultimately allowing citizens to achieve self-cultivation and harmonize with family and society. Varying immensely when it comes to political involvement, the communist "mass line" involves the party's tasks not only to protect and educate the people and develop the economy to benefit the population but also to integrate people into the system, where they voluntarily participate in the party's initiatives and political campaigns.

The CCP benefited greatly from its "mass line" through which the CCP won the support of the people during the Chinese revolution and the socialist transformation in the early 1950s. The CCP leadership reached the consensus that the contentment of the masses and their support of the regime should become the touchstone that justified the legitimacy of not only the rule of the regime but also the effective leadership of the CCP leaders. The institutionalization of the "mass line" in the post-Mao era has functioned as the mechanism for popular support of China's economic reform and as a system of checks and balances that prevents radical policies and disastrous political initiatives from ever destroying the country. By institutionalizing the "mass line," meritocracy is vindicated as a way to constrain the disqualified or corrupt party leaders yet support those who are capable and talented. Under Xi's leadership, the "mass line" has been viewed

⁵⁹ Liu Shaoqi, *Liu Shaoqi xuanji* [Selected works of Liu Shaoqi], vol. 1, pp. 348–354.

as the mechanism to improve the party's popularity among the people as well as the "ruling lifeline" for the CCP.⁶⁰ Xi's eclectic populist leadership style has been relying on the "mass line" as the party's greatest asset in bringing party officials closer to the people, weeding out corruption within the ranks, reducing the gap between the rich and poor, and achieving what Xi has called a "thorough cleanup" of the party by eliminating those who exhibit the "four undesirable work styles": formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance.⁶¹

Most party chiefs have tried to establish a unique ideology not only to justify the party's monopoly on power and major policy decisions but also to show that they represent the will and aspirations of the population. Mao viewed "class struggle" as the dynamics of social development among the classes where tension would persist even if the proletariat overthrew the bourgeoisie and seized control of the government. Deng introduced the "socialistic market economy" and "socialism with Chinese characteristics" while upholding the four cardinal principles. Jiang Zemin created the "Three Representations" as an ideological innovation to emphasize that the CCP must represent the advanced and socially productive forces in China and acknowledge the place of capitalists in society and extend the definition of the people from only the peasantry and workers to the new capitalist business class. Hu Jintao's "scientific outlook on development" and "harmonious society" (an extension of "scientific outlook on development") was introduced as the party's new guiding ideology to address the CCP's attempt to promote a harmonious society with scientific development as the process to achieve it.

COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNIST THEORIES AND PRACTICES

The communist concept of "collective leadership," which aims to make it impossible for excessive power to be concentrated in the hands of individuals or for them to step beyond the control of the party and the people, was originally derived from the Leninist theory of a vanguard party, arguing that the communist party itself was governed by norms and regulations that guaranteed its healthy relationship to the people.⁶² The "collective leadership" ruled the Soviet Union immediately after Lenin's death, but the emergence of a personalized dictatorship under Stalin quickly put an end to collective leadership. The Stalinist style of dictatorship was based on Marxist-Leninist policies, mass repression, and a "cult of personality" known as

⁶⁰ Renmin wang, June 16, 2013, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n/2013/0618/c1003-21871183.html> (accessed on August 1, 2016).

⁶¹ Xinhua, June 18, 2013.

⁶² Ian D. Thatcher, "Khrushchev as Leader," in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953–1964*, Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilic (eds.), p. 10.

Stalinism.⁶³ Motivated by the elite's sentiment to denounce the evils and excesses of Stalin's rule and the need for a general relaxation of Stalin's rigid control, Khrushchev's leadership launched a vigorous campaign against the "cult of personality" and an emphasis on "collective leadership" that led to a new stress on the authority of the party.⁶⁴ Members of the CCP party elite were inspired by their Soviet counterparts, who tried to avoid the excesses of Stalin's one-man dictatorship and emphasized a collective leadership.

Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956 was a mixed blessing for Mao. Khrushchev's disclosure of Stalin's crimes and megalomania in his secret speech to the Soviet 20th Party Congress was an attempt to undermine the influence of Stalin. Mao was not only elated, but fully supported Khrushchev's actions.⁶⁵ Mao remained despondent due to Stalin's doubt of his ability to lead the CCP as Stalin had viewed Mao as a "nationalist" instead of a "communist" and had seen Mao as an "agrarian revolutionary." Additionally, Mao saw an opportunity for himself and the CCP in the international communist movement by denouncing Stalin. However, Mao strongly disagreed with Khrushchev who completely repudiated Stalin, particularly Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin's "cult of personality." In Mao's perspective, the "cult of personality" was not merely necessary but required; otherwise, how could an organization function well if its members did not revere their leader?

This paradox presented a dilemma for Mao as he distinguished the "cult of personality" as a "correct" or an "incorrect" one, and according to Mao, "We must forever have 'cult of personality' toward the correct parts of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin because truth is in their hands."⁶⁶ Moreover, Mao and the CCP top leadership viewed Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin as morally unacceptable because Stalin was "extolled to the skies" by Khrushchev and other incumbent Soviet leaders when Stalin was alive but completely repudiated by them after he died.⁶⁷ Absolute loyalty from government officials to the emperor and from the subjects to their masters (despite their mistakes) has been a long-lasting moral code deeply embedded in the collective Chinese mentality. For new generation leaders in contemporary China, complete denunciation of their predecessors is morally unacceptable and often carries a great risk for their reputation and political image. Deng Xiaoping's refusal to denunciate Mao as Khrushchev did to Stalin and Xi Jinping's reluctance to

⁶³ Peter York, *Dictator Style: Lifestyles of the World's Most Colorful Despots*, p. 111.

⁶⁴ J. E. Blakeley, *Soviet Scholasticism*, p. 33.

⁶⁵ Shen Zhihua, *Chuzai shizi lukou de xuanze* [Choice at the cross roads], p. 100.

⁶⁶ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong wenji* [Collected works of Mao Zedong], January 1956–December 1958, vol. 7, p. 369.

⁶⁷ In Mao's own words, "Stalin was extolled to a place 10,000 *zhang* (c.a. 31,000 meters) high in the past and is currently slandered into a place 9,000 *zhang* low." See Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao Zedong's manuscripts since the founding of the state], vol. 6, p. 102.

target Jiang Zemin who has been considered the most important obstacle in Xi's anti-corruption campaigns reflect this mentality.

The principles of "core" leader versus "collective leadership" hold distinct and obvious differences as "collective leadership" is based on the ideal of first among equals, which was derived from Leninist ideas and practiced in the post-Stalin Soviet leadership. The Soviet party introduced collective leadership after Stalin's death to prevent the general secretary from holding the reins of power too firmly and to disperse power among the people who were pillars of the Soviet regime.⁶⁸ However, the ideal political system in both traditional and contemporary China prefers a unified and powerful leadership supervised and controlled by a sage ruler or paramount leader. The role of the sage ruler in a traditional metaphor of "all stars twinkle around the moon" was expected to be the "Son of Heaven" who was not created to be involved in the daily affairs of state business but rather a paramount leader who was concerned only with overall policy and the fundamentals of governance. This sage ruler was one who should inspire the bureaucracy to devote itself to the nation and the welfare of the people, establishing and maintaining an environment that nourished the people and successfully brought peace to his country.

Once a party general secretary is accepted by the party elite as the sage ruler or the paramount leader, in theory, the party elite members are morally obligated to be loyal to him and to do whatever necessary to safeguard his reputation. For many party elite who perceive themselves as traditional scholar-officials, assisting and safeguarding the paramount leader is their moral obligation in order to serve the party and the state. The party elite may disagree with the paramount leader or even criticize him. However, his position as the paramount leader is not replaceable (even after he has officially retired) and their loyalty to the paramount leader must be absolute. When party elite members serve a talented and capable paramount leader, they have more confidence in the centralized state in achieving political stability and have faith in his leadership and are willing to comply with his command unconditionally. The domination of the paramount leader inevitably prevents the development of political institutionalization and promotes personalized and arbitrary rule by one leader.

Exceptions are made to this system when a party chief is found to be incapable of making the correct decisions, leading to the inability to control the bureaucracy. He may be found to be politically inept, morally corrupt, or not exceptionally bright. In these times, the system would open the space for the party elite to step out and share responsibilities with the party chief or take more responsibilities themselves through individual or group efforts while morally keeping the party chief in his institutional position. Individual or group efforts to oust the party chief through force or violence are extremely difficult and unacceptable because it violates the traditional moral code in which an official is

⁶⁸ Ilya Zemtsov, *Encyclopedia of Soviet Life*, p. 133.

forbidden to betray his master under any circumstances and “usurping” power from the ruler is viewed as “heinous treason” (*dani budao* 大逆不道). Although the Mencian notion of the right to rebel against rulers who have lost the “Mandate of Heaven” is justifiable, it only happens in an extreme situation and this idea has not been encouraged by any imperial dynasty since Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE) laid an institutional basis for the Confucian orthodoxy and made Confucianism the state ideology in the Han Dynasty.

In principle, the emergence of factionalism could be legitimate (at least from the perspectives of the party elite) due to the moral responsibility of the party elite to ensure that the system continually functions soundly and the damage caused by a weak and incapable party chief is reduced, if possible. In reality, many high-ranking officials take advantage of the party’s tolerance of factional activities to maximize their power and influence in the party leadership. Here, they are less concerned about their initiatives and factional activities as “impudent insubordination” because they are “fulfilling their moral duty” to serve the general good. Sometimes, the party chief, including the paramount leader, may align with some factions against a specific faction or turn factions to fight against each other in order to secure dominance in the leadership, as an aging and feeble Mao, by now critically ill, had done during the late stages of the Cultural Revolution. For the party elite, the pursuit of factionalism to safeguard the legitimate party chief can be justified as the factions supported by the party chief often have greater advantages in intra-party factional conflict.

Although traditional political ideas remained influential, the *realpolitik* in the twentieth century and the party elite’s commitment to communist ideology promoted more collegial relationships and the declined mentality of the scholar-officials based on absolute loyalty to the ruler. For the paramount leader, his effective rule relies greatly on the support of the high-ranking officials and even on his role in manipulating factions in order to guarantee his dominance in the leadership. Beyond the façade of unity in Chinese elite politics, factionalism remains an important feature not only of the Chinese communist movement but also of leadership politics and policymaking in the CCP. Indeed, contending factions in the CCP have functioned for years as an internal dynamic. It is arguable that Chinese characteristics of factionalism are more related to its Confucian culture than communist ideology and practice. Like Chinese communist elite politics, Vietnamese communist leadership politics, to a certain extent, has also been influenced by Confucian political ideas and the metaphor of “all stars twinkle around the moon,” in which the indisputable paramount leader Ho Chi Minh was far from being a communist dictator. His style of collective leadership contributed to the institutionalization of factionalism in Hanoi.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ See Quang Trung Thai, *Collective Leadership and Factionalism: An Essay on Ho Chi Minh’s Legacy*.

Compared with CCP politics, factionalism was not a prominent feature in Soviet politics. The ban on factionalism had been institutionalized by Lenin since 1921 when he realized that the party broke up into factions over trade union questions at the Tenth Party Congress. Lenin imposed the resolution On Party Unity, that banned any further factional activities within the party and even contained a secret provision for expelling those guilty of factionalism.⁷⁰ After Stalin politically defeated the “old Bolshevik” opposition factions in the later 1920s, Stalin established his monolithic control over the party and proclaimed the outlawing of factions to be an unchallengeable rule of “Leninist” party organization.⁷¹ Following Lenin’s death, Stalin emerged as a dominant figure, defeating Trotsky, guaranteeing political support through neutralizing his rivals in the leadership, and consolidating his power by removing his colleagues and establishing his position as sole leader of the party. While Stalin breached the principle of collective leadership by forming a cult of personality that placed him above the party, his control over the party relied greatly on his use of terror and the threat thereof. Although occasional factional activities were tactically conducted by the party elite to pursue their interests, as with the case during Brezhnev era in which the power-seeking factions could exert some leverage upon Brezhnev and on policy making, factionalism played a limited role in the Soviet leadership politics.

Collective leadership was designed to ensure political stability and unity of the Central Committee in conjunction with the Politburo, essentially serving to endorse the decisions of the higher body. In the absence of a paramount leader, collective leadership was utilized as an alternative during the post-Deng era, and the leaderships of the third-generation leader Jiang Zemin, and the fourth-generation leader Hu Jintao. Although the routinization of political life and the normalization of party procedures made progress, as Fewsmith points out, “The relative stability that appeared on the surface rested on an informal but important balance of power among the top political leaders.”⁷² Political reform, including the so-called “inner-party democracy,” was introduced to seek political coexistence, interest sharing, and competition regulating based on the principles of negotiation, compromise, consultation, and bargaining. This trend to introduce political reform and promote inner-party democracy was pushed further not only by the effort to promote economic efficiency but also by the combination of leadership transition and the collapse of the Soviet Union that “brought about a new and perhaps more sustained effort to think about inner-party democracy and institution building as the need to regularize relations within the party and between the party and society increased.”⁷³

The party was required to carry out all its activities on the basis of full compliance with the Leninist norms of party life, the principle of collective

⁷⁰ David G. Williamson, *The Age of the Dictators*, p. 63.

⁷¹ Doug Lorimer, *The Collapse of Communism in the USSR: Its Causes and Significance*, p. 19.

⁷² Fewsmith, *The Logic and Limits of Political Reform in China*, p. 4. ⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 170.

leadership, and the multifaceted development of inner-party democracy. While collective leadership seeks ideological support for the suppression of personal rule, decisions must be made according to the wishes of the collective leadership rather than the individual party chief. In the Soviet Union, the “collective leadership” thus limited the ability of the general secretaries to repudiate fellow oligarchs, understanding of course these posts were the genesis from which to bid for dominance. Brezhnev emerged to replace Khrushchev, who had been removed largely because his Politburo colleagues found him unmanageable, and the periods of “collective leadership” were clearly in order. Although Brezhnev was successful in using his control over personnel to secure his rule, bringing a much-needed period of stability and consolidation to politics and policy, and kept his post as the party chief longer than any Soviet leader except Stalin, he never managed to create a “Brezhnev Thought” or “Brezhnev Theory” as each CCP general secretary has done.

Unlike Soviet party chiefs who did not claim their “theories” or “thoughts” as the official ideology of the Soviet Communist Party, each CCP leader has established the “theory” or “thought” not only to justify a new era under his leadership that gives him the opportunity to win the confidence of the party elite for his role as the “core” of the party leadership but also to set up the ideology as the guiding principle for the party to follow. Mao was a genius who utilized ideology to justify his position as a paramount leader but also monopolized authority in defining guiding principles of the party. Manifesting the “core” of leadership is the ability to become the moral and ideological authority, as Mao demonstrated during his reign, and all CCP leaders have done as well. Although Stalinism guided the Soviet Union to bring an end to the revolution with the inception of the Soviet economic transformation through the approaches of “realpolitik, social pragmatism, exhaustion, or even cynicism,” it has never been named as the official ideology of the Soviet Union and instead only Marxism-Leninism could enjoy this status.⁷⁴ During the period of Stalin’s rule, Stalin compiled Marxism-Leninism in his book *“The Questions of Leninism”* and proclaimed it, instead of Stalinism, the official ideology of the state.

A significant indication for a party chief to become the “core” of the top leadership is whether his power is shared with other leadership members. If the CCP is ruled effectively by the “core,” the “core” is always the one who has the final say for leadership decision-making and his associates in the Politburo Standing Committee only represent the “core” to take charge of certain party or governmental organizations. As most of the established rules and processes are the accepted norms rather than any part of a codified system of practice, none of the party documents have clearly defined the responsibilities and power of the “core,” even though there is a loosely assigned job description for each of

⁷⁴ Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 23–24.

the leadership members. This seems to give an outsider an impression that this system stays fundamentally anarchic at the top due to unclear job description and the obscuration of power distribution at the top of the party leadership. The philosophy behind the unclear power distribution at the top of the party leadership lies in guaranteeing the dominant role of the “core” and ensuring a system that prevents the “core” from being overshadowed by any of his associates. Perhaps, the absence of clearly defined procedures for selecting and legitimizing high-ranking leaders provides the leeway for the “core” to define the responsibilities for the leadership members and ensure his effective control over the officialdom under different circumstances. The “core” is able to not only award power to certain leadership members but also take away power from the distrusted associates if necessary. If the “core” faces the challenge to achieve a personal goal in the Politburo, the “core” can often bypass the Politburo forcefully to push programs or impose decisions in the party leadership as Mao, Deng, and Xi have done.

For example, Mao created the so-called “Little Planning Commission” (*xiao jiwei* 小计委) to replace the State Planning Commission in 1965 in order to forcefully push the “Three Front Construction” (*sanxian jianshe* 三线建设) campaign that made “war preparation” a priority in China’s economic policy. During the Deng era, the Politburo was only a central party organ that carried out the decisions made by the party elders headed by the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. As the most powerful leader who has centralized many powers under himself after Deng, Xi has signaled that he intends to preside over a growing number of crucial decision-making committees and overhaul a wide range of long-entrenched policies. However, the CCP politics in the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras were forced to experience a significant change when a paramount leader did not rule the CCP. This was due to the transformation from strongman rule to the collective leadership that emphasizes power sharing, compromise, and consensus.

Deeply embedded in Chinese tradition is the expectation of the “core” of political leadership to promote political stability and economic prosperity, similar to the imperial cults that were part of a strategy of control in both the nationalist rule and communist polity, and they too were instrumental in creating order and stability. Once the “core” of a leadership is accepted, the system tends to create a favorable environment not only to grant more power to the “core” but also to deify the “core” and thus direct the cult of personality toward the “core.” Mao had an unchallengeable position as the “core” of the CCP’s top leadership and was credited as a sage who contributed to the progression of Marxist philosophers from Marx and Engels through Lenin and Stalin, the unifying hero-figure of the new China, a savior of Chinese people, and a brilliant political theorist and military strategist. The CCP version of the “core” of the party leadership differs fundamentally from the Leninist party general secretary – a figure as first among the equals because the

guiding principle of party leadership was its collegiality.⁷⁵ Mao was convinced that a cult of personality for the “core” of leadership was not only important but also required because “cult of personality reflects the respect of the masses and the authority that a leader deserves.”⁷⁶

Mao’s personality cult also contrasted with the cult of Stalin’s personality that was promoted by terror and the systematic killing of party cadres and the general population on a massive scale in addition to purges against political rivals and the top leaders who led the revolution with Lenin, claiming they were traitors. This created a relationship between the terror and the cult of Stalin’s personality: “Stalin’s cult facilitated his usurpation of power and the destruction of inconvenient people, while his crimes, supported by the apparatus and also by the deluded masses, extended and reinforced the cult of personality.”⁷⁷ The rise of Mao’s cult and the crucial source of his authority were derived from his unchallengeable role as the ideological authority, a hero as the savior of the party and the nation, his legendary political and military career, the prestige of his revolutionary charisma, the voice of truth, his powerful force in arousing mass “enthusiasm” through constant political campaigns, and the source of all wisdom. However, Mao occasionally used terror to achieve political and social control, as with the cases of the “red terror” launched by Mao in early Mao’s career in Jiangxi base areas to torture and execute around 4,000 Red Army troops whom he regarded as rebels in Fujian in the early 1930s. Similarly, he implemented mass campaigns to fight against the so-called “anti-socials, counter-revolutionaries and imperialists” in the 1950s and to promote popular terror against the party bureaucracy during the Cultural Revolution. Mao relied mainly on his manipulation of mass campaigns and mobilization and a combination of coercion and persuasion to enforce mass conformity and guarantee his domination in the party leadership.

Like communism, Confucianism and Legalism played an important role in influencing Mao’s ruling philosophy and methods. Concerning the “Son of Heaven,” Confucian leaders claim the authority and omnicompetence of a sage who is required to set the moral norm and standard of truth for the people and rules for the benefit and well-being of the masses. Legalists concentrated on a ruler-centered policy because they were concerned that the origin of an unstable society comes from rulers’ ineffectiveness in controlling the statecraft and reducing the races for power in the leadership. Besides his individual ability, which was vital to determine his real power, the ruler required not only the official authority but also strong personalistic

⁷⁵ Thomas G. Barnes and Gerald D. Feldman (eds.), *Breakdown and Rebirth, 1914 to the Present: A Documentary History of Modern Europe*, vol. iv, p. 234.

⁷⁶ Fei Xilin [Ni Feidelin], *Fei Xilin huiyilu: Wosuo jiechu de zhongsu lingdao ren* [Memoirs of Ni Feidelin: The Chinese and Soviet leaders to whom I contacted], Zhou Aiqi (trans.), pp. 25–26.

⁷⁷ Roy Aleksandrovich Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, ed. and trans. George Shriver, p. 623.

authority such as his profound personal ties and charisma to ensure his domination in the political system. In both the traditional and contemporary Chinese political system, there has been a consistent and strong emphasis on the role of the “core” of leadership in achieving political and social stability, prosperity, and harmony, in controlling the ruling elite and bureaucracy effectively. There has been further emphasis on self-establishment as the sage incarnating all the virtues, the charismatic model of ethical morality, the source of benevolence and goodness, and the embodiment of success, wisdom, and power that can not only defeat evil but also arouse mass “enthusiasm.” Although the sage ruler or the “core” of the leadership is ideally designed to rule the system, not every ruler could become the “core” of the leadership. Despite the ruler being supreme in theory in traditional China, his power in practice was less certain: he might be the most powerful person in the nation making all governmental officials comply with his will and implementing any program that he liked; he also might be nothing more than a puppet, totally controlled by others and in constant danger of assassination.⁷⁸

Although Deng Xiaoping never dominated the system as Mao had, Deng generally achieved the “core” of the leadership and served as the “patriarch” (*jiazhang* 家长) in the CCP leadership by building a broad anti-Hua Guofeng coalition to depose Hua, making the party leadership accept him as the *de facto* supreme power over the party and the state, putting factional competition and struggles under control, assembling an effective consensus in coalition with a group of veteran leaders, and steering the elite into a reform process that resulted in China’s rapid economic development. After his retirement, Deng continued to rule the CCP behind the curtain and even bypassed the central leadership to go to the public for advancing a deepening of reform in the “southern tour” in 1992. Although Deng enjoyed high prestige within the party, never losing any battle he undertook in the post-Mao period, he did not have absolute power as Mao had and, while still powerful, could not command the same level of charismatic authority as Mao. Deng pursued a unique model of Chinese socialism mixed with Confucianism, Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, and pragmatism. As Teiwes points out, Deng “did aggregate interests, seek non-ideological results and zig and zag according to pressure and unanticipated developments.”⁷⁹ The paramount leaders such as Mao and Deng relied mainly on their ability – through charisma, fear, belief, and loyalty – to get leaders, institutions, and the populace to carry out, or at least accept, courses of action inimical to personal, group, and national interests.⁸⁰

Compared with Mao and Deng, the post-Deng leaders felt challenged to achieve the same qualifications of ability, political resources, and background

⁷⁸ Xuezhi Guo, *The Ideal Chinese Political Leader: A Historical and Cultural Perspective*, p. 196.

⁷⁹ Frederick C. Teiwes, “Normal Politics with Chinese Characteristics,” in *The Nature of Chinese Politics: From Mao to Jiang*, p. 240.

⁸⁰ Teiwes, “Normal Politics with Chinese Characteristics,” p. 240.

that Mao and Deng have enjoyed given the limited experiences and opportunities in achieving revolutionary accomplishment, developing their political and administrative career, establishing profound personal ties, and cultivating a large number of loyalists. In the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras, the cycle of change in the leadership succession followed the pattern from the first among equals and CCP elite politics was increasingly consensus-driven due partially to their limited institutional and personal power, influence, and charisma and due partially to the economic reform and opening-up policy that promoted the growing transparency of political process and the institutionalization of Chinese politics. The post-Deng leaders beset with an enormous range of issues and pressures under a system lacking a dogmatic ideological compass to guide them, as Teiwes points out, have to “perform the function of aggregating diverse interests into a coherent, or not so coherent, program to satisfy various constituencies in order to maintain a policy thrust or to build support for an individual or a leadership group.”⁸¹ Although the system remained authoritarian, highly centralized, and hierarchical, the “inner party democracy” had been promoted to regulate the process of governance, systemize the leadership succession, and manage the intra-party conflict.

Commanding the party during the eras of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao required a political skillset unlike that of Mao and Deng. Governing the party through collective leadership and institutionalization was vital to managing elite politics, in order to prevent crisis from eroding the top levels due to factional discord, power struggles, and succession rivalries. Not only could an institution be conceived as an enduring collection of prescribed behavioral rules and organized practices, embedded in structure and processes, it could also constitute rules, norms, and other more temporary aspects of political activity.⁸² Under the supervision of the senior veterans led by Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun, the CCP leadership paid great attention to institutionalizing the exercise of power, the rules and the process such as age and term limits, and the transition of leadership succession. The institutional trend in Chinese politics could keep its momentum only if the individuals’ exercise of power relied predominantly on formal positions – and personalistic politics such as personal ties, personal loyalty, and charisma played only a marginal role in elite politics. The rise of Xi Jinping certainly posts the challenge for the CCP’s continual institutionalization that has been exercised in both the Jiang and Hu eras.

The increasingly significant role of formal politics in the Jiang and Hu eras did not mean that informal and personalistic politics no longer played an important role in elite politics. In fact, personalistic politics remained crucial in the evolution of the CCP. Due to the personalistic nature of Chinese politics,

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 239.

⁸² Johan P. Olsen, *Governing Through Institution Building: Institutional Theory and Recent Experiments in Democratic Organizations*, p. 36.

a formal position alone did not guarantee the real power of an individual leader who held that position. Although rules and regulations had been made and political power based on institutional positions had been emphasized to regulate elite politics, personalistic politics remained important. The exercise of formal authority and personal power of the party elite were not only complementary, they also served to strengthen one another. Party leaders could use the resources derived from their formal positions to cultivate a *guanxi* network and nurture their followers and loyalists. Compared with other leadership members, party chiefs would have more advantages to gain not only supreme formal authority but also personal power as they could legitimately use the resources granted by their formal positions to arrange their followers in important positions across the hierarchical chain of command in the party and governmental bureaucratic organizations.

For a party chief, the locus of power in the formal and personal realms could diverge due to a significant number of loyalists occupying key positions. Jiang Zemin was a typical example in terms of how a party leader without the strong background and profound personal connections in the CCP leadership could use his formal position and skillful tactics to seek survival and political advantages and ultimately pursue the “core” of the leadership. Jiang consolidated his grip on power by taking control over the PLA following the dismissal of the Yang brothers in 1992–1993 and seizing control of the Beijing party apparatus after he purged Beijing mayor Chen Xitong in 1995. As the Politburo Standing Committee was dominated by Jiang’s protégé and Hu Jintao was careful not to appear to upstage Jiang, the persistent meddling and involvement of Jiang Zemin was evident, even after his supposed full retirement from all positions in 2005. Jiang continued to function as the *de facto* “patriarch” of the CCP leadership while Hu lived very much under Jiang’s shadow during his ten-year tenure.⁸³

During the Jiang and Hu eras, institutionalization of formal leadership arrangements, in combination with regulating the rules, regulations, and responsibilities of high-ranking leaders, became the norm in party politics. Enthusiastically supported, especially amongst the younger party officials who felt a level of security due to this arrangement, the institutionalization offered a degree of tolerance – albeit limited – on diversity of policy priorities and dispositions. Institutionally, the party elite held equal voting rights, although the outcomes of these formal arrangements were often overpowered by informal personal and factional maneuvering. Additionally, the continuing “advisory” roles of the retired veteran leaders after they divested themselves of formal positions required legitimization through formal Politburo Standing Committee meetings. For example, Deng Xiaoping was accepted to “have the final say” for important decisions of the top leadership by the party in the First

⁸³ Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping: Renaissance, Reform, or Retrogression?* p. 79.

Plenum of the Thirteenth Party Congress held in November 1987.⁸⁴ Although Deng needed neither a personal presence in the Politburo nor the Politburo's decision to grant him the role of "advisor" with the power of final say, the institutional base of the paramount leader's "advisory" role justified Deng's legitimate involvement in the decision-making of the top leadership and strengthened Deng's position to monitor the CCP leadership to continue his reform and open-door policy, institutionalize party politics (e.g., age and term limits, leadership succession), and accept his command in cases of perceived crises.

It is naïve to believe that formal authority always equalizes the actual power of the party elite. The inequality of actual power, more or less, depends on age and experience, depth and breadth of career backgrounds, the relative stature of contributions, and the functional needs of the political system at a particular stage.⁸⁵ Career advancement for high-ranking leaders (e.g., whether they would be promoted from an insignificant province or department to an advanced level or nomination into the Politburo and thus have a chance to be selected into the Politburo or on the Politburo Standing Committee) at the top level has relied greatly on their skills in personalistic politics through a tactically flexible *Realpolitik* and factional competition. While policies and ideological lines were used as a rationale to cover the true goal of maximizing the power of factional strife in the Mao era, the successful factional maneuvering and the cultivation of the profound *guanxi* network, combined with the flexible tactics for achieving pragmatic goals through dialogue, negotiation, and bargaining, are the dynamic of elite politics in post-Mao economic reform.

Communist ideology assumes that a communist party is an institution with which the destiny and aspirations of the party members are fused and which, as an organization, is able to provide powerful forces and become an extraordinarily effective instrument by incorporating the collective intelligence, will, and wisdom of the party members. During the Chinese revolution, the CCP relied on a strong and disciplined organization to affect its members' devotion to the communist party's cause. Its organization, from the beginning, was structured as a vanguard party along Leninist lines. Compared with traditional bureaucracy, Chinese communist organizations were well-organized hierarchical entities with definitive leadership, inspiring ideology, a coherent political agenda, "iron discipline," tangible resources, and a popular "mass line" to facilitate quick decision-making by the party leadership and efficiency in carrying out those decisions.

The party's chain of command from the center to local organizations carried out the tasks while the party organizations recruited party members, disciplined party officials, reinforced social control, mobilized the masses, and implemented policies. In the 1950s, the party remained revolutionary for too

⁸⁴ Zhao Ziyang, *Gaige licheng*, p. 66.

⁸⁵ Lowell Dittmer, "The Changing Form and Dynamics of Power Politics," p. 225.

long rather than transforming into a governing party, relying on party organization and leadership to govern, rather than creating effective state institutions.⁸⁶ Ideological and organizational decay in the post-Mao era have become severe challenges that the party has had to face to maintain its legitimacy and retain control of its members. The post-Mao leaders have striven to strengthen the party organizations as a disciplined, orderly mechanism to educate, train, and control party members and to push the party's political and economic programs and campaigns. They have created various ideologies, referring to the party's ideological foundations and unity at a time when both ideological erosion and economic reform undermined the relevance of party leadership. In addition, members' commitment to the party and acceptance of its prescribed norms and operating procedures increasingly wavered as doubt grew.⁸⁷ Consequently, strengthening the party organization becomes the priority whenever the party suffers a lack of popularity and its survival is in jeopardy.

In the post-Deng era, without an unequivocal paramount leader like Mao or Deng, the party organizations have played a more crucial role. The organizations have provided the arena for high-ranking leaders to be engaged in negotiation, bargaining, consultation, and compromise in order for them to share power, pursue personal interests, and achieve consensus. The next generations of leaders are chosen in advance to ensure the peaceful and smooth transition of power, consistency of the current policy, and continual influence of party elders who are viewed as the "valuable treasure" (*baogui caifu* 宝贵财富) of the party. The "apprenticeships" in which the selected candidates are required to serve have become a prominent feature in post-Deng CCP politics. However, the deliberate process of selecting leaders and arranging generational succession, which was dominated by the incumbent leaders and the retired senior veterans, raises the question of how powerful these appointed successors actually are and how effective the collective leadership is, at least early in their tenures.

Institution plays an important role when leadership succession takes place. In the post-Deng era, all new generation leaders, to different degrees, have relied on the party institution and organizations to recruit and cultivate followers, promote their own loyalists to important posts, and establish their authority in the key party organizations – such as security, propaganda, high-ranking official promotion, and the military – especially in the early periods of their tenures. Due to the lack of prestige, revolutionary experience, profound personal relationships, and the support from more elite factions, they have to rely mainly on their formal positions as the party general secretaries to consolidate their power and hopefully become the "core" of the party

⁸⁶ Randall Peerenboom, "Social Foundations of China's Living Constitution," in *Comparative Constitutional Design*, Tom Ginsburg (ed.), p. 144.

⁸⁷ Young, "The Chinese Communist Party under Deng Xiaoping," p. 123.

leadership. When Deng created the rules for institutionalizing the post-Mao leadership succession, he was concerned with whether the new generation leaders would be able to establish themselves as the “core” of the party leadership. Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang were picked by the elders to be the party general secretaries, giving them the opportunity to establish themselves as the “core” of the leadership. However, both were dismissed after falling from grace with the elders and advocating liberal policies. Although Jiang Zemin was chosen hastily to replace the disgraced Zhao Ziyang when the CCP was facing crisis due to the 1989 Tiananmen incident and believed by many to be only a temporary transition figure, Jiang gradually established himself as almost the “core” of the leadership by building up his power base, cultivating a large number of followers, putting his loyalists in the important posts, purging his political rivals and enemies, and ensuring efficient control over the PLA.

The primary mechanisms for collective leadership are power sharing and consensus building, which rely on constant engagement in negotiation, compromise, and bargaining among the party elite. In the Jiang and Hu eras, the win-win solution and the effort to avoid leadership differences because the legitimacy of the party requires an appearance of consensus became a new party norm, guaranteeing leadership stability and political coexistence with harmonious working and desirable personal relationships. This norm was further reinforced by the tenet set by the party elders to prevent the elite competition from going out of control and promote harmony and stability: “Criminal law should not be applied to the members of the Politburo Standing Committee.” This party norm was the structural flaw of which top party leaders took advantage to exchange mutual interests and protections at the cost of party discipline and image. Their immunity from punishment led them to shelter interest groups to which they had close ties and from which they received tangible economic benefits. Consequently, systematic corruption grew rampantly nationwide as did the number of corrupt officials at all levels.