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Authoritarian Resilience Revisited: Joseph Fewsmith with Response from Andrew J. Nathan

Joseph Fewsmith[a] and Andrew J. Nathan[b]

[a]Boston University, Massachusetts, USA*; [b]Columbia University, New York City, USA

ABSTRACT

The conventional wisdom in the period following Tiananmen was that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would fall victim to domestic pressures and international economic forces and follow the Soviet Union and other socialist systems onto the 'dustbin of history.' But it did not happen. In 2003, Andrew Nathan offered an explanation. The factionalism of the past was weakening in the face of growing professionalism and functional specialization. Political succession was increasingly bound by widely accepted norms, and the regime, though still authoritarian, was the beneficiary of feedback mechanisms that allowed a degree of political participation and provided information on contentious issues. In short, institutions were being created that strengthened the regime and extended its longevity.

Observing elite politics in the years since, Joseph Fewsmith, challenges this thesis, arguing that it is not the strengthening of institutions that has provided such resilience but, on the contrary, the reassertion of long-standing party norms of centralized leadership that have prevailed and fought back against greater institutionalization. These differences in interpretation hinge on several points, including the definition of institutionalization. Fewsmith believes that the way the term has been used in the China field has been associated with a greater role given to the State Council and its expertise as well as a normalization of procedures within the party, including more routinized promotion and retirement procedures, the expansion of 'intraparty democracy' including the increased use of straw ballots for determining leadership succession, and the weakening of 'one man rule.' Fewsmith sees such trends as eroding the mobilizational structures of the party in favor of stronger institutions. Nathan does not see institutionalization as incompatible with party norms.

Perhaps one point of contention is the Bo Xilai case. Nathan does not see this case as weakening the institutions of the party because it was a matter of Bo, not Xi, stretching the norms of the party by campaigning for office. Fewsmith sees this incident as a greater challenge to norms and institutions not only because Bo refused to accept the decision of the party (to appoint Xi as successor) but also because he apparently conspired with Zhou Yongkang and others. For Fewsmith, this was a failed *coup d'état*, not just a matter of stretching norms.

Similarly, for Nathan, Xi's use of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) to consolidate power was the use of an existing party institution, 'whose long-established and normatively accepted (although abusive) procedures enabled Xi to purge both political rivals and corrupt cadres….' Fewsmith would argue that never in the reform period had the CDIC been used in such a way to purge political enemies.

CONTACT Joseph Fewsmith fewsmith@bu.edu; Andrew J. Nathan ajn1@columbia.edu

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In the final analysis, perhaps this discussion comes down to what one makes of the outsized role that Xi has taken on. For Nathan, Xi has followed and even strengthened institutions, whereas for Fewsmith, Xi has pushed back against institutionalization to reaffirm the centralization of power that has traditionally gone along with the CCP's mobilizational system. This dialogue between Joseph Fewsmith and Andrew Nathan is to encourage readers to think more about 'institutionalization' and the evolution of elite politics in China.

Provocation from Joseph Fewsmith

On 25 February 2018, the Xinhua News Agency announced that the then still upcoming meeting of the National People's Congress (NPC) would consider a proposal to end presidential term limits. Not unexpectedly, the Congress subsequently approved this proposal and named Xi Jinping as president for a second term, but now with the option of more terms. This decision generated an enormous amount of commentary. News organizations greeted the announcement with shock. Max Fisher, writing for *The New York Times*, summed up the view of many China specialists when he wrote that China's success as an authoritarian system was because it had developed 'unusually strong institutions,' particularly rule by consensus and term limits.[1] Unfortunately, Fisher's summation is accurate; the idea that China has undergone a process of 'institutionalization' has become the dominant meme in the China-watching community.[2] Even more unfortunately, this meme is simply wrong.

This is not to say that there has been no institutionalization or that there have not been significant pressures to move toward greater institutionalization, but the idea that institutionalization undergirded China's 'authoritarian resilience' is not correct. Indeed, institutionalization was always corrosive of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s Leninist system and thus was resisted and largely quarantined to the non-critical parts of the system. At the core of the system, the struggle for dominance remained alive and well.

Emerging from the Cultural Revolution, China's new leaders were wary of falling under a new dictatorship. Deng Xiaoping was very conscious of the defects of the party's organization. In his justly famous 18 August 1980, speech to the Politburo, he criticized the 'over-concentration of power,' which inevitably led to the concentration of power in the hands of a few, or just one person—which, in turn, led to mistakes.[3] The History Resolution adopted by the CCP in 1981 said that Mao Zedong had 'increasingly put himself above the Central Committee of the Party.' The result was a 'steady weakening and even undermining of the principle of collective leadership and democratic centralism in the political life of the Party and the country.'[4] This criticism was the basis of Deng's efforts to separate party from state, an effort that culminated in Zhao Ziyang's proposal at the Thirteenth Party Congress in 1987 to separate party cadres from 'public servants' doing 'professional work.'[5] This was an effort to create a Weberian-style bureaucracy in the State Council while maintaining the CCP in a sort of supervisory role, something inherently contradictory. Party 'fractions' (*dangzu*)[6] were to be removed from state offices. This effort had barely gotten off the ground when the conflicts surrounding the Tiananmen crackdown brought it to an end. Since then, the idea of separating party and state existed in a sort of limbo—until Xi Jinping killed it at the Nineteenth Party Congress in October 2017.[7]

[1]Max Fisher, 'Xi Sets China on a Collision Course with History', *The New York Times*, 28 February 2018, p. B4.
[2]The classic statement of this position was Andrew J. Nathan, 'Authoritarian Resilience', *Journal of Democracy* 14(1), (2003), pp. 6–17. Since then, it has become widely accepted in the field.
[3]Deng Xiaoping, 'On the Reform of the Party and State Leadership System', in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975–1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1983), p. 311.
[4]'Resolution on Certain Problems in Our Party's History since the Founding of the PRC', *China.org*, 22 June 2011, available at: http://www.china.org.cn/china/CPC_90_anniversary/2011-06/22/content_22839137.htm. (accessed 26 June 2018).
[5]Zhao Ziyang, 'Yanzhe you Zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi daolu qianjin' (Advance along the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics), *Shisanda yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian, shang* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), Vol. 1, pp. 4–61.
[6]A party fraction or group is the party organization in a state office and oversees the operations of that state office. It is different than a 'faction,' a group that forms to promote the mutual interests of its members.
[7]Joseph Fewsmith, 'The 19th Party Congress: Ringing in Xi Jinping's New Era', *China Leadership Monitor* 55, (2018), available at: https://www.hoover.org/research/19th-party-congress-ringing-xi-jinpings-new-age. (accessed 26 June 2018).

Despite the policy and political struggles that brought the 1980s to such a harsh conclusion, many observers believed that the division of labor among the leadership set up by Jiang Zemin in the 1990s marked a turn toward institutionalization. And when Hu Jintao succeeded Jiang Zemin as general secretary in 2002, many people believed that China, alone among authoritarian systems, had solved the problem of succession. Thus, the recent removal of term limits on the presidency (there had never been term limits on the more important posts of general secretary and head of the Central Military Commission (CMC)) seemed to reverse the progress toward institutionalization over the previous decades.

Institutionalization?

But the institutionalization that many people think happened simply did not occur. The idea of institutionalization refers to what might be called 'state building,' the creation of bureaucracies that are staffed by people promoted on the basis of merit and the development of rules governing succession that are designed to limit and normalize political competition so that it does not devolve into regime threatening political struggle. These trends imply the lessening of the importance of faction and personal networks. Indeed, these academic notions resonate well with Jiang Zemin's call in 2001 for the party to move from a revolutionary party to a ruling party.[8] The CCP seemed to have been studying Max Weber; legal-rational authority seemed to be on the march.[9]

Unfortunately, Chinese elites have never ruled through consensus, succession has never been normalized, and struggles for power and dominance never ended. More to the point, the mobilizational system that the CCP developed through years of revolution has never given way to a Weberian-style bureaucracy, though the decisions just cited suggest some preliminary movement in that direction. What the recent removal of term limits suggests is not so much a 'power grab,' as the stark unveiling of the rules by which politics have always been played.

Before looking at the power dynamics of contemporary China, it is useful to acknowledge the very real pressures to build institutions in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. Emerging from that cataclysm, the one thing all reformers could agree on was the necessity of preventing China from ever returning to the Cultural Revolution. But they disagreed sharply on how to avoid doing so. How much of the old system should be criticized and reshaped? To what degree should Mao Zedong be criticized? How much of the old planning system should be retained? Such disagreements fueled campaigns such as those against 'spiritual pollution' (1983) and 'bourgeois liberalization' (1987 and 1989). But in the immediate aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the emergence of the reform coalition in 1978, there was agreement on avoiding the overconcentration of power and its corollary, the personality cult. Deng Xiaoping purposely took a low profile. The 1982 Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) that emerged from the first party congress following the accession of the reformers listed general secretary Hu Yaobang first. Hu was followed by veteran military leader Ye Jianying, and then Deng, who certainly had greater power than either Hu or Ye. Then came the new premier, Zhao Ziyang, followed by Li Xiannian and Chen Yun.

The other item on which all reformers agreed was the need to rejuvenate the cadre force. This was not only because many of the veteran cadres were too old and infirm after the Cultural Revolution but also because they simply did not have the education and new thinking that would be needed to institute economic reform. There were also structural pressures to move toward some

[8]'Jiang Zemin zai qingzhu jiandang bashi zhou nian danhui shangde jianghua' (Jiang Zemin's talk at the meeting to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party), *www. People.com*, 1 July 2001, available at: http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/16/20010701/501473.html. (accessed 26 June 2018).

[9]See particularly the Fourth Plenum's decision, 'Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jiaqiang dangde zhizheng nengli jianshe de jueding' (The party center's resolution on strengthening the party's ruling capacity), *www.people.com*, available at: http://www.people.com.cn/GB/40531/40746/2994977.html (accessed 26 June 2018).

form of institutionalization. Cadres, who had been buffeted by political storms and criticism during the Cultural Revolution, wanted stable and predictable career paths. Under these and other pressures, there was real progress in institutionalizing political processes. Party Congresses have been held every five years despite sometimes deep divisions within the party, such as those caused by Tiananmen. Cadre careers became much more predictable, and they retired on schedule, though retired cadres sometimes retained a degree of influence not compatible with their retired status.[10]

In the end, following the political meltdown of Tiananmen, Deng took the single most important step to try to normalize Chinese politics—he determined not only that Jiang Zemin would serve two terms (not counting the years between 1989 and 1992 when he was serving out the remainder of Zhao Ziyang's term) but also that Hu Jintao would follow Jiang. What Deng was trying to do was set up a system in which the leader of one generation would not decide the leadership of the next generation but rather the one after that. It was an experiment in skipping generations to prevent one leadership from dominating power by picking its own successors. This effort might have led to institutionalization, but it failed. China has never had a system of term limits, and Deng's efforts to implement one was fighting history and the political practice of the CCP. However, Deng's arrangement made people think, at least for a while, that succession had become peaceful and regularized. It is the contrast between that arrangement and the recent announcement that term limits were being eliminated that has given rise to so much commentary.

But if the pressures to institutionalize were real, so too were the counter pressures that would work against institutionalization. One can look at these pressures as being both organizational—the way the party has developed and is organized—and temporal—the issues facing the party at any given time. The history and the evolution of the party are important; the CCP had developed as a revolutionary party that relied on mobilization and hierarchy. Mobilization meant organizing people, not always voluntarily, to accomplish tasks, whether attacking a landlord, digging irrigation canals, or building a 'new socialist countryside.' Fortunately, the mass mobilization of people is a thing of the past, but mobilization nevertheless remains central to the way the party rules, whether introducing new policies, fighting corruption, or studying party documents.

A mobilizational party is very different from a legal-rational bureaucracy. As Weber argued, a legal-rational bureaucracy is constructed on the basis of law, the office holder and the institution are separated, and the bureaucratic inferior obeys authority only as a 'member' of the organization. The organization itself is quite impersonal.[11] The CCP forms a large-scale organization with abstract rules, but the execution of those rules is personalistic at any given level. Indeed, the ability of a leader to govern effectively depends heavily on loyalists to accomplish tasks.

Tasks are central to the operation of the CCP. Although there has been much discussion in recent years about the cadre evaluation system, in practice the evaluation and promotion of cadres depends more on their ability to complete assigned tasks and display personal loyalty than it does on fulfilling an abstract set of criteria. It is precisely this task-oriented nature of the party that defines it as a mobilizational party. And a mobilizational party cannot rely on abstract rules—legal-rational authority—but needs centralized leadership. We see this process in operation whenever the party decides to tackle a particular problem. When the leadership makes a decision, whether promoting the economy or curtailing pollution, that decision is translated into tasks, and those tasks cascade downward, level-by-level, with different cadres assigned some portion of the broader task. Accomplishing such tasks, and being an effective leader, depends on trusted subordinates. Unreliable subordinates can be remarkably successful in undermining a superior and surprisingly difficult to discipline or dismiss.

[10]Melanie Manion, *Retirement of Revolutionaries in China: Public Policies, Social Norms, and Private Interests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[11]See Ken Jowitt, 'The Leninist Phenomenon', in Ken Jowitt, *The New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 1–49.

The need for trusted subordinates is apparent at the highest levels of the system as well as the lowest. A leader who cannot place trusted subordinates in critical positions cannot be effective. Not all positions are created equal, and the importance of different positions can be changed over time, according to the needs of the leadership. Thus, in the early 1980s, confronted with an aged and conservative Politburo, Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang shifted much work to the Secretariat, by-passing the Politburo. But, in general, leaders need to control such organs as the military, the security forces, the general office, and the Organization Department.

The resurgence of hierarchy

One can see this personalistic, non-bureaucratic structure generate pressures toward hierarchy in operation throughout precisely the period in which many observers argue that the party was moving toward institutionalization. One early indication that institutions were not strong enough to constrain political power came when Deng decided to purge the military leadership in order to shore up Jiang's position. The military is one of those organs a leader must control, and Deng understood that the Yang brothers—Yang Baibing, then secretary-general of the CMC and Yang Shangkun, previous vice chair of the CMC and then president of the People's Republic of China (PRC)—did not support Jiang. So, following the 14th Party Congress in 1992, both were dismissed from their positions and the leadership of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) purged.[12] This cleared the way for Jiang to build his own support in the PLA, including most importantly the promotions of Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong. Jiang secured his support in the PLA so well that Hu Jintao would never be able to command the military.

But when Jiang Zemin became general secretary in 1989, he was weak. His only experience in Beijing was as Minister of Electronics, a ministerial level (*buji*) position that left him far below the 'party and state leaders' who actually ruled the country (and the retirees above them). He would have had limited access to the persons and information available to leaders at the highest levels. It is useful in this regard to recall Zhao Ziyang's statement in his memoirs that even he, after seven years as premier and nearly two years as general secretary, still had only limited knowledge of what was going on among the retired cadres who still remained powerful.[13] Taking cognizance of the fate of his two predecessors (Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang) and following the lead of senior leaders who supported him (particularly the elders Li Xiannian and Bo Yibo), Jiang charted a cautious course. Jiang was so cautious that he ignored Deng's efforts to revive reform in the winter and spring of 1991, leading Deng to very nearly replace him. Jiang finally moved to embrace reform more fully following Deng's trip to the south and the PLA's open support of Deng. It is no wonder that a weak leader would seem to embrace institutionalization as Jiang did in his call for building a ruling party, cited above.

However, Jiang did not stay weak. He was aided in solidifying power by the passing of the old guard. Li Xiannian, Jiang's closest supporter, died in June 1992. Hu Qiaomu, Mao's former secretary and the party's most authoritative ideologue, passed in September 1992. Chen Yun died in April 1995. And Deng Xiaoping was clearly in declining health. On 1 October 1994, Deng Xiaoping was shown on television watching the fireworks over the night sky. But instead of the focused, energetic Deng people had known, Deng was now an old man, staring blankly at the display.

When the Fourth Plenary Session of the Fourteenth Central Committee met in September 1994, it was made clear that power had passed—five years after he had become general secretary—to Jiang Zemin. An authoritative *People's Daily* editorial declared that 'the second-generation leading collective has been successfully relieved by its third-generation leading collective.' Although the emphasis here was still on 'collective leadership,' it was clear that Jiang's personal leadership was

[12]Richard Baum, *Burying Mao* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 366-367.
[13]Zhao Ziyang, *Gaige licheng* (*The course of reform*) (Hong Kong: New Century Press, 2009), p. 265.

being strengthened. Huang Ju, one of Jiang's closest protégés in Shanghai, was promoted to the Politburo, and two other close followers, Wu Bangguo and Jiang Chunyun, both Politburo members were added to the Secretariat. But if any one action marked the consolidation of Jiang's power, it was the arrest of Chen Xitong, the party secretary of Beijing, in April 1995. Chen was a member of the Politburo and close ally of Deng Xiaoping. His arrest, thus, marked an assertion of power and declaration that Jiang's power no longer depended on Deng. Leadership was no longer so collective.[14]

At the Fifteenth Party Congress in 1997, age limits were finally introduced. All leaders 70 and above were asked to resign. Although Jiang himself was 71, the new rule forced Qiao Shi, always a thorn in Jiang's side, to step down. Five years later, Jiang would again lower the age limit, this time to 67 (giving rise to the famous formula *qishang baxia*—one can be promoted at 67 but must retire at 68) largely to force the retirement of Li Ruihuan, another antagonist. Rules were being introduced, but they were being introduced for distinctly non-institutional reasons. In doing so, Jiang was following the long-standing practice of building personal power and supporting a group of followers (often called the 'Shanghai gang,' suggesting that 'factionalism,' however, understood, was increasing, not decreasing), not introducing new, more institutionally based norms.[15]

As this brief narrative suggests, the question is not, or not just, a question of formal position but rather of substantive power. The Chinese have an expression for the person who is actually in charge—*yibashou* ('number one hand'). So the question was whether Jiang Zemin could leverage his position as general secretary to become *yibashou*. It took several years, but Jiang did indeed emerge as the core or *yibashou* of his generation. Even so, he was not as powerful as Deng before him or as Xi has become after him, but he was certainly the most powerful leader of that period.

Deng had decreed that Hu Jintao would take over in 2002, and Jiang did not have the power to stop this transition. But just before the Sixteenth Party Congress met in November, Xinhua News Agency announced that two of Jiang's supporters, Jia Qinglin, the party secretary in Beijing, and Huang Ju, the party secretary in Shanghai, would 'be transferred to the center.'[16] When the Congress was over, and the new PBSC was revealed, people were startled to find that the body had been expanded from seven people to nine—the largest it had ever been—and that Jia and Huang had been added to it. Jia and Huang joined four other close allies of Jiang's—Wu Bangguo, Zeng Qinghong, Wu Guanzheng, and Li Changchun, so the PBSC was completely dominated by Jiang Zemin supporters—and Jiang himself continued to head the CMC. Indeed, Jiang Zemin had never been more powerful than the day he left his position as general secretary, a fact completely at odds with the thesis of increasing institutionalization.

So the succession happened, leading many observers to conclude too optimistically that China had solved the problem of succession. But Hu Jintao had succeeded to the position, but not the power. The Chinese political system was simply not institutionalized; formal position did not confer the power to lead. And events would prove that Hu was simply not able to follow the model that Jiang had set out. Four years later, Hu borrowed a page from Jiang Zemin's playbook and arrested Chen Liangyu, party secretary of Shanghai, for corruption. Chen was removed from office in September 2006 and expelled from the CCP in July 2007. The timing suggested a major effort to reduce the strength of Jiang Zemin at the upcoming Seventeen Party Congress, but that congress would end up strengthening Jiang, not Hu.

The result of the Seventeenth Party Congress in 2007 was that He Guoqiang became head of the CDIC, Meng Jianzhu became head of Public Security, and Zhou Yongkang, who would later become one of the primary targets of Xi Jinping's campaign against corruption, became head the Political and Legal Commission. In other words, the heads of all the party's main investigative organs were

[14]Joseph Fewsmith, *China since Tiananmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 162–165.
[15]Ibid.
[16]Xinhua she, 'Jia Qinglin, Huang Ju diao zhongyang gongzuo' (Jiang Qinglin and Huang Ju transferred to the center for work), *Xinhua*, 22 October 2002, available at: http://www.chinanews.com/2002-10-22/26/235077.html (accessed 26 June 2018).

in the hands of people loyal to Jiang. Moreover, Jiang had managed to 'flip' the leadership of the Political and Legal Commission from one of Li Peng's followers, Luo Gan, to one of his own. Hu Jintao had no tools left to investigate any more of Jiang's followers, and, indeed, Hu was remarkably quiet during his second five-year term. This is what happens when a general secretary cannot rid himself of the influence of his predecessor, a lesson Xi Jinping clearly learned.

If there are very real organizational pressures toward hierarchy and personal power, there are also temporal issues—the problems facing the party and particularly its leadership at any given time. Just as the Cultural Revolution made Deng Xiaoping and others introduce new rules governing promotion and retirement, a sense that the party was floundering under the challenge of corruption and the weak leadership of Hu Jintao (which was the result, at least in part, of the continued influence of Jiang and his colleagues) has shaped Xi Jinping's approach. There were at least three major problems.

The first was the issue of succession, the problem supposedly resolved by institutionalization. Xi Jinping was the first leader of the PRC who was neither a revolutionary nor designated by a revolutionary. The Eighteenth Party Congress at which he came to power was in 2012, 63 years after the CCP came to power. And Xi Jinping was of the Cultural Revolution generation, a generation that learned early that political struggle did not always follow the rules. Unfortunately, Bo Xilai, the princeling who the Seventeenth Party Congress had passed over in favor of Xi (Xi was designated heir apparent five years before becoming general secretary), was also of that same generation. We cannot be sure what motivated Bo. He is a person of open ambition, who seems to have had a high opinion of his own abilities and perhaps a corresponding disregard of Xi's (who did not have a very distinguished career in Fujian[17]). Perhaps there was also a generational aspect—Bo's father, Bo Yibo, had an even more distinguished career than did Xi's father, though both reached the position of Vice Premier. Whatever the motivation, Bo seemed determined to overturn the decision of the Seventeenth Party Congress and apparently had conversations with Zhou Yongkang, the PBSC member in charge of security, and Xu Caihou, the vice chair of the CMC, about doing so. We do not know the details, but according to Xi Jinping[18]:

> In recent years, we have investigated high-level cadres' serious violation of discipline and law, especially the cases of Zhou Yongkang, Bo Xilai, Xu Caihou, Ling Jihua and Su Rong. Their violations of the party's political discipline and political rules was very serious; it had to be viewed seriously. These people, the greater their power and the more important their position, the more they ignored the party's political discipline and political rules, even to the extent of being completely unscrupulous and reckless (*siwu jidan, danda baotian*)! Some had inflated political ambitions, and violated the party's organization to engage in political conspiracies (*zhengzhi yinmou*), to immorally (*goudang*) violate and split the party!

These charges were repeated, with some variation at the Sixth Plenum in September 2016, when Xi laid out a number of sins that party cadres had committed in recent years. He noted: 'Zhou Yongkang, Bo Xilai, Guo Boxiong, Xu Caihou, Ling Jihua and others seriously violated party discipline and law. Not only were their serious economic problems exposed, but their serious political problems were also exposed.'[19] Whether or not Xi's charges are accurate, it is very clear that the problem of succession had not been solved.

The second issue was party dysfunction. Party dysfunction can be viewed from two perspectives. First, although Hu Jintao was never able to challenge Jiang Zemin for ultimate power in the party, he was able to promote a large number of followers over the ten years he was general

[17]Willy Wo-lap Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[18]Xi Jinping, '*Xi Jinping guanyu yanming dangde jilü he guiju lunshu zhebian*' (*Selected comments by Xi Jinping on Strictly and impartially [upholding] party discipline and rules*) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe and Zhongguo fangzheng chubanshe, 2015), pp. 28–29.

[19]Xi Jinping, 'Guanyu "guanyu xinxingshixia dangnei zhengzhi shenghuode ruogan zhunze" he "Zhongguo gongchandang dang nei jiandu tiao" de shuo ming' (Explanation of 'Some regulations concerning intra-party life under the new situation' and 'Regulations on intra-party supervision in the CCP'), *Xinhua she*, 2 November 2016, available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-11/02/c_1119838057.htm (accessed 26 June 2018).

secretary. If one looks at the membership of the Eighteenth Central Committee, there were 46 members with significant ties to the Communist Youth League (CYL) (23%). One cannot assume that all these people were loyal supporters of Hu Jintao (or that people without a CYL background were not supporters of Hu), but the number is a rough indication that Hu Jintao had built a considerable following and there was some expectation that such people would balance Xi Jinping. As it turned out, with the exceptions of Li Keqiang, Hu Chunhua, and Wang Yang none of them survived the Nineteenth Party Congress nor were they replaced by younger people who had risen through the CYL. Xi presided over a remarkable cleansing of the party.

The other perspective is that local factionalism had become a serious problem for the party. After Ling Jihua was arrested, the Chinese press, including the PRC-owned Hong Kong press, began to write extensively about corruption and factionalism in Shanxi province, where Ling Jihua was from. These articles showed clearly the links between local government and local industry, usually coal, and between higher level party people and local party organizations. Wealthy coal producing areas developed factions reaching from the county level all the way to the provincial party standing committee. Such a province was simply not responsive to Beijing's will, so there was a large-scale purging of officials after Xi took power.[20]

Finally, there was the specter of the Soviet Union. As Xi made clear on numerous occasions, he was worried that the CCP might follow the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) into the dustbin of history. As Xi put it in a speech shortly after taking power, the Soviet Union had collapsed because party members had lost all 'ideals and convictions.'[21] Xi was determined that the ideals and convictions of CCP members would be restored, along with party discipline. Thus, we have seen a sharp tightening and narrowing of propaganda over the past five years.

Authoritarian resilience revisited

The above narrative reveals that the institutionalization thesis has been considerably overstated. This does not mean that there is nothing to the thesis; certainly compared to the tumultuous days of the Cultural Revolution the careers of cadres are more stable and predictable (though the campaign against corruption has introduced new uncertainties). Even at the elite level (ministerial level), careers are more stable. This is an important factor in explaining why the struggles that take place at the highest level have not reverberated down through the system more than they have on policy issues.

However, elite in-fighting is not bound by institutional rules and sometimes unfolds over many years—as when it took Jiang Zemin at least five years to 'consolidate' power. Theories on authoritarian rule suggest that such in-fighting is likely to result in regime collapse, which has not, at least not yet, happened in China.[22] Why not? Looking at the four decades of reform and opening, one can see three distinct periods. The first is that of Deng Xiaoping. The irony is that Deng could institute many of the reforms he did, including efforts to separate party and state (though it should be understood that these reforms never went very far) because of his dominance over the system. He and Chen Yun frequently disagreed on economic reform, the speed of reform, and other issues, but Chen Yun never had the military support or the personal ambition to challenge Deng. For these reasons, the system was stable, at least until Tiananmen. Once it was clear who had won and who had lost (Zhao Ziyang), the Leninist system snapped back into place.[23] That Deng Xiaoping was still alive was a major factor in this stabilization.

[20]Joseph Fewsmith, 'China's political ecology and the fight against corruption', *China Leadership Monitor* 46, (2015), available at: https://www.hoover.org/research/chinas-political-ecology-and-fight-against-corruption. (accessed 26 June 2018).
[21]Chris Buckley, 'Vows of change in China Belie private warning', *The New York Times*, 15 February 2013, p. A1.
[22]Milan W. Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[23]The reality was a bit more complicated than this as there was deep debate in the aftermath of Tiananmen. Those debates were settled by Deng Xiaoping's trip to the south in 1992.

In the second period, Jiang Zemin gradually consolidated power. But he never became powerful enough either to remain in power once his two terms were over or place one of his cronies in power. There was enough of a balance of power at the top that Deng's will carried the day (from the grave!) and Hu Jintao replaced Jiang as general secretary. But Hu was never able to accumulate enough power to become *yibashou*. So Jiang remained the most powerful leader even after stepping down. He certainly had enough power to interfere in the Eighteenth Party Congress to prevent Hu Jintao's protégé, Li Keqiang, from taking over.[24] In short, the institutionalization that many analysts thought had developed in this period really reflected the relative weakness of both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, the relative, but uneven, balance of power between them, and the continuing influence of Deng's experiment in having one generation choose the leadership of the second generation below it.

But it was not so much institutionalization as it was paralysis, and that sense of paralysis was one factor in convincing the elite (at least those not under investigation) to yield to Xi's strong hand. Ironically, what has brought about the stability of the system is not institutionalization but the consolidation of power at the top of the system, first with Deng, then with Jiang, and now with Xi. Whatever movement there was toward institutionalization (retirements, age limits, etc.) was overwhelmed by the concentration of power. Only such a concentration of power was compatible with the mobilizational system bequeathed by the revolution. Authoritarian rule has proven resilient in China, but by a reassertion of a hierarchical, mobilizational model, not through institutionalization and certainly not through rule by consensus.

Implications

There are both practical and theoretical implications that emerge from this discussion. First, the removal of term limits was important primarily as a marker of Xi's rapid consolidation of power, during which he has been willing to use the sort of strong-arm tactics that many observers thought a thing of the past. Whatever agreement Xi may have obtained to carry out his campaign against corruption; it is difficult to imagine Jiang and other elders agreeing to Xi's wholesale reshaping of the political elite. Never before in the reform period had three members of the Politburo been asked to step down before reaching the retirement age (Liu Qibao, Zhang Chunxian and Li Yuanchao all stepped down from the Politburo at the Nineteenth Party Congress, though the former two were allowed to retain their seats on the Central Committee). Of the nine non-PBSC members of the Politburo who are age-eligible to stay on the Politburo or be promoted to the Standing Committee, seven are close to Xi. Many of these people received extremely rapid promotions over the past five years. Members of the PLA were forced to retire early as Xi undertook a large-scale reshaping of the military elite. And efforts to promote intra-party democracy were reversed. The rapid concentration of power in one wing of the CCP, although consonant with party history, is far more significant than the removal of term limits. Perhaps most significant is the battle with Bo Xilai and his supporters seems to mark the return of a type of winner-take-all politics we had hoped was a thing of the past.[25]

It is these phenomena that present great uncertainties for the future. The Bo Xilai case not only marked the sort of power struggle that had seemingly passed, but it also made very clear that China has not solved the succession problem. Power is difficult to pass from generation to generation, and the longer Xi and those close to him hold on to power, the more other groups will feel excluded, and the more they will be prepared to pounce on any mistake Xi makes. One can imagine that at some point, perhaps when Xi goes to see Marx, those who currently feel excluded will pose a challenge, with all the dangers of intra-elite conflict that such a scenario poses.

[24]Joseph Fewsmith, 'The 18th party congress: testing the limits of institutionalization', *China Leadership Monitor* 40, (2013), available at: https://www.hoover.org/research/18th-party-congress-testing-limits-institutionalization (accessed 26 June 2018).
[25]Fewsmith, 'The 19th Party Congress: Ringing in Xi Jinping's New Age.'

This danger seems all the more serious because the Xi leadership appears more exclusive than previous leaderships. Deng Xiaoping dominated his era, but he had Chen Yun to contend with. Chen brought a different voice to the table and represented a considerable constituency within the party. Jiang Zemin came to dominate another period in the evolution of Chinese politics, but he did not eliminate Hu Jintao. One looks in vain to find such an 'opposition' group in Xi's China. The range of views Xi is likely to hear appears correspondingly narrow, and the constraints on his actions seem limited indeed.

Another danger is the conflict that is likely to emerge between the political system and the society. China has already developed a very diverse society that is deeply engaged in the world. Trying to manage such a society with a centralized, authoritarian system will be increasingly difficult, even with all the technical tools that are being employed.

Xi Jinping has set out a governance project that is quite the opposite of that of Deng Xiaoping. Deng made it clear that he wanted to change the role of the party from something that monopolized everything to a political body that would set policy and supervise work but intervene much less. Xi, in contrast, has demanded that the role of the party be increased. The party constitution, as revised by the Nineteenth Party Congress declares that the 'party leads everything.' The party has always been in charge, but it had never been specified in the party constitution that it 'leads everything.' And at the Party's Third Plenum in late February 2018, it passed a document, 'The Resolution of the Party Center on Deepening the Reform of Party and State Organs,'[26] that makes clear that the party's role in governance is to be strengthened.

Traditionally the state side of the party-state has played the leading role in managing the economy, but it has been apparent for some time that premier Li Keqiang's role was much diminished from that of his predecessors. Now we know why. This was not, or not just, a reflection of factional differences or personal dislikes so much as part of Xi's broader understanding of the role of the party. This policy, now made clear, raises many questions. In recent years, the party has been establishing party cells in private enterprises and foreign-invested businesses. In the past, those party organizations have often been of benefit to the enterprises because they were often used to secure benefits from government departments. Will the party organizations now play a greater role in the management of the enterprises? One can easily imagine new sources of friction and/or new obstacles to the growth of private enterprises.

On a more theoretical level, the evolution of elite politics in China make clear the tensions inherent in this sort of mobilizational system. Efforts to normalize—institutionalize—the system lead to dysfunction and conflict whereas efforts to recentralize power lead to a concentration of power that inevitably make future transitions more difficult. In addition, political trends are raising questions about China's relations with the world. The centralization of power, the renewed emphasis on the role of the party, and the tightening of ideology all seem inconsistent with an increasingly diverse and contentious society, the close integration of the Chinese and global economies, and the need for innovation and embedded in global production chains. How China deals with these contradictions is the question looming over the next decade and more. Xi has declared that it is a 'new age;' indeed it is.

Response from Andrew J. Nathan

Who would dare to disagree with Joe Fewsmith on the facts? But what do the facts mean? I agree that Chinese elite politics has been a constant struggle for power, and that Xi Jinping has consolidated more power than his immediate predecessors. (Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that he has consolidated more power than Mao, because Mao's interventions in policy were

[26]Central Committee, 'Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu shenhua dang he guojia jigou gaige de jueding' (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the Decision on deepening the reform of party and state organs), *Renmin ribao*, 5 March 2018, available at: http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0305/c64094-29847159.html (accessed 26 June 2018).

episodic, while Xi's are continual.[27]) But compared to Mao—or even to Deng or Jiang, as Fewsmith describes their roles—Xi has so far carried out his consolidation of power within the bounds of existing institutions rather than by breaking them. And he has also strengthened some institutions, and created some new ones. Institutionalization never means the end of politics, but is rather an attempt to constrain politics within certain channels. In this sense, the Chinese system is more institutionalized today than when Xi took power in 2012.

Xi became the heir apparent in 2005 (if not earlier) in the way that had become normal in the post-Mao period, by the consensus choice of the senior leaders. It was Bo Xilai, not Xi, who stretched the norms by campaigning for top office. Xi did nothing that we know of to undermine Bo; instead, Bo and his wife ended their own careers when Bo's fight with his police chief Wang Lijun led to the exposure of his wife's involvement in the murder of the British businessman Neil Heywood. After Xi took office as General Secretary, he consolidated power by using an existing Party institution, the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission, whose long-established and normatively accepted (although abusive) procedures enabled Xi to purge both political rivals and corrupt cadres who were not political rivals. Within the military, Xi used the accepted prerogatives of the CMC chair to get rid of older generals and put his loyalists into top positions; he strengthened the institutional role of chair by implementing a 'chairman responsibility system' that made him something like a true commander-in-chief.[28]

Xi took further steps in power consolidation at the Nineteenth Party Congress in October 2017 by packing the 25 member Politburo with 14 of his personal followers (plus himself). An analysis of the Politburo lineup indicates that he did this, however, without violating established Party norms. Those who should have retired according to the 'seven up eight down' rule did retire, including Xi's right-hand man Wang Qishan. All 25 Politburo members including Xi are within the normative age range of 50 to 70. The lineup hints that Xi intends to honor the age rules going forward: seven of the 14 Xi loyalists on the ruling body are eligible by age to be reelected at the 20th Party Congress in 2022.[29] And two of these loyalists are among the three who are young enough to serve in the 21st Politburo, if they survive that long politically.

These arrangements suggest thoughtful preparation to keep Xi (or at least Xi-thought) in command for at least another ten years without breaking the established age norms—with, to be sure, one important exception, the potential reelection of Xi himself to a third or additional terms. If Xi stays in office past 2022, as seems likely, that will indeed be a break in the age norm. But it has not happened yet. And if it does happen it will be a single break in the norm, rather than a total breakdown. Xi's adherence to the rules in all other respects is all the more noteworthy because the rules he is honoring are new and fragile. The age-based retirement system for political leaders, as well as the term limit on the presidency, were introduced by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s. As Fewsmith describes, the 'seven up eight down' rule for top Party posts is an informal norm that came into effect step by step as an outgrowth of Jiang Zemin's struggle to consolidate power in the 1990s. A full handoff of all three levers of power (party, state, and military) on schedule from one leader to another first took place in the 2012 succession from Hu to Xi.

Xi can continue to rule the military without violating any norms, so long as he continues to serve as Party secretary, because the only clear rule for the chairmanship of the CMC, and one that has been honored only intermittently, is that the position is usually held concurrently by the General Secretary. By the end of 2017, there remained only one relatively minor obstacle to Xi's power consolidation: the state Constitution's two-term limit for the office of president. If Xi had left this norm in place while taking a third term as Party Secretary in 2022, he would have violated an informal norm: that the Party secretary serves concurrently as state president. To avoid violating

[27]Andrew J. Nathan, 'China: back to the future', *The New York Review of Books*, 10 May 2018, pp. 36–37.
[28]James Mulvenon, 'The Cult of Xi and the rise of the CMC Chairman responsibility system', *China Leadership Monitor* 55, (2018), available at: https://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/winter-2018-issue-55 (accessed 5 July 2018).
[29]Cai Qi (b. 1955), Li Xi (b. 1956), Huang Kunming (b. 1956), Zhao Leji (b. 1957), Li Qiang (b. 1959), Chen Min'er (b. 1960), and Ding Xuexiang (b. 1962).

the constitutional term limit, he could theoretically have split the party and state roles by appointing a Medvedev-like stand-in to serve as state president (as Yang Shangkun had served as state president when Zhao Ziyang and then Jiang Zemin were party secretaries from 1988 to 1993). Instead, Xi decided to amend the constitution. He did so, however, once again in accordance with the rules, that is, by having the NPC exercise the constitutional power of amendment that it has utilized numerous times in the past. The election of Wang Qishan as Vice President at the same NPC meeting stretched the 'eight-down' rule, but that was a rule developed for the Politburo and had not, so far as I know, ever been explicitly applied to posts at the 'state leader' level.

Xi's reasons for keeping the state presidency linked to the party secretary position were probably two-fold. First, with China's growing international role, and given the fact that countries are normally represented in international meetings by heads of state rather than by leaders of ruling parties, Xi must have felt it was important to occupy that position himself. Probably even more material to Xi's decision to keep the state presidency in his own hands was the strengthened role he intended to create for the state apparatus in implementing his policies. Besides abolishing presidential term limits, the NPC adopted an ambitious plan to restructure the state in ways intended to make it stronger in its role—under Party leadership—of managing the economy and society. The Congress created seven new ministries and restructured almost every other State Council-level agency. It merged the China Banking Regulatory Commission and the China Insurance Regulatory Commission into the Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission. It created two new ministries to consolidate functions dealing with the environment: the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of Ecology and Environment. It established a new Ministry of Veterans Affairs to provide better services to demobilized military personnel. Most importantly, the Congress created the State Supervision Commission, which folds the anti-corruption mandate of the Party Disciplinary Inspection Commission into a larger mandate that will pursue not only corruption but also failures to implement policy, not only among Party cadres but also among government officials. And many commentators see Xi weakening the role of Premier, taking direct presidential charge of the government bureaucracy through his chairmanship of many policy areas 'leading small groups.' Having strengthened the state apparatus to make it a more effective instrument of his rule, it would not have made sense for Xi to hand control over it to someone else.

To be sure, these changes in the Party, military, and the state are not, as Fewsmith points out, Weberian or Zhao Ziyang-like reforms that seek to give officials autonomy or insulate them from politics. Nor, as Carl Minzner has pointed out, are they intended to strengthen the independent rule of law.[30] They are reforms that aim to make the party-state apparatus more responsive and accountable to the Party's—that is, to Xi's—leadership. They seek to make what Fewsmith rightly calls the 'mobilizational party' or 'task-oriented' system more effective—because, as Fewsmith points out, that kind of system 'needs centralized leadership.' But this does not mean that the reforms are deinstitutionalizing, or chaos-generating. They seek to generate a very strict kind of order.

But do these institutionalizing steps undermine another institution, that of collective leadership? That is a possible interpretation. It would not contradict the thesis that an institutionalization process is taking place, since institutional change is by definition a process of unmaking old rules in order to make new rules. But Fewsmith provides a better interpretation: collective leadership was never an institution, in the sense of a valued set of procedures that nobody wanted to change (or as institutionalist theorists would put it, an equilibrium solution such that no one's interests would be served by a deviation from it). It was instead an unsatisfactory state of the power indeterminacy, which existed because Deng, Jiang, and Hu each had to deal with other powerful leaders (whether in office or retired) who prevented them from exercising full authority. The dispersion of power was a source of dissatisfaction within the party, because it created difficulty in making tough decisions,

[30]Carl Minzner, *End of an Era: How China's Authoritarian Revival Is Undermining Its Rise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

inconsistent policy implementation, and the protection of corrupt followers by power brokers. One can interpret the history that Fewsmith recounts as a long story of the Leninist party-state straining to produce the kind of strong leader that it needs. If that was what it was trying to do, it seems to have succeeded.

But are the institutions Xi is building 'resilient'? This is the place in this essay to repeat my frequent disclaimer that when I wrote about 'authoritarian resilience' in 2003, I was not predicting that the system would never fail, but was trying to understand why it had not yet collapsed. Chinese political institutions might have decayed later on. But I have argued in this essay that they did not.

They have evolved. But have they evolved in a way that is good for authoritarian resilience? I agree with Fewsmith (and with many other Western analysts, like Carl Minzner and David Shambaugh[31]) that the kind of institutions Xi is building generate particular risks. (There is probably no kind of institutional set-up that doesn't carry its characteristic set of risks.) As Fewsmith notes, these risks were foreseen in Deng Xiaoping's 18 August 1980, speech 'On the Reform of the Party and State Leadership System.' Overly long tenure tempts leaders to view themselves as indispensable. It leads them to fear what might happen to them after they give up power. It weakens the ability of other political forces to limit the leader's power. It stifles the careers of talented younger politicians. It makes officials and ordinary people afraid to speak the truth, depriving the top leader of information and ideas. The leader may stay in power beyond the time when he has the creativity and energy to run the system well. When the leader finally steps down or dies, the lack of a regularized succession process may lead to a power struggle. In these ways the centralization of power is potentially destabilizing.

However, neither Fewsmith nor I see evidence that the system is in imminent danger. I agree with him that the game of politics will never stop. But for now, the political process has generated strong man and the players seem willing to follow the rules he lays down.

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Notes on contributors

Joseph Fewsmith is professor of International Relations and Political Science at Boston University.

Andrew J. Nathan is Class of 1919 Professor of Political Science and a faculty member of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University.

[31]David Shambaugh, *China's Future* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016).