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Victor C. Shih

CONTENTIOUS ELITES IN CHINA: NEW EVIDENCE AND APPROACHES

The purges of former Politburo Standing Committee member Zhou Yongkang, former Central Military Commission Vice Chairman Xu Caihou, and the former head of the Central Committee Office Ling Jihua in 2014 re-excited a long-standing debate in the field of elite Chinese politics: how contentious is politics at the elite level? On the face of it, these purges, as well as the arrests of ninety nine senior officials associated with these three individuals and with other cases, seem to prove that elite politics remains highly contentious at the top (People's Daily 2015). This outcome was surprising considering that decades of institution building had taken place after the Cultural Revolution. However, proponents of institutionalized politics in the CCP argue that the leadership had a genuine desire to clean house, and that these arrests, even if politically motivated, instilled a renewed discipline in the party. Once the "bad apples" were eliminated, the leadership under Xi Jinping would have continued on the road of institutionalization (Li 2014). Cadre promotion institutions, regular meetings of the Politburo and its standing committee, party congresses, and retirement rules remain largely unaffected by the purges and will continue to ensure relatively harmonious decision making and predictable successions in the foreseeable future.

The purpose of this special issue is to rejoin this debate in the wake of both recent political developments and the emergence of new methods to study elite politics in China. The articles in this edited issue provide evidence that elite contention continues to have significant impact on some of the most important outcomes in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP): the appointment and removal of cadres, decisions on major policies, and political stability.

However, instead of engaging in another around of debate on the role of elites versus institutions in China, these articles present systematic evidence that competing elites influenced key outcomes in China through both formal institutions and informal factions. Factions here refer to informal networks of reciprocity formed by senior leaders in the Chinese Communist Party to protect themselves against potential challengers. As Pye (1981, 7) put it, factions are "… linkage networks that extend upward in support of particular leaders who are, in turn, looking for followers to ensure their power." Lower-level officials, in turn, joined factions in order to secure promotions and other regime goods from powerful patrons. The articles in this issue provide robust evidence that having ties with the party secretary general increases one's likelihood of promotion relative to peers who have either no ties or ties only with other Politburo Standing Committee members. Besides showing that factions matter, this result suggests that the agenda

setting and personnel powers of the party secretary general enhances his ability to promote his faction. In other words, senior officials in the party took advantage of formal powers of their offices to enhance their factional or informal influence.

Furthermore, formal institutions and informal factions interact in complex ways to influence cadre appointments, policy decisions, and political stability. To remain as elites in the largest authoritarian government in the world, most upper echelon officials in the Chinese Communist Party are willing to cooperate with one another as long as they perceive others as cooperative. The articles in this issue find that elites have strategies for identifying uncooperative colleagues and that they act to prevent these uncooperative individuals from becoming powerful. Also, there is evidence that formal institutions, such as the retirement rule, may lessen the incentive to engage in uncooperative behavior because younger officials are assured of future promotion opportunities. Finally, even when there are intense elite conflicts, formal institutions and structural factors may shape the timing, manifestation, and severity of these conflicts. For example, the succession competition came to a head in 2012 because the 18th Party Congress, where Hu Jintao and several other Politburo Standing Committee members had been expected to retire, took place at the end of the year. Moreover, despite rumors of an attempted coup by Zhou Yongkang, nothing resembling a coup materialized, partly because formal rules preventing someone in his position from deploying armed troops within China (Swaine 2012).

Formal institutions also constrain the capacity of even a true dictator to achieve his preferred policy outcome immediately. For example, Mao could not get the provinces to make fantastical plans about grain production at the beginning of the Great Leap Forward until the State Planning Commission formally had decentralized planning authorities to the provinces in the spring of 1958 (Bo 2008). Taken altogether, the articles in this issue suggest pervasive factional competition that was at times conflictual, but was shaped and constrained by formal institutions. Also, interest groups whose preferences are determined by their positions in the bureaucracy lobby for and influence policies. The complex reality of Chinese politics transcends the ideal types portrayed by the earlier literature on elite politics.

This set of articles also contributes to the burgeoning literature on comparative authoritarianism. A thriving literature explores institutional mechanisms such as legislatures that helped authoritarian leaders maintain power by appeasing elites and supporters from various segments of society. However, this set of articles on China suggests that Communist regimes faced an altogether different set of challenges than regimes without a Leninist party structure. Leninist parties typically dominated society, leaving few challenges outside of the regime. Thus, legislatures in Leninist regimes mainly served as information mechanisms, rather than as arenas where regimes bargained with their social support bases or oppositions (Gandhi 2008; Truex 2015). Instead, communist regimes' gravest threats came from an internal split. Typically, the command structure inherent in Leninist institutions, as well as retirement and promotion institutions, ensured cooperation between elites. However, the malleability of institutions meant that a few ambitious individuals or a sudden power vacuum could upset the equilibrium and inaugurate periods of intense conflicts between elites. It is quite possible that no institutional solution exists to resolve this problem completely in communist regimes. Relative to well-functioning democracies, politics in communist regimes will still be

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much more prone to political instability, manifested as the violent and irregular turnovers of the top elites.

In addition to these new insights, this set of articles also uses a range of new data, such as quantitative biographical data, expert survey data, and internet search data. The articles also deploy a range of new methods, including social network analysis and agent-based modeling. The new data, which are mostly derived from publicly available sources, promise to improve vastly the replicability of results in the study of Chinese politics. The collection of systematic data on elite networks, for example, will permit a much more nuanced understanding of elite factions than previous generations of scholarship on elite politics, which depended on elite interviews, close reading of memoirs, and analysis of selected official publications. Hypotheses can be fine-tuned and re-tested, and new methodology can be applied to challenge existing results. For example, instead of debating whether factional ties matter for promotion, quantitative measurements of factional ties allow scholars to gauge the impact of factional ties with individual senior leaders in the CCP and under specific political environments. Also, quantitative data of elite biographies allow scholars to conduct previously impossible analysis, such as mapping an official's network with both peers and officials at the highest level.

ELITE POLITICS: A GAME WITH INSTITUTIONALIZED RULES?

Ever since Western scholars began to study the Chinese Communist movement, a debate has raged about whether the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represented a broadly unified movement in which differences in the leadership mostly could be settled through formal or informal institutions. According to one view, the discipline of the *nomenclature* and democratic centralism rendered the CCP elite a coherent entity from the start, loyally heeding the commands of Mao or even Stalin (Wittfogel 1960; Barnett and Vogel 1967). This allowed the party to defeat two major enemies (Japan and the KMT), as well as to transform society (Barnett and Vogel 1967). The "Yan'an roundtable" of senior Communist leaders in the 1950s and early 1960s smoothly governed China and allowed the party to turn China from a desperately poor nation to an atomic power by the mid-1960s (Teiwes 2001; Teiwes 1993). Into the reform period, Deng craftily formed elite coalitions to promote reform policies, which were carried out at the micro-level by entrepreneurial local party secretaries (Shirk 1993; Oi 1999).

Outbreaks of hostility in the leadership were anomalies or were caused by exceptionally predatory individuals such as Mao (Dittmer 1998; Miller 2008; Teiwes 2001). In particular, the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) interrupted the normal functioning of party institutions in favor of personalist politics. In the last decade of Mao's rule, he ran China by issuing a series of written and verbal instructions that were carried out by an increasingly small handful of sycophants (Gao 2003). But the party quickly rebuilt decision making and cadre promotion institutions after the arrests of the Gang of Four in 1976 (Teiwes 2001; Vogel 2011, 354). Hua Guofeng, Mao's anointed successor, and later Hu Yaobang and Deng Xiaoping, restored regular meetings of the Politburo and the Standing Committee, as well as party plena and congresses. In fact, Deng and his successors continued to perfect party institutions, especially formal and informal rules on retirement, in the subsequent decades (Manion 1993). Deng and Chen Yun also launched the reserve cadre system, which carefully vetted and selected a large group of young cadres

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slated for fast track promotions (Cui 2003). The reserve cadre system was accompanied by an increasingly sophisticated set of metrics to score cadres on their performance (Whiting 2004; Edin 2003). These innovations culminated in a norm of retirement that applied even to Politburo Standing Committee members above the age of 70 (Fewsmith 2001, 195). These rules on retirement presumably lessened younger officials' incentive to use extraordinary means of achieving power, because institutionalized channels provided reasonable opportunities for advancements.

A more recent wave of scholarship on elite politics even asserts that institutionalization in the 1980s and 1990s had rendered factional politics obsolete by the 2000s. According to this line of reasoning, post-1978 institution building resulted in increasingly fixed and transparent procedures at the party plena, firm retirement rules, and a meritocratic and unpoliticized system for cadre promotion (Miller 2008; Bo 2004). Therefore, factions—i.e. networks of patron–client relationships that seek to maximize the power of the patron—had outlived their usefulness and were fading in influence (Miller 2008). Because none of the younger leaders were endowed with strong ties with the Chinese military and the security apparatus, they strengthened party institutional control over the armed forces rather than relying on factions, thus leading to the atrophying of factions in favor of formal institutions (Huang 2008). Partly because factions' influence was fading, a broadly unified central leadership was able to compel even the military to unload profitable side businesses and the local governments to hand over the lion's share of taxes to the central government (Yang 2004).

A complementary strand in the literature contends that even if there were different policy preference between central and local officials, the party's formal control over the appointment of lower officials allowed the central government to achieve the major objectives of promoting growth, controlling inflation, and ultimately to remain in power (Landry 2008; Huang 1996). Here again, the cadre evaluation system, which scored cadres on a broad spectrum of performance indicators, aligned the behavior of lower-level cadres with the larger objectives of the regime (Edin 2003). Even if factions existed, they did not undermine the regime's effort to achieve these fundamental objectives.

By contrast, an alternative approach to the study of Chinese politics portrays a communist party deep in the throes of internal factional struggle from the earliest days (Braun 1982; Kuo 1966; Schwartz 1949). In fact, the party was on the edge of self-destruction throughout the 1920s and the 1930s due to internal strife (Kuo 1968; Saich and Yang 1996). At first, Stalin's witch-hunt against Trotskyites led the nascent CCP into a witch-hunt of its own that spanned from Moscow to Shanghai, resulting in the expulsion and executions of hundreds of cadres in the nascent CCP (Zhang 1998, 402). After the CCP-KMT split, in 1927, failed urban uprisings and defections to the KMT led to several rounds of internal purges as factions within the party accused each other of these failures while their Moscow patrons capriciously adjudicated (Pantsov and Levine 2012). Factional splits in this period also led to high volatility in the CCP's revolutionary strategies, which changed depending on who had Moscow's favor (Kuo 1966). Even during the Long March, in 1934–35, which saw the reduction of CCP forces by over 60%, Mao first struggled with the internationalist wing of the party, followed by a struggle with the Zhang Guotao faction that nearly destroyed the party (Braun 1982). Only the serendipity of protection from Zhang Xueliang in northwestern China

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and Mao's emergence as the strongest leader in the party gave the CCP sufficient coherence to defeat the KMT. Mao's victory within the party had little to do with party discipline, but instead was a product of Mao's political cunning and ruthlessness, good timing, and the luck of having Stalin's blessing (Gao 2000; Pantsov and Levine 2012, 7).

According to this view, factional rifts ran from the Politburo Standing Committee down to the counties and across various civilian bureaucracies and even into the military (Whitson and Huang 1973). These informal fractures colored every important decision made in the party (Dittmer 1995; Fewsmith 1994; Pye 1980; Shih 2008a; Tsou 1976). For example, instead of relying on formal institutions to vet and promote the best possible candidates, senior leaders in the party competed to position their protégés in important positions, regardless of their merit (Shih et al. 2012). The relative power of factions also determined the trajectories of economic policies and even monetary policies (Shih 2008a; Fewsmith 1994).

Furthermore, senior leaders formed, abolished, and manipulated formal institutions in order to obtain advantages for their factions (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006; Schoenhals 1996). For example, during the Cultural Revolution, Mao drastically enlarged the Central Committee and introduced many young members who were blindly devoted to Mao in order to dilute the influence of any surviving veterans in the party (Ye 2009, 1052). Also during the Cultural Revolution, the Central Case Examination Group, which had been an ad hoc organization with a few cadres, became a vast bureaucracy with thousands of cadres as Mao directed its wrath against his enemies (Schoenhals 1996).

Purges, ideological splits, and even military coups were expected features of politics rather than anomalies in the Chinese Communist Party. The everyday facade of harmony, cooperation, and institutional procedures merely masked behind-the-scenes suspicion and strategizing among the top leaders in the regime (Dittmer 1995). Even in the midst of seeming harmony, top officials in the regime constantly were watching for credible signs of loyalty from underlings and small hints of hostility from potential rivals (Shih 2008b; MacFarquhar 1997). Eventually, the contest for the "monistic, unified, and indivisible" power in the CCP surfaced, which continued until one faction obtained victory against all others (Tsou 1976; MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006).

During his reign (1936–1976), Mao repeatedly purged senior colleagues, even those whom he chose to be his successor, due to suspicion of their motives (Teiwes 1993; MacFarquhar 1997). Mao's distrust of his colleagues culminated to the 1971 planned purge and preemptive flight of Lin Biao, Mao's "dearest comrade-in-arms" for decades (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006). Even after the re-establishment of numerous formal institutions in the party in the 1980s, Deng had to remove two of his successors in highly irregular fashion due to clashes (Baum 1994). In 1989, elite conflict spilled into the open as the formal head of the party, Zhao Ziyang, attempted to make an alliance with the student protestors, while Deng Xiaoping, a veteran stalwart and the formal head of the military, convened a group of retirees against party regulations to remove Zhao and to crush the students (Party Central Office Secretariat 2001).

Into the 1990s and 2000s, political leaders in China used "corruption investigations" as excuses to remove political enemies (Pomfret 2000; Lam 1999). During the Bo Xilai affair in 2012, a gun battle nearly erupted in China, when heavily armed police sent by Bo Xilai crossed into a neighboring province to storm the barricades outside of the

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US Consulate erected by the police of another province (Ho and Huang 2013). As a result of this incident, not only was Bo Xilai, then a Politburo member, arrested for alleged corruption. His patron, Zhou Yongkang, then the chief of all internal security forces in China and a Politburo Standing Committee himself, came under investigation and was eventually arrested for corruption, although his true crime might have been a coup plot (Anderlini 2012). Subsequent to the coup rumors and Xi Jinping's ascendency to the general secretary position, Xi and his long-time friend Wang Qishan, who was appointed as the head of the party's anti-corruption watch-dog, launched a thorough purge of all of Zhou Yongkang's allies and followers, as well as the followers of Ling Jihua, another high flying official during the Hu Jintao administration.

THREE KEY QUESTIONS

In the ongoing debate on institutionalization and elite contention, three core questions emerge. First, have formal institutions supplanted factions as the main determinants of important outcomes in the regime? Even if factional tendencies continue to exist, perhaps they no longer impact promotions and purges of senior officials, decisions on major policies, and overall political stability. If so, perhaps one can ignore factions. Due to the ebb and flow of elite Chinese politics, much of the existing literature has focused on this issue, but no clear conclusion has emerged. When a Politburo or a Standing Committee member was removed between the party congresses, factionalists claimed victory. When a peaceful succession took place, institutionalists declared that politics in China finally had institutionalized. In reality, factions and formal institutions likely interact in complex ways to produce outcomes in China.

Hence, a crucial second question, one with which the literature also has grappled for decades, is how did institutions interact with patron–client relationships to produce policy and personnel outcomes (Dittmer 1995; Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988)? Formal institutions first shaped how competing elites advanced their goals, which also had a profound impact on how elite conflicts occurred. For example, although factional affiliation had a robust impact on promotions (Shih et al. 2012; Keller 2014), in actual practice, patrons must work through the formal institutions of cadre evaluation, democratic consultations, and reserve cadres to advance clients (Jia et al. 2014). Similarly, in the current round of inner party purges, Xi Jinping systematically made use of the discipline and inspection commission to uncover evidence of corruption, first of the clients, then ultimately of the patrons of rival factions. Without a robust set of institutions to investigate and to arrest corrupt officials, factional disputes in China may have been settled by even more violent means. In a sense, the anti-corruption bureaucracy provided a convenient and relatively bloodless arena for top leaders to engage in factional infighting.

Formal institutions and informal conflict may also interact when the actions of contentious elites reshape the structure and strength of formal institutions. Again focusing on the example of the discipline and inspection commission, this organ has been strengthened tremendously in both its authorities and its size because of Xi Jinping's use of it to purge his rivals (Economist 2015). Similarly, new rules can both transform the power of institutions and provide new arenas for rival factions to attack each other. The new rules forcing all officials to disclose their and their immediate families' wealth to the party have further strengthened the organization departments at every

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level as they have been entrusted with the collection and recording of data on official wealth, down to the stock tickers of shares owned by officials and their immediate family members (Xinjingbao 2015). Such stringent disclosure requirements will provide opportunities for political rivals to accusing each other of leaving out significant family assets in the disclosures.

The third question is related to the overall stability of the regime. Is the equilibrium in elite Chinese politics founded on a "code of civility," or does it reflect the outcome of a zero-sum contest of power between senior leaders (Nathan 1973; Tsou 1976)? The traditional debate on this issue portrays the equilibria as being the polar opposites of one another. Either Chinese leaders were constantly thinking of ways of destroying each other, or they were perfectly civil to each other and conducted debates purely within the confines of established institutions, either formal or informal.

Again, reality likely is much more complex. As members of the supreme Politburo Standing Committee or the Central Military Commission, patrons of the various factions reaped enormous benefits from the continual well-being of the party. Thus, all the players in the elite political game knew that their colleagues had some incentive to preserve harmony at the elite level. Rather than a prisoner's dilemma game, where the equilibrium action is defection, the elite political game in China is more akin to a stag hunt, where players are willing to cooperate so long as they perceive cooperation from the others. Indeed, some recent models of authoritarian politics have begun portraying authoritarian politics as one of weary dictator ruling with the help of self-serving officials (Debs 2007; Egorov and Sonin 2011).

The cooperation between the dictator and other senior officials is not perfect, however. In a single-party system with a censored media and a formal injunction against elite debates, it is more difficult to observe cooperative behavior (Shih 2008b). To mitigate the fundamental information asymmetry in authoritarian politics, elites in the party may have developed formal institutions such as the retirement rule to lessen incentive for uncooperative behavior. Furthermore, elites may have developed rules of thumb to help them identify uncooperative behavior early on, which allowed them to punish the uncooperative elite using formal institutions. Thus, the equilibrium at the elite level is neither harmonious cooperation nor a constant struggle. Rather, the equilibrium may fluctuate between harmony and tension, depending on subtle signs that change the elites' beliefs about their colleagues' intentions.

In this special issue, we draw on a group of articles to address these questions. Furthermore, this set of articles also breaks new ground on the data and methodological front. Traditional studies of elite politics in China involved close reading of the official press and leaders' speeches, as well as elite interviews and observations of promotions and purges. These tools remain relevant today because scholars of Chinese politics still need some indications of elite intention in China. However, new data sources and ways of presenting data, as well as new models of decision-making have allowed researchers to incorporate a wealth of new information into the analysis of the Chinese elite and present it in novel ways. These articles make use of quantitative biographical data, GIS data, internet search data, and expert interview data, as well as new methods such as network analysis and agent-based modeling. A common feature of these articles is the *replicability* of empirical results, which allow researchers to settle debates and accumulate knowledge in a systematic manner. Instead of relying on the subjective

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evaluation of individual scholars on the merit of a hypothesis, any scholar can use the same data and methods to re-test a hypothesis. To be sure, expert interpretation of the results often still is necessary. However, short of major institutional shocks, debates are more likely to be settled when an accumulation of empirical findings points to one direction.

FACTIONS, FORMAL INSTITUTIONS, AND ELITE CONTENTION

In this special issue, one set of articles addresses the issue of the measurement and impact of elite factions on important political outcomes. Instead of focusing on a small subset of senior officials who presumably belonged to a given faction, this set of articles make use of quantitative biographical data on all officials who were full or alternate Central Committee members in various periods of time. This comprehensive approach allows scholars to identify all potential factions at the elite level, to map out factional members in relations to each other, and to isolate the impact of factional affiliations.

The first article on this issue is "Moving Beyond Factions: Using Social Network Analysis to Uncover Patronage Networks among Chinese Elites" by Franziska Keller. She compares quantitative measurements of factions with expert assessments of factional affiliations to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. This article contains two fundamental critiques of the existing literature on elite politics. First, the "inductive approach," as she labels it, is highly subjective and difficult to replicate because it relies on individual scholars' assessment of the ties between a patron and various clients. Instead, algorithms that systematically connect individuals based on shared traits, such as birth province or work experience, are much more transparent and replicable.

Second, she argues that instead of conceiving patron–client networks as bilateral relationships between the patron and the client, social network analysis allows researchers to place every individual for whom there is data in a social network. The researcher can then derive more nuanced metrics, such as degree centrality and betweenness centrality, of an individual's place in the social network. She further correlates these measures of connectedness with the formal ranks of high-level officials to assess whether network measures can predict formal power in China accurately. Substantively, she finds a robust correlation between officials' centrality in a network based on shared work ties and their official ranks in the party, suggesting that contemporary patron–client networks are based on shared work ties rather than broader ties such as shared native provinces.

In "Factions of Different Stripes: Gauging the Recruitment Logics of Factions in the Reform Period," David Meyer, Victor Shih and Jonghyuk Lee make use of the existing literature to derive four reasonable ways of measuring factional ties. These measurements reflect whether a patron engages in a broad or narrow strategy of factional recruitment. Their results show that only some party secretary generals, such as Hu Yaobang and Xi Jinping, seemed to pursue a broad factional strategy, where even native place ties become a predictor of promotions. The strictest definition of factional ties, reflecting the strategy of a narrow faction, significantly increases the probabilities of promotion by the most in most party congresses. This makes the narrow definition of a faction a much more consistent predictor of promotion. The results in this article also suggest interaction between formal institutions and elite contention, discussed below.

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In "Term Limits and Authoritarian Power Sharing: Theory and Evidence from China," Ma similarly derives measures of factional ties between alternate Central Committee (CC) members and both the incumbent leader and the main rival. He finds that both the incumbent and the main rivals were able to influence the promotion of their protégés from alternate to full CC members. Again, this result shows that affiliates of both the current and former party secretary general had an additional advantage even relative to their peers who have ties with other Politburo Standing Committee members.

In all of these articles, the null hypothesis is that factional ties exert no systematic influence on promotion outcomes in China (Miller 2008; Bo 2004). Yet, in all of these articles, that null hypothesis was rejected by the evidence. In addition to showing the wide-ranging impact of informal ties on promotions and policies, these articles on factions uncover additional insights about patron–client networks. Keller finds that network centrality, which measures the connectedness of a member in a network relative to others in the same network, has a systemic correlation with party rank and with policy outcomes. Furthermore, Keller introduces the concept of betweenness centrality to elite Chinese politics. According to her, betweenness centrality, which measures an actor's position in the midst of various networks, may be a better predictor of one's political survival than one's direct ties to individual patrons.

Although looking at photographs in the *People's Daily* continues to be a useful tool, network indicators first developed for other purposes seem to offer another way for China scholars to identify important leaders in China. The Meyer, Shih, and Lee article finds that different leaders in the CCP had varying recruitment strategies or trajectories for their factions. Both the Meyer, Shih, Lee article and Ma's article suggest that formal institutions play a role in the factional promotion of officials. In both of these articles, the result show that current and former party secretary generals who enjoyed additional agenda setting and personnel authority could promote followers more systematically than even their peers in the Politburo Standing Committee. These insights into factional politics introduce new dimensions to be explored in future work.

Besides showing the widespread impact of factional ties on elite politics, this set of articles also begins to untangle the complex interaction between informal ties and formal institutions. In particular, the Ma article provides evidence that factional balancing, at least at the Central Committee level, went hand in hand with the strengthening of the retirement rule in the 1980s and 1990s, much as the qualitative literature has predicted (Nathan and Tsai 1995). The Meyer, Shih, Lee article shows that the retirement rule created a cohort effect in which the outgoing party secretary generals had weakening influence over the promotion of ACC members into the CC because colleagues in their cohorts had either been promoted during their first terms or had been forced to retire by the rule. In essence, the retirement rule forced older political leaders to focus their energy on the promotion of protégés at the Politburo level, where the retirement age is significantly higher (5–10 years).

Meyer, Shih, and Lee also provide some evidence that the institutionalization of the reserve cadre system may have afforded even deposed party secretary generals such as Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang some degree of influence over cadre promotion. Similar to the discussion on path dependence, informal elite politics may have produced an equilibrium, which was locked into place by formal institutions (Pierson 2000;

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Weingast 2005). Unlike in advanced democracies, however, subsequent elite political struggle quickly dismantled most of the results of the previous critical junctures, despite the existence of myriad formal institutions. The malleability of formal institutions in authoritarian regimes should caution scholars against reading too much into any particular institutional effect.

The Efird, Lester, and Wise article, entitled "Analyzing Coalitions in China's Policy Formulation: Reforming the Role of State-Owned Enterprises in China's Energy Sector," makes use of new data and decision-making models to give further credence to a long-held argument in the field of China studies. As Lieberthal and Oksenberg (1988) pointed out, the existence of a vast bureaucracy to operate the planned economy prevents top leaders from implementing their preferred policies across the spectrum. Because of the complex and overlapping layers of bureaucrats who could shape and implement energy policies, even if Xi Jinping had been in favor of liberalizing energy policies, Efird, Lester, and Wise find that recalcitrant bureaucrats and SOE managers would have managed to preserve the status quo to a large extent.

Finally, this set of articles also measures elite conflicts, explores the causes of conflicts, and inquire the complex relationship between formal institutions and elite conflicts. In Meyer, Ram, and Wilke's "Circulation of the Elite in the Chinese Communist Party," they derive a family of metrics that measure elite level reshuffling, which have long been a key concept in the literature, often measured by qualitative judgement. While predictable reshufflings of similar scale during party congresses denoted the institutionalization of retirement rules, large spikes in reshuffling, especially at the Politburo and standing committee levels, indicated elite contention. These metrics potentially provide a standard way by which China specialists can consistently measure a vague concept such as "reshuffling."

Last, "Keeping Your Head Down: Public Profiles and Promotion under Autocracy," by Dimitar Gueorguiev and Paul Schuler, directly addresses the conditions under which elite conflicts may arise. The authors imply that under most circumstances, the intra-elite relationship in China and Vietnam is one of cooperation. The continuity of these regimes despite experiencing multiple external and economic shocks provides prima facie evidence of this assertion. The cooperative relationship between elites must have some enforcement mechanism, or a predatory elite would overturn it. Using internet search data on high-level officials in China and in Vietnam, they find evidence that higher than normal public profiles are associated with a smaller chance of promotion. At the extreme, an official who went out of his way to garner public attention signaled his ambition to upset the existing political equilibrium. Such a person would be criticized or even removed by others in the ruling coalition. Gueorguiev and Schuler cite Bo Xilai in China and Nguyen Ba Thanh in Vietnam as examples of ambitious officials who were ultimately punished by their colleagues.

To be sure, much more work needs to be done to investigate the causes of elite conflicts in Leninist authoritarian regimes systematically. The appearance of ambitious or even predatory elites in itself can upset the existing equilibrium and cause conflicts. However, knowing that other elites are vigilant about signs of ambition, why did some elites, such as Bo Xilai, still signal ambition? Is it a gamble for power as some have suggested? Or something else? (See Ho and Huang 2013). Also, how did some leaders, such as Mao and Xi Jinping, manage to systematically destroy every other faction without any

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repercussion? What endowments or elite equilibria allowed them to achieve dictatorial power? Future research needs to continue to explore these issues.

WHAT DOES ELITE CHINESE POLITICS SAY ABOUT AUTHORITARIAN RULE?

The preceding discussion about Chinese politics addresses some of the key questions in authoritarian politics: how do dictators stay in power? How do they manipulate institutions to do so? What tips the equilibria between elite cooperation to elite conflict? Yet, the mechanisms discussed in this issue are very different from those discussed in the recent literature on authoritarian regimes.

The recent literature has evolved around the question of how the dictator may use institutions such as elections and legislature to credibly distribute spoils to regime supporters while coopting or neutralizing opposition (I think Magaloni is actually pivotal here) (Cox 2009; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Svolik and Boix 2007). To be sure, distributing spoils was a problem for China and other Leninist regimes. However, in Leninist systems an authoritarian legislature was not the main mechanism for the distribution of spoils as were the case in competitive authoritarian regimes. Senior positions in the ruling Communist Party came with ample benefits and rent-seeking opportunities. Thus, assigning officials to various positions was tantamount to allocating rent to them. Factional politics in China was largely the competition between different patron–client groups to secure these prized positions.

Authoritarian legislatures could be more relevant where organized social groups and parties continued to exist autonomously outside of the regime, and regimes had to bargain with and coopt them. Legislatures may also matter where the state structure was less extensive and less resourceful than in Communist regimes (Posusney and Angrist 2005). However, since Communist regimes sought to dismantle existing social organizations and parties and remake social orders upon taking power, autonomous social groups typically were not threats to these regimes once they had consolidated (Linz 2000). Although legislatures existed in Communist regimes, they did not represent autonomous social groups and were not the main solutions to the regimes' key challenges, which had nothing to do with challenges from autonomous social groups.

The continual survival and growth of Leninist parties such as Vietnam and China suggest that basic issues such as the sharing of spoils and the management of conflicts have been solved by Leninist institutions to some extent. As long as the top elite work with each other, they can be sure of a sizable reward. This is why empirical work on non-democracies find that one party dictatorships have a better record surviving than dictatorships without ruling parties (Geddes 1999). Couching the logic in terms of game theory, Leninist parties thrived and succeeded in many countries because Leninist hierarchical institutions imposed a stag hunt game dynamic on elite participants, at least most of the time. Under the principle that lower-level party cells must obey the commands of higher-level party units, national-level party leaders all had a great deal of control and discretion over lower-level party members, which transcended institutional boundaries outside of the party. The *pishi* (instructions) of a Politburo Standing Committee member were obeyed at least nominally by lower-level party members regardless of their institutional affiliations. To be sure, lower-level officials often used the conflicting instructions from senior leaders as weapons to maximize their self-interest (Lieberthal

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and Oksenberg 1988). Rampant principal–agent problems also existed in Leninist systems (Landry 2008, 162). Nonetheless, those on the top of the pyramid reaped enormous benefits from the organizing principle of the party.

The key question for these regimes, therefore, was what conditions could upset or even overturn this enforced game of stag hunt. To use the example of Bo Xilai, he already was a Politburo member—among the twenty most powerful officials in all of China—when he launched the "Sing Red Songs, Strike Black Forces" campaign, which strongly signaled his ambition to his colleagues. Why did he upset what was already a beneficial equilibrium for him? One answer was that heterogeneity in individual ambition played a greater role in affecting systemic stability in authoritarian regimes than in consolidated democracies.

Ambition mattered more in authoritarian regimes because the institutions were malleable enough such that if ambitious individuals could obtain or consolidate power through unconventional means, they would pursue these avenues even if they heightened systemic instability. For example, Xi Jinping consolidated power partly by creating new leading groups and placing himself as the chairman of most of them. By creating these semi-permanent organs, Xi made obsolete the previous system, which gave every Politburo member a portfolio of issues to oversee. This institutional change strengthened Xi's hand by formally making him the ultimate arbiter for all of the most important policy areas, but this change also weakened other Politburo members' incentive to preserve the existing system.

Another possibility is that although Leninist institutions provided some guarantees to elite participants, there were still uncertainties, especially around the time of succession (Tullock 1987). As such, mutual mistrust developed between senior officials. A related possibility was that although Leninist institutions reliably delivered spoils to elite participants, they still could not deliver *information* that well-functioning democracies readily provided—the relative distribution of power among elite actors, the preferences of elite actors, and developing coalitions between elite actors. Thus, the slightest sign of an elite member defecting from the cooperative equilibrium threw a Leninist Party into the throes of unconstrained conflicts. Some theoretical works have begun to explore these issues (Egorov and Sonin 2011; Acemoglu et al. 2006; Svolik 2012). However, the increasingly rich data from established Leninist regimes such as China and Vietnam provide fertile soil for further theoretical development and hypotheses testing, particularly as different types of authoritarian regimes are subjected to closer comparison. Future works will continue to fine-tune our understanding of the foundation of political stability and instability in Leninist authoritarian regimes.

Victor C. Shih is associate professor at the University of California at San Diego specializing in China. He is the author of a book published by the Cambridge University Press entitled *Factions and Finance in China: Elite Conflict and Inflation*. He is further the author of numerous articles appearing in academic and business journals, including *The American Political Science Review, Comparative Political Studies, Journal of Politics, and The Wall Street Journal.*

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