

CHAPTER 1

Governance

Collective Leadership Revisited

Things don't have to be or look identical in order to be balanced or equal.

—MAYA LIN 林璎

This book examines how the structure and dynamics of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have evolved in response to the challenges the party has confronted since the late 1990s. This study pays special attention to the issue of leadership selection and composition, which is a perpetual concern in Chinese politics. Using both quantitative and qualitative analyses, this volume assesses the changing nature of elite recruitment, the generational attributes of the leadership, the checks and balances between competing political coalitions or factions, the behavioral patterns and institutional constraints of heavyweight politicians in the collective leadership, and the interplay between elite politics and broad changes in Chinese society. This study also links new trends in elite politics to emerging currents within the Chinese intellectual discourse on the tension between strongman politics and collective leadership and its implications for political reforms. A systematic analysis of these developments—and some seeming contradictions—will help shed valuable light on how the world's most populous country will be governed in the remaining years of the Xi Jinping era and beyond.

This study argues that the survival of the CCP regime in the wake of major political crises such as the Bo Xilai episode and rampant official corruption is not due to “authoritarian resilience”—the capacity of the Chinese communist system to resist political and institutional changes—as some foreign China analysts have theorized. Rather, China's leadership has survived and thrived over the past three decades because it has continually

sought new mechanisms, institutional regulations, policy measures, and political norms to resolve its inherent deficiencies and inadequacies. Whether foreign analysts like them or not, some of these institutional developments are actually much more extensive and even more “democratic” (at least at the intraparty level) than the outside world has generally recognized or appreciated. By keeping abreast of changes—especially those resulting from the development of new, dynamic forces in Chinese society—and adapting accordingly, the CCP has maintained its grip on one-party rule.

XI’S CONSOLIDATION OF POWER: REVERSING THE TREND OF COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP?

Over the past two decades, China has undergone a major transition in leadership structure and governance. The shift has often been characterized as a move from an era shaped by the arbitrary authority of an all-powerful strongman—first Mao, and then Deng—to a new era of collective leadership. This change means that the composition of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) is more important than ever before. Of particular significance are the idiosyncrasies of the body’s members, its group dynamics, and the balance of power between its factions. Over the past two periods of leadership, the party’s chief, beginning with Jiang Zemin of the third generation, and then Hu Jintao of the fourth generation, was merely seen as the “first among equals” in the collective leadership of the PSC.¹ In contrast to the eras of Mao and Deng, China’s political structure, the rules and norms that govern its elite politics, and associated decisionmaking processes appear to have changed dramatically.

Five Main Areas of Change under Xi’s New Leadership

With the arrival of Xi Jinping in 2012 to 2013, the existing trend toward collective leadership has become less apparent, or possibly even reversed. Some observers argue that Xi’s leadership represents the “end of collective leadership” and the “reemergence of strongman politics.”² In the first three years of his tenure as top leader, Xi Jinping surprised many China analysts with his bold and effective political moves and policy undertakings. To date, the initiatives that have stood out in Xi’s administration fall on five main fronts.

First, Xi quickly and skillfully concluded the Bo Xilai trial, which both the Chinese and international media called China’s “trial of the century.”³ The Bo Xilai case represented the greatest challenge to the party’s legitimacy since the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident and was widely perceived to be a “no-win” situation for the CCP leadership. The scandal exposed the decadent lifestyles of some high-ranking party leaders, including involvement

with sex, drugs, money laundering, and even murder. Xi and his colleagues handled the case wisely. Prosecutors focused on Bo's official corruption, not on his other unlawful or immoral behavior, thus avoiding a broader exposure of the Chinese political system's flaws. They used social media to disseminate details of the courtroom proceedings, thereby undermining potential criticism of lack of openness. Bo's verdict of life imprisonment seemed appropriate—neither too severe nor too lenient.

Second, with the support of his principal political ally in the PSC, “anti-corruption tsar” Wang Qishan, Xi launched a remarkably tough national antigraft campaign. In 2013, for example, the Wang-led Central Commission for Discipline Inspection along with the Ministry of Supervision handled 172,000 corruption cases and investigated 182,000 officials—the highest annual number of cases in thirty years.⁴ By May 2016, the Xi leadership had purged a total of about 160 leaders at the vice-ministerial and provincial levels (副省部级, *fushengbuji*) on corruption charges, including twenty members of the 18th Central Committee of the CCP and one member of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.⁵ The twenty recently purged members of the 18th Central Committee are Ling Jihua (full member and former director of the United Front Work Department), Zhou Benshun (full member and former party secretary of Hebei), Yang Dongliang (full member and former director of the State Administration of Work Safety), Su Shulin (full member and former governor of Fujian), Li Dongsheng (full member and former executive vice-minister of Public Security), Jiang Jiemin (full member and former minister of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission), Yang Jinshan (full member and former vice-commander of the Chengdu Military Region), Wang Min (full member and former party secretary of Liaoning), Li Chuncheng (alternate member and former deputy party secretary of Sichuan), Wang Yongchun (alternate member and former vice president of the China National Petroleum Corporation), Wan Qingliang (alternate member and former party secretary of Guangzhou), Chen Chuanping (alternate member and former party secretary of Taiyuan), Pan Yiyang (alternate member and former executive vice-governor of Neimenggu), Zhu Mingguo (alternate member and former chair of the Guangdong People's Political Consultative Conference), Fan Changmi (alternate member and former deputy political commissar of the Lanzhou Military Region), Wang Min (alternate member and former party secretary of Jinan), Yang Weize (alternate member and former party secretary of Nanjing), Qiu He (alternate member and former deputy party secretary of Yunnan), Yu Yuanhui (alternate member and former party secretary of Nanning City), and Lu Xiwen (alternate member and former deputy party secretary of Beijing). Seven of these former officials (Su Shulin, Chen Chuanping, Wang Yongchun, Wan Qingliang, Pan Yiyang, Yang Weize, and

Yu Yuanhui) were born in the 1960s and thus had been considered up-and-coming leaders of the future generation.

In an even bolder move, Xi sent four heavyweight leaders to jail: former PSC member Zhou Yongkang, who for ten years controlled China's security and law enforcement apparatus; former vice-chairs of the Central Military Commission (CMC), Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong, the highest-ranking generals, who for a decade were in charge of military personnel affairs; and Ling Jihua, who was in charge of the General Office of the Central Committee under Hu Jintao and oversaw all of the activities and document flows of the top leadership. These moves to clean up corruption within the party greatly bolstered public confidence and support for Xi, contributing to his image as a strong leader.

Third, Xi has shown dexterity on the foreign policy front. Although the outside world views China as increasingly assertive and even belligerent, the Chinese public generally interprets foreign policy issues from its own more patriotic perspective.⁶ As is evident in China's official broadcasts and social media, the public tends to believe that China has been on the defensive in disputes in the East and South China Seas and that maritime tensions are largely due to a U.S.-led effort to contain China. To many Chinese, China's foreign policy under Xi has been a great success. Xi's "proactive" foreign policy approach (奋发有为, *fenfa youwei*) represents a remarkable departure from that of his predecessor, Hu Jintao, who was often seen as following a policy of "inaction" (无为, *wuwei*).⁷ For example, Xi has significantly improved China's relationship with South Korea, even at the risk of antagonizing North Korea's Kim Jong-un. Xi also presided over a defining event in Sino-Russian relations: the signing of a thirty-year gas deal with Russian president Vladimir Putin in 2014. Some Chinese scholars have argued that China now seems to have more leverage in the U.S.-China-Russia triad, which contrasts with the Cold War era, when the United States carried more clout.⁸ At the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, held in Shanghai in May 2014, Xi again asserted China's right to influence regional matters. He claimed that "ultimately Asian affairs should be decided by Asians, and Asian security should be protected by Asian nations."⁹ On the world stage, China has many economic cards to play with nations of the European Union, and China's influence in Africa and South America has grown unprecedentedly strong.

Fourth, in late 2015 and early 2016, while China's economic slowdown and the resulting socioeconomic tensions within the country were dominating public concerns in China and abroad, Xi Jinping achieved a milestone victory in restructuring the People's Liberation Army (PLA). With this unprecedentedly large-scale and multifaceted transformation, known simply as the "military reform" (军改, *jungai*), Xi has profoundly revamped

the PLA administrative lineup, restructured its regional organization, and reshuffled officers across departments, regions, and services. These far-reaching changes are also paving the way for the rapid promotion of “young guards,” many of whom are seen either as Xi’s long-time protégés or his new loyalists.¹⁰ Xi’s “ability to impose his will on the PLA,” as the *Wall Street Journal* has observed, is in stunning contrast to his predecessors.¹¹ His “sweeping change” to the PLA reflects “a skill that his predecessor Hu Jintao lacked utterly and that Jiang Zemin wielded inconsistently,” notes a seasoned overseas scholar of the Chinese military.¹²

Although it will take a total of five years to complete the military reform as scheduled for 2020, some major structural changes occurred immediately after Xi Jinping’s important speech on the detailed plans about the transformation of the PLA under his administration in November 2015. It has been widely recognized for decades that the Chinese military is markedly unprepared for modern warfare, as the PLA structure has not been conducive to commanding joint force operations. Xi’s grand military reform at least partially aims to address this deficiency. Several aspects of military reform are intended to alter the long-standing “dominance of the army” (大陆军, *dalu jun*) in the Chinese military. These include downgrading of the four general departments (which have been dominated by officers from the army), establishing the Army Headquarters (which aims to make the army equal to, instead of superior to, other services such as the navy and air force), founding the Strategic Support Force, and emphasizing joint operations within the new structure of theater-based commands. These measures all contribute to a strategic shift away from a Soviet-style, army-centric system and toward what analysts call “a Western-style joint command.”¹³

Finally, and perhaps most important, Xi is determined to reform and revitalize China’s economy. He has championed his vision of a “Chinese dream,” defined as the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the opportunity for all Chinese to attain a middle-class lifestyle. As evident from the Third Plenum of the 18th Central Committee, held in November 2013, the overall objectives of Xi’s economic policy are to make the private sector the “decisive driver” of the Chinese economy, to satisfy the desires of the Chinese middle class, and to allow more members of the lower class to attain middle-class status.¹⁴ Xi aims to present China and the world with a blueprint for this new phase of China’s economic reform. With a road map for financial liberalization, service-sector development, and a new stage of environmentally friendly urbanization, Xi has set a bold agenda for economic change that aims to be as consequential as Deng Xiaoping’s landmark decision to pursue economic reform and opening in 1978.¹⁵

These five far-reaching measures have greatly bolstered public confidence in the new party boss in Zhongnanhai (the headquarters of the CCP and

the Chinese government). These are clear manifestations of Xi's very impressive rise over the past three years. Specifically, they demonstrate how Xi Jinping was able to identify potential threats to the party's legitimacy and supremacy—Bo Xilai's dramatic scandal, public dissatisfaction with both rampant official corruption and an ineffective leadership structure for making policy, Chinese nationalist sentiment in a rapidly changing international environment, the exigency of military reform, and the growing demands and desires of an emerging middle class—and then turn them to his advantage as a way to consolidate power.

No less significant has been the consolidation of Xi Jinping's power through the many top leadership positions that he has assumed. Previously, Presidents Jiang and Hu both first became general secretary of the party and then, after waiting months or years, took over the country's top military post. In contrast to his predecessors, Xi immediately took control of both pillars of party strength. Xi also chairs the newly established National Security Committee (NSC) and the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (CLGCDR), two crucial decisionmaking bodies. In addition, he holds the top position in several central leading groups in important functional areas such as foreign affairs, finance and the economy, cybersecurity and information technology, and military reform.¹⁶ Altogether, Xi now holds a total of twelve top posts in the country's most powerful leadership bodies (see table 1-1).

Given Xi's seeming monopoly of power in the Chinese political system, Chinese and foreign analysts have begun to refer to the current top leadership as the "Xi administration," rather than the "Xi-Li administration" (which refers also to Premier Li Keqiang). This contrasts with the naming convention for previous administrations, namely, the "Jiang Zemin-Zhu Rongji administration" and the "Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao administration."¹⁷ Observers argue that Premier Li has been marginalized, as Xi has taken over all of the top posts in economic affairs, which traditionally fall within the purview of the premier.¹⁸ Zhang Lifan, a well-known Chinese historian and outspoken public intellectual, has argued that Xi hopes to be "as strong as [Vladimir] Putin when dealing with domestic and foreign affairs."¹⁹ As Zhang noted during Xi's 2013 visit to Moscow, Xi's and Putin's personalities are very similar.

Reviewing the Trend of Collective Leadership and Interpreting Xi's Recent Initiatives

The developments that have followed Xi's ascent to the top leadership at the 18th National Party Congress raise a critical question: Will Xi's ongoing concentration of power reverse the trend of collective leadership, which has been a defining characteristic of post-Deng Chinese politics?

TABLE 1-1. Top Leadership Posts that Xi Jinping Holds Concurrently, as of May 2016

Leadership body	Post	Tenure since
Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party	General Secretary	2012.11
Presidency of the People's Republic of China	President	2013.03
Central Military Commission of the CCP	Chair	2012.11
Central Military Commission of the PRC	Chair	2013.03
National Security Committee	Chair	2013.11
Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms	Head	2013.11
Central Leading Group for Foreign Affairs (Central Leading Group for National Security)	Head	2013.03
Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs	Head	2012.11
Central Leading Group for Financial and Economic Work	Head	2013.03
Central Leading Group for Network Security and Information Technology	Head	2014.02
CMC Leading Group for Deepening Reforms of National Defense and the Military	Head	2014.03
PLA Joint Operations Command Center	Commander in chief	2016.04

Note: CMC=Central Military Commission; CCP=Chinese Communist Party; PLA=People's Liberation Army; PRC=People's Republic of China.

Since the mid-1990s, China's authorities have embraced the notion of *collective leadership*, a term that can be traced back to the early years of the Chinese Communist revolution.²⁰ Deng Xiaoping, however, made the greatest contributions to the development of collective leadership in both theory and practice.²¹ Deng was also the first to explicitly tie the concept to the role and function of the PSC.²² On December 24, 1990, Deng said to then CCP general secretary Jiang Zemin and then premier Li Peng that "the key to China's stability lies in the collective leadership of the Politburo, especially its Standing Committee."²³ According to Deng, it would be unhealthy and dangerous if a country's fate were to depend on one or two individual leaders.²⁴

The 2007 Party Congress Communiqué defines collective leadership as "a system with a division of responsibilities among individual leaders in an effort to prevent arbitrary decisionmaking by a single top leader."²⁵ As a result of this new norm in the political establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), during leadership transitions, both the Chinese

elite and the public have closely focused their attention on the composition of the PSC. For overseas China watchers, despite highly diverse and divergent assessments of Chinese elite politics, the last decade or so has witnessed a surprisingly strong consensus about the pivotal importance of the PSC.²⁶

But that consensus seems to have come to an end, as some view Xi as a new strongman in the Middle Kingdom. Western media have frequently cited Chinese scholars who claim a “return of strongman politics” in China. A front-page article in the *International New York Times* calls the Chinese decisionmaking process “Xi’s one man show.”²⁷ The article quotes a distinguished Chinese professor who characterized Xi as the “emperor” on the PSC, with the other six members of the committee serving as his “assistants.”²⁸

Some analysts believe that the so-called collective leadership has not worked well in the past and can never work in the future because it is inherently disintegrated and ineffective; it only leads to political infighting and bureaucratic deadlocks. This is reflected in the widely perceived Hu-era phenomenon of “policies decided at Zhongnanhai not making it out of Zhongnanhai.”²⁹ This gridlock, some observers argue, enabled heavyweight figures such as Zhou Yongkang, who controlled the security apparatus, and Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou, who were in charge of military personnel, to “make CCP leader Hu Jintao a mere figurehead.”³⁰ He Pin, a New York-based veteran China analyst, argues that the system of collective leadership, in which no one individual is responsible and accountable, is not sustainable. In his view, Xi’s rapid consolidation of power is a “return to a more normal political reality in China.”³¹

Some analysts assert that rule by the PSC (常委制, *changweizhi*), which characterized both the Jiang and Hu eras, has now been replaced by a head of state system (元首制, *yuanshouzhi*) under Xi’s leadership.³² Other analysts have gone a step further and argued that, as chairman of the National Security Committee and other crucial offices, Xi now enjoys unprecedented power in the PRC, surpassing even Mao and Deng.³³ The most extreme view, which is shared by distinguished Harvard professor Roderick MacFarquhar, well-known Chinese dissident scholar He Qinglian, and seasoned Hong Kong-based China analyst Willy Wo-Lap Lam, is that Xi is attempting to launch his “own cultural revolution,” similar to Mao’s.³⁴ He Qinglian, for example, compares Xi’s approach in establishing new central leading groups with Mao’s decision to set up the Central Leading Group of the Cultural Revolution in May 1966, which marginalized the supreme role of the PSC at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.³⁵

SKEPTICISM ABOUT XI'S DOMINANCE

It is one thing to recognize Xi Jinping's remarkable achievements in consolidating power over the first three years of his tenure as top CCP leader, but quite another to conclude that he has become a paramount and charismatic leader in the manner of Mao or Deng. Some scholars of Chinese politics have remained skeptical of the claim that Xi has attained supreme stature.³⁶ They believe it is far too early to forecast Xi's political trajectory and personal ambitions. Because the bold anticorruption campaign and comprehensive market reform will undermine various vested interest groups, including party officials and state-owned enterprise (SOE) executives, Xi needs to maximize his power and authority to achieve these objectives. Without this power, as Singapore-based political scientist Zheng Yongnian argues, Xi simply cannot do anything.³⁷

From a different perspective, Xi's concentration of power may betray "an acute sense of insecurity."³⁸ In the words of British political scientist Steve Tsang, Xi may feel that "he needs to exert a high level of control over the party in order to make the reforms that China needs."³⁹ Xi's like-minded colleagues in the top leadership, of course, strongly support his endeavor to save the CCP. But their support for Xi's amassment of individual power could be temporary rather than permanent. Also, at a time of rapid change, with the two-decade-long practice of collective decisionmaking facing a serious test, there is understandably a certain amount of disagreement about what in fact is taking place in the leadership. Critics have highlighted four major factors that may undermine Xi's capacity to end collective leadership and become a Mao- or Denglike figure in Chinese politics.

Absence of Legendary Revolution or War Experience

The power and charisma of Mao and Deng grew out of their extraordinary leadership through revolution and war, as well as their decades of political networking.⁴⁰ Mao's authority stemmed largely from his leadership during the Long March and his enormous contribution to the founding of the PRC in 1949. Mao's followers—the Long Marchers and other revolutionary veterans—occupied an overwhelming majority of leadership positions during the first two decades of the PRC. Mao himself wielded enormous—almost unchallengeable—personal power after the Communist victory and was viewed as a godlike figure, especially during the Cultural Revolution. He routinely made major policy decisions alone, including the establishment of the "interior third front" (三线建设, *sanxian jianshe*), which was the large-scale construction of the defense industry and the development of electric and transportation infrastructure in China's interior that began in

1964, and the invitation that led to President Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972.⁴¹ The most convincing evidence of Mao's individual power is, of course, his launch of the devastating Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.⁴²

Furthermore, Mao treated succession as if it were his own private matter; discussion of the transition of power after Mao was taboo, and he literally did away with two expected successors when they displeased him: Liu Shaoqi in 1966 and Lin Biao in 1971. The omnipresent slogan "Long Live Chairman Mao!" reinforced the illusion of Mao's "immortality." The chairman literally held power until he exhaled his dying breath in September 1976. The result was a cataclysmic succession struggle that led, ironically, to Deng Xiaoping's rise to power and the reversal of most of the policies that characterized Mao's China.

Like Mao, Deng had a legendary revolutionary career, during which he cultivated a robust political network. He also drastically and imaginatively changed the country's course of development in the post-Mao reform era. When Deng returned to power in 1978 (the third rehabilitation in his incredible political career), he promoted some of his "revolutionary comrades in arms" from the Anti-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War to key military posts in the PLA. In 1988, of the seventeen full generals who held the highest military ranks after the Cultural Revolution, ten came from the Second Field Army, to which Deng had personal ties. Some, including Defense Minister Qin Jiwei and Director of the General Political Department of the PLA Yang Baibing, came from the 129th Division—Deng's own unit.⁴³

The loyalty of these military leaders to Deng was among the most crucial factors that enabled him to remain in power after the 1989 Tiananmen crisis. The same loyalists also made the military the "protector and escort" of Deng's economic reform and opening-up policy.⁴⁴ As a result of Deng's legendary political career and formidable mentor-protégé ties, a set of reform initiatives—establishing special economic zones and initiating programs that allowed Chinese students to study in the West—were implemented with little resistance.⁴⁵

Also, like Mao, Deng's selection of his successor was pretty much his decision alone. In fact, he twice removed leaders he had tagged to succeed him—Hu Yaobang in 1986 and Zhao Ziyang in 1989—because he saw them as being too soft on democracy protesters. But unlike Mao, Deng did not pursue large-scale political purges, nor did he cause drastic disruptions to society. During the Deng era, political succession and generational change in the Chinese leadership became a matter of public concern. Whereas Mao was seen as a godlike figure, Deng was just a political strongman (政治强人, *zhengzhi qiangren*). For many years in the 1990s, people in China and Sinologists abroad speculated about geriatric Deng's imminent death, often causing

stock markets in Hong Kong and China to fluctuate wildly. In actuality, Deng effectively handed over the reins of power to Jiang before he died in 1997.

Those who doubt Xi's preeminence claim that holding twelve leadership posts is not necessarily a sign of strength. They argue that for all of his influence, Deng Xiaoping did not hold any leadership positions between 1989 and 1997, except for the post of honorary chair of the China Bridge Association, and yet no one would doubt that Deng was the real boss of Zhongnanhai in most of his final years. He Pin argues that even though Xi may be able to acquire monopolized powerful positions (集权, *jiquan*), he will not be able to exert actual authority and power (威权, *weiquan*).⁴⁶ In He's view, establishing a personality cult to bolster Xi's image would be counterproductive and detrimental, not only for present-day China but also for Xi himself.⁴⁷

Because of his generational attributes, Xi cannot boast political associations based on his revolutionary or war experiences, nor does he command a large team of devoted and well-positioned protégés in the current leadership. Even though Xi has recently promoted many "young guards" to the military leadership, their loyalty to Xi is something new—not based on decades-long bonds forged as army comrades, as was the case for Mao and Deng with their loyalists. Also, Xi's new loyalists must share power with other military leaders whose careers were not advanced through mentor-protégé ties. As Perry Link has observed, both Mao and Deng "were shrewd and powerful men who could dictate ideas and then either force or manipulate others into obedience. Top leaders after Deng have not been able to rule in this way; they have needed to balance power interests and continually watch rivals over their shoulders."⁴⁸

There has been widespread concern in China and abroad that Xi's ambitious economic reform agenda announced at the Third Plenum in the fall of 2013 cannot be effectively implemented due to bureaucratic resistance, "suggesting that Xi is not quite as all-powerful as it may seem."⁴⁹ Along the same lines, critics believe that Xi's bold anticorruption campaign may create many enemies, provoking a backlash against him within Chinese officialdom.

Xi's Relatively Short Tenure as Heir Apparent

Unlike his two predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, who served for many years in the top decisionmaking circle as presumed future leaders before assuming power, Xi has found the path to succession rather short. He served only one term in the PSC and two years as vice-chair of the CMC before becoming party boss in the fall of 2012. By contrast, when Jiang was appointed to top posts in the party, state, and military soon after the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, he had spent many years working in the shadow of the

paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. While Deng “ruled behind a screen” (垂帘听政, *chuilian tingzheng*), Jiang reinforced his power gradually by promoting many of his close friends to the national leadership—most noticeably his former junior colleagues at the First Ministry of Machine Building, Li Lanqing, Jia Qinglin, and Zeng Peiyan, and his protégés in Shanghai, Zeng Qinghong, Wu Bangguo, and Huang Ju. All but one of these men later became members of the PSC.⁵⁰

Similarly, as heir apparent, Hu Jintao served two terms on the PSC and five years as vice-chair of the CMC. He had already formed a strong mentor-protégé network of former colleagues through the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL), which he led in the early 1980s. Many of these so-called CCYL factional leaders (团派, *tuanshipai*) were well positioned in the national leadership when Hu succeeded Jiang as top leader in 2002.⁵¹ Notable examples include Song Defu (Fujian party secretary), Wang Lequan (Xinjiang party secretary and Politburo member), Li Keqiang (Henan party secretary), Li Yuanchao (Jiangsu party secretary), Wang Yang (executive deputy secretary-general of the State Council), Liu Yandong (director of the CCP United Front Work Department), Du Qinglin (minister of Agriculture), Meng Xuenong (Beijing mayor), and Huang Huahua (Guangdong governor). These long-time protégés constituted Hu’s power base when he served as the CCP general secretary, and some of them currently serve on the PSC, Politburo, and Secretariat.

For Xi Jinping, the experiences of his predecessors have likely motivated him to move quickly to form his own strong team with which he can more effectively lead, both now and in the future. Xi, of course, is not without political allies in the top leadership, but political allies are not the same as personal protégés. Xi was not responsible for the ascent of his powerful political allies to the PSC, which contrasts with Jiang and Hu’s involvement in the rise of their own personal protégés. In a sense, Xi’s basis of power and authority is not as infallible as it seems. This also raises an important question as to what that basis is. Indeed, an important distinction exists between Xi’s individual power and the group power generated by the dominance of his political allies in the top leadership.

Distinction between Xi’s Individual Power and the Dominance of His Allies on the PSC

The first three years of the Xi administration brought remarkable changes in politics and policy as Xi took control of the leadership agenda. But these achievements arguably had more to do with the factional makeup of the PSC than with Xi’s authority and command. In the post-Deng era, two major political coalitions associated with former general secretaries Jiang Zemin

and Hu Jintao (who both still wield considerable influence) have been competing for power, influence, and control over policy initiatives. The first coalition, which was born from the Jiang era and is currently led by President Xi Jinping, can be named the Jiang-Xi camp (江习阵营, *jiangxi zhenying*). Its core membership was once the Shanghai Gang (上海帮, *shanghaibang*)—leaders who worked under Jiang when he was a top municipal leader in the city and later moved to Beijing to serve in the national leadership. Increasingly, the Jiang-Xi camp consists of “princelings” (太子党, *taizidang*)—leaders born to the families of revolutionaries or other high-ranking officials. Both Jiang and Xi are princelings themselves, though other princelings in Beijing have long harbored suspicions about the “authenticity” of Jiang’s pedigree.⁵²

The second coalition, known as the Hu-Li camp (胡李阵营, *huli zhenying*), was previously led by Hu Jintao and is now headed by Premier Li Keqiang. Its core faction is *tuanpai* officials, leaders who advanced their political career primarily through the leadership of the CCYL when they were young, as both Hu and Li did. They usually have humble family backgrounds and often have leadership experience in less developed inland regions. This bifurcation has created within China’s one-party polity something approximating a system of checks and balances, as the two coalitions attempt to direct the policymaking process. This informal experiment in Chinese elite politics, which this author calls the “one party, two coalitions” mechanism (一党两派, *yidang liangpai*), has been one of the most important political developments in post-Deng China.

At the 18th National Party Congress, the Jiang-Xi camp won an overwhelming majority of the seats on the PSC. It secured six of the seven spots, while the Hu-Li camp is now only represented by Li Keqiang.⁵³ This six-to-one ratio in favor of the Jiang-Xi camp is a crucially important political factor in present-day Chinese leadership, yielding Xi, the protégé of Jiang, tremendous support and power. It explains why he can so quickly and boldly carry out his new initiatives—the successful closure of the Bo Xilai trial, the strong anticorruption drive, a more proactive foreign policy, military reform, and an ambitious market reform agenda. This is also the reason the PSC has been able to grant Xi twelve top leadership posts.

Yet, it should also be noted that the five members of the PSC who are Xi’s political allies are expected to retire, as a result of age limits, at the 19th National Party Congress planned for 2017. They include Wang Qishan, a skilled political tactician and Xi’s longtime friend, who has played an instrumental role in the anticorruption campaign and financial reforms, and Yu Zhengsheng, another seasoned politician who has ties with Xi’s family reaching back almost seven decades.⁵⁴ Even before the 18th National Party Congress in November 2012, some analysts were predicting that following the Hu-Wen administration, these three heavyweight politicians would form

the “iron triangle” (铁三角, *tiesanjiao*) in the top leadership.⁵⁵ It is likely that the Jiang-Xi camp will no longer enjoy as overwhelming a majority after the next round of leadership turnover.

The Enduring Power of the Opposition Camp

The dominance of Jiang’s men in the current PSC does not necessarily mean that “the winner takes all” in Chinese elite politics. Leaders of the Hu-Li camp are still well represented in other important leadership bodies. Although the Jiang-Xi camp dominates the PSC, the other eighteen Politburo seats are divided equally between the Jiang-Xi and Hu-Li camps (see table 1-2). On the seven-member Secretariat, five members advanced their careers largely through the ranks of the CCYL; three of these—Director of the CCP Organization Department Liu Qibao, Vice-Chair of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Du Qinglin, and State Councilor Yang Jing—are Hu’s *tuanpai* protégés.⁵⁶ Of the ten members on the executive committee of the State Council, four officials—Li Keqiang, Liu Yandong, Wang Yang, and Yang Jing—are prominent *tuanpai* leaders.

It is also notable that in each of the nine most important leadership organs of the PRC—namely, the PSC, the PRC presidency (president and vice-president), the State Council, the CMC, the CCP Secretariat, the NPC, the CPPCC, the Supreme People’s Court, and the Supreme People’s Procuratorate—the top-ranked leader (第一把手, *diyibashou*) and the second-ranked leader (第二把手, *di'erbashou*) are split between the two competing coalitions (see table 1-3). This suggests that China’s current collective leadership maintains a factional balance of power.

Another factor contributing to factional balance is the ascent of numerous *tuanpai* leaders to the 376-member Central Committee. Many of them serve as provincial party secretaries, governors, and ministers of the State Council or their deputies, or in other important leadership posts. More specifically, *tuanpai* leaders, whose time working with the CCYL coincided with Hu Jintao or Li Keqiang’s leadership of the league, now occupy ninety-nine seats on the 18th Central Committee, constituting 26.3 percent of this crucial decisionmaking body.⁵⁷

As the “one party, two coalitions” dynamic appears to be a new experiment in Chinese elite politics, it is possible that the CCP will also experiment with a new mechanism of “factional rotation” (派系轮换, *paixi lunhuan*). This may partially explain why the Hu-Li camp quietly acquiesced to its significant minority in the 18th PSC. Based on political norms and age requirements in elite Chinese politics, leading candidates for the 2017 PSC will likely include several leaders from the Hu-Li camp, such as Vice-Premier Wang Yang, Guangdong Party Secretary Hu Chunhua, and Director of the

TABLE 1-2. Factional Identity of Members of the Politburo, 2016

Name	Age (2016)	Confirmed and designated leadership post	Jiang-Xi camp	Hu-Li camp
Xi Jinping*	63	Party Secretary-General, Chair of CMC, PRC President	X	
Li Keqiang*	61	Premier of the State Council		X
Zhang Dejiang*	70	Chair of the National People's Congress	X	
Yu Zhengsheng*	71	Chair of the CPPCC	X	
Liu Yunshan*	69	Executive Secretary of the Secretariat	X	
Wang Qishan*	68	Secretary of the CCDI	X	
Zhang Gaoli*	70	Executive Vice-Premier of the State Council	X	
Ma Kai	70	Vice-Premier of the State Council	X	
Wang Huning	61	Director of the CCP Central Policy Research Office	X	
Liu Yandong (f)	71	Vice-Premier of the State Council		X
Liu Qibao	63	Director of the CCP Propaganda Department		X
Xu Qiliang	66	Vice-Chair of the CMC	X	
Sun Chunlan (f)	66	Director of the CCP United Front Work Department		X
Sun Zhengcai	53	Chongqing Party Secretary	X	
Li Jianguo	70	Vice-Chair of NPC		X
Li Yuanchao	66	Vice-President of the PRC		X
Wang Yang	61	Vice-Premier of the State Council		X
Zhang Chunxian	63	Xinjiang Party Secretary	X	
Fan Changlong	69	Vice-Chair of the CMC		X
Meng Jianzhu	69	Secretary of the Commission of Political Science and Law	X	
Zhao Leji	59	Director of the CCP Organization Department	X	
Hu Chunhua	53	Guangdong Party Secretary		X
Li Zhanshu	66	Director of the CCP General Office	X	
Guo Jinlong	69	Beijing Party Secretary		X
Han Zheng	62	Shanghai Party Secretary	X	

Notes and Source: * Refers to Politburo Standing Committee members. Jiang-Xi camp=Jiang Zemin and Xi Jinping camp; Hu-Li camp=Hu Jintao and Li Keqiang camp; CMC=Central Military Commission; CPPCC=Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; CCDI=Central Commission for Discipline Inspection; (f)=female; CCP=Chinese Communist Party; NPC=National People's Congress; PRC=People's Republic of China. Cheng Li, "Opportunity Lost? Inside China's Leadership Transition," *Foreign Policy Online*, November 16, 2012 (http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/11/16/opportunity_lost).

TABLE 1-3. Factional Affiliation of Top Two Leaders in the Most Important People's Republic of China Leadership Organs, 2016

Leadership organ	Top-ranked leader		Second-ranked leader	
	Name	Faction	Name	Faction
Politburo Standing Committee (PSC, two highest-ranking members)	Xi Jinping	Jiang-Xi camp (princeling)	Li Keqiang	Hu-Li camp (<i>tuanship</i>)
PRC Presidency (President & Vice-President)	Xi Jinping	Jiang-Xi camp (princeling)	Li Yuanchao	Hu-Li camp (<i>tuanship</i>)
State Council (Premier & Executive Vice-Premier)	Li Keqiang	Hu-Li camp (<i>tuanship</i>)	Zhang Gaoli	Jiang-Xi camp
Central Military Commission (Chair & Executive Vice-Chair)	Xi Jinping	Jiang-Xi camp (princeling)	Fan Changlong	Hu-Li camp
CCP Secretariat (two highest-ranking members)	Liu Yunshan	Jiang-Xi camp	Liu Qibao	Hu-Li camp (<i>tuanship</i>)
National People's Congress (Chair & Executive Vice-Chair)	Zhang Dejiang	Jiang-Xi camp (princeling)	Li Jianguo	Hu-Li camp
CPPCC (Chair & Executive Vice-Chair)	Yu Zhengsheng	Jiang-Xi camp (princeling)	Du Qinglin	Hu-Li camp (<i>tuanship</i>)
Supreme People's Court (President & Executive Vice-President)	Zhou Qiang	Hu-Li camp (<i>tuanship</i>)	Shen Deyong	Jiang-Xi camp
Supreme People's Procuratorate (President & Executive Vice-President)	Cao Jianming	Jiang-Xi camp (Shanghai gang)	Hu Zejun	Hu-Li camp (<i>tuanship</i>)

Note and Source: CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CMC = Central Military Commission; CPPCC = Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; NPC = National People's Congress; PRC = People's Republic of China. Cheng Li, "A Biographical and Factional Analysis of the Post-2012 Politburo," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 41 (June 6, 2013), 11.

CCP Propaganda Department Liu Qibao. All of these leaders currently serve on the Politburo, and all are known as *tuanpai* leaders who worked very closely with Hu Jintao in the leadership of the CCYL in the 1980s. Hu Chunhua, one of the two so-called sixth-generation leaders in the current Politburo, is viewed by some analysts as the heir apparent to Xi, in line to succeed him at the 20th Party Congress in 2022.⁵⁸

It is interesting to note that Xi's ongoing anticorruption campaign is not directly motivated by factional politics, although the political capital and public confidence acquired through the campaign's achievements will potentially allow Xi to appoint more of his protégés to the top leadership in the next round of political succession. Five out of the six largest corruption cases that have been investigated over the past three years have involved Jiang's protégés, namely, former Politburo member Bo Xilai, former minister of Railways Liu Zhijun, former PSC member Zhou Yongkang, and former vice-chairs of the CMC, Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong.

Different reasons led to these five leaders being charged, but in each case, the crimes were outrageous in scope. In some cases, such as the Bo Xilai-Wang Lijun episode, the fallen official was unlucky enough to have his crimes publicly exposed. The publicity was likely a result of Xi's need to prove his ability to curtail rampant official corruption, to improve the tarnished image of the CCP, and, most important, to quell public resentment over the convergence of political power and economic wealth that emerged from a government primarily run by princelings and Jiang's protégés.⁵⁹ In fact, the anticorruption tsar, Wang Qishan, is also a princeling and Jiang's protégé. In demonstrating that princelings can crack down on other princelings or their political allies, Xi and Wang have effectively headed off criticism that the new leadership's anticorruption campaign is merely motivated by factional politics.

Only after the trial of Bo Xilai and arrests of the other four aforementioned leaders did Xi and Wang begin to purge some of the heavyweight leaders in the Hu-Li camp, most noticeably the prominent *tuanpai* leader Ling Jihua. Ling was Hu Jintao's confidant, formerly serving as the director of the Central United Front Work Department and director of the Central General Office. In the lead-up to the 18th National Party Congress, Ling was a top contender for PSC membership. But he faced a political Waterloo during the last leadership succession due to fallout from a scandal involving his son, who was killed when he crashed a Ferrari driving at high speeds in Beijing. Ling's alleged cover-up, as well as suspicion of a cross-factional conspiracy between him and Zhou Yongkang, brought his political ambitions to ruin.⁶⁰ Ling's brother, Ling Zhengce, the former director of the Development and Reform Commission in Shanxi Province, was arrested earlier in 2014 on corruption charges. That it took two years to remove Ling Jihua

may reflect caution on the part of Xi Jinping and Wang Qishan in handling cases that involve Hu's *tuanpai* protégés.

It remains to be seen whether they will pursue other cases against prominent *tuanpai* leaders. One does not need to be a seasoned China watcher to realize that further purges of heavyweight *tuanpai* leaders will be widely perceived as faction driven and could carry grave consequences. But even if the leadership structure or factional lineup changes in accordance with Xi's political desire, the broad political circumstances in this rapidly changing country are unlikely to make a return of strongman politics feasible.

BROAD CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE XI LEADERSHIP

The tension between Xi's concentration of individual power and China's past practice of collective leadership has become especially significant at a time when the country is confronting many daunting challenges. Over the past several decades, China has been beset by growing wealth disparities, repeated industrial and environmental disasters, resource scarcity, public health and food safety crises, frequent instances of social unrest, and a manual labor shortage in some coastal cities, coinciding with high unemployment rates among college graduates. China's economy faces serious and interrelated problems, including mounting local debt, the proliferation of shadow banking, overcapacity in certain industrial sectors, and a growing property bubble. The old development model, which relied on export-driven and cheap labor-oriented growth, has come to an end. Chinese labor costs have risen rapidly, and the country can no longer tolerate the previous growth model's severe damage to the environment, including the pollution of air, water, and soil. But the new consumption-driven, innovation-led, and service sector-centric model has yet to fully take flight.

Of course, Xi and his generation of leaders did not create these problems; they have largely inherited them from their predecessors. In fact, Xi's bold economic reform agenda has sought to address many of these issues. Some argue that factional deadlock in collective leadership led to the Hu-Wen administration's ineffectiveness during the so-called lost decade, when seemingly little could be done to counter rampant official corruption and the monopolization of SOEs. This rationale has apparently bolstered the case for Xi's more forceful personal leadership.⁶¹ If a more balanced factional composition in the PSC leads to infighting, political fragmentation, and policy deadlock, why should China not organize leadership so that power is concentrated in the hands of Xi and his team? If collective leadership assigns each PSC member one functional area and thus leads to political fragmentation and poor coordination, why should more power not be given to the general secretary? If local governments have been the main

source of resistance to reform initiatives, why should Zhongnanhai not establish the Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms at various levels of government to facilitate policy implementation? This line of thinking seems to explain the basis for the six-to-one split of the current PSC and Xi's twelve top leadership posts.

But in consolidating power, Xi also runs a major political risk: If he cannot deliver what he has promised as part of his economic reform agenda, he will not have anyone else with whom to share the blame. The recent stock market crisis in China and the very strong government interference in order to "save the market" reflect Xi's political vulnerability and his sense of urgency. Xi's popularity among the general public, including the majority of the middle class, is always subject to change if China's economic conditions deteriorate.

Furthermore, Xi's inclination for monopolizing power has alienated a large swath of China's public intellectuals, especially liberal intellectuals. They were particularly dismayed in the early months of Xi's tenure by orders instructing them not to speak about seven sensitive issues: universal values, freedom of the press, civil society, civil rights, past mistakes by the CCP, crony capitalism, and judicial independence.⁶² In public discourse, some of these topics remain very sensitive or even taboo. Media censorship has tightened under Xi's leadership, as has the state monitoring and management of research institutes, universities, and NGOs.

It should be noted that Xi's politically conservative and economically liberal approach to governing mirrors the method preferred by his predecessors, who always seemed to take one step forward economically while taking a step backward politically. During his famous "Southern Tour" (南巡, *nanxun*) in 1992, Deng called for greater market reform and economic privatization, while continuing to crack down on political dissent. Jiang broadened the CCP's power base by recruiting entrepreneurs and other new socioeconomic players, a formulation known as the "Three Represents" (三个代表, *sange daibiao*), while launching a harsh political campaign against the Falun Gong, an emerging religious group. Hu's populist appeal for a "harmonious society" sought to reduce economic disparities and social tensions, all while tightening police control of society, especially in regions with a high proportion of ethnic minorities.

And yet, Xi seems to face deeper and rougher political waters than any Chinese leader since Mao, with the very survival of the party-state resting in his hands. With the revolution in telecommunications and social media, the way China's authorities manage domestic political issues—from human rights and religious freedom to ethnic tensions and media censorship—has increasingly caught the eye of the Chinese public and the international community. Xi's decision to prioritize economic reforms may be strategically

sound, but he may not be able to postpone much-needed political reform for too long. Xi must make bold, timely moves to implement political reforms—including increasing political openness and expanding the role of civil society—and address issues that are currently preventing China from blossoming into a true innovation-driven economy.

Likewise, Xi's ambitious anticorruption campaign has not come without serious political risks. Though popular among the Chinese public, this ad hoc initiative may ultimately alienate the officialdom—the very group on which the system relies for steady governance. Ultimately, Xi's limited crackdown on official corruption should not serve as a replacement for reinforcing the rule of law, adopting institutional mechanisms like official income disclosure and conflict of interest regulations, and, most important, taking concrete steps to establish an independent judicial system in China. Otherwise, it will only be a matter of time before a new wave of official corruption leaves the public cynical about Xi's true intentions and the effectiveness of his signature campaign.

From an even broader standpoint, China's history under Mao and Deng was one of arbitrary decisionmaking by one individual leader. This method is arguably unsuitable for governing a pluralistic society amid increasingly active interest group politics. Despite its deficiencies, collective leadership generally entails a more dynamic and pluralistic decisionmaking process through which political leaders can represent various socioeconomic and geographic constituencies. Bringing together leaders from contending political camps with different expertise, credentials, and experiences contributes to the development of more-effective governmental institutions. Common interests in domestic social stability and a shared aspiration to further China's rise on the world stage may make collective leadership both feasible and sustainable. In this sense, Xi can modify and improve the system of collective leadership, which is still largely experimental. But it would be pretentious and detrimental to attempt to replace most of the rules and norms that have governed elite politics over the past two decades. One simply cannot turn the clock back to the old days of the Mao era, when China was far less pluralistic and far more isolated from the outside world.

INADEQUACIES OF SCHOLARLY DEBATES

For the international community, a well-informed, accurate, and sophisticated understanding of China's leadership structure and politics is essential in today's world. One of the most unfortunate gaps in the growing literature on contemporary China is the relative lack of insightful and informed research on leadership politics. Many authors have held forth at length about China's foreign policy, strategic behavior, military capabilities, social tensions,

economic prospects, and demographic challenges, but few have addressed the topic that underpins all of these areas, namely, the changes and developments in politics and decisionmaking at the leadership level.⁶³

With China emerging as a global economic powerhouse, PRC government policies—relating to the domestic economy, trade, taxation, industry, the environment, and energy—will continue to have a major impact on the global economy. The Chinese political structure and leadership, including the decisionmaking process and personal characteristics of leaders, will be among the most important factors that shape these policies. Unity or division within the leadership will undoubtedly affect China's overall political stability. Growing tensions in the East China Sea and South China Sea and the widespread view among the Chinese public that the United States wants to contain China have further clouded Chinese leadership politics. At the same time, China's foreign policy is increasingly influenced by domestic considerations, including elite competition, the economy, energy security, nationalism, and maintaining political support from the military. These domestic and international factors mean that the study of Chinese leadership politics is more important than ever before. For U.S. policymakers, misjudging Xi's power or drawing unbalanced assessments of the status and trends of collective leadership risks rendering policies toward China ineffective.

Though the overseas media has reported extensively on China's elite politics—including the importance of the PSC, the characteristics of top leaders, and Xi's efforts to consolidate his power—numerous facets of Chinese collective leadership have escaped rigorous scholarly scrutiny.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, many analysts have gravitated to either of two extremes. Some researchers remain burdened by stale perceptions and vulnerable to rumors. They are obsessed with investigating information obtained from unverified "secret documents" in China and often rely on outmoded analytical frameworks with ideologically loaded terminology to analyze the PRC's increasingly complicated governing structure. Many overseas analyses of Chinese politics are based on rumors, myths, and speculation rather than verifiable and empirical facts.

Meanwhile, other scholars and observers are so impressed by the capacity and achievements of Chinese leaders that they have abandoned their critical lens, sometimes overlooking fundamental deficiencies in China's political system and serious shortcomings in individual leaders.⁶⁵ The most notable recent example is a book written by Robert Lawrence Kuhn, a businessman who has become a biographer of PRC senior leaders. After extensive interviews with many rising stars of the fifth generation of PRC leaders, Kuhn offers substantial if not absolute praise of their talent, wisdom, and vision.⁶⁶ To be fair, Kuhn's interviews with Chinese senior leaders are informative and insightful, providing an important perspective. But he and other

like-minded overseas analysts have often overlooked the long-standing problems of the authoritarian system when it comes to selecting national leaders. Until a more legitimate mechanism for selecting leaders is implemented, these problems will likely continue to undermine the unity of the leadership and the party's governance capacity.

In academic studies of Chinese politics, two contending views have prevailed over the past decade. One is the analytical paradigm of authoritarian resilience. Western scholarship on the durability of the party-state regime began to emerge in the mid-1990s and has become the mainstream position over the last decade.⁶⁷ After the CCP survived the political turmoil of the 1989 Tiananmen incident, which caused a serious legitimacy crisis, some China analysts began to appreciate the endurance and adaptability of the Chinese leadership in handling daunting challenges both at home and abroad. These analysts view the CCP as adaptable enough to respond quickly to changes in its environment and to become more competent over time. "The result," some scholars observe, "has been to create a power system characterized by 'authoritarian resilience.'"⁶⁸

By definition, the CCP's resilient authoritarianism refers to a one-party political system that is able to "enhance the capacity of the state to govern effectively" through institutional adaptations and policy adjustments.⁶⁹ A key component of the authoritarian resilience thesis is the argument or perception that the CCP's system can successfully resist or suppress demands for democracy in the country and around the world.⁷⁰ Not surprisingly, party leaders and conservative public intellectuals seek to reinforce the belief that "democracy is not appropriate for China," but that a resilient authoritarian system is.⁷¹

In his analysis of why the CCP has been able to retain power since the 1989 Tiananmen incident, Andrew Nathan outlines four important institutional developments in the Chinese political system:

1. the increasingly norm-bound nature of its succession politics;
2. the increase in meritocratic, as opposed to factional, considerations in the promotion of political elites;
3. the differentiation and functional specialization of institutions within the regime; and
4. the establishment of institutions for political participation that strengthen the CCP's legitimacy among the public at large.⁷²

Establishing these institutional mechanisms has certainly been a part of the CCP leadership's agenda. Indeed, over the past decade some of these processes have influenced the political behavior of leaders and changed the game of China's elite politics. But one can also argue that, for now, they all have serious limitations. None has been effective enough to make the overall

Chinese political system more resilient.⁷³ The “norm-bound nature of its succession politics” has been overshadowed by widespread “black box manipulation,” which is anything but meritocratic. Nepotism in various forms—blood ties, school ties, regional identities, and mentor-protégé ties—continues to play a crucial role in elite selection. Similarly, the CCP has explicitly stated that it is not interested in pursuing a Western-style tripartite division of government. Instead, the Chinese leadership has proposed an institutional separation of the party into three divisions, namely, decisionmaking, policy implementation, and supervision. Given that CCP power remains unchecked, however, the party leadership’s promotion of “functional specialization of institutions within the regime” has been mostly empty rhetoric. And CCP paranoia about group protests, petitions, and the rise of social media forums is a serious obstacle in the way of institutionalized public participation.

In general, the authoritarian resilience thesis tends to underestimate the vulnerability of the authoritarian political system. It largely overlooks the fact that new socioeconomic forces in the country pose serious challenges to the CCP’s monopoly on power and will make it more difficult for prominent leaders such as Bo Xilai and Zhou Yongkang to benefit from misuse of personal influence. As described earlier, competing factions within the party leadership may fail to broker the necessary deals to preserve party unity. The authoritarian resilience paradigm also neglects to adequately consider strong demands for democracy by liberal-minded intellectuals and a burgeoning Chinese middle class. New experiments in the management or reform of party institutions should lead to deeper changes if the system is genuinely resilient. A truly durable political system remains open to new ideas and new experiments. It would therefore be able to evolve institutionally and politically and avoid becoming dogmatic and stagnant.

Opposite to the “authoritarian resilience” camp, another group of scholars holds the belief that the CCP—but not the country—is in danger of collapse. In his remarks at the China Reform Forum in December 2011, scholar Zhang Lifan argued that “China is not in danger, but the CCP is.”⁷⁴ In his view, many CCP officials are aware of the party’s tenuous legitimacy. They ultimately do not care whether or not the CCP survives and are instead concerned only with the well-being of their own families. Rampant official corruption, the tendency of leaders to transfer their personal assets abroad for safekeeping, and the phenomenon of officials sending their family members to study or live in the West all reflect party elites’ lack of confidence in the country’s sociopolitical stability.⁷⁵ Observers often note that the Chinese government budget for national defense in 2012 was 670.3 billion yuan, whereas the budget for police and other domestic security expenditures amounted to 701.8 billion yuan.⁷⁶

Critics also point out the unprecedentedly large presence of princelings in the top leadership, the role of mentor-protégé ties in elite promotion (for example, the prevalence of *tuanpai* and *mishu* in the leadership), and the fact that those who do not have strong family backgrounds or political connections have routinely used bribes to “purchase office” (买官, *maiguan*). Minxin Pei, a prominent U.S.-based scholar of China’s elite politics, has identified the trend of China’s leaders using “fake or dubiously acquired academic credentials to burnish their resumes.” All of the above have tarnished the CCP elite’s claims of legitimacy and meritocracy.⁷⁷

Scholars who predict the CCP’s collapse are often cynical about Xi’s intentions and capacity to pursue serious political and legal reforms, which they believe are essential to the party’s survival. In the lead-up to the 18th National Party Congress, Zhang Lifang stated bluntly, “If the next generation of leaders do not pursue political reforms in their first term, there is no point in doing so in their second term.” In his words, “China should witness either reforms in the first five years, or the end of the CCP in ten years.”⁷⁸ David Shambaugh’s famous article “The Coming Chinese Crackup” argues along the same line of thinking while highlighting the imminent nature of this doomsday scenario for the CCP and, in particular, for Xi.⁷⁹

Just as proponents of the authoritarian resilience thesis have not adequately considered societal factors, scholars associated with the collapse paradigm tend to underestimate the strong incentive for CCP leaders to ensure the party’s survival and the wealth of political resources that those leaders have to change the odds against them. In a sense, critics see China’s problems as dynamic, but they do not give the country’s leadership the same credit. The assumption that the CCP leadership is static and stubborn proves problematic, as it disregards the recent political measures and policy changes enacted by Xi and his new leadership team in the wake of scandals relating to Bo Xilai and others.

China’s political future, especially the survival or transformation of its one-party system, is a complex issue that demands more intellectually rigorous analysis and debate. The resilience and collapse paradigms are based on some valid empirical evidence and analytical insight, but both are too deterministic in forecasting China’s political trajectory. Neither has seriously scrutinized the remarkable changes in the formation of the CCP elite or the Chinese conception of collective leadership and its intriguing role in the transformation of Chinese society.

Some PRC scholars have recently argued that collective leadership is a uniquely Chinese form of governance. In his new book *The System of Collective Leadership in China*, Hu Angang, an influential scholar and director of the Institute for Contemporary China Studies at Tsinghua University, goes a step further and glorified China for developing, in his view, a political

system of collective leadership that is more democratic, more responsive, and superior to the presidential system (总统制, *zongtongzhi*) in the United States.⁸⁰ In criticizing the U.S. system, he cites several negative features, including the influence of money in presidential politics, the empty promises of presidential candidates, lack of long-term strategic planning, widespread bureaucratic inefficiency, monopolized executive power, and dysfunction due to partisan bickering.

According to Hu Angang, the most important feature of the Chinese political system at present is that it is “collective”—Hu coined the term *collective presidency* to refer to the Chinese collective leadership—and therefore differs from the U.S. presidential system, which emphasizes the “individual.”⁸¹ The Chinese system values “collective wisdom” rather than “individual wisdom” and relies on “collective decisionmaking” instead of the “individual decisionmaking” favored by the U.S. presidential system.⁸² The diverse backgrounds and expertise of the PSC members are invaluable assets in the decisionmaking process, helping the body avoid reaching arbitrary, ill-considered conclusions more reliably than an individual leader. In Hu’s view, PSC members who also lead other institutions not only represent diverse interests but also more effectively coordinate and implement policies.⁸³ Hu also elaborates on what he calls the five mechanisms of Chinese collective leadership: division and coordination of responsibility, generational succession, group learning, separate investigations and visits, and collective decisionmaking.⁸⁴

Hu proposes thirteen ways in which the Chinese collective leadership can improve—including by adopting regulations on procedures and voting for major decisions, ensuring against the resurgence of the personality cult, soliciting external consultant work, and strengthening political accountability—but he hardly discusses any fundamental flaws of China’s political system. Most notably, Hu does not address China’s political and institutional vulnerabilities. Not surprisingly, Hu Angang’s thesis has received far more criticism than praise in Chinese semiofficial news circuits and social media channels, as well as in Chinese academic circles. Critics especially find fault in Hu’s simplistic assessment of both American and Chinese political systems and his contradictions about the “monopolized power” and “powerlessness” of the U.S. president.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, Hu Angang has made both the Chinese public and the intellectual community pay greater attention to the origin, operation, and implications of collective leadership, especially the pivotal role of the PSC. Western scholars of Chinese politics have not yet engaged in the serious research that this subject demands. Analysis of Xi Jinping’s ascent and recent consolidation of power and its impact on collective leadership has relevance beyond China’s future trajectory. It can also contribute to a broader

understanding of the political transition processes in authoritarian regimes in general. An empirically grounded, comprehensive study of China's search for collective leadership can enrich the wider academic literature on comparative political systems.

THE OVERARCHING ARGUMENT AND KEY THEMES OF THIS BOOK

The overarching argument of this book is that despite the persistence of one-party rule in the PRC, the ruling party has continued to evolve and reform itself over the past three decades. China's governance structure and political dynamics in general have progressed significantly, becoming far more institutionalized than many of the system's harshest critics in the West acknowledge. One must recognize that China's experiment with orderly, institutionalized transfer of power is relatively new. Yet, in what is no insignificant feat, the country has twice completed a generally peaceful, systematic transition of leadership: first in 2002 and again in 2012. A more comprehensive analysis of the inner workings of China's collective leadership—its structure, composition, internal dynamics, limitations, and the role of the top leader—yields vital insights regarding the party's stability and future prospects.

The CCP is apparently unwilling to relinquish its monopoly on political power and experiment with a Western-style system based on a separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. This does not mean, however, that the CCP is a politically stagnant institution completely resistant to institutional change, nor does it mean that there is a total absence of checks and balances in the Chinese political system. Furthermore, leadership under the one-party system does not necessarily consist of a monolithic group of elites that share similar personal and professional backgrounds, political experiences, policy preferences, and worldviews.

Certain institutional rules and norms—including the retirement age requirement, term limits, regional representation, and multicandidate elections for the Central Committee—have proven enduring and effective. While these institutional mechanisms cannot fully eliminate the nepotism inherent in elite promotion, they have nevertheless imparted a new sense of consistency and fairness, and even changed competitive political behavior among the elite.

The elite transformation in China during the past three decades is not simply generational; it is also occupational. In fact, the background of the CCP leadership has shifted twice over the past three decades. The first transition was from a revolutionary party consisting primarily of peasants,

soldiers, and urban workers to a ruling party dominated by technocrats (that is, officials who were trained as engineers and natural scientists before they advanced politically in the mid-1980s and 1990s). The second shift occurred at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when a different set of leaders, this time with formal training in law, economics, and other social sciences, rose to power at both the national and provincial levels. Perhaps even more important than the fluidity of elite turnover and the growing diversity in educational and occupational experiences among political leaders is the trend, within the upper echelons of the CCP, toward competition between the two informal coalitions described earlier in the chapter.

This study pays special attention to what the Chinese term *inner-party democracy*, a conceptualization of the new period of collective leadership that emphasizes deal making and compromise between competing factions or coalitions, in addition to the observance of commonly accepted guidelines affecting various forms of representation—be they regional, institutional, or professional. A far cry from liberal democracy, this experiment expands political choice for members of the party establishment in a fairly limited way. However, the gradual evolution of this emergent inner-party competition and cooperation may pave the way for a more significant transformation within the Chinese political system.

To a certain extent, Xi's remarkable rise and quick consolidation of power also reflect important changes in Chinese leadership politics, particularly new adjustments in its institutional governance framework over the past three decades. These largely unanticipated developments call for analysts both in China and abroad to reassess collective leadership. This study rejects as being too extreme two widely held perceptions of Xi Jinping: one maintains that Xi has already become a Mao-like dictator; the other argues that Xi's grip on power is tenuous at best, claiming that he has made too many enemies and cannot get anything done due to strong bureaucratic and local resistance.

The truth—a more realistic assessment—lies somewhere in between: Xi has indeed emerged as a powerful leader, but not powerful enough to neglect the norms and regulations of collective leadership. Chinese politics can hardly return to the days of Maoists' zero-sum game. Deng and other Chinese leaders who followed Mao were determined to prevent any future leader from running away with the system, as Mao had, and to make it similarly difficult to abandon or depart from the strategy of reform and opening.⁸⁶ In addition, Chinese society today differs fundamentally from that of the Mao era.

What do the above findings and arguments mean for foreign leaders, especially for U.S. policymakers? A balanced and accurate understanding of Chinese leadership politics, especially the sources of and constraints on Xi's

power, is essential as foreign countries develop their strategies toward China under Xi's leadership.⁸⁷ Foreign analysts must be careful not to overstate any one dimension of Xi's leadership while ignoring others. Furthermore, it would be a huge mistake to conclude that any of Xi's policy decisions—either domestic or foreign—are predetermined or made in isolation. It would be even more dangerous for U.S. decisionmakers to assume that a major confrontation or war with China is inevitable. It is still too early to make a definitive judgment about Xi's intentions, political savvy, and historical legacy. Ultimately, of course, China will decide its own path, and Xi will pursue his priorities to the best of his ability. But policymakers in Washington have a strong influence over China's trajectory and a huge incentive to encourage the Chinese political system to develop stronger checks and balances and to ensure that U.S.-China relations remain stable. A more complete understanding of Xi's motivations and the dynamics of the environment in which he operates will help serve this mutually beneficial goal.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Generally speaking, the field of Chinese political studies has benefited tremendously from several new developments that facilitate research. These include the Internet revolution, the availability of new and open sources in China, and the growing accessibility of Chinese public intellectuals and policymakers for meetings and interviews. The rapid growth of the Internet has allowed quicker and more-comprehensive access to official and unofficial Chinese sources of hard data and qualitative information.

Despite lack of transparency and the mysterious nature of Chinese elite politics, publicized biographical information on Chinese leaders has become increasingly detailed and standardized. In recent years, Chinese authorities have made deliberate efforts to release more-comprehensive biographical data about officials at various levels of leadership, including information that was once considered highly sensitive, such as accounts of the mentor-protégé ties of party leaders. Meanwhile, Chinese books published in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas provide additional—though often unverified—information about Chinese leaders' backgrounds, family ties, and political networks.⁸⁸ Some specialized online websites run by the CCP are devoted to biographies of leaders in the party, the government, certain major state-owned enterprises, and the military.⁸⁹

Since former PRC president Yang Shangkun published his diary in 2001, China has witnessed a wave of memoirs, diaries, and autobiographies of senior leaders in the country, especially of those who have retired.⁹⁰ Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Zhu Rongji, Wen Jiabao, Li Ruihuan, Qiao Shi, Wu Guanzheng, Li Lanqing, and other former PSC members have all published their

memoirs and diaries.⁹¹ In addition to the writings of retired leaders, top political figures also released biographies while they were in power. For example, works about Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, written by two senior Chinese journalists and published in Hong Kong and Taiwan, were available in bookstores across the mainland while Hu and Wen still served in top leadership positions.⁹² Furthermore, popular Chinese newspapers and magazines such as *Southern Weekly*, *Southern People Weekly*, *China Newsweek*, and *Phoenix Weekly* frequently publish long profiles and interviews with rising stars in the provincial and ministerial leadership.⁹³ In 2013, for example, both *Southern People Weekly* and *Phoenix Weekly* carried long feature stories about Wang Qishan, including his background, characteristics, circles of associates, and his four-decade-long friendship with Xi Jinping.⁹⁴

Xi himself had published extensively before becoming a national leader. The collection of essays he wrote as party secretary of Zhejiang, entitled *New Thoughts in Zhejiang*, was published before he moved to Beijing in 2007.⁹⁵ From 1998 to 2002, while Xi attended a part-time doctoral program at Tsinghua University, he wrote, edited, or coedited five books on rural reform and agricultural development as well as science and technology policy.⁹⁶ Most significant, information about Xi Jinping's associates and protégés is publicly available and quite reliable, as Xi himself has recently spoken with the media both in China and abroad about the relationships he has developed throughout his career.⁹⁷

Altogether, these biographical materials complement one another, presenting comprehensive and detailed information about top leaders' family backgrounds, paths to office, political networking, and attitudinal and behavioral attributes. Such a wealth of information about the Chinese leadership was unimaginable just a few years ago. However, this bounty presents a new challenge for scholars of China's elite politics, as accessibility to more data does not necessarily translate into better scholarship or more-insightful analysis. Scholars must now more carefully distinguish between important and trivial information, between insider accounts and deliberate misinformation from stakeholders, and between facts and rumors. It is a great challenge to use all of the relevant pieces, while taking advantage of multiple sources and means of analysis, to construct a holistic framework that brings new clarity to China's leadership politics. In a way, this study also pursues the middle-ground approach between voluminous Chinese-language commentary on elite politics—much of it focused on personal power struggles and relationships—and Western political science literature, with its ever-increasing emphasis on quantitative and data-driven assessment, rational choice modeling, interest group interactions, and policy analysis.

This study incorporates four methodological approaches: (1) a structural assessment of the regime's new distribution of power and the evolving

tensions between various functional leadership bodies, with a special focus on recent institutional changes under the Xi administration, including highly fluid ad hoc leading groups and intriguing ties between the civilian and military leadership; (2) a large-scale quantitative analysis of biographical data of the 376 full and alternate members of the 18th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party; (3) a comprehensive presentation of the author's analytical model, "one party, two coalitions"; and (4) a qualitative examination (based on both a literature review and interviews with Chinese leaders and their advisers) of recent ideological and policy discourse in the country.⁹⁸

ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME

Each of the following chapters adopts one of the above methodologies or a combination of approaches. Altogether, these chapters consider a wide range of information to analyze important attributes of and key dynamics within the Chinese political system. These thematically focused discussions should be useful not only to a broad set of China specialists but also to non-China specialists who are eager to understand what is happening in the Middle Kingdom. Below are brief previews of each chapter, highlighting the organizational components and logical framework of this volume as a whole.

Chapter 2 offers a concise overview of the structure of China's party-state, with an emphasis on the supreme power of the PSC. The chapter examines the respective roles of various leadership institutions in the party and the government. It also assesses interactions between those institutions, as well as the functions of ad hoc coordinating bodies such as functional central leading groups and aims to present a clear framework of the inner workings of the Chinese political system and its decisionmaking mechanisms.

Chapter 3 provides detailed empirical data that illustrate the transformation in the generational and professional attributes of Chinese elites over the past three decades. The main body of the chapter is a comprehensive biographical analysis of the 376 full and alternate members of the 18th Central Committee of the CCP, the leadership body that includes almost all of the most powerful leaders in the country. Data examined include the leaders' personal and professional backgrounds, demographic distribution, career paths, and political affiliations.

Crucial to any analysis of China's political trajectory is an understanding of the kind of leadership that is governing the country. This is even more important now, given the emergence of a new group of political elites with distinct educational and professional credentials who will run the country for the next decade and beyond. Throughout PRC history, changes in the

composition of the political elite have often reflected—and sometimes heralded—broader social, economic, political, and ideological changes.

Chapter 4 examines educational backgrounds of the 18th Central Committee of the CCP. Based on both qualitative and quantitative analyses, the chapter highlights the change and new attributes of the educational credentials—including the trend of advanced degrees and foreign study and work experiences—of the Chinese elite over the past three decades. The emphasis, or overemphasis, on advanced educational attainment among political elites has also led to many leaders receiving education, especially in postgraduate programs, on a part-time basis, often from the Central Party School (CPS). This phenomenon has drawn much public criticism, undermining the credibility and legitimacy of the CCP elites.

Chapter 5 traces the remarkable rise and decline of technocrats (engineers-turned-political leaders) and also reveals the growing occupational diversity and rapid rise of two new elite groups: first, entrepreneurs (from both the private sector and SOEs), and second, lawyers and legal professionals in the Chinese leadership. This study divides these leaders with legal professional backgrounds into three subgroups: (1) leaders who hold a law degree in name only, as they primarily studied Marxism or politics instead of receiving legal training, (2) leaders who are legally trained but have never practiced law, and (3) leaders who are legal professionals in terms of both educational credentials and professional practice in the field of law. An important theoretical proposition in Western social science literature on political elites is that the occupational identities of political leaders usually have some bearing on other characteristics of a country's political system. The ongoing elite transformation embodied in the growing power and influence of entrepreneur and lawyers—just like the previous elite transformation, known as “technocratic turnover”—will likely shape the leadership's socioeconomic and political policies. It may also change the way the world's most populous country is governed.

Mentor-protégé ties play an important role in elite formation in virtually all political systems. But arguably no country gives greater advantage, in terms of bestowing promotions to those who have previously served as personal assistants (秘书, *mishu*) to senior leaders, than China. Chapter 6 focuses on the spread of the *mishu* phenomenon in the CCP leadership. After examining the historical, administrative, and political factors that led to the *mishu* phenomenon, the chapter reveals how this development has contributed to rampant official corruption in the country. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the diversity of Xi's *mishu* cluster, which broadens his power base and affords him more options when assembling an effective leadership team and also setting a diverse policy agenda.

Chapter 7 explores the factional composition of the CCP leadership, examines how the factions were formed, and explains why dynamic factionalism is intrinsic to a system of collective leadership. Based on a meticulous tracing of mentor-protégé ties and various forms of political networking, this chapter argues that two informal coalitions within the CCP leadership are actively competing for power, influence, and control over policy initiatives in post-Deng China. The chapter aims to deepen the understanding of China's new factional dynamics, especially the main characteristics of its "one party, two coalitions" mechanism.

The dominance of his political allies in the PSC has enabled Xi Jinping to pursue an ambitious anticorruption and market reform agenda during his first term. The effectiveness of Xi's policies and the political legacy of his leadership, however, will depend significantly on the political positioning of his protégés during his second term. Chapter 8 examines the basis of Xi's power, including the "Shaanxi Gang" (陕西帮, *shaanxibang*), friends whom Xi met during his formative years, and local leaders who worked with Xi before he moved to Beijing, as well as his *mishu* cluster. These groups make up Xi's inner circle of allies, serving as his hands, ears, mouth, and brain. An analysis of Xi's most trusted associates will identify some of the stars poised to rise in the next round of leadership turnover.

Chapter 9, the concluding chapter, aims to forecast two trends in China's continuing transformation. One is the CCP leadership and the other is state-society relations. A forecast about the upcoming leadership turnover at the 2017 Party Congress can shed valuable light on the prospects for the survival and revival of collective leadership in the Xi era. With the arrival of many novel sociopolitical players and the public's increasing engagement with policy issues in China, the interaction between elite politics and socio-economic forces is more dynamic than ever before. This chapter places the Chinese political experiments and intellectual debates in the broader context of the country's long and painful journey toward rule of law and democratization. This discussion reaffirms the main thesis of the volume: Xi's legacy will largely depend on whether he encourages or obstructs this trend of political institutionalization in the governance of an increasingly pluralistic country.

As a whole, this volume highlights several important paradoxical developments in Chinese politics and society: a rigid political system confronting a rapid circulation of political elites; Xi's quick accession to and hold on power in the name of effective implementation of domestic and foreign policies, despite the persistence of strong institutional norms and constraints stemming from collective leadership; the influence of mentor-protégé ties on elite selection in the face of increasing public demand for political

representation and transparency; and the stagnation of political reform and tight ideological control in the midst of an increasingly dynamic society and blossoming intellectual firmament. The complex interplay between these seemingly contradictory developments in Chinese politics constitutes one of the most important political dramas of our time.