

China's Communist Party-State: The Structure and Dynamics of Power

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Ever since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been the country's only ruling party. With the exception of a few tumultuous years during the early phases of the Cultural Revolution, the ultimate source of political power in China has always been the Communist Party. Indeed, for the past six decades, power struggles within the CCP leadership have been the only serious instances of political contention in the country. With more than 85 million members, the CCP is currently the world's largest ruling political party, and only the Korean Workers' Party of North Korea has held on to power for longer.

The CCP has made it clear that it is not willing to give up its monopoly on political power to experiment with multi-party democracy, nor do Party leaders appear interested in moving toward a Western-style system based on a separation of power between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. This does not mean, however, that the CCP is a stagnant institution that has been completely resistant to political change. On the contrary, the CCP has experienced a number of profound transformations in terms of the recruitment of party elites, institutional reforms, and ideological changes (see chapter 5 for a discussion of the latter). Furthermore, the CCP leadership today is by no means a monolithic group whose members all share the same ideology, political background, and policy preferences.

It would also be an oversimplification to assert that there is a complete absence of checks and balances in the Chinese political system, at least within the communist party leadership itself. This chapter argues that two main leadership factions or coalitions are currently competing for power, influence, and control over policy

initiatives. These two coalitions represent the interests of different socioeconomic classes as well as different geographical regions, thus creating something approximating a mechanism of checks and balances in the decision-making process. This development reflects an important transition away from the political system that existed throughout the first four decades of the PRC, one that relied on the arbitrary decision-making power of an individual leader, notably Mao Zedong, and subsequently Deng Xiaoping. Today, Chinese politics are characterized by a system of collective leadership, or what the Chinese call “inner-party democracy,” which functions according to commonly accepted rules and norms such as term limits and regional representation. This experiment provides only limited political choices for the party establishment. However, the gradual evolution of this new system of inner-party bipartisanship may pave the way for greater transformations within the Chinese political system in the years to come.

This chapter aims to highlight both the sources of continuity in China's long-standing party-state system and some of the more recent and profound changes in the PRC's political landscape. An analysis of the structure and dynamics of power in China will not only reveal how the country is governed, but will also provide an assessment of the future political trajectory of this emerging world power.

THE STRUCTURE OF CHINA'S COMMUNIST PARTY-STATE

The CCP describes the history of its leadership in terms of political generations. Mao Zedong is portrayed as the core of the first generation of PRC leaders, Deng Xiaoping as the core of the second, and Jiang Zemin as the core of the third. Although he was not explicitly designated as its core, Hu Jintao was the head of the fourth generation of CCP leaders, and the current general secretary, Xi Jinping, fills that role for the fifth generation. Despite the dramatic changes in ideology and policy over the course of these generations, the CCP has always clearly maintained that it plays the “leading role” in the state and society and therefore has the right to command the government, the media, the legal system, and the military in the interests of preserving China's socialist system.

By design, the top leaders of the CCP have concurrently held the most important positions in the state (or government) since the establishment of the People's Republic, including president of the PRC, premier (or prime minister) of the State Council (the government cabinet), the chair of the National People's Congress (the legislature of the PRC), and chair of the Central Military Commission (CMC). Leading party officials at various levels of the state—provincial, municipal, county, and township—concurrently serve as officials in local government organizations. The head of the party organization—the party secretary—at any level of administration is the real “boss” in local political and policy matters. For example, the city of Shanghai has both a party secretary and a mayor, but the party secretary is the one with the greater authority, although the mayor is also a high-ranking party member.

In a very real sense, the institutions of party and state are intimately intertwined, which is why political systems such as the PRC (and previously, the Soviet Union)

are referred to as communist party-states.* The preamble to the constitution of the PRC makes several mentions of the leadership of the communist party and Article 1 describes the PRC as “a socialist state under the people’s democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants,” but the document is rather ambiguous about where supreme political power truly lies. In practice, the communist party is unequivocally in charge at all levels, and the state operates merely as the executor of decisions made by the party.

Although high-ranking Chinese leaders have sporadically called for a greater separation between the party and the state, the overwhelming trend of the last two decades has been to consolidate and revitalize the party rather than fundamentally change the communist party-state system. The catchphrase of the Chinese leadership under former party leader Hu Jintao was “enhance the governing capacity of the ruling party.” This meant that party officials, especially young rising stars at various levels of the leadership, often simultaneously should serve in important positions within both the party and the government.

Two important observations can be made regarding the party-state structure in present-day China. First, the party has the power to make all of the state’s most important personnel and policy decisions. Second, notwithstanding the party’s leading decision-making role, many important policy discussions, as well as most activities relating to policy implementation, take place in or through *government* institutions, not CCP organizations. In order to understand the complex relationship existing between the CCP and the PRC government, it is essential to grasp the basic structure of both the party and the state.

Organization of the CCP

As indicated in Figure 6.1, party organizations exist at all administrative levels from the center in Beijing down to the 4.2 million primary, or “grassroots” units, which, according the CCP’s constitution, “are formed in enterprises, rural areas, government organs, schools, research institutes, communities, social organizations, companies of the People’s Liberation Army and other basic units, where there are at least three full Party members.” The party’s reach extends throughout the country, but power is highly concentrated at the center, particularly in the twenty-five-member Politburo (or Political Bureau) and the seven members who concurrently sit on its Standing Committee.

The Politburo and the Standing Committee are formally elected by the **National Congress of the Communist Party of China** (or National Party Congress), which convenes for about two weeks in the fall once every five years and is the most important political convention in the country. All delegates must, of course, be members of the communist party. There were two types of delegates to the most recent party congress, which met in November 2012: regular and invited. The 2268 regular delegates included representatives from China’s thirty-one provincial-level administrations

* For a discussion of a communist party-state as a type of political system, see chapter 1.

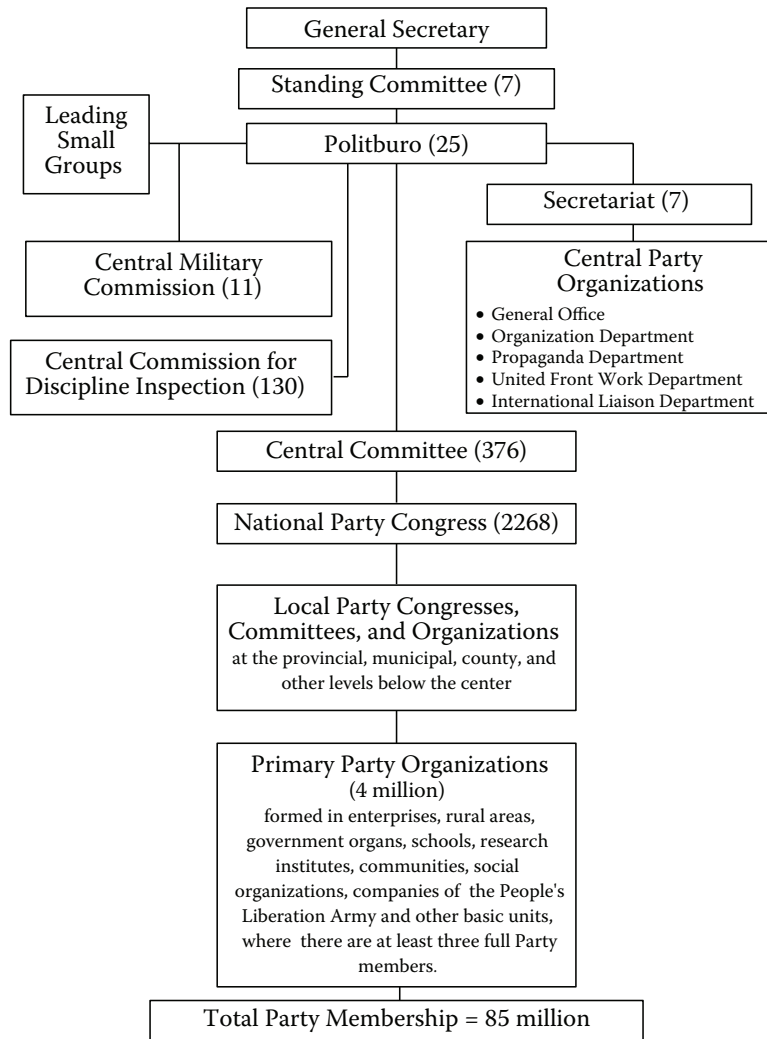


FIGURE 6.1 Organization of the Chinese Community Party.

Note: Numbers in parentheses as of 18th Party Congress, November 2012.

(which includes twenty-two provinces, five administrative regions, and four large cities directly under central administration). There was also a delegation of ethnic Taiwanese who are citizens of the PRC and members of the CCP, as well as delegations from the central departments of the party, the ministries and commissions of the central government, major state-owned enterprises, China's largest banks and other financial institutions, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and the **People's Armed Police**. Fifty-seven specially invited delegates, who are also eligible to vote, were mostly retired party elders and can be considered China's equivalent of the "superdelegates" to the Democratic Party Convention in the United States. There were also 314 non-voting observers and 147 non-communists who were invited to attend the opening and closing sessions.

The party congress elects the **Central Committee** (currently 205 full and 171 alternate members) and the **Central Commission for Discipline Inspection** (130 members). In *theory*, the Central Committee then elects the party's most powerful

organizations: the Politburo, the Standing Committee, and the CMC (11 members). It also elects the general secretary, which is the top position in the CCP. In practice, however, the process is top-down rather than bottom-up: the leading organizations of the party closely guide the selection of members of the Central Committee, and then present to the Central Committee for its “approval” of a slate of candidates for the incoming Politburo and Standing Committee.

The general secretary is elected for a five-year term and can be reelected for one additional term. It is the expectation that the party leader will serve two full terms and that a leadership transition will take place every decade. For example, Xi Jinping took over as general secretary in 2012 from Hu Jintao, who was first elected to that position in 2002 and reelected in 2007. Barring unforeseen events, Xi will be reelected at the Party Congress in 2017 and serve until 2022. Recent practice has been that the heir apparent is anointed at the halfway point in the current general secretary’s term by being elevated to a number of preparatory positions, including a seat on the CCP Standing Committee, vice president of the PRC, and vice chair of the CMC. Thus, by the fall of 2017, when the 19th Party Congress meets, it should be clear who will be China’s top leader from 2022 to 2032, although analysts in both China and abroad are increasingly doubtful that the political structure and leadership succession will remain unchanged in the coming decades.

The Central Committee convenes at least once per year in meetings called plenums or plenary sessions. Generally, all full members and alternate members attend these sessions. Top officials in CCP central organs, government ministries, provincial administrations, and the military who are not members of the Central Committee are also invited to attend the plenary sessions as nonvoting participants. Plenary sessions provide an opportunity for the announcement of new policy initiatives and major personnel appointments. For example, the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee held in December 1978 adopted Deng Xiaoping’s reform and opening proposals, and this landmark meeting is often considered the turning point in CCP history from the Cultural Revolution focus on ideology and politics to an emphasis on economic reform.

As suggested above, to call the process of choosing the Politburo and the Standing Committee by the Central Committee an election is something of a misnomer. These top bodies are actually selected by the outgoing Standing Committee, with considerable influence being exercised by retired or retiring senior leaders. For example, Deng Xiaoping personally chose Jiang Zemin to take over the position of CCP general secretary in 1989, and Jiang Zemin played a major role in the shaping of the Standing Committee chosen in 2012.

There is intra-party competition for Central Committee seats. Since the 1982 National Congress of the CCP, the Party has followed the method of “more candidates than available seats” (*cha’e xuanju*) for the election of the Central Committee. The 18th Party Congress[†] in 2012 chose 205 full members from the 224 candidates on

[†] National Party Congresses are numbered in sequence beginning with the 1st Party Congress in 1921 that marked the founding of the CCP. Seven congresses were held between then and the founding of the PRC in 1949. The 8th Party Congress in 1956 was the first held after the CCP came to power. Because of political turmoil during the Maoist era, party congresses were convened irregularly. (Thirteen years elapsed between the 8th and 9th Party Congress, which was held in 1969.) Since 1982, party congresses have been held every five years.

the ballot (9.3 percent were eliminated). In the election for alternate members of the Central Committee, they elected 171 leaders from a candidate pool of 190 (11.1 percent were eliminated). There is considerable speculation about whether such inner-party democracy will also be applied to the selection of the Politburo, the next organization up in the party's power structure, as part of the CCP's broader political reform strategy, which aims to make China's party-state system somewhat more open, competitive, and representative, without weakening its "leading role."

The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (130 members), while less important than the Central Committee, does play a crucial role in monitoring and punishing abuses of power, corruption, and other wrongdoings committed by party officials. The Commission primarily handles cases involving party officials. Its most serious sanction is to purge senior level officials and expel them from the party; in cases where it is determined that a crime may have been committed, the matter is handed over to the state judicial system. Lower-level party organizations, including provincial, municipal, and county-level bodies, also have discipline inspection commissions that report directly to the commission one level above them. The chiefs of the local discipline inspection commissions are usually not selected from the localities that they serve, but are transferred in from elsewhere to lessen the possibility of favoritism.

The **Secretariat** (7 members) is an important leadership body that handles the Party's routine business and administrative matters. Secretariat members meet daily and are responsible for coordinating the country's major events and meetings, drafting important documents, and arranging top leaders' foreign and domestic travel. By comparison, the more powerful organizations, the Politburo and Standing Committee, meet only once a month and once a week, respectively. Members of the Secretariat, like members of the Standing Committee, all live in Beijing. Some Politburo members reside in other cities, where they serve concurrently as provincial or municipal party chiefs. Of the seven members of the current Secretariat, three also serve as members of the Politburo, with one of those (the Executive Secretary) serving on the Standing Committee.

The Secretariat supervises the work of the General Office of the CCP (its administrative coordinating body) as well as the party's four most important central departments—the **Organization Department**, the Propaganda (or Publicity) Department, the United Front Work Department, and the International Liaison Department. The current directors of the General Office, the Organization Department, and the Propaganda Department also serve on the Secretariat. The Organization Department determines the personnel appointments of several thousand high-ranking leadership (or cadre) positions in the party, government, and military, as well as in large business firms, key universities, and other important institutions. These positions are part of the *nomenklatura* ("name list") system that was adopted from the Soviet communist party. Control of the cadre appointment process is one of the CCP's most important sources of power. The Propaganda Department is primarily responsible for spreading the party's message and controlling the media. The United Front Work Department deals with non-communist organizations, including the country's eight "democratic parties,"* ethnic and religious policy, and with issues concerning Taiwan, Hong Kong,

* China's constitution says the PRC has "a system of cooperation and political consultation led by the Communist Party of China." In fact, China does have eight political parties other than the CCP, which are officially referred to as the "democratic

and Macau. The mission of the International Liaison Department is to establish contacts with foreign political parties; it was more important and active when there were more communist parties in the world.

Among the twenty-five members of the current Politburo, eight primarily represent party organizations, nine come from government organizations, two from the military, and six from province-level administrative units. Table 6.1 lists some key information about the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee, the most powerful leadership body in China. These individuals hold, concurrently with their positions on the Politburo Standing Committee, some of the most important offices in the party-state, including the presidency and premiership of the PRC, and the chair of China's legislature (the National People's Congress). Party General Secretary Xi Jinping serves simultaneously as President of the PRC and chair of the CMC.

In addition to these formal leadership institutions, the CCP also has a number of informal interagency executive decision-making bodies focused on major functional issue areas, which are called “**leading small groups**.” Some of these leading small groups are more or less permanent and some are temporary task forces convened to deal with an immediate issue. The permanent leading small groups currently cover the following areas: foreign affairs; national security; politics and law; ideology and propaganda; party affairs; finance and the economy; rural work; Taiwan; Hong Kong and Macao.¹

The main purpose of these leading small groups is to coordinate the implementation of policies across top decision-making bodies such as the Politburo, the State Council, and the CMC. Leading small groups report directly to the Politburo and its Standing Committee, and the most important ones are normally headed by a member of the Standing Committee. At present, for example, Xi Jinping heads the leading groups on national security, foreign affairs, and Taiwan affairs.

The State Structure

The structure of PRC government is presented in Figure 6.2. China's constitution declares, “All power in the PRC belongs to the people. The organs through which the people exercise state power are the National People's Congress and the local people's congresses at different levels.” People's congresses operate at every administrative level in the PRC from the national at the top to rural townships and urban districts and are the legislative branch of the government. But, like other state organizations, the congresses operate under strict party scrutiny and exercise power only as allowed by the CCP.

In rural areas, deputies to county and township people's congresses are *directly* elected by all eligible citizens in that locale, as are deputies to people congresses at the lowest level of formal urban administration, the district. Elections at all higher levels

parties.” These parties are made up mostly of academics, scientists, writers, artists, professionals, and entrepreneurs and have a total membership of about seven-hundred thousand, must swear allegiance to the CCP, and do not compete with or challenge the CCP in any meaningful way.

TABLE 6.1 CCP Politburo Standing Committee (elected November 2012)

Name	Other Key Positions	Year Born	Birthplace	Education	Provincial Leadership & Other Major Experience
Xi Jinping	CCP General Secretary; PRC President; Chair, Central Military Commission	1953	Beijing (native of Shaanxi)	- B.A., Chemical Engineering, Tsinghua University (1975–1979) - Ph.D. in Politics and Marxist Theory, Tsinghua University (via part-time studies, 1998–2002)	- Party Secretary: Zhejiang, Shanghai - Governor: Fujian, Zhejiang
Li Keqiang	Premier, PRC State Council	1955	Anhui	- B.A., Law (1982), Peking University - Ph.D., Economics (via part-time studies), Peking University	- Party Secretary: Henan, Liaoning - Governor: Henan
Zhang Dejiang	Chair, National People's Congress	1946	Liaoning	- Studied Korean language at Yanbian University in Yanji City, Jilin Province (1972–1975) - B.A., Economics, Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang, North Korea (1980)	- Party Secretary: Jilin, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Chongqing - Vice Premier
Yu Zhengsheng	Chair, Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference	1945	Zhejiang	B.A., Ballistic Missile Automatic Control, Department of Missile Engineering at the Harbin Institute of Technology (1963–1968)	Party Secretary: Hubei, Shanghai
Wang Qishan	Chair, Central Commission for Discipline Inspection	1948	Shandong (native of Shanxi)	B.A., History, Northwest University in Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province (1976)	- Party Secretary: Hainan - Mayor: Beijing - Executive Chair, Beijing Olympics - Vice Premier
Liu Yunshan	Executive Secretary of the Secretariat	1947	Shanxi	Studied at Central Party School (1981; 1989–1992)	Deputy Party Secretary: Inner Mongolia
Zhang Gaoli	Vice Premier, PRC State Council	1946	Fujian	- B.A., Statistics, Department of Economics, Xiamen University (1965–1970) - Mid-career studies, Central Party School (1990)	Party Secretary: Shandong, Tianjin

Source: Alice Miller, "The New Party Politburo Leadership," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 40 (January 2013), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/137951>; China Vitae, chinavitae.com.

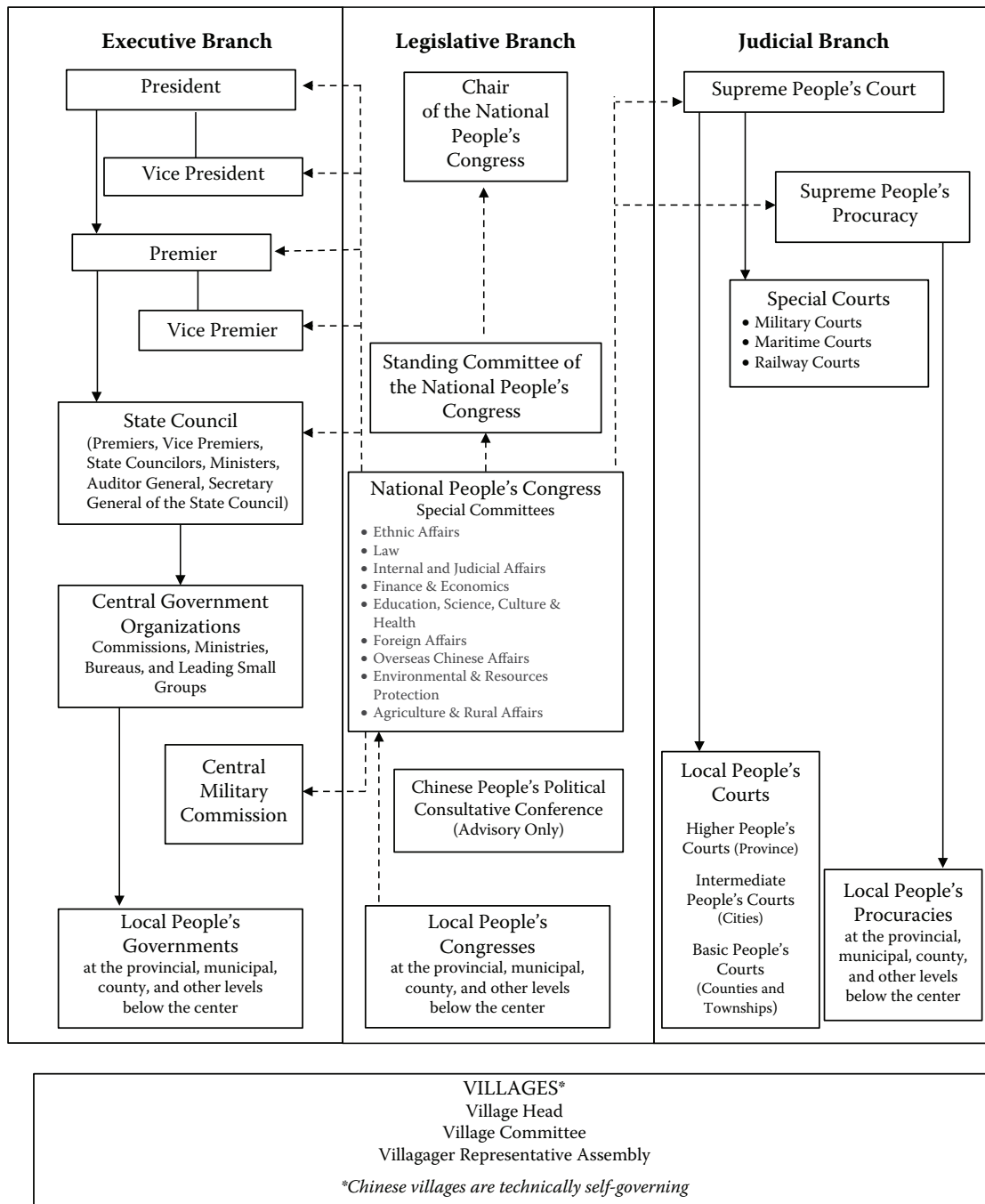


FIGURE 6.2 Organization of the People's Republic of China

are *indirect*, meaning deputies are elected by the people's congress at the next lowest level. For example, deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC) are elected by the people's congresses at the provincial level. (China's 650,000 villages are not considered to be a formal level of administration and have a different form of governance, which involves direct elections, as discussed in chapter 9.)

Deputies to the NPC are allocated according to the population of a given province. The NPC recently equalized the representation of urban and rural areas. Prior to this reform, every 960,000 rural residents and every 240,000 urban residents were represented by one NPC deputy, which gave China's cities much more clout in the

legislature. The province with the smallest population is guaranteed at least fifteen deputies. Special administrative regions such as Hong Kong and Macau have a set quota of delegates, as does the PLA. The current NPC, formed in 2013, has nearly three thousand deputies, who were elected to five-year terms. Deputies do not serve as full-time lawmakers, and when the NPC is not in session, they return to their regular locations and jobs.

Just as the National Congress of the CCP elects party leaders every five years at its fall meeting, the NPC elects a new state leadership at a meeting in the spring of the year following the party congress, although those to be elected have been predetermined by the party. But unlike the party congress, which only meets every five years, the NPC convenes in its entirety every March for a two-week session, during which deputies discuss the reports by the premier and other government leaders and approve laws and legislative regulations. The NPC has increasingly served as a venue for policy debates, although politically sensitive or controversial topics are off limits. The work of the NPC has become more substantive in terms of drafting laws and regulations and providing a venue for policy discourse, but it still basically acts as a rubber stamp for decisions made by the party leadership.

When the NPC is not in session, the **Standing Committee of the National People's Congress** (not to be confused with the much more powerful CCP Politburo Standing Committee) takes responsibility for any issues that require congressional consideration. The Standing Committee of the NPC, which generally convenes every two months, with each meeting lasting about one week, is headed by a chair, who is also a member of the party Politburo Standing Committee. The NPC also appoints nine special committees to draft legislation in various areas such as economics, education, energy, and the environment.

In theory, NPC delegates are not only supposed to elect the members of the Standing Committee of the NPC, but are also constitutionally entitled to elect the president and vice president of the PRC, the chair of the state Central Military Commission, the chief justice of the **Supreme People's Court**, and the chief of the **Supreme People's Procuracy** (the PRC's top law enforcement official, roughly equivalent to the attorney general of the United States). The body is also empowered to approve the premier, who is appointed by the president, as well as the other members of the State Council and CMC. In reality, however, all of the candidates for these positions are chosen by the top party leadership. This formal process is hardly competitive. When Xi Jinping was elected PRC president in 2013, the vote was 2952 for, 1 against, and 3 abstentions. The election for vice president was more contested: the tally was 2839 for, 80 against, and 37 abstentions.

This lack of competitiveness notwithstanding, it is an interesting and fairly recent phenomenon that NPC delegates sometimes vote against some nominees for important positions in the confirmation process. For example, the nominee to head the government's environmental protection ministry in 2013 won "only" two-thirds of the vote, which probably reflected a widespread public unhappiness with air pollution and other ecological problems.

The State Council is headed by the premier, and its Executive Committee consists of the premier; four vice premiers; and five state councilors, who are senior government leaders with broad responsibilities (one of the state councilors also concurrently serves as secretary-general of the State Council). The State Council currently consists

of more than two dozen members, including ministers or commissioners who head functional departments such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the National Health and Family Planning Commission, the central bank governor and auditor-general (who oversees the government's budget). All except one of these minister-level leaders are members of the CCP, and the vast majority are members of the party Central Committee, and their first loyalty is to the party.

As discussed in more detail in chapter 7, the judiciary is not a separate independent branch of government in the PRC. The CCP uses the nomenklatura system and other means of control to keep a close watch on all aspects of China's legal system. Some Chinese intellectuals who believe that the PRC should move toward a true rule of law system have spoken out against party interference. One such intellectual is law professor He Weifang, who has been a consistent critic of party interference in legal affairs. In 2006, he bluntly criticized Zhou Yongkang, Minister of Public Security (who was also a member of the CCP Politburo), for his heavy-handed "oversight" of the Supreme People's Court. To Professor He, Zhou's actions exemplified the lack of a genuinely independent judicial system in the country. "There is no other country in the world," Professor He said, "in which the chief justice reports to the chief of police."² Although Professor He has been harassed by the government, he has continued to speak out, including at a conference in Washington, DC, in 2012, where he spoke forcefully about "the increasing consciousness of law on the part of Chinese citizens, the inclination of the legal profession to look to the West for understanding how the rule of law should be effected, and the need for reform."³

The Party and the Army

The party's control over the military has been an important principle in the long history of the CCP. In 1938, Mao Zedong declared, "Every Communist must grasp the truth, 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.' Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party."⁴ On a few occasions, however, the PLA has intervened in Chinese politics, such as the 1971 "Lin Biao incident," when Minister of Defense Lin Biao pursued a failed military coup to overthrow Chairman Mao (see chapter 3), and in the two years immediately following the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, when the generals of the so-called "Yang family clique"—Yang Baibing and Yang Shangkun—gained enormous power, only to be outmaneuvered by Deng Xiaoping (see chapter 4).

But over the past decade, China's military has steadily moved away from active involvement in domestic politics. The chance that a military figure might serve as a "king-maker" has become increasingly remote. In each of the last four Politburos (1997–2012) there were only two representatives of the military, and none served on the Politburo Standing Committee. Furthermore, no member of the military elite serves on the current Secretariat, which signals the further retreat of the PLA from domestic affairs and foreign policy and toward a more narrow focus on military affairs.

The most important organizations for deciding military policy are the CCP Central Military Commission and the PRC Central Military Commission. Although technically the former is a party organization and the latter is part of the state structure, they are in fact

different names for the same institution with identical membership. This arrangement reflects the CCP's desire to exercise its power and authority, at least formally, through the PRC's constitutional framework. In reality, however, the Central Military Commission reports to the Politburo and its Standing Committee. In other words, China's armed forces are under the command of the CCP, not the government of the PRC.

The current CMC has eleven members. CCP General Secretary and PRC President Xi Jinping is the chair, which effectively makes him commander-in-chief of China's armed forces. The two military leaders who are on the Politburo serve as CMC vice chairmen. Other members include the minister of defense, the heads of the PLA's four general departments (organizational headquarters, political, logistics, and armament), and the heads of the Navy; Air Force; and Second Artillery Corps, which is China's strategic missile force. Since 1992, only three civilians, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping have served on the CMC. Nevertheless, the norm that a civilian party leader is in charge of military affairs seems to be well-accepted by the PLA.

Both Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin delayed turning over the position of CMC chair to a relatively untested successor by holding onto the seat for a few more years, even after they had stepped down from their party and government posts. This created a rather strange situation in which the civilian commander-in-chief of China's armed forces did not hold any other position in the party or the government. In the run-up to the 18th Party Congress in 2012, there was considerable speculation that retiring general secretary, Hu Jintao, might similarly try to stay on as head of the CMC for a transition period. But Xi Jinping took over as CMC chair at the same time he was elevated to the top party position. By surrendering power to Xi, Hu set an example for a more institutionalized and complete political succession and strengthened the relationship among the party, the state, and the army.

The Changing Composition of the CCP

While the Chinese party-state institutional structure has remained more or less the same over the past six decades, the occupational and educational backgrounds of the CCP's membership and the party's leaders have changed profoundly. The CCP has been transformed from a revolutionary party consisting primarily of peasants, soldiers, and urban workers to a ruling party that includes an increasing number of members from diverse areas of society.

Over the past half century, the size of the CCP has increased enormously. As shown in Figure 6.3, CCP membership has increased from about 5 million in 1949, when the party came to power, to 85.1 million as of mid-2013. Note that nearly half this growth has occurred since the end of the Maoist era in 1976. In 2011, 3.1 million new members were admitted to the CCP out of 21.6 million applicants.⁵ However, the party's total membership still constitutes a very small proportion (about 7.5 percent) of the total age-eligible (over 18) population.

Not only has the CCP grown enormously in size, but its occupational composition has also changed in dramatic ways over the past three decades. At the start of the reform era in 1981, farmers and workers—the traditional base of the communist party—made up 63.4 percent of the CCP.⁶ As Figure 6.4 shows, those two groups

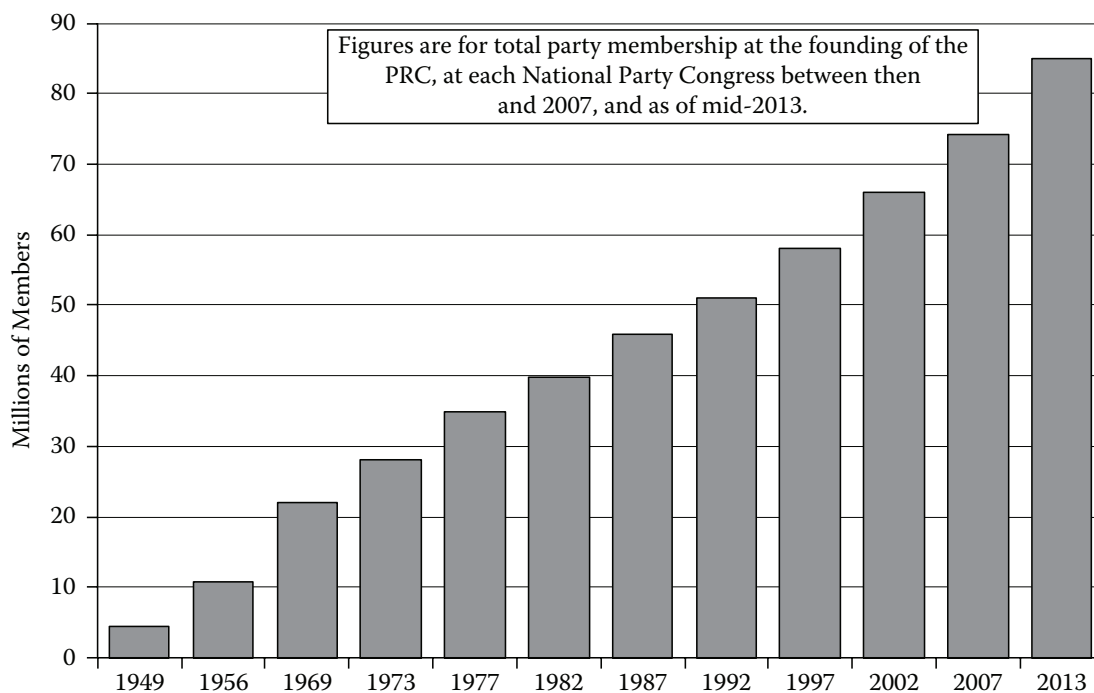


FIGURE 6.3 CCP Membership, 1949–2013

Sources: ChinaToday.com, <http://www.chinatoday.com/org/cpc/>; "China's Communist Party membership exceeds 85 million," Xinhua.net, June 30, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-06/30/c_132498982.htm.

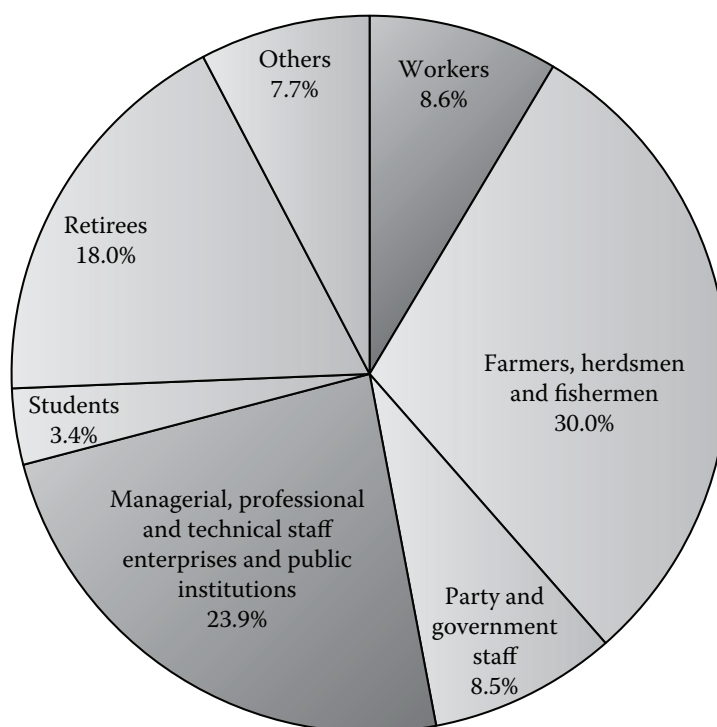


FIGURE 6.4 Occupations of CCP Members, 2011

Source: http://www.china.org.cn/china/2012-08/14/content_26231924.htm.

accounted for just 38.6 percent of CCP members in 2011. Although farmers continue to constitute the largest single segment of the CCP, the current occupational composition of the party reflects the impact of modernization and the ideological reorientation of the party. For the last decade or so, the CCP has actively sought to recruit members from groups that only came into existence with the market reforms, the so-called new social strata, which includes, among others, private entrepreneurs (**“Red Capitalists”**), technical personnel and managers in private firms and foreign-funded enterprises, independent professionals, and the self-employed. (See below for a discussion of the role of private entrepreneurs in the CCP.)

In the three decades after the establishment of the PRC, elite recruitment—bringing in new leaders—was mostly based on family background (the preferred categories being peasant or worker), ideological loyalty, and political activism, rather than on educational credentials and/or managerial skills. This politicized pattern of recruitment was expressed by the idea that it was better to be “red” than “expert” during the Mao years. “Reds” were cadres who advanced their careers on the strength of their revolutionary pedigree and ideological purity, while “experts” were members of the party elite who distinguished themselves by their educational credentials and technical skills.

When it came to elite recruitment and promotion, reds almost always prevailed over experts. Thus, from 1949 through the early 1980s, the educational attainment of party cadres and members was extremely low. In 1955, for example, only 5 percent of national leaders had a junior high school education or above.⁷ Even in 1985, only 4 percent of CCP members were educated beyond the high school level, and a majority (52.2 percent) had received only a primary school education or were illiterate.⁸ These numbers reflect the low value placed on educational accomplishments and technical know-how within the CCP before the reform era.

The educational level of CCP members has increased significantly in the past three decades, now that “expertise” is much more valued than “redness” in the recruitment process. In 1998, among the 61 million CCP members, only 11 million were college graduates (17.8 percent); by 2011, about 32 million CCP members held, at minimum, a two-year college degree, constituting 38.6 percent of the total membership.⁹

The growth in the percentage of national-level party leaders with higher education has been particularly dramatic. For example, in 1982, no member of the Politburo had completed a university education; in 2013, all 25 members of the Politburo had college-level degrees, nineteen from universities, one from a military academy, and five from the Central Party School, where the training is largely political, ideological, and managerial. Thirteen Politburo members have advanced degrees, including General Secretary-President Xi Jinping (Ph.D. in law and political science) and Premier Li Keqiang (Ph.D. in economics). The percentage of college-educated top provincial leaders (party secretaries, governors, and their deputies) increased from 20 percent in 1982 to 100 percent in 2010, and two-thirds had post-graduate education, usually in part-time programs, and several held Ph.D. degrees. Their fields of graduate education were diverse, including economics, management, politics, and law, as well as engineering.¹⁰

The 1980s–1990s was a time of “technocratic turnover” within China’s party-state leadership. In 1982, technocrats—cadres with a university-level technical education—constituted just 2 percent of the Central Committee, but by 1987 they made up 25 percent of the Central Committee. By 1997 they made up over half. The nine members

of the Politburo Standing Committee elected in 1997 were *all* engineers, including the three top leaders, General Secretary Jiang Zemin (electrical engineer), Chair of the NPC Li Peng (hydroelectric engineer), and Premier Zhu Rongji (electrical engineer). This was also true of the top three leaders elected in 2002: General Secretary Hu Jintao (hydraulic engineer), NPC Chair, Wu Bangguo (electrical engineer), and Premier Wen Jiabao (geological engineer). The representation of technocrats also rose dramatically in other high-level leadership categories; for example, in 1982, no provincial party secretaries or governors had higher-level technical education; by 2002, 74 percent of provincial party secretaries and 77 percent of governors were technocrats.¹¹

Beginning with the 17th Party Congress that met in 2007, the dominance of technocrats in the Chinese leadership began to decline and the percentage of leaders with non-technical educations started to rise sharply. The Politburo elected that year had thirteen technocrats (including eleven engineers) out of twenty-five members (52 percent), down from eighteen out of twenty-four (75 percent) in the 2002 Politburo. In the current twenty-five-member Politburo formed in 2012, in terms of highest degree obtained, only four (16 percent) are technocrats. Others majored in economics, political science, law and humanities. Xi Jinping's undergraduate degree is in chemical engineering, but he also has an advanced degree in law and political science.¹² Having leaders who are educated in a broader range of fields may well bring more diverse perspectives to policymaking and problem-solving.

The rise of technocrats and others with higher-education degrees to dominance in the Chinese leadership over the recent decades is particularly striking considering the following three facts. First, in 2010, only 7 percent of China's labor force had a college education.¹³ Second, although China was traditionally a meritocratic society in which status was largely determined by success in the imperial exams, scientific knowledge and technical competence, which have for centuries been esteemed in the West, were always subordinate to literary and cultural achievements in the Confucian worldview. Third, China's meritocratic tradition underwent an extreme reversal during the Mao era, especially during the Cultural Revolution, when professionals or "experts" were repeatedly targeted as enemies of the people.

Women are very underrepresented at all levels of the CCP. In 2012, women made up only 23.8 percent of total party membership, a modest improvement from 16.6 percent in 2002.¹⁴ They are even less well-represented in the top leadership organizations and positions. There are thirty-three women among the 376 full and alternate members of the Central Committee (16.5 percent), but only ten of the 205 full members (4.8 percent) are women. Two out of 25 members (8 percent) of the Politburo are women, and no women sit on the seven-person standing committee. At the end of 2012, among the 31 provincial-level administrative units of the PRC, there was only one female party secretary (in Tianjin) and one woman governor (in Anhui).¹⁵

The Route to the Top through the Provinces

An analysis of the composition of the party's top bodies reveals a significant increase in the number of leaders who have advanced their careers through experience in provincial leadership posts. Since the reform era began in 1978 the most important political

credential for a top leadership position has been experience as a provincial-level party secretary. Former party leader Jiang Zemin was promoted to general secretary of the CCP in 1989 from the post of party secretary of Shanghai (where he had been credited with the “successful” handling of pro-democracy demonstrations). Hu Jintao had served as party secretary in both Guizhou and Tibet before being promoted to the Standing Committee in 1992. Xi Jinping has served as governor of both Fujian and Zhejiang province and as party secretary of both Zhejiang and Shanghai. Six of the seven members of the current Standing Committee served as provincial party secretaries and/or governors prior to their ascent to the supreme decision-making body, and the seventh was deputy party secretary in Inner Mongolia, where he worked for twenty-five years.

The increase in the percentage of Politburo members with experience as provincial leaders since 1992 is shown in Figure 6.5. The fact that over 70 percent of the Politburos elected in 2007 and 2012 have substantial experience in a top provincial-level leadership position speaks to the importance of this path to the pinnacle of power. Since two members of both Politburos were military, the percentage of civilians with major provincial experience was even higher.

The large representation of leaders with provincial experience in the Politburo and its Standing Committee reflects the growing power and influence of the politicians who run the country's thirty-one province-level administrative units. The central authorities also try to prevent the building of local power bases through the promotion of provincial leaders to positions in Beijing and by frequent reshuffling of provincial leaders.

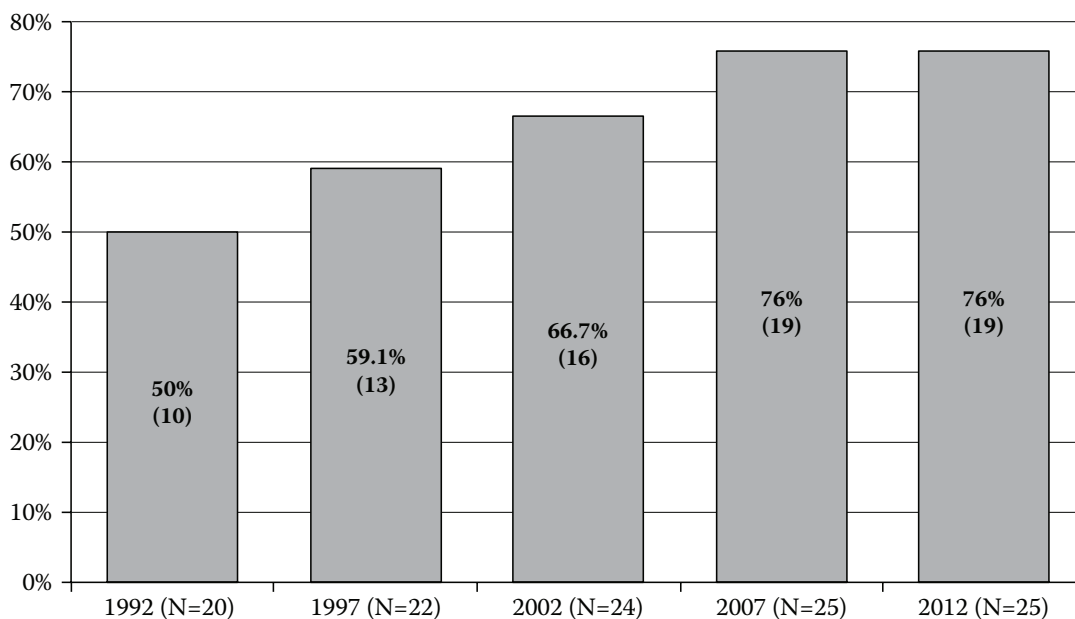


FIGURE 6.5 Politburo Members with Provincial Experience as Party Secretary and/or Governor (Year refers to date of election by Central Committee)

Source: Cheng Li, “A Biographical and Factional Analysis of the Post-2012 Politburo,” *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 41 (June 6, 2013), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/148836>.

Top CCP officials seem to be seriously concerned with ensuring regional balance in the national leadership. The Politburo that was elected in 2012 has at least one current member who was born and/or worked extensively in each of China's major geographic regions—the northeast, north, northwest, east, south central, and southwest. In addition, there are six Politburo members who have previously served or currently serve as province-level party secretaries in the four major cities directly under central government control: Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing.

This concern for equal regional representation in the CCP's leadership organizations is even more evident in the distribution of full membership seats on the Central Committee. A strong political norm in Chinese elite recruitment since the 1997 Central Committee has been that almost every province-level administration has two full membership seats on the Central Committee, usually occupied by the party secretary and governor. Although provincial leaders are sometimes promoted to the central government or transferred to other provinces, this distributional norm has been strictly applied at the time the Central Committee was initially elected. Local demands for an even distribution of membership seats across provinces and regions in both the Central Committee and the Politburo have become increasingly accommodated and institutionalized by the party leadership.¹⁶

At the same time, top national leaders still need to accumulate political capital through close ties with some of the country's most important regions. The priority that top party elites place on leadership experience as a party secretary in major provinces and cities serves to make such posts pivotal stepping-stones for aspiring entrants into the top national leadership. This further enhances the political weight of local power in present-day China. But the fact that provincial leaders' career prospects depend on their superiors in Beijing speaks unambiguously to the enormous power the central party-state has over local administrations in China's still highly hierarchical, authoritarian system.

Another experience at the local level shared by many of the China's newest generation of leaders is that of having been "sent-down youth" during the Cultural Revolution. Five of the seven members of the CCP Standing Committee were among the more than twenty million students who were sent to the rural areas to do manual labor in the late 1960s and early 1970s after Mao disbanded the Red Guard movement (see chapter 3). Xi Jinping spent 1969–1975 working in an agricultural commune in a very poor area of Shaanxi province and only began his university education after returning from the countryside. Some observers think this experience may give the leaders a deeper understanding of the difficult conditions still faced by many of China's hundreds of million farmers.

New Players in the CCP: Entrepreneurs and Lawyers

In recent years, two distinct groups, entrepreneurs and lawyers, have emerged as new and important players in both the socioeconomic and political life of the country. Like the ascendancy of well-educated leaders in the Chinese communist party-state in the 1980s, the growing influence of these groups represents another major shift in the landscape of Chinese politics.

The upward social mobility and political role of entrepreneurs—owners and managers of private businesses—is particularly momentous.

Traditional Chinese society, which was dominated by the scholar-gentry class, tended to devalue merchants because they lived by making profits off others rather than through “honest” mental or manual labor. The anti-capitalist bias reached its extreme during the first few decades of the PRC. The four million private firms and stores that had existed in China prior to 1949 had all but disappeared by the mid-1950s as part of the transition to socialism. During the Cultural Revolution anything to do with capitalism was branded poisonous, and top leaders such as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping were purged for allegedly taking China down “the capitalist road.” Small-scale private business and self-employment wasn’t possible until the end of the Mao era, and private enterprises that could employ a large number of laborers did not exist in China until the late 1980s.

Several factors have contributed to the reemergence of entrepreneurs in the PRC. Among them are the lifting of ideological taboos against privately owned businesses; rural-to-urban migration, which created a huge number of very small-scale entrepreneurs in China’s cities; joint ventures between foreign and Chinese private companies; the establishment of stock and real estate markets; and the technological revolution, which has given birth to a whole new private industry. In 2004, there were 1.6 million private firms in China; by 2012, that had grown to 10.6 million, with another 40 million small-scale individually owned firms that only employed a handful of people, usually family members and relatives. Taken together, such private enterprises contribute 60 percent of China’s total gross domestic product and account for more than 80 percent of urban employment and over 90 percent of new jobs.¹⁷

Chinese entrepreneurs are, of course, a diverse lot. There are three distinct subgroups: (1) self-made entrepreneurs: peasants-turned-industrialists in rural areas and owners of business firms of varying size in cities; (2) bureaucratic entrepreneurs: officials and their relatives who made their fortunes in part by abusing power in various ways throughout the process of market reform; and (3) technical entrepreneurs: computer and Internet specialists who became wealthy as a result of rapid technological development. Self-made entrepreneurs usually come from humble family backgrounds and received relatively little education. In contrast, a large number of bureaucratic entrepreneurs received undergraduate degrees in economics and even master’s degrees in business administration, usually in part-time mid-career programs. Furthermore, most of them were already CCP members or officials when they began to engage in private business. Technical entrepreneurs may or may not have strong family ties that have helped them in business. They are often seen as China’s “yuppie corps,” and some have received training abroad.

The rise of the private entrepreneurs in terms of political influence can be traced to July 2001, when then-CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin gave an important speech on the eightieth anniversary of the Party’s founding. In his speech Jiang claimed that the party should be representative of three components of society: the advanced social productive forces, advanced culture, and the interests of the overwhelming majority. As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, Jiang’s so-called “Theory of the Three Represents” was an ideological justification for the priority given to the private sector in China’s economic development and for allowing entrepreneurs to be members

of the communist party (the CCP still shies away from calling them “capitalists”). A 2004 official study by the United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee found that 34 percent of the owners of private enterprises were members of the CCP, up from just 13 percent in 1993. Of that 34 percent, only 9.4 percent had joined *after* Jiang’s 2001 speech,¹⁸ which reflects the fact that Jiang’s ideological embrace was mostly just formal acknowledgement that a large number of party members were already engaged in private business. More recent studies suggest that the proportion of private entrepreneurs who are CCP members remains at about one-third, but, interestingly, the larger the scale of the private enterprise, the more likely it is that the owner(s) are party members.¹⁹ Entrepreneurs and their executive counterparts in state-owned industries have just begun to acquire positions in the national and local-level political leadership. Although the thirty-four private entrepreneurs who were selected to participate in the CCP’s 2012 National Party Congress made up only 1.06 percent of the total number of delegates, the media highlighted the fact this was double the number who attended the 2007 session.²⁰ A handful of tycoons serve as either full or alternate members of the Central Committee, but just one of those (an alternate) is a private entrepreneur, the CEO of China’s Haier Group, a multinational consumer electronics and home appliances manufacturer.

Wealthy business executives have been more visible in the less-powerful state institutions, the National People’s Congress and its advisory body, the **Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference** (CPPCC).[§] At the 2013 meeting of these two bodies, the deputies included eighty-three billionaires;²¹ in contrast, there is not one billionaire in the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives. A few former CEOs of State-Owned Enterprise (SOEs) currently hold posts as provincial party secretaries or governors.

Clearly, although private entrepreneurs play a much more significant role in the PRC than they did just a few years ago, there is still a long way to go before their political clout comes anywhere near matching their economic power. It is worth noting that the children of many of the top Chinese leaders are now pursuing careers in the business sector, with most working in foreign joint ventures such as investment banks, rather than climbing the ladder of the CCP political hierarchy as their technocrat fathers did. If, as is likely, some of them aspire to political careers, it would represent a very different path to power, with important implications for the future of the Chinese communist party-state.

Along with the economic and political rise of entrepreneurs, there has also been an increase in the power and prevalence of lawyers in China (see chapter 7). The Maoist system was hostile to both the legal profession and the legal system. At the start of the reform era in the early 1980s, there were only three thousand lawyers in a country of over one billion people.²² Since then, the number of registered lawyers and law school

[§] The CPPCC consists of over two thousand members who represent a wide range of constituencies, including the CCP, China’s non-communist “democratic parties,” official mass organizations (such as the All-China Women’s Federation), various occupational circles (such as artists and writers, educators, medical personnel, and farmers), ethnic minorities, and religions. Although the majority of members of the CPPCC are non-communists, the organization is bound by its charter to accept the leadership of the CCP, and it has always been headed by a high-ranking party leader. The Conference meets each year for about two weeks, concurrent with the annual session of the National People’s Congress, but its function is only to advise the government; it has no legislative power of its own.

students has increased significantly. In late 2012, China had a total of 220,000 lawyers in about 20,000 registered law firms.²³ This is still a tiny legal profession (especially on a per capita basis) when compared to the more than one million lawyers in the United States. But the number of lawyers in China has increased dramatically in recent years and will become even more so in the years to come. There are now more than 630 law schools and law departments in China, graduate about 100,000 students each year.²⁴

Some of China's lawyers work outside the political establishment to challenge abuses of power, including rampant official corruption, and seek to promote the rule of law at the grassroots level. While activist lawyers are an emerging factor in Chinese politics, they are still subject to regulation and persecution by the party-state. All lawyers must be licensed by the government, and the authorities often refuse to renew these licenses if the lawyer in question has been regarded as a troublemaker. For example, the lawyers representing the families whose children were killed in poorly constructed schools during the earthquake that struck Sichuan province in May 2008 were harassed by the state. The blind activist, Chen Guangcheng, who was self-taught in legal procedures, was arrested in 2006 and then imprisoned for four years on trumped up charges after he had brought a class-action lawsuit against officials in his home province, charging them with abuses in connection with China's one-child policy. After his release from prison in 2010, Chen was placed under strict house arrest. He escaped in April 2012 and took refuge in the American embassy in Beijing. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton negotiated his departure, along with his family, to the United States to pursue the formal study of the law at New York University.

Other lawyers work within the political or intellectual establishment and may become political leaders. The rapid rise of younger leaders with legal training is an important trend in Chinese politics. Three members of the Politburo, including Premier Li Keqiang, have some training in the legal studies.

An important theoretical proposition in Western studies of political elites is that the occupational identity of the leaders in a given country correlates with—and sometimes has a determining effect on—the nature of the political system. Political elites often want to leave their leadership legacy in the area in which they have a personal or professional interest. Technocrats, for example, are often particularly interested in economic growth and technological development due to their own backgrounds in these subjects. It will be interesting to watch whether the growing presence of lawyers and social scientists in the current generation of leaders will give greater attention to meaningful political and legal reform than the preceding generations of communist ideologues, revolutionary veterans, and engineer technocrats.

NEW DYNAMICS IN THE CHINESE POLITICAL SYSTEM

In addition to the growing diversity in educational and occupational experiences of China's political leaders, several other trends have changed the dynamics of Chinese politics in important ways: the transition from the dominance of a single, charismatic leader to a more collective leadership, the institutionalization of party rules and

procedures, the relationship between the central party-state and local authorities, and the emergence of a balance of power and informal system of checks and balances between two major leadership camps.

Mao Zedong wielded enormous, almost unchallengeable, personal power for most of the first three decades after the founding of the PRC in 1949 (see chapter 3). He 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 of his expected successors who 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 on to power until he had 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 Maoist China.

During the Deng era, political succession and generational change in the Chinese leadership became a matter of public concern (see chapter 4). Yet, because of his legendary political career, no leader seriously challenged Deng’s ultimate authority. Even when he did not hold any important leadership positions following the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, Deng was still regarded as China’s “paramount leader.” For many years during the 1990s, speculation by people in China and Sinologists abroad about when the elderly and ailing Deng would die often caused stock markets in Hong Kong and China to fluctuate wildly. Like Mao, Deng thought who took over after him was pretty much his choice alone. In fact, also like Mao (though more gently), he twice removed leaders he had tapped to succeed him, Hu Yaobang in 1986 and Zhao Ziyang in 1989, because he saw both of them as being too soft on democracy protesters. But unlike Mao, Deng effectively handed over the reins of power to Jiang well before he died in 1997.

Jiang Zemin had neither the charisma nor the revolutionary experience possessed by Mao or Deng. To a large extent, Jiang exercised power primarily through coalition building and political compromise. Hu Jintao’s generation of leaders relied even more on power sharing and finding consensus, and Hu was only the “first among equals” in his generation of leaders. As a result of this shift toward collective leadership in the CCP, negotiation and compromise among competing factions has come to be a far more prominent part of Chinese elite politics than ever before.

The second trend is the movement toward increasing institutional restraints on the exercise of power within the Chinese party-state. Nepotism of various forms (e.g., blood ties, school ties, regional identities, bureaucratic affiliations, or patron–client ties) continues to play an important role in the selection of leaders. At the same time, however, institutional mechanisms, including formal regulations and informal norms, have been more effectively implemented to curtail various forms of favoritism and abuse of power. These institutional developments include:

- *Inner-party election and decision by vote.* As discussed above, the CCP has adopted some election methods to choose the members of the Central Committee and other high-ranking leaders. Furthermore, major personnel and policy decisions are now often decided by votes in party standing committees at various levels of leadership, rather than solely by the committee’s head (secretary).

- *Term limits.* With few exceptions, a term limit of five years has been established for top posts in both the party and the government. An individual leader cannot hold the same position for more than two terms.
- *Age limits for senior cadres.* Based on CCP regulations, leaders above a certain level cannot exceed a set age limit. For example, members of the Central Committee, Politburo, and Standing Committee will not be considered for reentering these leadership bodies when they reach sixty-eight years of age. The average age of the Politburo elected in 2012 was about sixty-one. This is quite a change from even the fairly recent past; when Deng Xiaoping really took charge of the party in 1982, the average age of the Politburo was seventy-two, with several members in their eighties, and China's political system was said by some to be a "gerontocracy," or "rule by the elderly."
- *The "law of avoidance" in the appointment of local top leaders.* Provincial party secretaries, heads of the discipline commissions, and police chiefs are almost always nonnative outsiders who were transferred from another province or the central administration. This practice is in accordance with traditional Chinese custom of the "**law of avoidance**" that prohibited imperial officials from being stationed in their home provinces in order to reduce the possibility of favoritism and region-based factionalism.

These institutional rules and norms not only generate a sense of consistency and fairness in the selection of leaders, but also make the circulation of the Chinese political elite very fast. The rate of change of CCP Central Committee membership, for example, has been remarkably high over the past thirty years, with newcomers constituting an average of 62 percent at each of the five Party Congresses held during that period. The 2012 CCP Congress, which had a Central Committee turnover rate of 63.8 percent, also saw large membership turnovers in the other leading bodies of the CCP (see Figure 6.6). Because of the mandatory retirement age, it is already possible to predict that at least eleven of the twenty-five members of the current Politburo, including five of the seven members of the Standing Committee, will retire at the next party congress in 2017. The infusion of new blood into the leadership cannot but help the party-state adapt to changing circumstances and new challenges.

As a result of the fluidity of membership in these crucial leadership bodies, no individual, faction, institution, or region can dominate the power structure. These developments have reinforced the norm of checks and balances in the Chinese leadership and have affected elite behavior. Leaders are now far more interested in establishing their legitimacy through institutional channels than were their predecessors, who relied only on personal power and connections.

The third trend that is having a profound effect on Chinese politics is the changing relationship between the central party-state and local authorities. This shift has been hastened by the emergence of local interests politically and economically empowered by the decentralization stemming from China's market reforms. The many inequalities (e.g., between urban and rural, coast and inland, the prosperous and the poor) that have also been a product of three-plus decades of economic reform have transformed center-local relations into one of the country's most daunting challenges.

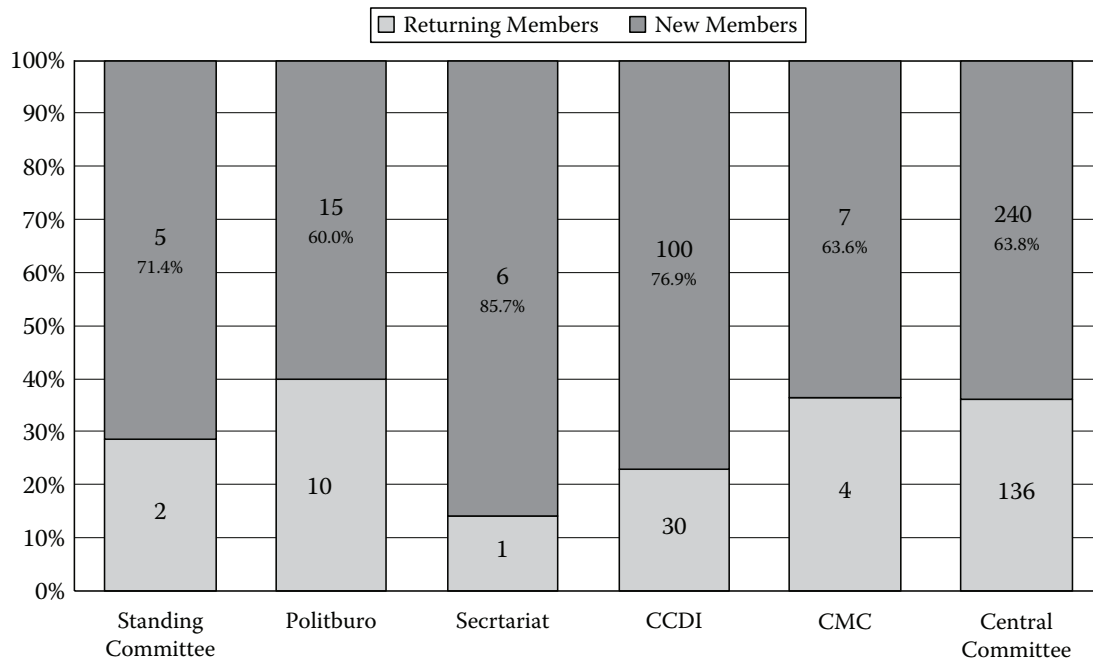


FIGURE 6.6 Membership Turnover of Top CCP Organizations at the 18th Party Congress, November 2012

Note: CCDI = Central Commission for Discipline Inspection; CMC = Central Military Commission.

Source: Cheng Li, "Opportunity Lost? Inside China's Leadership Transition," *Foreign Policy*, November 16, 2012.

Understandably, local leaders (mainly provincial and municipal leaders) tend to side with the top national leaders who will protect or advance their interests. Politicians in areas that have benefited from the reforms want to keep the policy orientation that favors their interests, while those in disadvantaged regions favor members of the central leadership who represent a change in direction. Whichever "side" they are on, local leaders in China have a much bigger stake in—and a bigger opportunity to influence—elite politics than ever before in the history of the People's Republic.

CHECKS AND BALANCES IN AN AUTHORITARIAN PARTY-STATE

Each of the above three recent trends in Chinese politics has shaped a fourth important development, the emergence, within the upper reaches of the CCP, of an unofficial system of checks and balances. The CCP leadership is now structured around two informal coalitions or factions that have come to check and balance each other's power. This is not the kind of institutionalized system of checks and balances that operates with the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the American government, an essential element of a truly democratic system. But it is an important development in how Chinese politics works and may have far-reaching implications for the future.

The two groups can be labeled the "**populist coalition**" or the Hu camp, led by former General Secretary-President Hu Jintao, and the "**elitist coalition**" or the

Jiang camp, which was born in the Jiang Zemin era and is currently led by top officials, including Xi Jinping, with close political ties to Jiang. The populist coalition gives more emphasis to addressing some of the serious problems, such as vast economic inequalities and environmental degradation, that resulted from the growth-at-any-cost strategy of development pursued by Jiang Zemin in the 1990s. The elitist coalition represents business interests, including state-owned enterprises, and China's more prosperous coastal regions.

Factional politics is, of course, not new in China. Major events during the Mao and Deng eras, such as the Anti-Rightist campaign, the Cultural Revolution, and the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, were all related to factional infighting among the CCP leadership. But factional politics is no longer a vicious power struggle and zero-sum game in which winner takes all and those on the losing end are likely to be purged or worse. Neither the elitist nor the populist coalition is capable of, nor really wants to, totally defeat the other. Each coalition has its own strengths, including different constituencies, which the other does not possess. Their relationship, when it comes to policymaking, is one of both competition and cooperation. This situation is sometimes referred to as the "one-party, two-coalitions" political mechanism.²⁵

Upon his ascension to the post of general secretary of the Party in 2002, Hu Jintao quickly sensed that his mandate was to fix the economic disparities associated with Jiang's leadership. As a result, Hu, in partnership with Premier Wen Jiabao, used his time at the helm to promote a populist strategy under new catchphrases such as "scientific development" and "harmonious society" (see chapters 4 and 5). While some refer to the Hu-Wen years as the "lost decade" because of lack of significant progress in economic, political, and legal reform, there were, in addition to continuing high growth rates (10.5% per year), important gains in areas of central concerns to the populists. These included going a long way toward expanding health care insurance to the point where by 2010 more than 90 percent of both the urban and rural population had at least minimal coverage.²⁶

These leaders of the two coalitions have distinct personal careers and political associations. Many of the top leaders in the elitist coalition are children of revolutionary heroes or high-ranking officials. This group of so-called **princelings** includes Xi Jinping, whose father was a close associate of Mao's who fell afoul of the Chairman's ideological wrath in the early 1960s and later emerged as a strong proponent of economic reform. The elitists have advanced their political careers primarily in Shanghai (and are sometimes referred to as the "Shanghai Gang") or other major cities or coastal provinces.

By contrast, most of the leading figures in the populist coalition, for example, Hu Jintao and Li Keqiang, come from more humble or less-privileged families. They usually had substantial leadership experience in less-developed inland provinces. For example, Hu Jintao spent most of his working life in some of the poorest provinces of China's inland region, including fourteen years in Gansu, three years in Guizhou, and four years in Tibet. Similarly, Wen Jiabao spent fifteen years after graduating from college working in extremely arduous conditions (also mainly in Gansu).

Many of the prominent populist leaders also advanced their political careers through the ranks of the **Chinese Communist Youth League** (CCYL) and have therefore garnered the label *tuanshipai*, literally, "league faction" (see Box 6.1). The

BOX 6.1 THE YOUNG PIONEERS AND THE CCYL

The CCP has two organizations that bring together young people to learn about party ideology and policies and to engage in service projects and other activities that support party goals, the *Young Pioneers* and the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL).

Almost all students in the PRC between the ages of 7 and 14 belong to the Young Pioneers, whose official purpose is “to promote ‘indoctrination of children by cultivating [positive] feelings of the Party and the socialist motherland.’”^{††} New members make the following pledge: “We take our oath under the flag of Young Pioneers: I promise to follow the lead and teachings of the CCP, to study well, to work well, to labor well—to prepare myself and sacrifice all my energy for Communism.”^{‡‡}

The CCYL is an organization for people aged fourteen to twenty-eight. Its main function is to identify and foster new Communist Party leaders. In 2013, the CCYL had nearly ninety million members, a staff of over 190,000 full-time cadres (many of whom are older than the age limit for ordinary members), and about 3.6 million local chapters. The CCYL’s mission statement refers to the organization as the “reserve army” for the Party. In addition to providing ideological training, the league runs a variety of social service programs and operates several prominent media outlets, notably the *China Youth Daily* newspaper. Membership in the CCYL does not guarantee party membership, nor is participation in the youth organization required to join the CCP. But being active in the CCYL can certainly facilitate becoming a full party member.

^{††} Hunter Hunt, “Joining the Party: Youth Recruitment in the Chinese Communist Party,” *US-China Today*, November 7, 2011, http://uschina.usc.edu/article@usct?joining_the_party_youth_recruitment_in_the_chinese_communist_party_17639.aspx

^{‡‡} Hunt, “Joining the Party.”

tuanpai and princelings served as the core groups in the larger competing political coalitions—populists and elitists, respectively.

It is very important to note that both camps share fundamental goals: to ensure China’s political and social stability, promote continued economic growth, enhance China’s status as a major international player, and, most importantly, the survival of CCP rule. These common goals often push the two factions to compromise and cooperate with each other and have created a kind of “bipartisanship with Chinese characteristics” at the top of the party-state. To a degree, leaders of the elitist coalition also recognize the need to allocate more resources to inland regions and help vulnerable social groups, just as the populists understand the importance of maintaining rapid economic growth to meet the rising expectations of China’s urban middle class.

Furthermore, because the leaders of the factions differ in expertise, credentials, and experiences, they understand that they need to find common ground to coexist and govern effectively. The *tuanpai* are masters in terms of organization and propaganda and have often had experience in rural administration, especially in poor inland regions, but they generally lack experience and credentials in some of the most important administrative areas and are short on skills related to the handling of foreign trade, foreign investment, banking, and other crucial aspects of economic policymaking. Therefore, they have to cooperate with the elitist coalition, who have

strong backgrounds in economic and financial administration and have spent most of their careers in the developed coastal cities.

The factional power and influence of both princelings and *tuanpai* is not new, but has been a factor in Chinese politics for the last twenty years or so. It was only with Hu Jintao's rise to the top leadership, however, that the *tuanpai* really came of age in terms of power. During the Hu-Wen years the two factions maintained a more-or-less equal allocation of seats in the top leadership organizations. For instance, in the twenty-five-member Politburo elected in 2007, the *tuanpai* held eight positions (32 percent), the princelings held seven (28 percent).

The factions also rotated the driver's seat in the succession from Jiang to Hu and did so again in the succession from Hu to Xi Jinping. The Politburo elected in 2012 was also quite balanced, with twelve of the twenty-five members falling into the princeling-elitist camp (48 percent) and eleven (44 percent) being identifiable as *tuanpai*-populists. However, in the Politburo Standing Committee, the Jiang camp clearly has an advantage with six out of seven members, while the Hu camp has only one *tuanpai*-populist (Premier Li Keqiang).

There is balance at the very top in that General Secretary-President Xi Jinping is a princeling and Premier Li Keqiang is a *tuanpai*. Xi seems to be focused on the private sector, market liberalization, foreign investment, and Shanghai's role as a financial and shipping center. In contrast, Li emphasizes affordable housing, *hukou* reform that helps migrant workers settle down in urban areas, basic health care, and clean energy.

But, overall, the princelings have apparently gained the upper hand in most key civilian and military organizations, perhaps due to their powerful connections.²⁷ In any case, their obvious ascendancy is likely to reinforce public perceptions of the convergence of power and wealth in the country. More worryingly, it might spell the end of bipartisanship and lead to a vicious power struggle, potentially undermining the legitimacy of the political system and threatening the stability of the country at large.

The interaction between populists and elitists in the leadership—between the *tuanpai* and princeling factions—reflects a new dynamic of interdependence and power-sharing through checks and balances in Chinese politics. This bipartisan collective leadership also entails a more pluralistic decision-making process through which political leaders can represent various social and geographic constituencies. It is hard to overemphasize what a dramatic change this marks in the “rules of the game” for the CCP's leadership politics.

The dominance of Jiang's men in the new Politburo Standing Committee, however, does not necessarily mean that again “the winner takes all” in Chinese elite politics. It should be noted that Hu's protégés are still well-represented in other important leadership bodies. Many *tuanpai* leaders have made it onto the new 376-member Central Committee. *Tuanpai* leaders who previously worked within the CCYL national or provincial leadership when Hu Jintao or Li Keqiang was in charge of the CCYL now occupy ninety-six seats on the new Central Committee, constituting 25.5 percent of this crucial decision-making body. This increase is relatively steep when compared with the *tuanpai*'s eighty-six seats on the previous Central Committee (23.2 percent of its 371 members).²⁸

Prominent *tuanpai* leaders who failed to obtain a seat in the Politburo Standing Committee at the 18th Party Congress, such as Vice President Li Yuanchao and Vice

Premier Wang Yang, will still meet the age requirement for the 19th Party Congress in 2017. As the “one party, two coalitions” dynamic appears to be a new experiment in Chinese elite politics, it is possible the CCP may also experiment with a new mechanism of “factional rotation” (*paixi lunhuan*). This may explain why the Hu camp quietly acquiesced to its very disadvantageous power distribution at the 18th Politburo Standing Committee.

It is particularly worth noting that in each and every of the nine most important leadership organs in the PRC, namely the PSC, PRC presidency (president and vice president), State Council, CMC, CCP Secretariat, NPC, CPPCC, Supreme People’s Court, and Supreme People’s Procuracy, the number one (*diyibashou*) and number two (*dierbashou*) leaders come from the two competing coalitions.²⁹ This suggests that under collective leadership in present-day China, there is a deliberate effort on the part of the top leadership to maintain factional balance of power in various forms.

Nevertheless, the CCP’s inner-party “bipartisanship” has significant limitations in terms of further political reform. The PRC is still an authoritarian communist party-state that can be brutal in repressing dissent and opposition. Factional politics within the CCP, although not nearly as opaque to the public as in the Mao era, are not transparent. The lack of an independent press means that the public mostly knows only what the party leadership wants it to know about the policymaking process and the contenders for power. The seats in the most powerful bodies in the party-state are still decided by a very small number of top leaders through dealmaking, not through open competition.

The CCP’s bipartisan factional politics may provide a semblance of checks and balances that helps to keep the party leadership resilient and adaptable to changing circumstances, but conflicting interests and competing policy initiatives may also make the decision-making process lengthier and more complicated, perhaps leading to deadlock. At a time when China confronts many tough choices, the bipartisan leadership may find it increasingly difficult to reach a consensus on how to deal with crucial issues such as the regional redistribution of resources, an inadequate public health system, failing environmental protection, ethnic tensions in Tibet and Xinjiang, relations with Taiwan, reform of the banking system, disputes with the United States over foreign trade, and territorial disputes in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. Political paralysis over key issues could not only impede effective policymaking, it could also dissolve into ruthless factional power struggles—perhaps even involving the military.

CONCLUSION: WHITHER CHINA?*

There are two sharply contrasting and controversial perspectives on China’s near- to medium-term political future that are now locked in mutual contention. These two rival scenarios reflect fundamentally different assessments of the country’s socioeconomic situation and likely political trajectory.

The first scenario envisions an abrupt bottom-up revolution. This assessment has recently generated much heated intellectual and political debate in the PRC. In

* The following section is adapted from Cheng Li, “China at the Tipping Point? Top-Level Reform or Bottom-Up Revolution?” *Journal of Democracy* 24, No. 1 (January 2013): 41–48. By permission of The Johns Hopkins University Press.

December 2011, the thirty-year-old best-selling author Han Han (China's most popular blogger whose site has registered well over 580 million hits) posted a now-famous essay titled "On Revolution."³⁰ Although Han argues that "revolution is hardly a good option for China," his intriguing view of the choice between reform and revolution has pointedly reflected—and greatly enhanced—the public awareness of the risk of revolution in the country.

Additionally, one of the most popular books in PRC intellectual circles today is the Chinese translation of Alexis de Tocqueville's 1856 classic *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. One frequently quoted passage is Tocqueville's argument that revolutions usually occur not when the old regime resists change, but rather when it begins to attempt reform only to find expectations outstripping any possible rate of improvement.

The second scenario is reform from above, which CCP elites often refer to as "top-level design of reform" (*gaige de dingceng sheji*). It is related to the leaders' new-found understanding that China is now in "deep water" and can no longer afford the cautious approach to reform known as "crossing the river by feeling the stones" (*mozhe shitou guohe*). Improvised reform, in short, needs to give way to a more methodical and more profound set of changes. Moreover, with so many of China's present-day socioeconomic problems growing out of impasses and obstacles within the political system, basic political reform will have to be part of the agenda as well.

There is a case to be made that Chinese authoritarianism is "resilient" or "strong."³¹ But this view underestimates both the inherent vulnerability in the one-party system and the growing resentment that the public feels over CCP leaders' enormous power and wealth, especially in the wake of major scandals such as the fall in 2012 of the rising political star Bo Xilai in connection with his wife's murder of a British businessman and charges of official malfeasance (see chapter 4) as well as another astonishing corruption case associated with the former Railway Minister Liu Zhijun, who was convicted of economic crimes in 2013 and sentenced to death "with a two-year reprieve"—essentially life in prison without the possibility of parole.³²

Is there a bottom-up revolution in the making in China? There are many factors at work that could undermine the legitimacy of CCP to the point that its hold on power is seriously weakened.

After more than two decades of remarkably rapid economic growth, China has recently experienced a slowdown, which could reveal flaws in the PRC's authoritarian system and thus become a trigger for political crises. The growing oligarchic power of SOEs, especially gigantic flagship companies, is widely viewed as driving massive corruption, crowding out private investment, squeezing the middle class, and stalling the innovation that China must achieve if it is to make the transition from an export-led economy to one oriented toward consumption and innovation. Many worry about environmental degradation, health hazards, and a wide range of public-interest issues that touch on all classes.

Public protests, large and small, have been increasing in recent years and have become a source of some concern to the regime, which refers to such occurrences as "**mass incidents**" (*quntixing shijian*). A Chinese sociologist estimated that in 2010 there were 180,000 mass incidents, a three-fold increase from 2003.³³ The main causes of this social unrest are shady land deals that enrich developers (and often

cadres), but in which urban residents or rural villagers get only meager compensation; forced evictions (also related to real estate development); labor disputes; pollution; and corruption, brutality, or miscarriages of justice by local officials, including the police.³⁴

Most of the protesters are farmers and workers, but China's growing middle class has become vocal and active in expressing discontent about environmental dangers. Middle-class anger at government policies has become increasingly evident in recent years. An unemployment rate of about 20 percent among recent college graduates (who are presumed to be members of China's future middle class) should send an alarming signal to the Chinese government. Given how hard it is to get a small-business loan, the opaque and poorly regulated nature of the Chinese stock market, and the general lack of investment opportunities, middle-class savings have flowed heavily into real estate. The nightmare of a bursting property bubble is a real possibility.

One telling sign that even the country's elites lack confidence in China's political stability is the large flow of capital leaving China in recent years. From 2000–2011, China had the world's highest illegal financial outflow, at \$3.8 trillion for the period from 2000 to 2011.³⁵

Given the CCP leadership's determination to preserve its grip on power, it is no surprise that the police have become more powerful, with an influence over socioeconomic policy that matches their bigger budgets. In 2012, the \$110 billion allotted to "maintaining social stability" (*weihu wending* or *weiwen* for short) exceeded the amount spent on national defense by four billion dollars. The growing power of the police has also created a vicious circle in which the more fiercely the police suppress unrest, the more violent and widespread it grows. With all the sources of social resentment, possible triggering factors, and disturbing trends, one should not be too quick to disregard the scenario of a bottom-up revolution.

Perhaps the Chinese political structure will be able to continue its quite remarkable record of adapting to changing circumstances and new challenges and preserve the party-state into the foreseeable future. What are the prospects that the CCP leadership will act to save itself by undertaking systemic political reform? As discussed above, a few important institutional reforms designed to promote intra-CCP democracy have been put into place. It is understandable that CCP leaders and their advisors are inclined to pursue democratic experiments within the Party, or in other words, to carry out political reform in a way that is incremental and manageable, characterized by elite competition, balance of power among factions, and links to distinct interest groups in Chinese society.³⁶ Could this lead China toward democratization?

The path to democracy varies from nation to nation and depends largely on a country's historical and political circumstances. Chinese leaders and public intellectuals have every right to argue that the PRC's version of democracy will, and should, have its own distinct (or even unique) features. After all, the democratic regimes that one finds in India, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, and the United States are very different from one another in significant ways, while also sharing fundamental values, institutions, and processes essential to democracy. Moreover, it is even possible for a democracy—as in both Japan and Mexico—to undergo lengthy stretches of one-party rule while preserving key features of democratic governance, including vigorous political contestation, fair elections, a free press, and a vibrant civil society.

A dynamic interplay of checks and balances among ruling party factions often provides a kind of bipartisanship in such one-party dominant democracies.³⁷

China's very limited form of bipartisan elite politics within the CCP might contain the seeds of evolution toward this kind of regime. The new competitive dynamics within the collective CCP leadership could have the effects of making lobbying more transparent, factional politics more legitimate, rules and laws more respected, elections more genuine, and elites more accountable and representative. New political parties often emerge from factional divisions within existing parties.

Furthermore, public demand for a more competitive, more institutionalized, more transparent political system will, however, only become stronger. Along with a larger middle class, the country has a more assertive legal profession that argues for constitutionalism and strong measures to curb corruption and abuses of power. The media, too, are more commercialized and influential, and social media have achieved a level of pervasiveness that no one could have imagined only a few years ago. Democratization through a combination of top-down reform and bottom-up pressure is not an impossible scenario for China. But for that to happen would require a sea change in the CCP's long-standing insistence that it has the right to play the leading role in Chinese politics and that a multi-party system is not an acceptable model for China. And meaningful political reform may be blocked by the strong resistance from some conservative leaders and powerful vested interest groups, such as large state-owned enterprises.

Over the next decade or so, China's future will hinge on the dynamic between the fear of revolution and the hope for political reform. The threat of revolution from below may push the forward-looking political leaders to pursue incremental yet bold political reform. Should reform fail, however, revolt may well be the upshot. And the unfolding drama, wherever it leads, will undoubtedly have profound ramifications far beyond China's borders.

NOTES

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