One Leader, Two Cups of Tea: the Demise of Collective Leadership and the Rise of the Cult of Personality in Xi Jinping's China

BY

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

in

Political Science

Department of Political Science

University of Alberta

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Abstract

President Xi Jinping's resurgence of Maoist political tactics, specifically the resurgence of the cult of personality, has received increased academic attention throughout his presidency. However, certain aspects of this trend under Xi still need to be expanded in the academic narrative. Specifically, why and how did Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong create cults of personality while other paramount leaders like Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao did not? Based on a quantitative study of factional distribution within the Central Committee, this thesis demonstrates how high amounts of collective leadership within the Central Committee result in less chance for a leader to create a cult of personality than low amounts of collective leadership. As explained through the sovereign's dilemma, leaders can choose strong leadership while weakening the elite or the inverse; each choice impacts the leader's power and the state's capacity. This will be demonstrated through a mixed methods approach of historical analysis and quantitative factional data of each era of paramount leaders from the proclamation of the People's Republic in 1949 to today, from Mao to Xi. Based on these findings, this thesis argues that each Paramount leader has the agency to choose which side of the sovereign's dilemma they will face: high amounts of collective leadership will weaken the leader, resulting in the inability to create a cult of personality but higher state capacity. In contrast, a weakened elite will allow the leader to develop a cult but will impact the state's capacity.

Acknowledgments

There are many people who I would like to thank for their guidance, support, and encouragement during the process of writing this thesis and during the four years of my undergraduate degree. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, employer, and mentor, Dr. Ashley Esarey. Throughout this academic year, Dr. Esarey has been not just a supervisor for this thesis but also a guiding light during my process of graduate school applications and for delving deeper into my professional career. Our weekly conversations were a tremendous source of support, and his guidance has been invaluable as I pursue my next journey into graduate school. I am grateful for his role as my supervisor during my thesis. Our talks helped me rationalize my thesis in my head, supporting the trends I was pursuing while giving me leeway to pursue the research project I desired. Also, Dr. Esarey has given me the privilege of being his research assistant for the Taiwan Studies Program this academic year. This has been a fantastic learning opportunity and a source of excitement for our coming summer conference. Thank you for your guidance.

I would also like to thank Dr. Brian Gold, Dr. Ryan Dunch, and Dr. Dion Blythe. During my first year of pursuing my undergraduate degree, I wanted to be a lawyer; however, it was a career I was never passionate about. However, through taking classes with these professors, I found my passion for Chinese politics and academics, which has changed my life. Without their early support, the long conversations during office hours, and the passion they showed me for their work, I would not be where I am today. To all my professors, thank you for passing on your passions and knowledge to me.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my friends and family for their support during this process and over the previous four years. First and foremost, thank you to my honours

cohort. Though our time together is coming to an end, this isn't goodbye. The academic journey we went on together over the past three semesters, I believe, will bind us together in some shape or form for the rest of our lives. To my Mom and Dad, thank you for instilling in me the love of reading and politics from an early age; you allowed me to come up with my conclusions independently and fostered without subduing my passion for politics, I am eternally grateful. Finally, thank you to my friends from back in Strathmore. Specifically, thank you for listening to my ramblings about Chinese politics when we were trying to play golf.

This paper is the culmination of four years of love and passion for China; researching China has changed my life. The country's long history, rich culture, and diverse traditions inspire me daily to continue studying and respecting its long traditions. This thesis is dedicated to the Chinese people, culture, and history.

Chapter 1: Introduction

During the 20th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in October 2022, in the grand testament to the Party's rule, the Great Hall of the People, Xi Jinping sat with the other 2,296 participating delegates from all across China. During the Congress, it generally looked like a uniform group of Party cadres and representatives from other aspects of Chinese life. However, glancing again at Xi Jinping, you can notice a subtle difference that breaks this uniformity. Xi Jinping has two cups of tea, while everyone else has one. For many, this may not symbolize much, and many people may have been more focused on former President Hu Jintao's abrupt exit during the closing ceremony. However, in a state where the subtle differences may mean significant policy changes, this has symbolized a fundamental change within the People's Republic of China (PRC). It represents an end to the "first among equals" narrative of previous paramount leaders and a return to a Maoist relationship with Chinese elites, a period of centralized rule, "One Leader, Two Cups of Tea." This paper will argue that Paramount leaders of China have a choice: purging the elite, centralizing their leadership, thus allowing the creation of a cult of personality, followed by Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong, or allowing for greater amounts of collective leadership, thus weakening the Paramount leadership; however, allowing for greater state capacity, followed by Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao. This argument will be established in six chapters: the first chapter demonstrates the methodological and theoretical rationale that this paper will follow; the second chapter will represent the literature around the topics of cult of personality, including cults worldwide, and collective leadership; the third chapter will represent the Mao Zedong era; the fourth chapter will demonstrate the heights of collective leadership and the rational under the "Dengists" Deng

Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao; while chapter five will demonstrate the rise of the Cult of Xi; finally, chapter six will put each era into discussion and establish some conclusions.

Since his inauguration as President of the PRC, Xi Jinping has significantly diverged from previous paramount leaders, including Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), Jiang Zemin (1926-2022), and Hu Jintao (1942-present). These include the incorporation of "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" into the Party Constitution, which occurred while he was still the paramount leader. At the same time, he diverged from the traditional two-five-year terms established by Deng Xiaoping. Militarily, China is expanding into the South China Sea, and a reassertion of state power in business through state-owned enterprises weakening figures like Jack Ma is creating a more hard-authoritarian relationship within the economic side of Chinese life. Xi Jinping has significantly altered China's political, economic, and cultural dynamics. He is on the path to establishing what Elizabeth Economy has called a "Third Revolution," marked by growing authoritarianism at home and an increasingly expansive China overseas. However, one trend Xi Jinping has pursued, which represents a substantial departure from Dengist policy and constitutes a considerable shift towards Maoist policy, is the re-emergence of the cult of personality.

At its core, the cult of personality is a tool for leaders to centralize their power through the use of the state's propaganda apparatus, thereby penetrating the state's polity and mass mobilizing society. In effect, they are creating a sense of legitimacy for their rule and the actions that they pursue (Marquez 2018, 266). A cult of personality often represents the ultimate consolidation of one person's rule; therefore, this is often detrimental to other elites within the state structure (Marquez 2018, 266). Elite networks across the state are frequently strategically purged from positions of power and replaced by a single network loyal to the cult. Discourses

that diverge from the cult's dominant discourse are singled out and purged from the party/state apparatus (Marquez 2018, 267). This thesis aims to examine the cult of personality surrounding elite networks, specifically collective leadership within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), by analyzing each Paramount leader's period of governance and their approach to the relationship between a cult of personality and collective leadership. In other words, analyzing how Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping generated a cult of personality and why they created a cult. On the other hand, why did Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao pursue anti-cult leadership, instead following the principles of collective leadership. This chapter will begin by addressing the main research question and key definitions, followed by two hypotheses on the relationship between the cult of personality and collective leadership and an analysis of this paper's methods and theoretical framework.

Defining the Cult of Personality and Collective Leadership

This research will combine two concepts from the academic literature, specifically those of Max Weber and political scientist Xavier Márquez, to define the cult of personality, therefore creating a definition that encompasses multiple factors of the cult of personality for this research. The cult of personality is an exaltation of a leader's charismatic authority through the state's propaganda apparatus and interaction rituals that demonstrate citizens' devotion to a political leader (Márquez 2018, 266; Weber 1994, 312). These interactions project a secularized god-like image of that leader, which penetrates the public sphere of the polity (Márquez 2018, 266; Weber 1994, 312). In other words, through a complex propaganda system, specifically through interactive objects that exalt the leader's charisma, the cult represents the absolute consolidation of one person's rule, penetrating all levels of society. The concept of a cult in the Chinese context can be traced back to one of the key individuals who promoted the cult of personality in China,

Mao Zedong. Cults of personality within China are not pre-modern tools, though they may use some pre-modern rhetoric–Mao or Xi are not emperors in the sense that Qin Shi-huang of Qin was an emperor; instead, according to historian Rana Mitter, "Mao's cult of personality, even when it drew on pre-modern forms, was an essentially modern enterprise. It was based on an idea of the individuated self, a rejection of Confucian values of 'moderation' and 'order,' as well as respect for age, revered dynamism over stasis, and was propagated through the media as an expression of collective, supposedly non-hierarchical mass values" (Mitter 2008, 146-147). These ideas were driven by the modern revolution of the May Fourth Movement, which fundamentally shaped modern Chinese thought. Thus, the cult of personality in the Chinese context does follow the Weber and Marquez model; Mao and Xi have used interaction rituals, objects such as Mao's Little Red Book and Xi Jinping's phone app for Xi Jinping Thought connect cult consumers to the cult leader; while the states propaganda apparatus propagates images of each of these leaders like Xi Jinping playing soccer in Ireland or Mao's charismatic speeches as tools for charismatic authority (Esarey 2021, 888; Cheek 1989, 101; Leese 2011, 90), as such these cults of personality are connected to personality cults worldwide; however, it also has these domestic roots that make it a unique enterprise. This paper intends to demonstrate how the cult of personality is the product of deliberate choices made by political leaders, specifically, co-opting the propaganda system and weakening factional distribution within the political establishment. Therefore, by weakening the elite, the leader can consolidate power by replacing these figures with the leader's factional allies. As a result, these tools cement how the paramount leader can form a cult of personality. Chapter 2: Literature Review will expand on non-Chinese examples of cults of personality and the general similarities between cults worldwide.

Throughout this research, collective leadership will be defined as "a system with a division of responsibilities among individual leaders to prevent arbitrary decision-making by a single top leader" (Li 2016, 13). A faction, according to Lucien Pye, is "personal relationships of individuals who, operating in a hierarchical context, create linkage networks that extend upward in support of particular leaders who are, in turn, looking for followers to ensure their power" (1981, 7). This is the "first among equals" narrative that has existed throughout CCP history, which will be expanded more in Chapter 2. Specifically, collective leadership relates to factional interactions within the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, where different factions deliberate on policy behind closed doors to eventually reach a consensus. Collective leadership, therefore, has a limiting effect on the paramount leader's power. Political scientist Hu Angang argues that the most important factor of the Chinese political system during the 2000s and early 2010s is that it is "collective"-- Hu coined the term collective presidency to refer to the Chinese collective leadership— and therefore differs from the U.S. presidential system, which emphasizes the "individual" (Hu 2014, 7-8). Hu expands on this in explaining how the Chinese system values "collective wisdom" rather than "individual wisdom" (Hu 2014, 7-8). He also proposes ways collective leadership can improve, including by adopting procedure regulations and voting for significant decisions, ensuring against the resurgence of the personality cult, soliciting external consultant work, and strengthening political accountability (Li 2016, 31). Thus, Hu Angang, a Chinese academic, similar to David Shambaugh, an American academic, argues that collective leadership is a "norm" or a type of "institution" that had specific political figures in China like Zeng Qinghong, Zhao Ziyang, and Wen Jiabao trying to further institutionalize (Shambaugh 2016, 95-97 and Hu 2014, 7). As a result, a dilemma emerges for these leaders; an inverse relationship between these two variables appears: the cult of personality

demonstrates an absolute consolidation of the paramount leader's rule. This is because, for a cult of personality even to appear, the leader has to have specific amounts of central control from the elites and allies willing to produce the cult, and if this does appear, the propaganda apparatus mobilizes the population through images to connect themselves with the central leader which forms worship (Marquez 2020, 22; Dikötter 2019, 100; Wylie 1980, 52). In contrast, collective leadership represents the limit of one's rule. Therefore, a leader has a choice, absolute rule, and a cult of personality, but with a weaker elite. Alternatively, promoting collective leadership and creating consensus-based rule. This is the sovereign's dilemma that each paramount leader has to choose (Wang 2023, 71). Each side of the dilemma has differing effects on the leader's individual power and the state's capacity.

Research Question

The question this thesis aims to answer is as follows: Why and how did Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong create a cult of personality while Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao did not? To answer this question, this paper will study, through a historical analysis, how the discourse of a cult of personality compared to collective leadership seesawed throughout the leadership of these five leaders, specifically, how each leader treated the relationship between their own personal power and collective leadership. To conduct this research, this paper will use a historical analysis of case studies and a quantitative study of each Paramount leader's relationship with factions in the Central Committee over their period of governance. Therefore, these qualitative and quantitative processes demonstrate how collective leadership within the Chinese Communist Party is about factional interplays; high amounts of factions debating and cooperating will equate to a higher amount of collective leadership within the Party apparatus, weakening the "one-man" rule of the Paramount leader. If these factional networks lose salience,

and the ruler co-opts the propaganda apparatus, it weakens the collective leadership, and the cohesion the elites bring to governance is dismantled, therefore resulting in the consolidation of absolute rule that has the qualities to generate a cult of personality.

To operationalize this research, this paper will analyze the relationship between collective leadership and the cult of personality in the case studies of all five Paramount leaders of the People's Republic of China: Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping. The first case to be analyzed will be Mao Zedong. By analyzing secondary sources, primary sources like philosophical texts, and quantitative data on factional distribution, Mao will demonstrate a baseline of how Chinese leaders interacted with these variables and whether future leaders followed or diverged from the Maoist line. Specifically, through a historical analysis, this paper will paint a picture of the Mao era and how actions pursued by Mao directly interacted with the two variables and demonstrate how his period of rule represents a consolidation of personal rule, helping him generate a cult of personality. As a result, personality cults are the consequence rather than the cause of established autocracy (Luqiu 2016, 290). A cult of personality, a dependent variable, is influenced and shaped by central leaders and their followers in an already established authoritarian regime. This will be analyzed through language used by central leaders and followers regarding personality cults and quantitatively by factional distribution within the Central Committee. The second case, or a collection of cases, will represent the height of collective leadership within the PRC. Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao will all be analyzed in one case study because, regarding this study, all three figures will be categorized as "Dengists." This is because, for the context of this research, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao didn't diverge from Deng Xiaoping's stance on collective leadership, demonstrating a consensus among the three leaders. This consensus is partially due to Deng,

Chen Yun, and Li Xiannian, after the Tiananmen crackdown, personally selecting Jiang Zemin as the next general secretary (Vogel 2011, 622-623) and at the 14th Party Congress Deng picked Hu Jintao as heir apparent after Jiang (Vogel 2011, 686). However, this paper will also argue that both Jiang and Hu had the agency to follow Deng Xiaoping's collective leadership consensus because it benefited them politically. Similar to the Mao case analysis, this case will use a historical analysis of these figures' governance periods and examine secondary sources, plus quantitative data to demonstrate the changing discourses and factional distribution that were positive for the generation of collective leadership and a movement away from the cult of personality rule. Finally, the current President Xi Jinping will be the last case to be analyzed. The method to analyze this case will not change; to answer how and why Xi Jinping decided to reanimate the cult of personality, historical analysis and the use of quantitative data will be conducted. At the same time, this analysis will demonstrate what each leader believed the benefit of each variable is; this is the why question. Why might a leader pick collective leadership over a cult of personality? The methodology of this research will be further discussed later in this chapter; however, it is important to demonstrate the basic case study selection that the chapters of this paper will follow.

Hypothesis

This thesis will address one of the core debates within the Chinese academic community, specifically the debate between Columbia political scientist Andrew Nathan and Boston University political scientist Joseph Fewsmith, on authoritarian resilience and the realities of institutionalization in the PRC. Joseph Fewsmith argues that Xi Jinping isn't breaking any form of consensus or "norm," instead argues that it is not the strength of any form of institution that has provided stability and resilience from the "Dengist" era but the long-standing norms of

centralized leadership have continued to prevail compared to institutionalization (Fewsmith and Nathan 2019, 167). For Fewsmith, the "code of civility" among factions, the Weberian-style meritocratic bureaucracy, and the party's agreement against the creation of a cult of personality didn't materialize, and if it did, it wasn't resilient (Fewsmith and Nathan 2019, 169). The party never developed from its original mobilization task-based party, thus not following Max Weber's "legal or rational" authority institutionalized states develop (Fewsmith and Nathan 2019, 169-170). Xi Jinping's use of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) to "purge political rivals and corrupt cadres" was never employed to the same extent in the "Dengist" era; as such, it broke any sort of norm within institutions developed during that era (Fewsmith and Nathan 2019, 169). On the other hand, Nathan argues that Xi Jinping may have consolidated more power than even Mao because Mao's power was episodic; Mao had periods of relative weakness, particularly after the failed Great Leap Forward and periods where he consolidated his power like during the Cultural Revolution, while Xi's is continuous–Xi has consolidated his power through the bonds of existing institutions or through creating new ones (Fewsmith and Nathan 2019, 176-177; Nathan 2018, 36-37). However, even with this consolidation of power, Xi has done it within the bounds of existing institutions, not breaking them. For Nathan, the political struggles of the Xi era does not mean institutionalization didn't happen or was weak, institutionalization does not mean "the end of politics," but rather an attempt to constrain elements of politics into certain channels (Fewsmith and Nathan 2019, 177). Thus, institutionalization has occurred in China, and Xi Jinping, in his own way, is continuing that trend through using existing party institutions such as the CDIC to purge figures who are trying to rapidly shift party institutionalization, like Bo Xilai. This paper aims to answer the question: Is Fewsmith or Nathan more correct? Did the CCP institutionalize? Is Xi still constrained by the

institutions, using some to his advantage while weakening others, like collective leadership? Or did institutionalization never really happen? Was the "Dengist" era that of weak institutions that Xi quickly broke, and now is creating a centralized cult of personality ignoring any "rule of the road" established under Deng? Or are they both wrong? Is there a third option based more on the agency of each Paramount leader that allows them to choose to follow or ignore the institutionalization of the party?

As such, the two hypotheses for this research that are essential to answering the number of questions within this thesis are: hypothesis (H1) is that Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping deliberately weakened collective leadership; therefore weakening elite cohesion, allowing them to generate a cult of personality, while Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao demonstrated the opposite effect. This hypothesis aligns with my research question; however, it is essential to distinguish it as a hypothesis for this research because it provides a basic expectation of the study's outcomes, which will be discussed further in the theoretical section of this paper. This thesis follows the general concept of the importance of agency, in which each paramount leader can choose to follow collective leadership or form a cult of personality, but not both; this is due to the sovereign's dilemma established by Professor of Government at Harvard University Yuhua Wang, the dilemma of centralized rule but a weaker state, or weaker rule but a stronger state. Through their agency, Paramount leaders can follow certain institutions and not others; however, they cannot eliminate the institution one hundred percent. This study's second hypothesis (H2) posits that collective leadership within the CCP is crucial for both CCP leaders and the Chinese state, with periods of high collective leadership enabling greater state capacity. On the other hand, periods of collective leadership decline result in a weaker state and a stronger ruler. The null hypothesis for this study is that collective leadership within the CCP is just a buzzword that,

in reality, has very little genuine evidence that it has been of actual importance for CCP leaders. This is following more of Joseph Fewsmith's argument, in which during the periods of "collective leadership," it was pretty clear who was in charge; Deng Xiaoping controlled the military, and when Deng picked Hu Yaobang as General Secretary, he picked someone he knew for years, in reality, Deng was in control, not the collective (Fewsmith 2019, 125). Meanwhile, Rodrick MacFarquhar described Zhao Ziyang–the General Secretary after Hu Yaobang–as a "constituency of just one" (MacFarquhar 2009, xix). Zhao had a strong relationship with Deng, but he and Deng sometimes had to bob and weave intense factional battles, and he was mainly following the discretion of Deng; as a result, he was elevated to the powerful position "General Secretary" through the agency of Deng even if it seems, as MacFarquhar argues, that the collective may have disagreed with Zhao's policy choices (MacFarquhar 2009, xix). Thus, even during the supposed period of the "height of collective leadership," with scholars such as Harvard sociologist Ezra Vogel arguing that Deng reformed the leadership structure of the party so that the collective would rule, not the arbitrary whims of the paramount leader like under Mao (Vogel 2011, 381), did this occur, or did the paramount leaders still have substantive power? Did Deng control much of the political apparatus as a "central leader" instead of "first among equals?" This hypothesis gets to the root of the research question, which challenges the core aspect of the relationship between collective leadership and the cult of personality. As a result, this hypothesis presents a challenge to the research question, which the research must address through a critical examination of these variables to substantiate the research question.

Theoretical Framework

Part of this research is about the agency of leaders' power, will they centralize it through a cult of personality or allow for collective leadership, each variable has a differing effect on the

state. Through studying the relationship between the cult of personality and collective leadership, the leader has two choices to make: centralized leadership or a strong state. This dilemma is known as the sovereign's dilemma. Written by Yuhua Wang, the sovereign's dilemma was a framework applied to Imperial China, from the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). According to Wang the sovereigns dilemma can be summarized as the following:

"A coherent elite that can take collective action to strengthen the state is also capable of revolting against the ruler. This dilemma exists because strengthening state capacity and enhancing ruler duration require different elite social terrains, which are the ways in which central elites connect to local social groups—and each other" (Wang 2023, 71).

In lay terms, throughout the millennia of imperial dynasties, the rulers had to choose between trying to strengthen their leadership through weakening the coherent centralized elite, which resulted in lower state capacity because the elite ended up caring more about their local interests than the state because of the elite social terrain shift. Or a coherent elite who weakened the ruler; however, state capacity would be higher because the elite cared about the state's interests due to their far-flung social terrain. Elite social terrain is the ways elites connect across the state; central elites located in the capital connect to other elites through kinship ties like marriage ties that create a social terrain (Wang 2022, 7). Elite social terrain provides insights into the levels of state strength the elite prefer; state strength can be analyzed as state capacity, like fiscal policies that strengthen the state or the ability to levy taxes (Wang 2022, 46). Therefore, for a state to collect

taxes or impose fiscal policies, it needs a specific type of state capacity that can support these measures.

In his work, Wang argues that the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties represented a weakened ruler but high state capacity. The ruler-elite relationship was represented by the aristocratic families that were actively involved in the politics of the primary two capitals, Chang'an and Luoyang, where through marriage networks, cooperation among elites made them a coherent collective decision-making group, weakening the ruler (Wang 2022, 77). Therefore, these elites cared about their far-flung interests across the empire due to these kin networks. As a result, they produced policies that increased state strength through state capacity measures. For example, the Two-Tax Reform created a progressive tax system; this was a smooth and effective reform, supported and implemented by the elite, the dominant class being taxed (Wang 2022, 75). However, the rulers suffered short reigns. Due to the elite cohesion, elites could use their networks to cooperate against the ruler; this resulted in the Tang rulers suffering the highest probability of being overthrown by the elite (Wang 2022, 79).

This era of state strengthening collapsed due to the Huang Chao Rebellion (874-884), a rebellion that went to the capitals and killed many of the aristocratic elite. As a result, the emperor took advantage of the disarray to reform the elite social terrain by choosing his power over state strength. Therefore, under the Song (960-1279) and Ming (1369-1644) dynasties, the emperor became absolutist because he sidelined the elite. Furthermore, due to the changing elite social terrain, the elite cared more about their local interests than the state, weakening overall state capacity. The elites did not want the state involved in their new businesses. When the state tried to get involved, like the reforming Emperor Shenzong, the reforms failed because in an absolute monarchy, the ruler can set the agenda, and the leadership transition can dramatically

affect policy. Therefore, when the opposition groups to the reforms forced the removal of the reformer Chancellor Wang Anshi from the cabinet and with the death of the pro state-strengthening Emperor Shenzong, these opposition forces, with the Dowager Empresses' support, abolished the reforms (Wang 2022, 121). Overall, these two case studies demonstrate the sovereign's dilemma, absolute rule or state strength; during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the leader's power was weaker due to the cohesion of the elite, while under the Song and Ming Dynasties, the ruler's power was much more absolute due to the removal of the cohesive elite. Therefore, each choice the leader makes affects the elite social terrain and the state's strength.

This framework Yuhua Wang established to analyze Imperial China was developed from Samuel Huntington's king's dilemma from his novel "*Political Order in Changing Societies*". For Huntington, traditional monarchical systems in the post World War II world grappled with modernization that generated a dilemma for their leaders (Huntington's 1968, 177).

"On the one hand, centralization of power in the monarchy was necessary to promote social, cultural, and economic reform. On the other hand, this centralization made difficult or impossible the expansion of the power of the traditional polity and the assimilation into it of the new groups produced by modernization. The participation of these groups in politics seemingly could come only at the price of the monarchy" (Huntington 1968, 177).

In other words, the monarch is punished for their own success in expanding the participation of traditionally underrepresented groups and changing the social terrain; this creates problems that damage the centralized authority the monarch generates through the reform measure. However, the more authority the monarchy exercises for reforms, the more difficult it is to transfer that

authority to another institution (Huntington 1968, 179). Therefore, a sovereign has to contend with institutions that try to limit their power; liberal institutions and political parties challenge the monarch's centralized power. As a result, if the monarch is reformist and wants to create reforms, it creates possibilities for social groups and institutions to change the monarchy. This creates a system where the monarchy can avoid the dilemma by becoming, in effect, an un-modernizing monarchy, which damages the state. Overall, Wang implements Huntington's concept into the framework of Imperial China, creating a dilemma Chinese emperors had to face, their own personal power or greater state strength. Some arguments that have been made against Wang's work that may affect my work is that the theoretical framework only focuses on the national and domestic levels. According to Changkun Hou, Wang's analysis assumes that state, society, and family are always separated from each other and that no concept exists that can integrate the three (Hou 2022, 329). As a result, the research is limited to the study of the national and domestic levels. In a similar vein, Peng Peng argues that Wangs argument would be more persuasive if instead of only analysing these macro-level effects of reforms like the Single-Whip Reform; Wang should have analyzed it through the micro-level lens showcasing how individual interests were determined and the deliberate efforts made to resist or delay the implemen-tation of the reform (Peng 2023, 263). Overall, the main critiques of Wang's work seems to be from his level of analysis, which according to these reviewers, would have made a more robust analysis of the *Rise and Fall of Imperial China* and individuals perspectives on these reform/state building efforts.

What does this tell us about contemporary China? How does Yuhua Wang's work fit within the Fewsmith and Nathan debate? As this paper will argue, China is returning more to personalistic rule; as Susan Shirk has argued in her paper, Xi is returning China from collective

rule, from Nathan's authoritarian resilience to personalistic rule (Shirk 2018, 23-24). What Xi is demonstrating in regard to Yuhua Wang's work is a return to a historical continuity within China. As argued by Wang, from the Song Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, Chinese emperors continued to centralize their leadership, and with that, they fragmented Chinese elites, weakening the overall state (Wang 2022, 121); in a similar vein, Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign has fragmented the Chinese elites, weakening factions across China (Li and Manion 2023, 829). Wang argues that the early Tang Dynasty established certain "political norms" due to the power of the aristocratic families within the capitals of the Tang; this weakened the emperor and had elite families practically running the state (Wang 2022, 66-67). Almost similar to Nathan's argument, these "political norms" became ingrained for hundreds of years until the Huang Chao Rebellion crushed these families and allowed the emperor to reform their relationship with the elite through fragmentation, centralizing his leadership (Wang 2022, 92). As such, a new form of centralized institutionalization occurred around the emperor for the following four dynasties. What *The Rise and Fall of Imperial China* tells us is that this debate, the sovereign's dilemma, is part of Chinese continuity. The sovereign's dilemma has always dominated Chinese political statecraft and the debate of elite power; what this paper is trying to demonstrate is extending this continuity into the era of the CCP. Therefore, certain variables have to be fleshed out that Wang or Huntington did not consider due to their analysis of monarchical regimes. Furthermore, how the paramount leaders of the PRC interact with these variables and how these variables interact with each other has to be elaborated on; that will be the goal of this section. In short, this paper argues that Chinese leaders have a choice: allowing collective leadership or centralizing their leadership. A high level of elite cohesion may weaken the ruler; however, it may benefit the state because the elite social terrain requires different factions to care about the overall state and limits

the influence of a cult of personality on the bureaucracy. In contrast, if the ruler centralizes their leadership and, therefore, deliberately chooses to purge factions, weakening collective leadership, they can generate a cult of personality–this can have a dramatic effect on state capacity. This paper will argue a "purge" is "the nonroutine removal of an official from power at the direction of a supreme political leader (or collection of leaders), invoking some standard that fits within regime norms" (Li and Manion 2023, 817). These are "broad purges" attempting to "coup-proof" the leadership of the Party by dismissing large factional followers in the bureaucracy and political class (Li and Manion 2023, 817). This is because, as argued by Svolik, "Although the dictator may be the most powerful member of the ruling coalition, he rules in the shadow of the threat of a coup" (Svolik 2012, 482). As a result, choosing the side of centralization of the sovereign's dilemma is about a concern by the paramount leader about their individual leadership in contrast to the elite; a broad purge of factions may eliminate that elite threat. Therefore, this thesis proposes, through an analysis of this framework, that Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping created a cult of personality and Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao didn't because they each had a dilemma on how they viewed their power within the state.

The relationship between the terms collective leadership and factionalism will be connected. Collective leadership involves more factional competition for power and influence over policy, such as decisions made by leadership groups rather than by one autocratic leader. Furthermore, collective leadership inherently involves more factional competition and coalition-building; it is a dynamic process where factions are lobbied for influence on policy (Li 2016, 299). Factions generate a 'code of civility' because the desire to crush the rival faction is stimulated by the limited nature of power that each faction has; more factional distribution equals less absolute power (Nathan 1973, 46). For a moment, factions may have some power over

others. However, it is never overwhelming, and it is more about consensus building within factions, and with other factions, factions try to form consensus with other factions to create policy, because of the number of factions, no faction can fully dominate (Nathan 1973, 46). For example, Deng Xiaoping worked through consensus building; he had to work through the factional interplay between more conservative and liberal figures (Vogel 2011, 381). This is a sign of the collective leadership that existed under Deng, inner party democracy, a sense that listening to the opinions of factions to generate policy was a deliberate choice to be followed by figures like Deng Xiaoping (Vogel 2011, 384). Therefore, these two variables, collective leadership and factionalism, are inherently entwined; high amounts of factional distribution will equal a weaker sense of absolute power, and therefore, a cult of personality will not develop. This choice is based on the individual agency of each Paramount leader. It isn't just about how they view their power but, in ideological terms, what they view the primary contradiction of the Party to be. Through this dialectical materialism lens and its real-world applied mechanism of historical materialism, the Paramount leader has a choice of the primary struggle for the Party (Rudd 2024, 31). Deng Xiaoping believed China was still at the "primary stage of socialism," meaning that the Party needed to unlock the factors of production (industry) before they moved on to relations of production (class); this deliberate choice by Deng influenced how he viewed his leadership in the context of collective leadership compared to Mao and Xi (Rudd 2024, 67-68). The process of how factional distribution influences the cult of personality developed will be discussed further in the methodology section.

Methodology

This paper analyzes three case studies to address the sovereign's dilemma and how collective leadership can inhibit the construction of a cult of personality. The Mao Zedong era

from 1949-1976, the "Dengist" era, which involved Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao's periods of Paramount leadership, and finally, Xi Jinping's era. Each era will employ a triangulation by analyzing each era through a quantitative factional model of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CC) and a historical model that analyzes works and speeches by Paramount leaders that delves into this research through a different lens that the quantitative data may miss in its analysis. This papers main argument for the quantitative data is that if we see high amounts of factional distribution, meaning more collective leadership, then it would have a cohesive effect on the Paramount leader and, therefore, inhibit the possibility of generating a cult of personality. On the other hand, if we see more dominance by one faction and a sharp decline in factional distribution in the CC, then the Paramount leader may have more control, purging collective leadership in which the Paramount leader has the power to create a cult of personality. The argument for analyzing the Central Committee is similar to that of Victor Shih et al. "Although the Central Committee is by no means the universe of the power elite in China, one can reasonably argue that most important officials are in the CC" (Shih et al. 2010, 53). Overall, the historical methods will be done by analyzing each case study through texts like "*The Governance of China*" by Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong's "*Four Essays on Philosophy*" and background information regarding each era that quantitative data cannot demonstrate. These texts will help give a deeper dive into why these individuals view the importance of centralizing their respective leaderships.

Factional Distribution in the Central Committee Method

This will draw from Andrew Nathan's indispensable work on factional politics within the CCP. The starting point for Nathan's analysis is clientist ties, which he defines as "a non-ascriptive two-person relationship founded on exchange, in which well-understood rights and obligations are established between the two parties" (Nathan 1973, 37). The checklist for a clientist tie is extensive, including "(i) a relationship between two people; (ii) It is a relationship especially selected for cultivation by the members from their total social networks; (iii) It is cultivated essentially by the constant exchange of gifts or services. (iv) Since the exchange involves the provision by each partner of goods or services the other wants, the parties to the tie are dissimilar; very often, they are unequal in status, wealth, or power; (v) The tie sets up well-understood, although seldom explicit, rights and obligations between the partners; (vi) Either member can abrogate it at will; and (vii) It is not exclusive; either member is free to establish other simultaneous ties (so long as they do not involve contradictory obligations)" (Nathan 1973, 37). Corporate ties, like those made from work, can become clientist ties because of the initial contact that creates the necessity to create a clientist tie. In this sense, a faction can form in many ways, like through shared revolutionary experience, work experience, or even being in the same university. Clientist ties articulate to form a dynamic complex network that serves many functions, but in the context of this paper, it is mainly about politics (Nathan 1973, 39). For the purpose of engaging in politics, these ties form factions with only a few or multiple layers of members–due to the power and influence of the faction–the former being called a "simple faction" and the latter a "complex faction" (Nathan 1973, 41). Because the structure of a faction is based on personal ties, upward and downward communication tends to follow the basis of recruitment (Nathan 1973, 42). In this sense, factional membership is generational-oriented, similar to how we define CCP leadership in different generations. This communication is done

through sub-leaders; the more sub-leaders, the more time it takes to disseminate information, and the more likely that information has become distorted. Therefore, factions tend to be limited in the amount of layers they can establish (Nathan 1973, 42-43). A faction tends to be weakened through competition by lower members for the leadership or doesn't survive when the leader of the faction dies or is purged; in the example of Zhou Yongkang, who created clientist ties from his work and created a powerful faction from 2007-2012, when he was purged during the anti-corruption campaign in 2014, that faction dissolved, and many of its members were arrested on corruption charges (Meyer et al. 2016, 45).

Figures like Nathan have argued that factional politics gives rise to too much transactional cost so no single faction can take total control of the government; in this sense, a "code of civility" emerges between the factions, in essence, collective leadership (Shih et al. 2010, 80). However, the CCP has gone through the ups and downs of this "code of civility" with different eras of purges. During events like the Hundred Flowers campaign and the Cultural Revolution, Mao purged opposing factions like Liu Shaoqi's Northern Bureau (Shih et al. 2010, 94-95). In this context, there is a divide between eras of "code of civility" and "winner takes all." During periods of "codes of civility," collective leadership avoids monopolies of domination from other faction groups; no one faction can take all the nodes of top governance, and this generates factional checks and balances (Francois et al. 2023, 567).

Victor Shih and Factional Data

Victor Shih, political science professor at the University of California, San Diago's two works: *Coalitions of the Weak : Elite Politics in China from Mao's Stratagem to the Rise of Xi* and *Gauging the Elite Political Equilibrium in the CCP: A Quantitative Approach Using Biographical Data* are two quantitative works that are essential data set's for this research. In the

latter work, according to Shih, data on factional politics tends to be formed based on being born in the same province, same school, common revolutionary, or work experience between members of the CC (Shih et al. 2010, 84). Though the Chinese system is very opaque, and we don't know the exact form of factions, most factional data has been constructed through this process. Many academics, such as Cheng Li, have used qualitative analysis to form factional ties, which will also be essential for this work. However, academics like Victor Shih have created robust quantitative data sets and graphs essential for demonstrating the factional divide in the CC. Though we know basic variables like birth, date of joining the Party, and educational level, many CC members have constantly moved from different positions; therefore, to mitigate this complex coding issue, Shih established that for every position a CC member holds, three columns are dedicated to coding: a numerical code to describe the position, the start year of that position, and the end year (Shih et al. 2010, 54). Thus, even if a CC member had a prosperous career with multiple concurrent positions, they only had to expand the number of columns to track it all. Figure 1 demonstrates part of this data collection through the cadre Chen Yun and his positions within the CCP and PRC in the 1950s. The first three digits of each position code represent the exact position, so for Chen Yun 142 represents "Chair of the Finance and Economic Committee," while the last digit represents the ranks of what he achieved in this position, so he is the highest position in this department (Shih et al. 2010, 55).

TABLE 3.1. *Tracking Chen Yun's positions in the 1950s*

Name	Chair, Finance and Economic Committee	Start Year	End Year	Vice Premier	Start Year	End Year	Minister of Commerce	Start Year	End Year
Chen Yun	1421	1949	1956	1025	1949	1975	1321	1956	1958

Figure 1: “Tracking Chen Yun’s Positions in the 1950s.” (Shih et al. 2010, 55).

For CC membership, they coded both full and alternative members, as well as the sessions they participated in (first to sixteenth CC); they also coded positions with a four-digit number within the CC like General Secretary, a Politburo Standing Committee member, Politburo member, or a CC member and the composite units of central party organization like Secretariat, the Department of Organization, the Department of Propaganda, leadership in Party newspapers and journals like the People’s Daily and so forth (Shih et al. 2010, 55). Demographics were coded, like university, gender, and birth, but also, when applicable, pre-1949 positions within the Party, like revolutionary experience–if you participated in the Long March (1934-35) or in the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, if you were part of a revolutionary base area like Jiangxi, Shaanxi etc, or different military attachments like the New Fourth Army and the Eighth Route Army (Shih et al. 2010, 56). Armed with these assumptions and coding plans, Shih et al. designed a computer algorithm in Stata to look for CC members who shared the background or experience of the formal head of the CCP from 1921 to 2006 (Shih et al. 2010, 84). As stated by Shih et al., “For every year in that period, the algorithm first looks for members who served on the CC in that year. It then looks for serving CC members who shared characteristics with the formal head of the Party that year. If a serving CC member shared at least one experience or characteristic with the Party secretary general, that person is presumed to be a member of his faction” (Shih et al. 2010, 84). The coding took years, but the general premise stayed the same: position, start year, and end year. Through this process, they and other academics have discerned factional cohesion within the CC, periods of high or low factionalism.

In his 2022 work, *Coalitions of the Weak,* Shih attempts to answer why Mao promoted figures with weak qualifications during the Cultural Revolution even though the pool of experienced, dedicated, and senior cadres was relatively large (Shih 2022, 2-3). This is because Mao and now, later, Xi Jinping are choosing a "coalitions of the weak" strategy by redistributing elite power away from experienced cadres with broad factional networks to junior or tainted officials (Shih 2022, 3). This creates policy trade-offs and fewer challenges to the paramount leader; notably, the coalition of the weak is dependent on the paramount leader's patronage, so once they die, political instability may ensue (Shih 2022, 4). Overall, Shih pursued a longue durée analysis of China, from Mao to Xi Jinping, and the differing impacts of the elite's relationship with the paramount leader, the era of "coalitions of the weak" to the era of "collective leadership" where more experienced cadres ruled. He uses quantitative data to demonstrate factions and differing distributions of leadership within the Central Committee. This data was accumulated in a similar vein to Shih's previous work, and the data previously made helped establish this new work. Overall, Shih's work has been essential for the data accumulation of this thesis; the years Shih put into his research created valuable data sets that have contributed to the output of this work.

Historical Methods

Historical methods refer “to the craft that historians deploy in collecting, assessing, validating, and interpreting evidence to gain knowledge of a past event or occurrence (Fazal 2023, 140). Historical methods have been neglected in the analysis of much political science research. As a result, like Fazal, this paper will make the case for an interpretive understanding

of political phenomena through historical research. This requires contextualizing the historical research and, through the interpretive process of the research, according meaning to human action (Fazal 2023, 140). Historical methods help with framing the research; they problematize research through an all-round understanding of the phenomenon, and they are an understanding of the trajectories certain variables have made over time. This paper will examine primary sources written by Chinese leaders. These documents are not politically inert but produced in settings full of the context of power, and these documents have different bearings on different parts of the population. Texts that will be analyzed, like "*The Governance of China*" by Xi Jinping, have a certain meaning for elites in the Central Committee compared to train operators in Chongqing. These texts are known as "documents of power"; they personify the state and its agencies. They are documents of the bureaucratic order that encapsulates rules, ideology, procedures, decisions, judicial orders, etc; these documents affect millions of lives with a stroke of a pen (Fazal 2023, 143). Certain steps for the historical methodology inquiry this paper will partake in are in this order: 1) like all scientific processes; we are not arguing for absolute truths, instead arguing for Popperian falsifiability and finding precise definitions of the subject of inquiry; this will be critical of many of my perceived assumptions of the definitions established due to my lack of knowledge in Mandarin; 2) this paper has been open about the availability of historical evidence, the Chinese system is very opaque, the ideas of the "cult of personality" and "factional-collective leadership" are rejected publicly by the CCP so many of the sources this paper uses are academic assumptions through educated variability; 3) critically look at the documents for validity and authenticity, look at the individual who created them and the institutions and time they created them in; 4) finally, drawing inferences from the data accumulated to make (Fazal 2023, 142).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Due to the complexity of the topics involved in this research, this paper's literature review will justify the creation of the definitions used and the historical literature around these topics. The literature review will focus on two fundamental topics for this thesis. First, this chapter will examine the creation of the cult of personality from figures like Durkheim, who argued about the ritualization of cult worship, and figures like Max Weber, who argued for the leader's charismatic authority as a key variable that allows for the creation of the cult. Second, this chapter will examine the formation of collective leadership from figures like Cheng Li and Graeme Gill, justifying the association of factionalism with collective leadership and how collective leadership shapes the CCP.

Cult of Personality

The basis for the cult of personality comes from two models of thought. One argues for a ritual model of cult development; this model particularly stresses their cult character as a set of rituals of leader worship; this can include mass meetings to small individual ceremonies where

many people are actively participating in the cult across the polity (Marquez 2018, 266). The character of this cult model is pursued through a bottom-up process where citizens have the agency to pursue ritual worship. However, it can also be produced top-down, where the state produces ritual objects en masse. A charismatic authority model stresses cult production as a top-down process where the regime directly produces cult images (Sundhal 2022, 440). Specifically, it manufactures a particular personality of the leader, where the cult ends up exalting the leader's authority through the regime, creating, projecting, and spreading a God-like charismatic image of the leader. Overall, these two models are not mutually exclusive; for cults of personality to prosper, it requires a joining of both models (Marquez 2018, 267).

The figure who expanded the ritual model was Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), who set the model up in the case of religious ritual. The goal was to see what social ingredients combine to make a ritual successful. For Durkheim, ritual is "a mechanism of mutually focused emotions and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership" (Collins 2004, 24). Durkheim, a pupil of Fustel de Coulanges, a scholar who analyzed ancient Greek rituals, illustrated the essence of ritual as subcognitive ritualism. The goal of Durkheim's method is to understand how ideas formulate through their social practices, in contrast to the analysis of ideas in their own terms, like a Platonic essence. It goes beneath the essence of the immediate human consciousness, like how we view idealized forms when we first encounter them, like the myths of Greek Gods (Collins 2004, 27). We can't explain ideas in the vacuum of their own terms; for Durkheim, ideas are formulated through group engagements. The special case that formulated Durkheim's concept of subcognitive ritualism is religious ideas that can always be analyzed through the membership of the group that assembles to carry out their particular ritual (Collin 2004, 27). Morality, ideas, and other more

significant concepts that structure human development are established through our group structure; different structures create different conceptions of these ideas. Ritual participation within a group sets the boundaries of each group and, hence, the moral obligations of each group. As a result, different ritual practices result in different ranges of moralities for each group throughout history; the hero-morality of the Greeks can demonstrate this via figures like Hercules that shaped their ritual practices (Collins 2004, 28). Through a mutual shared experience of ritual, they create a shared reality, creating solidarity within the group.

Furthermore, for Durkheim, the turn towards secularization, the analysis of man as an independent moral being within a community, changes how we analyze ritual. In a sense, Durkheim argues secularization is just a "religion of man." Therefore, people participate in a ritual to transcend the mundane world to the sacred; ritual, then, is a mechanism by which members partake to recreate the crescendo of collective sentiment forged around particular objects (Chriss 1993, 257). In this case, Durkheim is at the macro level of analyzing rituals and how rituals are conducted within group membership. Therefore, ritual is a tool to direct the good or bad emotions of groups of people; it demands the person within the group to be a person among persons, in that sense creating a collective emotion towards the object.

Erving Goffman (1922-1982) analyzed ritual at the micro level; Goffman consistently emphasizes the immediate interaction ritual and the society that embodies the demands to follow ritual "here and now" (Collins 2004, 33). Goffman subtly deviates from Durkheim through his analysis of the everyday life of ritual practice. Rituals exist in a variety of formats, and for Goffman, these can be rituals, ceremonies, or everyday interactions. Rituals can be as simple as a bow, handshake, kiss, or simple greetings (Piotrowksi 1987, 22). At the same time, Goffman's use of ritual also looks at utterances that are conventionalized means of giving praise or shame,

this can be a simple hello while walking down the street, or it can be the *"Sieg Heil"* or *"Heil Hitler"* salutes used during the period of Nazi Germany (Piotrowski 1987, 23). "Ritual is a conventionalized act where an individual expresses their respect and regard of ultimate value to an object or to its stand-in" (Piotrowski 1987, 23). However, a society may require an individual to follow a ritual to be a "member" of that society. For Goffman, individuals feel pressured to conform to rituals, which helps us analyze rituals as a means for producing group solidarities, even if it is based on fear (Collins 2004, 33–34). Goffman focuses on the ordinary unnoticed events that ritual can symbolize; ritual is more than the mass rallies like the Nuremberg Rallies of the Nazis or Red Guards mass rallies during the Cultural Revolution; it is the everyday practices that often go unnoticed.

In the context of this research, Xavier Marquez is the figure who unified both the macro and micro analysis of ritual in the context of cults of personality. Marquez argues that the cult is a “widespread communicative activity that participants understand to express veneration or worship to the ruler” (Marquez 2020, 22). This communicative activity is widespread and requires “communicative artifacts” (ritual objects) that are representations of the ruler; this can include paintings, poems, movies, or simple things like a pin (Marquez 2020, 23). In this sense, a cult is a rhetorical tool, and it is a political marketing campaign through the use of ritual objects. The ritual of the cult of personality represents what Durkheim would call the total secularization of society, where God in the religious context disappears, and it becomes a worship of the leader as a “Man.” These rituals are not just passively consumed, but they act in ways that credibly indicate high levels of respect; this can be in the process of the mass rally where each individual is aware of their shared commitment to the ruler to simple ceremonies in a school where the ritual object is worshiped (Marquez 2018, 266).

Furthermore, cult artifacts tend to be created through centralized production, the use of the bureaucratic authority of the state that standardizes cult production. Connecting the ritual model to the charismatic authority model, the direct production by the state of ritual artifacts attempts to use bureaucratic authority to increase the leader's charismatic authority by directing the state or Party institutions to produce ritual representations of the leader (Marquez 2020, 25). Through the use of writers' unions, propaganda departments, and the total control of the media, they are enlisted to produce artwork, produce hagiographies, and try to create a narrative through the production of ritual objects that exalt the leader. These are calculated decisions by the state to persuade audiences of the leader's authority (Marquez 2020, 28). Conversely, however, ritual objects that exalt the leader do not have to be produced in a centralized fashion. According to Marquez, ritual models also put great stress on the participation of the cult public in the process of cult construction; this means that through the enhancement of the cult via the propaganda apparatus of the state, it disseminates the ideas of the cult to the common people, resulting in a desire to produce cult objects from the bottom-up (Marquez 2018, 267-268). Therefore, this bottom-up production of the cult can affect how the leader and the state interact with the cult. Either they can embrace it, as this paper will show the Roman emperor Caligula did, or the bottom-up cult can damage the leader, as in what happened to Napoleon III.

The figure who established the charismatic authority model was Max Weber (1864-1920). Weber explains charismatic authority in the context of grounds to legitimize a leader's rule. Specifically, a leader's authority comes from their exceptional "gift of grace" or charisma, "the entirely personal devotion to, and personal trust in, revelations, heroism, or other qualities of leadership in an individual" (Weber 1994, 311-312). This is charismatic authority, as exercised by a prophet or in the field of politics by various leaders (Weber 1994, 312). Similar to

Durkheim, Weber brought charismatic authority into the secular realm. For Weber, charismatic authority became part of the secular authority and was part of the basic building blocks of structures of domination a leader can have in the state (Marquez 2022, 28). Essentially, if the leader is able to project their charismatic authority, it is a justification for leadership. Therefore, charismatic authority needs to be projected to reach any group larger than a few people. As a result, charismatic authority is a top-down process where the state intentionally uses technology to address its charismatic aims to new audiences through mass-produced newspapers and other tools (Marquez 2022, 29). Staging of authority is essential in this process; if the staging is sufficient through the use of mass ceremonies to produce common knowledge of a leader's charismatic authority, then the leader's charisma becomes a normative recognition because you are a witness of the mass ritual event (Marquez 2022, 37). Charismatic authority is on the verge of becoming a cult of personality. According to Sundhal, the charismatic authority model becomes a cult of personality when it is understood as the exaltation of an individual's authority through the creation, projection, and spread of a God-like image of a leader (Sundhal 2022, 431). Even though we are in a secular realm of understanding, the individual becomes associated with a God-like image through the leader's charismatic authority.

The ritual and charismatic authority models are both needed to make a successful cult of personality; one cannot be effectively created without the other. Two actions that are essential for these models to become a cult of personality are loyalty signaling and ritual amplification. These are not mutually exclusive; they are both essential in the production of the cult of personality. Loyalty signaling requires individuals to publicly praise the leader to take advantage of opportunities for advancement (Marquez 2020, 25). Loyalty signaling occurs when individuals know that rewards or punishments are rising from credibly and publicly recognizing

the ruler. However, these do not have to be genuine loyalty signals; the social recognition of the leader isn't necessarily sincere; it is more about recognizing the leader's authority than a genuine belief that the leader is a "God," many pursue this action just to survive (Marquez 2020, 23). On the other hand, ritual amplification emerges when ritual objects are produced within a ritual context. Therefore, they are part of a ritual amplification of preexisting emotional attachment to the leader (Marquez 2020, 25). Overall, these two actions together create flattery inflation, which becomes so widespread that it becomes a totalizing cult of personality. The early period of the Cultural Revolution in China is particularly abundant in examples of this inflationary dynamic– Red Guards established an expectation that ordinary people needed to visually show support for Mao to avoid harassment; they had the incentive to memorize quotations from the "Little Red Book," wear Mao badges, or participate in loyalty dances (Marquez 2020, 29). Though the Little Red Book is directly produced via the state, it became a tool to create rituals from the bottom up.

To demonstrate the ever-expanding list of differing forms of cults of personalities throughout history, this section will delve into the essential cults of Caligula, Napoleon III, and Adolf Hitler. Each figure represents a slightly differing representation of how a cult forms. Some, like Caligula, existed during a time that lacked the technology to create a genuine cult of personality. However, his time demonstrates a rich example of how a cult can form and how ordinary citizens can react to that cult. While also demonstrating how flattery inflation can affect the ruler. While others like Napoleon III and Hitler deliberately created a top-down direct cult that was all-encompassing into the polity. Finally, this section will end with an analysis of how Communists saw the cult of personality. This will demonstrate its connection to the CCP and how they justified and saw an individual's worship in their ideology. As a result, this section will also analyze how Karl Marx and Fredrich Engles saw the cult of the individual and how it made

its way to the differing conceptions of the cult from Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin. Particularly how the "Cult of Stalin" had a dramatic effect on the production of the cult of personality in China.

Gaius Caesar Germanicus, also known as "Caligula," was born on August 31 in the year 12 A.D. At only 24 years old, on March 18, 37 A.D., he became Emperor of Rome after the death of his ailing great-uncle, Emperor Tiberius. Shortly into Caligula's reign, the Roman Senate conspired against Caligula, which was quickly uncovered; due to this distrust of the Roman Senate, this is where Caligula received his reputation as a "mad emperor" (Winterling 2003, 98). For the senators to survive the resentment of Caligula, they flattered him; this included gifts to his children, humiliating themselves for his amusement, voting in the Senate for the Senators to have a standing ovation to Caligula, and allowing Caligula to appoint his horse as a counsel meaning he is equating the Roman bureaucracy as horses (Winterling 2003, 101-103). This resulted in flattery inflation, where the Roman senate continually flattered Caligula; however, he never fully trusted the Senate. As a result, Caligula fled the capital, where he started to generate his cult image. Drawing from Alexander the Great and Emperor Xerxes, he carefully constructed an image that he was a God-like figure; by wearing Alexander's breastplate and other objects from figures of the past, he collected a new group of allies from outside the capital (Winterling 2003, 130-131). To show his return to Rome and his construction of his God-like persona, Caligula wanted to outshine any other Emperor's triumph in return to Rome; like Caesar's marching over the Rubicon, Caligula wanted to "walk on water." A bridge of ships, three miles long, was constructed in the Gulf of Baiae, each constructed to look like a regular road; when the structure was finished, Caligula dressed as Alexander the Great and road with his troop of cavalry and returned to Rome, now with a mission to change the Emperor system and

create a God like image of himself (Winterling 2003, 126-127). The Senators' flattery of Caligula continued, but some now believed he was divine; they would kiss his feet, call him a demi-god, and build temples for his worship where animals would be sacrificed in his name (Winterling 2003, 151). However, this was not just out of the blue, like what Caligula did outside Rome; he presented himself to be worshipped, he turned regular terms of greeting to greetings for him as a God, he dressed as Hellenistic Gods like Jupiter, and many scholars believe that Caligula intended to abolish the established form of Empire and replace it with a new kind of monarchy, modeled on the Hellenistic kingdoms where the ruler was divine–a "new state cult" was founded by religious policy from the top of the Empire-the Emperor himself (Winterling 2003, 152-153). Though we see a veneration for Caligula within Rome and the elite, we also see a bottom-up veneration for the Emperor after establishing the "state cult." In cities like Alexandria, non-Jewish residents made an attempt to win support from the Emperor by placing pictures of the Emperor in Synagogues and turning them into shrines for the cult; this became a place of worship for believers of the "Caligula cult" however, for many it was also just to gain power in the new state Caligula was trying to establish, these photos and temples became places of ritual and worship of the Emperor (Winterling 2003, 157). This ordinary citizen support for the cult caused a reaction from the top; due to the events in Alexandria, Caligula turned the Great Synagogue Temple in Jerusalem into a Temple of Worship for Caligula, therefore demonstrating the bottom-up reaction the Caligula cult had to ordinary citizens acceptance of the cult (Winterling 2003, 156). However, Caligula pushed the Senators too far, and the flattery inflation the Senators continued to pursue was not enough to satisfy the Emperor's dislike of the Senate, so he was murdered in 41 A.D. at the age of 28. This saw the end of the Caligula cult, the end of his ill-fated attempt to change the Roman system. However, it demonstrates an early attempt that

a leader can do to create a genuine cult of personality. Though without the technology of our modern age for mass circulation, due to his absolute power and his construction of an image that he was a God, the cult in cities was accepted by people who constructed rituals to worship the Emperor. Even if some were for personal gain, Caligula created a genuine form of early cult of personality.

The first modern personality cult that implemented modern technology like mass media and was inherently secular was Napoleon III. Charles-Louis Napoéon Bonaparte came to power in France after an election that introduced universal male suffrage and proclaimed himself Emperor of France after a coup in 1851 (Plamper 2012, 31). Napoleon III's leadership has constantly been compared to Caesarism, which in the Weber sense of charismatic authority means that the individual man transcends the particular understanding of divine grace and transforms society through charisma–the mysterious qualities that enable an individual to acquire power (Marquez 2022, 28). Napoleon III's image wasn't based on his connection with God like that of Caligula, nor was it based on any sort of battles that he won. Instead, it was his symbol of being a mortal man who represents the state. Through a carefully crafted image from the state, Napoleon used populist rhetoric, charity, and propaganda that showed him as a "down to Earth man"; the leader's body now absorbed all sacral aura and served as a metaphor for everything, all of society (Plamper 2012, 33). Premodern cults, like that of Caligula, referenced God; Caligula dressed as the Hellenistic Gods, and the king himself wasn't necessarily a sign for anything. His connection with the Gods gave the cult meaning; this changed under Napoleon III (Plamper 2012, 33). Thanks to the mass media, Napoleon III's cult was directed at the entire population. This allowed for the creation of ritual objects and mass-produced, uniform products like posters, pins, and newspapers; this brought the image of the Emperor to the masses (Plamper 2012, 34).

At the same time, thanks to modern schooling and the military, cult worship was brought to routinized parts of society. According to Matthew Truesdall, Napoleon III mainly relied upon *fête impériale* these were mass ceremonies like coronation ceremonies, birthdays, and the inauguration of public works that were brought to the masses through newspapers and new forms of illustrated papers like L'Illustration where people could view the Emperor and worship him; notably, these were used to communicate Napoleon's authority and popularity among the French people as a "Father of the nation" (Marquez 2022, 42). However, this was all done in the elements of the "closed society." The press was heavily censored, and political camps that challenged the cult were banned or attacked (Marquez 2022, 42). French society was never fully comfortable with the cult; occasional dissent within ceremonies like vandalism and heckling at the Emperor broke the shared worshiping feeling among the masses; plus, counter rituals were created which kept Republican and Legitimist narratives and ideas alive, creating a bottom-up effect on the cult and challenged Napoleon's claim to authority (Marquez 2022, 42). Overall, Napoleon III's cult used both the ritual model and charismatic authority model to create a cult of personality; for the first time, the Napoleon cult encapsulated the aspects that create a modern personality cult: secularism; the targeting at the masses, the use of modern media; the uniform mass-produced cult products; the limitation to closed societies, and the patricentrism.

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) became German Chancellor in 1933 by then President of the Weimar Republic Paul Von Hindenburg. However, even before then, the Nazi Party carefully crafted an image around Hitler that became the embers that created a mass cult of personality around the Führer. Specifically, events like the Reichstag Fire Decree boosted Hitler's popularity among German citizens because he was an eliminator of danger; at the same time, due to Nazi Party rhetoric, the poorer and neglected elements of Weimar society felt connected to the Hitler

myth, resulting in great electoral success for the Nazi Party and Hitler euphoria (Kershaw 1987, 52–53). Hitler became the focal point of national rebirth; since the fall of the German Empire in 1918 and the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was weak, and Hitler became the man to fix Germany; this is a continuation of the secularization of the cult. Throughout Germany, different towns connected Hitler with pagan symbols called "Hitler oaks" and "Hitler lindens" trees that would be planted in towns across Germany where citizens could feel connected to the Führer (Kershaw 1987, 55). At the same time, Hitler poems were constructed, communities made Hitler honorary citizens of their towns, films like "Triumph of the Will" were shown, and the Hitler salute became a common place for greeting in Germany (Kershaw 1987, 60). However, the true representations of the Hitler personality cult were his mass ceremonies. Though the Hitler image was crafted as a modest man who represents the People, mass ceremonies for his 44th birthday where every German town had an outward sign of adulation and public acclamation for the "People's Chancellor" occurred (Kershaw 1987, 57). Other ceremonies like those in Nuremberg showed the combined ritual worship people had towards Hitler; these ceremonies symbolized that Hitler wasn't just the Nazi Party, but Hitler was Germany (Kershaw 1987, 69).

During these ceremonies and the general Hitler cult, pseudo-religious secularism of salvation was created, where people would worship and use different incantations to pray to Hitler, and people would even pursue pilgrimages to the Berghof (Hitler's residence in the Bavarian Alps) to catch a glimpse of Hiter (Kershaw 1987, 69, 73). This image of Hitler wouldn't have been possible without the careful consideration of Joseph Goebbels, Reichsminister of Propaganda. His sole purpose was to formulate Hitler's cult of personality; without Goebbels's careful crafting of ritual objects and the Nazi rally system, the symbol of devotion towards Hitler wouldn't have been as successful (Kershaw 1987, 48–49). Part of this

image Goebbels crafted was that Hitler's chancellorship was no routine change in government for Germany; it symbolized a transposing of the trust of Germany from Hindenburg to Hitler–a national rebirth. By 1938-40, nobody could escape the Hitler cult on the radio, media, or in cinema; it was entrenched in all aspects of German polity. It symbolized the totalitarian "closed society" Germany existed in under the Nazis; non-believers of the cult were isolated and sent to concentration camps, free media didn't exist, and the success of the cult allowed Hitler to mobilize people against "undesirables" like the Jewish peoples, Roma peoples, and LGBTQ populations (Kershaw 1987, 80).

Overall, why was the Hitler personality cult thriving during his time in Germany and continuing with neo-Nazi groups across the world still worshiping the image of Hitler while Napoleon the III's cult wasn't successful during his time and doesn't have any sizable believers today? What made the Hitler cult was the use of a specific individual to construct the cult Joseph Goebbels and a group of loyal followers that disseminated the cult: the Nazi Party. This allowed for the direct construction of ritual objects as well as the bottom-up consumption and creation of the cult through pilgrimages and other forms of cult worship. Also, the Hitler cult successfully created an image of Hitler as the father of the nation that Napoleon III was not able to construct. Napoleon III's cult never had these two essential things; the cult was top-down; however, it never had a full-time constructor and a loyal group of followers to disseminate the cult.

According to Pittman, personality cult is a term that can be drawn from a letter written by Marx in which he rejects any means to foster a "superstitious belief in authority" (2017, 537). Marx's aim in criticizing the idea of a personality cult is to reject the attempt to place Marx as an individual above everyone else; the personal characteristics of an individual leader that place him/her above everyone else shouldn't be considered (Pittman 2017, 537). Instead, revolutionary

leaders should always keep grounding the workers' movement in actual historical tendencies. In other words, considering the importance of inner-party democracy and collective leadership as a criterion of revolutionary leadership, Marx's theory downplays the role of the "great man" in history instead of emphasizing collective leadership (Pittman 2017, 537). However, particularly in the Marxist transition through the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, these ideas shift. Vladimir Lenin's Vanguard Party that generated his revolutionary zeal–through the successes of the February and October Revolutions that brought an end to the Tsarist Regime in Russia were natural generators of Lenin's charismatic aura, creating a phenomenon strong enough to encourage a widespread commitment to revolutionary ideas–Lenin hero worship (Pittman 2017, 538; Strong and Killingsworth 2011, 401). Joseph Stalin used this image of Lenin to create his own cult of personality. Stalin believed Marxism allowed hero-worship and was fully aware of the Lenin cult, so as a legitimation tactic when Lenin died in 1924, Stalin used the Lenin cult for his own legitimacy through the use of Soviet ideologists investing in Stalin-centered propaganda patterned after Lenin's revolutionary zeal (Strong and Killingsworth 2011, 402-403). Through loyal figures like Lavrentiy Beria, propaganda tools like the media, film, art, and mass ceremonies were conducted from the top-down direct process of creating a Stalin cult (Brandenberger 2005, 257). However, how did these ideologists justify the cult-worship of Stalin when very clearly Marx himself opposed these ideas? A big controversy existed in the 1920s and 1930s in Soviet Russia on how to characterize the role of the individual, particularly the leader. Due to the chaos of the 1920s-1930s for the CPSU, people looked to a figure who understood how to stabilize the situation (Strong and Killingsworth 2011, 397). The Vanguard Party of Lenin helped generate this change in how a revolutionary Party and its leader are essential to communism. Part of this movement were Soviet philosophers like Lev Kleinbort's positive

assertion of the "cult of man" in Russian Marxism and Georgy Plekhanov's dialectical justification of the supreme role of the individual in their certain stage of history (Plamper 2012, 55). However, carefully crafting the Stalin image was part of this desire to create a stabilizing image for the Soviet Union. Weber postulates that charismatic authority can be transmitted through ritual to another figure (Strong and Killingsworth 2011, 398). As a result, the Soviets transmitted "Leniniana" the mass media, film, paintings, posters, sculptor work, and poetry dedicated to Lenin, meaning the stabilizing factor of Lenin to create the cult of Stalin–a new form of stability for the state, therefore, justifying this change from Marx's writings (Plamper 2012, 62). Compared to the bottom-up production of Lenin's cult, which was done through the successes of the revolution, the Stalin cult was directly produced via the state apparatus. With help from Beria, Stalin assigned his own biography as a central role in the Party catechism. The production of the biography was to bolster popular loyalty to the Party and state. By 1946, copies of Stalin's biography were all across the socialist world and were vital reading material for schools and in the military (Brandenberger 2005, 256). At the same time, the newspaper *Pravda* became the main medium through which Stalin launched his cult. Through staffing the paper with loyalists, Stalin deliberately modeled his image through *Pravda,* and he picked photographs and quotes that would be included in the print (Plamper 2012, 74). For example, during the events of his fiftieth birthday in 1929, Stalin picked three kinds of verbal contributions to the paper. One, by his fellow Bolsheviks, extolling his specific qualities–generating his charismatic authority; second, short telegrams from community organizations or other collectives; third, article or poetic tributes from the literary community using terms like vozhd (leader in supreme authority) denoting a more heroic image of Stalin (Plamper 2012, 75-76). Specific images were generated of Stalin; one was the image with him smoking his famous pipe-symbolizing

socialism; another image was during the 1930s celebrating the "new Soviet man" and "socialist heroes" in producing the Five Year Plan with Stalin positioned with these workers; the other famous image was created after WWII with Stalin as the older General with him pictured in Soviet uniform (Plamper 2012, 79). *Pravda* and Stalin's biography created ritual objects to generate worship of Stalin as a man. Like other modern personality cults, Stalin's cult gained shape due to the "Death of God" in politics, which led to the creation of man-Stalin's legitimacy through his charismatic authority over the people, creating his own God-like image (Plamper 2012, 64).

Collective Leadership

According to Deng Xiaoping, "The key to China's stability lies in the collective leadership of the politburo, especially its standing committee" (Li 2016, 13). Recent work on the upper escalon of authoritarian elite politics tends to divide the individuals into two groups: the dictator who wants to extend their power and the elite (members of the leadership) who continually try to limit the leader and attempt at forms of power acquisition (Gill 2018, 1). In this type of system, one of the main threats to the leader's power is the threat of their allies to replace them. However, in a Marxist-Leninist system, there is tension in the idea of individual leadership; in many of the writings of Marx and other early communist philosophers, the ideas of collective leadership were primary (Gill 2018, 5). Specifically, the idea that the collective is a stabilizing force for the Party-state and represents all classes of people. However, in the Soviet Union, there was an extreme tension between these two concepts. Many justified it through the ideas of historical materialism: we are just in a stage of history that doesn't permit pure collective leadership (Gill 2018, 5). However, due to the lack of formal rule books for institutions like the Central Committee (CC), elite politics in the Soviet Union and other Marxist-Lenninist states

was done through an institutional character that was fluid (Gill 2018, 5). This means that factional politics settled most of the debates within the Party; it created checks and balances for the CPSU. Many scholars who study "Kremlinology" tended to categorize Soviet leadership politics in cycles: a period of collective leadership denigrated into internal conflict leading to the emergence of a dominant leader who, when he died (Lenin, Stalin) or was overthrown (Khrushchev) would be replaced by another collective leadership, redoing the cycle (Gill 2018, 6). Different factions battled for power through purges and other means during periods like the 20s and post-Stalin 50s. However, this model captured a fraction of elite politics; the Brezhnev period lacked any form of absolute rule, and Brezhnev had to deal with collective leadership (Gill 2018, 6). This opened the door for a more institutional-structural analysis for elite politics. Many positions within the CC, particularly in the post-Stalin era, became regularized in what scholars have called "job-slot representation"; people became members of the CC not because of their personal qualities but because they filled positions in the regional structure that was the most important (Gill 2018, 7). This included heads of trade unions, senior military officials, newspaper editors, etc. In this context, the CC seemed to be based on the bureaucratic interests of the system; factions didn't totally control it.

Important breakthroughs in scholarship on collective leadership are the informal rules that make up factional politics. Particularly the informal rules in leadership. In the case of succession, through collective leadership, those so-called "senior secretaries," who were full members of the Politburo, would be the ranks to be a leadership successor; with the senior status, the individual's current occupation of the post was essential for when leadership was vacant (Gill 2018, 8). The rule suggests if you were to become General Secretary, one had to be senior secretary at the time of succession; this was the case for the transition from Konstantin

Chernenko to Mikhail Gorbachev, while another principle of General Secretary succession saw the figure appointed as "head of the funeral commission" this was demonstrated through Stalin to Khrushchev, Brezhnev to Andropov and, Chernenko to Gorbachev (Gill 2018, 8). These were some of the informal rules that collective leadership created. To build up the support to be appointed to these positions, factions were essential to form allies to support your rise.

Part of the conception of collective leadership is inter-party democracy. According to Cheng Li, “Inter-party democracy represents a shift from a monolithic Party apparatus represented by a single strong man leader to a diverse system of collective leadership in which rival factions compete for power, influence, and policy sway” (Li 2009, 1). This conception means that the leader is not absolute; if the General Secretary has to deal with collective leadership, their absolute power weakens. It is a form of checks and balances on the leader and the Party as a whole; it inherently involves more factional competition, but also coalition building between different factions; in the absence of strong-man politics, factional compromise becomes more common (Li 2009, 12). In the Chinese context an example of this according to Cheng Li is the populists vs princling factions during the 2008 leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. It is a highly dynamic process where there is a sense of inner partisanship between these coalitions, they have different socio-political and geographical constituencies–therefore, they argue for different policy options (Li 2009, 12). This creates a sense of institutionalization within the Party system, because the factions create their own rules and dynamics that creates a stable system for the Party to survive. The checks and balances created by collective leadership also creates a cohesive effect on the Paramount leader. When collective leadership is weakened, like how I argue, is going on under Xi Jinping. The Paramount leader accumulates an extraordinary amount of power. For example, according to Cheng Li, Xi immediately took control of many top

pillars of Party leadership, including the chairmanship of the NSC and CLGCDF, including many other top leadership positions (Li 2016, 12). However, collective leadership is “a system with a division of responsibilities among individual leaders in an effort to prevent arbitrary decisions made by a top leader” (Li 2016, 13). Collective leadership weakens the leader, factions can take other positions making the paramount leader a less absolutist figure (Li 2016, 14).

This work also adapts parts of Dr. Kevin Rudd's analysis of Xi Jinping from his new work "*On Xi Jinping: How Xi's Marxist Nationalism is Shaping China and the World*." Notably, it is about the idea of agency and structure. Do the changes we have seen and are continuing to see in China since the founding of the PRC in 1949 reflect the underlying structure of the Chinese Communist Party rather than any particular leader? According to Rudd, if we are following the structure argument, it didn't matter who replaced Hu Jintao in 2012; it was the underlying structure of the CCP, together with China's emerging wealth and the changing geopolitical situation, that inevitably meant China would become more assertive internationally, and the domestic political scene would shift away from "Reform and Opening" (Rudd 2024, 15-16). Instead, like Rudd, this paper argues that the changes we see in China are more about the individual agency of each leader. By contrast, there is something unique about Xi's individual agency and how it affects China's political statecraft and shifts China towards a more statist neo-authoritarianism (Rudd 2024, 16). In this regard, "Xi's shifting of the center of gravity in Chinese politics towards the Leninist left" is from Xi's design. According to Rudd, Xi is rehabilitating a classically Leninist Party through a new demand for absolute loyalty to Xi personally as "the core leader," which means a radically reduced space for political and policy dissent within the Party (Rudd 2024, 18). Therefore, collective leadership is weakening under Xi, but this isn't due to the structure of the Party; each Paramount leader has the agency to weaken to follow

collective leadership. They chose it because of how they viewed the agency of their own power and the primary contradiction for the Party in ideological terms.

According to Xuezhi Guo, this seesaw between this movement towards a "core leader" and collective leadership comes from China's past. Confucianism has evolved significantly from the time of Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BC) and the Han Dynasty; today, it is a synthesis between classical and Neo-Confucnian concepts and Legalist/Huang-Lao Daoism's interpretations of the world as it is (Guo 2019, 118). In this tradition, they want to achieve the Way (Dao) through living through naturalness (ziran); in this context, according to Guo, man-made institutions don't create great humans it is natural variables like the Dao; therefore, this caused traditional Chinese thinkers to rely on "Sons of Heaven" or "Sage Rulers" as the "core" of moral wisdom in society to achieve the Dao (Guo 2019, 131). These figures have the "Mandate of Heaven" (tianming) that had the mandate to govern "all under heaven"; China's continued ruler-centered polity has been driven by this core concept (Guo 2019, 134). However, the emperor-bureaucracy relations would be a check on this power. Different ruler-elite relationships through guanxi networks would impact the ruler. Also, ideas like "rectification of names," which makes sure individuals act according to their position (an Emperor acts like an Emperor and an official acts like an official), created ideas of checks and balances so that the Emperor would act like an Emperor (Guo 2019, 134). Rudd's analysis of Xi Jinping's Thought and what he calls the party's 2021 "Third Historical Resolution" in which Xi Jinping's "Marxism of contemporary China of the 21st Century" is an integration of Maoist-Marxism-Lenninism with Chinese traditional culture (Confucianism) to create a new integration of the ideology like Mao did in the 1930s shows the influence Confucnaisim still has on Chinese society (Rudd 2024, 291, 323). This idea of the "core leader," taken from the Chinese past, is fundamental to Chinese society today because

traditional Chinese thought is still important today. In this context, the CCP continues to seesaw between this "core leader" of China's past and the "collective leadership" of Marx's writings and parts of China's past. Ideas from what Confucius said, like that "all-stars twinkle around the moon," suggesting that even divine authority can be supplemented by the surrounding wisdom of scholars and what Guo argues is where the concept of "codes of civility" in factional politics Nathan establishes derives from, in which the ruler is benevolent even with rivals (Guo 2019, 140-141). To absolutist centralized "core leadership" through the agency of each Emperor and how they view their rulership, similar to the modern leaders of the CCP.

Chapter 3: The Man who Defined Our Future: Mao Zedong

With the remnants of the Kuomintang (KMT) Nationalists fleeing to the island of Taiwan, Mao Zedong, on October 1st, 1949, on top of Tiananmen Gate, declared the founding of the People's Republic of China and the start of a regime that continues to this day. Though this paper's analysis is of Mao's cult from 1949 to his death in 1976, to fully understand the cult of Mao, this paper demonstrates the initial support of the cult in Yan'an and how the conception of that "cult" changes when Mao finally achieves power.

The start of Mao's centralization of power in the CCP started during the Long March (1934-35), when Mao's arguments for a peasant revolution took hold. By the end of the Long March, the reduced eight thousand remaining participants were extremely loyal to the CCP and Mao's rhetoric that the "Red Army is on the road to liberation" (Dikötter 2019, 96). However, it wasn't until the Zunyi Conference (1935) that the CCP turned away from Comintern-trained figures like the 28 Bolshiviks, Otto Braun, and Bo Gu towards Mao as the central leader; as a result, a legitimization tactic started to appear within the CCP in Yan'an, that being the cult of personality (Leese 2011, 8). During this time in China, arguably, a conflict of cult development occurred between Chiang Kai-shek and Mao, at the same time as the actual military conflicts between the KMT and CCP. Similar to Stalin's use of the "Lenin cult," Chiang, particularly after 1927 and the Northern Expedition, co-opted the image of Sun Yat-sen for his cult; the implementation of the Mao cult in many ways was the mirror image of Chiangs and for a similar purpose, to bring legitimacy for their governments (Leese 2011, 18). Mao's ability to create an early personality cult was due to five reasons: the publishing of Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*, his appointment of Chen Boda as his chief theoretician, Mao's ability to rewrite Party

history, gain support from many figures within the Party for the legitimization purpose of the cult, and finally purging and denouncing previous leaders and essential figures of the CCP.

Edgar Snow (1905-1972) was an American journalist invited to Yan'an to write a piece on Mao. Through a carefully vetted process where the Party highly catered to Snow's whole experience in Yan'an, Mao created an almost mythical idealized version of himself and life in Yan'an for the novel. Mao gave Snow a rundown of his childhood, the mythical qualities of the Long March, and Mao's iconoclastic career as a revolutionary (Dikötter 2019, 97). Though Snow's time in Yan'an was created as an ideal sense of the actual reality going on for the CCP, in many ways, Snow had his agency to picture Mao in this ideal way. According to his biographer John Maxwell Hamilton, Snow had a deep emotional investment in the future of China and what he believed was connected to that future, the Chinese Communist Party; however, he wasn't entirely partisan; Snow asked Mao tough questions and never truly believed he fully understood how the Commune worked (1988, 18-19). Overall, the publishing of what became *Red Star Over China* was a hit in America and China, selling 12,000 copies in America; in China, it turned Mao into a household name; the photograph cover of Mao wearing his military cap with a single red star became an iconic image within China creating a charismatic authority/legitimacy for Mao across the fractured lands of China (Dikötter 2019, 97). At the same time, Snow is an essential primary source to understand Mao's conception of a cult of personality, and what he believed as the necessity of the cult. In a "Record of Conversation From Chairman Mao Zedong's Meeting with Edgar Snow" (1970), Mao argued:

"For example, [Charles Robert] Darwin, [Immanuel] Kant and even the American scholar [Lewis Henry] Morgan, who defined the primitive society. Even [Karl] Marx and [Friedrich] Engels

liked Morgan's works. We all adore someone. Would you be glad if nobody adored you? Would you be glad if nobody read your books and articles? We all need some personality cult, even you [need it]" (Mao Zedong, 1970).

Mao's direct reference to the need for admiration, to be adored, and the personality cult as the tool for this admiration demonstrates Mao's agency to create the cult of personality. Mao plays off the cult as something Darwin, Kant, and Lewis Henry Morgan have because people enjoy their work. However, this is a tool Mao used during many of his conversations; according to Timothy Cheek, Mao uses incoherent and often mysteriously layered language to confuse or conflate two opposing traits, overall demonstrating the power of his charismatic authority (Cheek 1989, 101). As such, when Mao conflates their admiration for the ideas of these Western scholars, he tells Snow that his personality cult is justified because all figures want to have this same admiration.

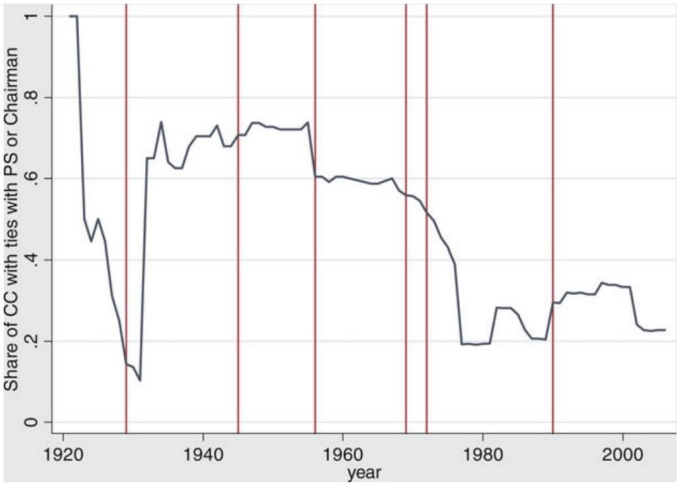
During this process, Mao promoted two figures who became essential in building the cult of personality around Mao: Chen Boda and Kang Sheng. Mao rapidly promoted Chen Boda to become a close confidant specializing in creating Maoist Theory. During this time in Yan'an, Chen and Mao rewrote Party history away from the founders Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao while also weakening the 28 Bolsheviks–Comintern urban-based revolutionaries, instead promoting more loyal revolutionaries like Liu Shaoqi (Dikötter 2019, 99-100). During this process of what would be known as the 1942 Rectification campaign, these figures were labeled as "right opportunists" or "left opportunists," where the correct Party line created by Mao and Chen diverged. This echoed the process Mao would continue to follow after gaining power, particularly during the One Hundred Flowers campaign and the Cultural Revolution, where mass

purges became commonplace. According to historian Timothy Cheek, the Yan'an Rectification Movement was a political education and training effort for Party figures, intellectuals, and artists, and it was like "Bible study" within small groups (Cheek 2021, 880). At the same time, it also included individual study, public confession of sin, a review of personal records by the intelligence services, and public campaigns regarding following Mao as a role model; these campaigns usually led to mass purges like in Yan'an (Cheek 2021, 880). Mao was the overall leader of these campaigns, and he had overall control of the Party's mass media apparatus where Mao became "the most sought-after writer in the entire CCP," and his writings were essential in organizing the rectification movement and eventually creating the cult of Mao (Wylie 1980, 112). However, his other close ally, Kang Sheng, was the leader of the purging efforts where a mass leadership shift occurred in Yan'an, and many Mao allies took over prominent positions within the Politburo and Central Committee. However, according to Leese, these early cult-building efforts were widely supported by the Party due to the battle of legitimacy the CCP was fighting against Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT (Leese 2011, 11). However, Liu Shaoqi–one of Mao's staunch supporters–was relatively public about his misgivings of Mao's cult building early on. In the Leninist Institute in Yenan on August 7, 1939, Liu reflected on the current line of the CCP, in which he argued that the CCP has inherent "fine traditions of the many progressive thinkers and prominent men" but at no point mentioned Mao and the Sinification of Marxism, he avoided mentioning Mao and urged his audience to become "best pupils of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin" but avoided mentioning Mao; at the same time, Liu directly referenced the avoidance of "idol worship" of any individual leader (Wylie 1980, 113). The cult provided a standard signal for the CCP around Mao and his revolutionary successes; for the CCP, Mao was the Lenin and Stalin of their revolution, so he had the revolutionary zeal and charismatic authority to gain

the support of the general cadre system within the Party, they were too concerned about the KMT and survival (Leese 2011, 18-19). The Yan'an cult of Mao is similar to future cults of Mao, with concepts of rectification politics, ritual worship, and the support of many Party cadres. The Yan'an cult also participated in mass purges of factional enemies that Mao and Chen Boda labeled as traitors; in many ways, the weakening of the Comintern-trained orthodox Marxist CCP factions allowed Mao not just to cement his leadership but also establish a cult around his leadership (Dikötter 2019, 100).

Figure 2, "Share of Central Committee with Ties with the Party Secretary General or Chairman" or (PSGI) is a longue durée analysis of factional ties among the top leaders of the CCP and, eventually, the People's Republic of China. It analyzes the factional dominance of each Party Secretary General/Chairman of the CCP. The early CCP was homogeneous, with leadership mainly surrounded by Marxist intellectuals connected through their mutual work experience at Peking University, like Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, and Li Da (Shih et al. 2010, 90). By the mid-1920s, the Party diversified, and Chen Duxiu could not account for the changing dynamics of the Party, from a group of intellectuals to labour and revolutionary activists like Mao; the following leaders who replaced Chen–Qu Qiubai, Xiang Zhongfa, Wang Ming, and Bo Gu never garnered strong factional support within the Party, collective leadership was prominent at this time (Shih et al. 2010, 91-92). This is because these figures were Comintern-trained intellectuals, the "Returned Students"; they were placed into leadership positions by Moscow and never adjusted to the diversifying class of the CCP. On the other hand, Mao could politically move past these figures and use the Rectification movement to consolidate control fully.

Figure 2: **Share of Central Committee with Ties with the Party Secretary General or Chairman (PSGI)**



Notes:

Vertical lines starting from the left:

1. 1929 Xiang Zhongfa appointed Party secretary
2. 1943 Mao officially took over as Party chairman
3. 1956 Eighth Party Congress
4. 1969 Ninth Party Congress
5. 1972 After the Lin Biao Incident
6. 1990 Appointment of Jiang Zemin after 1989

Figure 2: "Share of Central Committee with Ties with the Party Secretary General or Chairman." (Shih et al. 2010, 90).

Through the use of figures like Chen Boda, who consolidated Marxist theory and the reality of Chinese politics by 1938, they moved to the position of equating these concepts with the "Sinification of Marxism," a cultural term employed in these Rectification and Maoist campaigns against the 28 Bolsheviks and others (Wylie 1980, 52). Around the same time, Mao's fundamental philosophical text, "*On Contradiction*," was released in 1937. "*On Contradiction*" is a collection of Maoist lectures in Yan'an into a Marxist text that he believed was limited in China at the time (Wylie 1980, 55). Overall, "*On Contradiction*" is Mao's textual justification for the "Sinification of Marxism," where he argues that Stalin explained the universal character of Lenin in which "Leninism is the Marxism of the era of imperialism" (Mao 1937, 43) and at the same time that Leninism has a particular character because of its "Russified Marxism"

"Russia became the birthplace of the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution" (Mao 1937, 56). Therefore, Leninism was not just a total of Marxism and Russian Bolshevism; it is a qualitatively different form of Marx's original theory (Wylie 1980, 57). Chen Boda and Mao knew this, and in a similar fashion, they did the same with the "Sinification of Marxism". In this regard, Maoism comes from a historical lineage of a Germanic theory integrated into Russian/Bolshevik tradition and then into the Chinese tradition. As a result, Maoist ideas from the military, like "guerrilla warfare," and politics, like "struggle session," became key topics debated in the 7th Party Congress and, according to Wylie, became the "cornerstone of the foundation supporting the legitimacy of his leadership" (1980, 69). Mao, unlike many of the 28 Bolshevik leaders, had military experience, was connected to the ever-changing demographics of the Party, established a domestic ideology related to the reality of the CCP situation, and established a strong faction of supporters that could challenge the 28 Bolsheviks. Overall, Maosim and the Rectification politics became a tool to consolidate Mao's personal authority within the Party, creating an early cult of personality. These early events dramatically weakened the 28 Bolshevik faction and limited collective leadership early within the Party.

1956-1976

After the defeat of the KMT and the proclamation of the People's Republic in 1949, the Mao cult was still recognized in the minimum sense as a legitimization tool for the Party in Yan'an. However, elements of collective leadership started to dramatically, particularly after the seventh party congress in 1945, where many figures of Liu Shaoqi's faction, known as the "Northern Bureau," were inducted into the Central Committee, including Bo Yibo, Peng Zhen,

and Rao Shushi, Liu took full advantage of Mao's blessing to stack the CC with his allies in 1945 (Shih et al. 2010, 95). Mao gave the blessing for a couple of reasons; one is that Mao generally trusted Liu Shaoqi as an essential ally and the number two of the Party (Shih et al. 2010, 95). However, more importantly, Mao saw himself as the grassroots charismatic leader of the Party and the successor of a lineage of Marxist thinkers, which made his position essential. According to Rana Mitter, Maoism was a dynamic hybrid of an ideology, drawing upon Marxism, China's experience, and Mao's personality, creating inherently religious traits (Mitter 2008, 147). Maoism, like Roman Catholicism, was in many ways messianic; it created an image of "charismatic Maoism" where Mao himself became the center of ideological correctness because he was pictured as the heir of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin (Mitter 2008, 145). As a result, Mao created a mode of "individual salvation" through Maoism driven from Mao's personal background and experience during the May 4th Movement, the New Culture Movement, and the historical materialism that created a deterministic view that the CCP is the vehicle of destiny for China (Mitter 2008, 149). Therefore, Mao believed that the general Party was connected to him because he represented truth and that correct ideas didn't come from the elite–he achieved the Chinese revolution (Leese 2011, 69-70).

After the death of Stalin in 1953 and Khrushchev's Secret Speech, in which he denounced Stalin and his cult of personality, Mao was significantly impacted. Mao became deeply concerned about multiple rising "contradictions" he believed were occurring within the Party, particularly of rightists and the liberalization of the socialist world, mainly ignited by Khrushcev's speech (Shambaugh 2021, 53). Party cadres like Liu Shaoqi had recognized the cult's dangers. However, the immediate gains of implementing the Mao image in propaganda warfare against Chiang Kai-shek had greater value then (Leese 2011, 37-38). Though collective

leadership may have increased within the CCP during the early period of the PRC, Mao was still the Paramount leader and had the authority to denounce figures even if he was in the minority. Two examples demonstrate these effects. Firstly, though it shared general support from many factional leaders in the CC, Mao disliked Finance Minister Bo Yibo's proposed New Tax System (Teiwes 1990, 62). The new system introduced two innovations that would become serious issues for Mao: the principle of "equality between public and private enterprises" and altering tax payments from wholesale enterprise tax to a "factory turnover tax," which eliminated the business tax paid by "private wholesale enterprises" (Teiwes 1990, 62). Mao disliked these issues, arguing that Bo needed to "learn some dialectics" and that Bo Yibo was pressured to leave his position as Minister of Finance (Teiwes 1990, 64). Secondly, due to the increased industrial output from the First Five Year Plan (1953-1957), acute shortages of agricultural products were emerging due to the agricultural sector lagging behind the industry–resulting in an intense debate within the CCP leadership (Shambaugh 2021, 48). Two camps emerged in this debate: one was Mao and his solution of continued intense collectivization of agriculture; on the other was a figure known as Deng Zihui, who wanted to slow down collectivization and allow peasants to choose what crops they planted; major figures within the Party like Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi sided with Deng Zihui due to his experience as head of the Central Committee Rural Work Department; however, Mao sidelined him and denounced him as a rightest and collectivization continued (Shambaugh 2021, 49). These events dramatically impacted Mao's conception of power, particularly his concern with his own power. Chinese society's rise of "contradictions" and rightists is the justification Mao used to consolidate his power further.

One Hundred Flowers Campaign and Great Leap Forward

"Even the Party Center produced bureaucratism, why can't the site produce it too? What kind of people has the Party Centre produced? The Party Center has produced Chen Duxiu, produced Zhang Guotao, produced Gao Gang and Rao Shushi; it has also produced Li Lisan Wang Ming, so many! So this principle is mistaken" - Mao 1957 (Mao Zedong, MacFarquhar, Cheek, and Eu 1989, 170).

"Moreover, the roots of the capitalist class have not been severed; the capitalist class has not yet removed its cap; it still requires a period of thought remodeling before the cap can be removed" - Mao 1957 (Mao Zedong, MacFarquhar, Cheek, and Eu 1989, 155).

In 1956-1957, Mao and the Party leadership convened the 8th Party Congress. An air of accomplishment was around Beijing; though the Party had to deal with many "rightist" contractions, they survived, and the congress proclaimed that "socialist transformation had been achieved" (Shambaugh 2021, 53). However, Mao's address came with a chilling warning: "We still have our shortcomings. Among many of our comrades, there are still standpoints and styles of work that are contrary to Marxism-Leninism–namely, subjectivism in their way of thinking, bureaucracy in their way of work, and sectarianism in organizational questions….Such serious shortcomings in our ranks must be vigorously corrected by strengthening ideological education in the Party" (Shambaugh 2021, 53). This quote is the precursor to Mao's famous four-hour speech entitled "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People," from which the two beginning quotes are derived.

According to Timothy Cheek, the unconventionality of these speeches is a deliberate process by Mao because the sometimes incoherent and often mysteriously layered language highlights the power of his charismatic authority as the font of wisdom, as the authority for political action, and underscores the weight of his charisma (Cheek 1989, 101). Though they may be mysterious, they are layered in politics, and Mao's concerns are about where he believes the CCP is heading and his own personal power. Mao, extremely concerned about the Soviet Union's denunciation of Stalin's "cult of personality" during their 20th Party Congress, the liberal uprisings happening in Poland and Hungary, and the growing rightist contradictions within the CCP gave a summation of various issues confronting the CCP. Mao continuously distinguished between the "People" and the "Enemy." However, many academics view this as a trap, and Mao's solution to the contradictions of the CCP was to welcome intellectual criticism and their feedback (Shambaugh 2021, 54). However, two elements ultimately caused the end of this free criticism; one was the idea that Mao was trapping these figures and that the criticism was very vocal (Shambaugh 2021, 56). Second, for many lower-level Party cadres, the Mao cult from the Yan'an Rectification Movement took hold of their political and cultural psyche; many lower Party cadres wanted to help Mao and fight off challengers like inter-party democracy (Leese 2011, 54). Overall, this resulted in the anti-rightist campaign, resulting in mass arrests and reeducation campaigns. However, referring back to figure 2, Mao's total factional connection with the Central Committee actually shrank at the 8th Party Congress. In most regards, Mao was still the central leader, and his faction still was dominant within the Party; after the Anti-Japanese War dynamics changed, Liu Shaoqi's "Northern Bureau" faction became more prominent, and other figures now like Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang were becoming prominent figures in the Party, weakening Mao's overall power (Shih et al. 2010, 93). Though this does not mean the Mao

cult didn't weaken, 60% of the Central Committee was attached to Mao, particularly those lower cadres whom Mao was close to (Shih et al. 2010, 93). As a result, many ritual aspects of cult development were occurring. During and after the Anti-Rightist Campaign, regular self-examinations, mutual criticism, group study via small group study to large meetings were taken place was built into the organizational routine for all cadres–based on the Yan'an model–these cadres had to read Mao Zedong Thought (Whyte 1974, 65). The Anti-Rightist Movement dramatically weakened the new elites within China. Mao still had substantial influence within the Party, and the cult was still influential. Though Mao believed the CCP was the core leadership of all Chinese people where "All words and deeds departing from socialism are completely wrong" (Leese 2011, 62), one could argue that "departing from socialism" is more of a departure from Mao's line, in this sense, Mao is the core of Chinese leadership.

The Hundred Flowers, the Anti-Rightist campaign, and Mao's further consolidation of parts of his cult of personality were fundamental for Mao personally and dramatic for the CCP structurally. The cult of personality was to play an immortal role in Mao's increasingly utopian search for a Chinese path of development (Leese 2011, 66). Particularly, Mao proposed a way to dramatically increase Chinese production so that China could surpass the United Kingdom and be comparable with the United States in production, that being the Great Leap Forward (GLF) campaign (1958-1960). The GLF was particularly a developmental exercise, but it caused factional divisions and major changes to the leadership of the Party due to its effects on the PRC state. The nature of the GLF can be simply defined through a Maoist essay delivered in 1945 entitled "The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountain," a voluntarist text in which human will is a fundamental factor in society and the universe, it can move mountains (Mao, 1945). The Communist Party has the will to make a fundamental change against Imperialism and feudalism

and dramatically change Chinese civilization; the Chinese people with the Party can clear any mountain (Mao, 1945). The initial concept of the GLF came from the Party's annual "retreat" meeting in Beidaihe, where the Party initially approved a mass collectivization campaign and forming "people's communes," people's whole lives would be dedicated to the commune the very embodiment of communism where wages disappeared and "workpoints" established (Shambuagh 2021, 58). In December 1957, the National Planning Conference adopted the "Plan to Overtake and Surpass Great Britain in the Output of Steel and Other Major Industrial Products." However, the cadres achieved these bold desires from the central government through a major campaign of exaggerated statistics and mass mobilization of citizens. Agricultural production was dramatically exaggerated, while peasants were taken off the land to build major infrastructure projects by hand, like dams and roads; think of the Maoist vision of the Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountain essay (Shambaugh 2021, 59). At the same time, the target the "Four Pests" campaign occurred: rats, flies, mosquitoes, and sparrows were targeted in mass extermination campaigns; however, this had a major impact on the agricultural sector because of the dramatic increase of the locust population, damaging crops (Shambaugh 2021, 60). Collected by Wei Li and Dennis Yang, Figure 3 demonstrates grain output from 1957-1961 took a substantial decline; through their quantitative research, they argue it was due to multiple factors, including poor weather conditions, lack of peasants actually working on farms, and the increase of locust (Li and Yang 2005, 864).

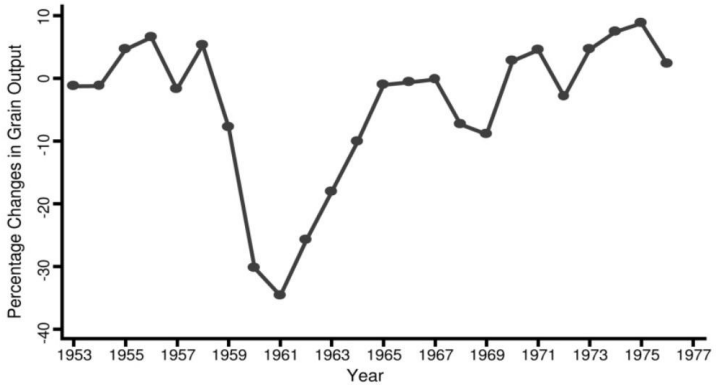


Figure 3 (Li and Yang 2005, 864).

At the same time, as the economic complexities were occurring within the communes, major cult rituals were being organized, and Party cadres and normal people had to go through forms of cult development. For example, in the case of Ma Kan-pu, a junior economic cadre was organized into a small study group during most of the 1950s. Specifically during the GLF, campaigns like the "counter rightist sympathies in society" campaign were tasked through group study to route out people who were dissenting regarding the poor output performance of the GLF; however, at the same time, this campaign became a key cult of Mao tool (Whyte 1974, 71). Through small groups, Ma's unit was organized to read articles supporting the main policy line of the GLF, listened to "mobilization reports" speeches given to the cadres in a very similar vein to ideas from Mao's personal essays, held examination meetings regarding the texts where they also had to reveal any dissenting opinion they may have or if others do, and organized to write big character posters containing accusations against others (Whyte 1974, 71-72). Massive flattery inflation was directed to Mao by cadres, particularly after the Beidaihe Conference, where Mao argued that his cult of personality was a "correct cult" (Leese 2011, 71). For example, Ke Qingshi, the first secretary of the Shanghai Party Committee and a major supporter

of the GLF policy, proposed to follow Mao "blindly" and even to the point of "superstitious belief" and at the same time Kang Shang argued that Mao Zedong Thought should be followed as the "apex" of thought (Leese 2011, 71). This mythical language around Mao particularly took hold on lower-level cadres who would compete amongst each other to pursue the economic statistics of the GLF campaign, and many were lying about their results for Mao (Leese 2011, 73). By the GLF campaign, Mao became very absolutist, and disagreement within the Party about the trajectory of Party policy on things like the GLF was something Mao wouldn't tolerate; political power remained superior to theoretical consistency (Leese 2011, 71).

Lushan and the Total Distrust Within Party Dynamics

By around 1958, however, and the Wuhan Conference, Party officials were becoming concerned about the failures of the GLF campaign, particularly its effects on the countryside, with famine conditions becoming more prevalent to the central leadership of the Party (Joffe 1975, 8). This created a divide within the Party, a divide Mao didn't win, and his position within the Party was dramatically affected, resulting in Mao relinquishing his ceremonial position of Chairman of the Republic; scholars argue that his wasn't a voluntary process demonstrating the cohesive effect collective leadership had at this time (Joffe 1975, 8). Though the true explosion of Mao's factional battles happened at the Lushan Plenum in 1959, the military general and hero of the Anti-Japanese War, Korean War commander, and Defence Minister Peng Dehuai, along with other cadres launched an assault on Mao's policy of the GLF through Peng's "Letter of Opinion" written to Mao (Joffe 1975, 9). The difficulties for the Party, according to Peng Dehuai's letter, were twofold: one was that there was a habit of "exaggerating miracles" in

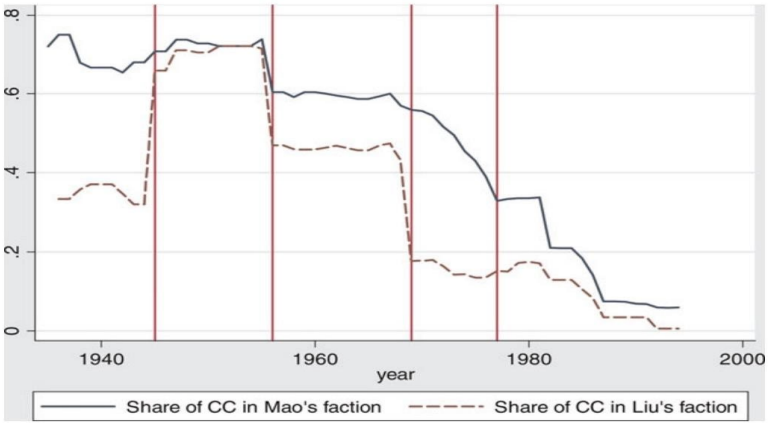
reference to the fake reports of grain production, which, according to Peng, created “tremendous harm” and that, due to these exaggerations, economic waste happened because “we considered ourselves rich while actually, we were still poor” (Joffe 1975, 10). Secondly, the Party became afflicted with “fanaticism,” which allowed it to create “leftist mistakes” in its haste to enter the era of communism; the Party forgot the mantra of “seeking truth from fact” and neglected “scientific and economic laws” (Joffe 1975, 10).

This direct response by Peng towards not just the failures of the GLF but also an attack on the cult itself demonstrated the Party leadership's inner feelings against the Maoist line. It also demonstrated, though seven years early, the explosion that would eventually happen with the Cultural Revolution, the following of Mao, and the weakening of collective leadership. However, the Peng Dehuai letter had a dramatic effect on the cult; the letter evaporated Mao's conciliatory attitude, and though he became more absolutist, Mao still "generally" followed the code of civility generated by collective leadership (Leese 2011, 73). This disappeared after Peng's letter. Mao replaced Peng with an ally, Lin Biao, who became an advent supporter of the Mao cult-building exercises. Lin created his own rectification movement within the military through the use of the Little Red Book, quotations of Mao that the PLA had to memorize, which for both Mao and Lin were tools to protect themselves from the distrust they felt among their colleagues (Leese 2011, 74) Party campaigns like "learn from the PLA" went throughout society; around the same time China became a nuclear power which dramatically changed the PLA's conception of its own importance, these acts laid the groundwork for Mao to lay the "spiritual nuclear explosion" of Mao Zedong Thought amongst his enemies with the Cult of Personality (Leese 2011, 86).

The Cultural Revolution

Though Mao's absolutist power seemingly declined after the failure of the Anti-Rightist campaign and GLF, Mao was not down for the count. Particularly during this time, figures like Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping substantially increased their own personal and factional powers within the CCP; this included a push for small market incentives within the agricultural sector to incentivize more production (Shih et al. 2010, 96). Figure 4, "The Relative Influence of Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi in the Central Committee, 1935-1995", which analyzes the rise and fall of the factional ties to Mao and Liu Shaoqi, demonstrates that Liu Shaoqi–Mao's designated successor–maintained a sizable factional presence within the CC after 1956, while Mao still had a major influence and cult development was still going on, particularly within the PLA by Lin Biao, Liu had the collective leadership authority to pursue policy that was counter to the Maoist line (Shih et al. 2010, 95-96).

Figure 4: **The Relative Influence of Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi in the Central Committee, 1935–1995**



Notes:
Vertical lines starting from the left:
1. 1945 Seventh Party Congress
2. 1956 Eighth Party Congress
3. 1969 Ninth Party Congress
4. 1977 11th Party Congress

Figure 4: “The Relative Influence of Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi in the Central Committee, 1935-1995.” (Shih et al. 2010, 95).

This created a serious concern for Mao, similar to what happened to Stalin after his death in 1953. Mao was convinced that the Party would reject and denounce him upon his death, and he was worried about the problem of sustaining the initial commitment and enthusiasm needed for the fulfillment of the revolution's long term goals; these new elites were losing the revolutionary drive, mainly targeted at Liu Shaoqi's "Northern Bureau faction" (Thompson 1988, 100). These concerns were particularly symbolized by Peng Dehuai's letter and became the precursor to the Cultural Revolution in 1966.

According to Rana Mitter, the Cultural Revolution was still a search for change in China derived from the May Fourth Movement; it became a debate between the grassroots/direct cult development of lower Party cadres and the PLA vs the elites within the Communist Party (Mitter 2008, 152). Mao and his allies Lin Biao, Chen Boda, Keng Sheng, and his wife Jiang Qing were aware of these developments within the Party; therefore, to mobilize the youth and launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to challenge the Party figures who sidelined Mao and launched a remobilizing revolution, Mao went swimming in the Yangtze River, this mobilized the Red Guard to go an destroy the Four Olds: old customs, old habits, old ideas, and old culture. In May 1966, at a CCP Politburo meeting, Mao spoke of his worries about a capitalist coup that was emerging within the Party, and he doubted the reliability of the Party apparatus to counter it; however, Liu Shaoqi opposed this line, and a very public argument commenced with Liu (Leese 2011, 122). The Beijing Party leadership was accused of fundamental errors in political lines and plotted a capitalist restoration; figures like Lin Biao talked of keeping the “proletarian

dictatorship" and postulated the unquestioning recognition of the supreme role of Mao–in this way, Lin was worshiping Mao–which resulted in Liu Shaoqi and his faction collapsing, being sent to the countryside (Leese 2011, 124). At the same time, figures like Chen Boda, publicly praised Mao as the guide for the Cultural Revolution, a form of flattery inflation started to emerge through these comments directed at Mao's greatness,

"Mao Tse-tung's thought is the guide for China's great proletarian cultural revolution. Comrade Mao Tse-tung has creatively developed the Marxist-Leninist theory of literature and art. Using the proletarian world outlook, he has systematically and thoroughly solved the problems on our literary and art front. At the same time, he has systematically and thoroughly blazed for us a completely new trail for the proletarian cultural revolution" (Chen Boda, 1966).

Chen's use of language such as "Mao Zedong thought is the guide for China" and commenting on Mao's "creativity" and genius is a primary example of the flattery inflation and Chen's promotion of the cult through his own personal devotion. Figures like Peng Zhen, Bo Yabo, and Deng Xiaoping were sent to the countryside to work, while Liu Shaoqi was sent to "house arrest," where he was denied medical care regarding his diabetes, dying shortly after in 1969. These figures were purged because of their attempt at marketization and their sideling of Mao to pursue this policy. Referring back to Figure 3, we see a dramatic drop in Liu Shaoqi's factional connection within the Central Committee; this is for two reasons: one is that many started to be purged, particularly in 1966. However, secondly, we start to see Mao rapidly promoting not just old personal allies from Yan'an like Chen Boda to propaganda chief, Kang Sheng to Vice Chairman, and Jiang Qing (Leese 2011, 123), but also lower level revolutionary

cadres were promoted to the CC throughout the Cultural Revolution (Chen et al. 2024, 357). This was one of the highest turnover rates in any period of time within the CC (Li 2016, 80). Notably, Mao started to promote figures from tainted factions like the Fourth Front Army, who were targeted as "rightists" during the Hundred Flowers Campaign because during the Civil War the Fourth Front Army split with Maos First Front Army; Mao viewed these figures as weak, as such, with the massive turnover of elites, these cadres would become the new heads of some departments; however, none were very experienced (Shih 2022, 55-56). In order to discern the effect of Mao's strategy on the Fourth Front Army faction, Victor Shih calculated the predicted probability of their purges and promotions during the Cultural Revolution by calculating predicted probabilities, the individual cadres rank is set at the lieutenant general level, while the other control variables are set at their means (Shih 2022, 78). Demonstrated through Figure 5, this work demonstrates that during the 9th Party Congress in 1969, Fourth Front Army members only had an 8% chance of being removed from the CC; while members from the First and Second Front Armies had a 43 and 39 percent chance of purging respectively. Similarly, including both CC and non-CC members, from the First and Second Front Armies had a 38 and 37 percent chance of being removed from command or of being jailed, respectively, during the Cultural Revolution (Shih 2022, 78). An officer of the same rank from the FFA, however, was purged with only a 24 percent probability (Shih 2022, 78). A similar picture is demonstrated for promotions during the CR, Fourth Front Army members according to Shih during the CR had a 50 percent chance of being promoted compared to the other army groups (Shih 2022, 79). As such, this demonstrates the "coalition of the weak" Mao surrounded himself with during the height of his cult of personality, weak allies who could not tarnish his power; as such, allowing him to hold more power compared to the collective.

TABLE 3.3 *Predicted probabilities of being purged and promoted during the CR for a lieutenant general in the First Front Army, Second Front Army, and Fourth Front Army*

	Removed from CC at 9th PC	Removed from Command during CR	Promoted Beyond CC during CR	Promoted During CR
First Front Army	0.43	0.38	0.18	0.25
	[0.23 0.64]	[0.26 0.51]	[0.03 0.32]	[0.13 0.36]
Second Front Army	0.39	0.37	0.22	0.10
	[0.02 0.76]	[0.17 0.56]	[-0.08 0.53]	[0 0.21]
Fourth Front Army	0.08	0.24	0.5	0.31
	[-0.1 0.26]	[0.12 0.37]	[0.07 0.9]	[0.16 0.46]

Note: 95 percent confidence intervals in []

Figure 5: "Predicted Probabilities of being Purged and Promoted During the CR for a lieutenant general in the First Front Army, Second Front Army, and Fourth Front Army." (Shih 2022, 78).

Overall, the collective leadership practiced in the 1950s particularly declined during the Cultural Revolution, and the cult of personality became a cult of the individual at the expense of others. Unlike the cult in Yan'an, which was about emancipation, this cult's primary goal was absolute loyalty (Leese 2011, 89).

With a substantial decline in collective leadership, the Maoist "correct personality cult" was widely promoted throughout society. Before, particularly by Lin Biao, who invented the ritual object the "Little Red Book," which became a staple of the Mao cult. Though it would be called a "direct top-down" production of a cult of personality, the Little Red Book became a tool for Red Guards for bottom-up cult production, forcing people to read and memorize the quotations and use their own interpretive views of the book as justifications for their actions (Leese 2011, 90). Lin Biao was a smart political operative. He disliked the collective leadership or "court politics" of the 1950s, and he tied himself to Mao by adopting the ideological slogans of "raising high the banner of Mao Zedong Thought" and "closely following Mao's political

line," Lin wanted to avoid the pitfalls of what he believed collective leadership generated (Leese 2011, 90). Lin reformed the military educational system, arguing that the PLA should follow Marxist ideology blindly, particularly the "military science of Mao Zedong Thought" and practiced within the PLA the "lively study of Mao Zedong Thought," which included worshiping Mao, highly theatrical performances, oral presentations of their dislike of imperialists, consuming movies, comics about Mao, and following the specific path of figures like Norman Bethune which required intense study of Mao Zedong Thought and his other texts.

For Lin, a loyal and politically stable military will be secured through a "spiritual nuclear bomb of Mao Zedong Thought" (Leese 2011, 100-101). Widespread feelings of Mao were stimulated through these processes. During the Cultural Revolution, the state produced 10.8 billion Mao texts, posters, and other objects, and a ritualistic style of studying and applying Maoist thought through interacting with these objects appeared (Leese 2011, 108). Many figures who attempted to preserve factionalism, like Luo Ronghuan, Deng Xiaoping, and Tan Zheng, either died too early to stop the production of Little Red Books or were too late to make a substantive difference, resulting in mass purges (Leese 2011, 110). Mao's cult wasn't just a creation of Lin Biao but derived from his highly charismatic authority. For many, the Mao cult was symbolized by the eight mass receptions done for Mao from August to November 1966; these receptions had Red Guards taking "pilgrimages" to go see Mao (Leese 2011, 128). With Chen Boda being promoted to the propaganda service, a dramatic increase in the mentions of Mao in the media, similar to Nazi policy regarding reference to Hitler, created a "hype" around Mao, helping his charismatic authority that transcended across the country (Leese 2011, 129). Mao became an object of worship. Mao's body became a source of political power; the physical

appearance of Mao, alone, without speaking, could drown out any other speeches and cause mass hysteria, quasi-religious, but in a highly secular system (Tu 2022, 508).

This flattery inflation by Mao was, of course, deliberate; Mao saw this as an extra bureaucratic source of power that did not rely on recognition from other Party elites (Marquez 2022, 20). An example of these massive "hype" or "flattery inflation" rallies was in August of 1966 when 1 million people from all across China made their way to see Mao. The speeches from leaders like Chen Boda were drowned out by calls to see the Chairman (Leese 2011, 131). These meetings were chaotic; they worshiped Mao as a living secular God, who, according to Rana Mitter, was still just a secular man who required "cheerleaders" for the cult to work; the "love" derived from the Red Guards for Mao Zedong Thought wasn't something based on rationality, but for Mao and his close allies it was fundamental (Mitter 2008, 155). Unlike Hitler's mass meetings, which were highly organized and directed towards Hitler's massive speeches, these eight mass meetings were chaotic, with barely any speeches. Instead, Mao's silence added to the allure of his character. Though similar to Hitler, Mao's cult was ideological totalism, which, according to Robert Lifton, is the "coming together of immoderate ideology with equally immoderate individual traits," essentially an extremist meeting ground between people and ideas (Lifton 1961, 419). Messianic ideologies like Maoism and Nazism allow this feeling to become a cult through processes like Milieu control: total control over individual communication, and mystical manipulation: initiated from above, seeking to provoke specific patterns of behavior and emotion in such a way that these will appear to have arisen spontaneously from within the environment, a "higher purpose" a mystical aura around the leader (Lifton 1961, 420-421), and finally the "cult of confession": an "absolute obsession with personal confession," the Red Guard became obsessed with persona confession as a mode for personal

purification–that sharing of confession enthusiasms can create an orgiastic sense of oneness (Lifton 1961, 425).

Referring back to Ma Kan-pu and his own cadre unit in 1966, Ma's unit sensed a major new Rectification campaign because of the changing party dynamics, particularly in the propaganda department, and at the same time, regular meetings began to be held every evening to study the flood of articles criticizing Northern Bureau officals, and sometimes additional study sessions had to be arranged during the mornings (Whyte 1974, 77). After the fall of the "Beijing Party Committee" cadres started spending half of each day in work and the other half studying the documents of the Cultural Revolution (Whyte 1974, 77). Newly formed Red Guard units came in and conducted propaganda activities; the Red Guards became more of a nuisance for Ma's unit once in 1967 the Provincial Party Committee capitulated to the Red Guards, with provincial leadership gone top cadre orders disappeared, all regular work in Ma's unit ceased while the Red Guard turned from general propaganda to planning attacks on specific cadres (Whyte 1974, 78). Nobody was in control of the cadre system, and eventually Ma and other members of his unit had to conduct self-criticism and examination of Mao Zedong Thought, even from time to time they were subjected to mass criticism meetings run by the Red Guards, or they were escorted to mass rallies (Whyte 1974, 79). Ma Kan-pu, like many cadres at the time, was a competent and loyal figure; however, the onset of the Cultural Revolution and the abuse these cadres faced by the Red Guards resulted in suicide, sudden deaths, or a brain drain effect with figures leaving for the safety of Hong Kong, like Ma himself (Whytle 1974, 80). The Cultural Revolutions disruptive effect became noticeable as the struggle extended into factories and communities in late 1966; because according to year-end official reports, the gross output value of industry increased by 20 percent, this gain was proclaimed as the sharpest rise in three

years–as such bureaucrats were lying about meeting ambitious production quotas (Cheng 1967, 150). In cities such as Shanghai workers were disrupted by Red Guard units taking control of factories forcing struggle sessions on figures (Cheng 1967, 154). As such, when bureaucrats are forced to participate in struggle sessions instead of working, when the system that organizes the cadre system collapses because of purging, and young Red Guards are roaming the streets disrupting labour, and resulting in the remainder of the bureaucracy so terrified that they lie regarding their production quotas–this resulted in a substantial decline in state and bureaucratic capacity. The state lost its control on violence during the height of Mao's cult of personality, the whims of state leaders were not followed with arbitrary decision makings being conducted by the Red Guards.

At its height, the Cultural Revolution saw a whole generation of youth placing their importance on Mao, who beat and killed people who in any way opposed the Maoist line or were just at the wrong place at the wrong time (Leese 2011, 139). However, what extensive flattery inflation creates is distrust, distrust in your own allies. This is what exactly happened to Mao; at the second plenum in 1970, Chen Boda announced that he developed a theory of Mao's Marxist-Leninst "genius" and that line should be followed; Mao believed this flattery was in reality to create an allusion to letting his guard down so Lin Biao and Chen Boda could take over the country (Whyte 1974, 292-293). Mao, through his paranoia but also valid critiques, believed Lin and Chen were trying to perpetuate a weak Party so that a new mass organization led by the PLA and Lin could take over the country, particularly after the death of Lin Biao in 1971 Mao initiated a full critique of Chen Boda–a once trusted ally–which resulted in Chen losing all political power by 1973 (Whyte 1974, 293). During the 70s, many of the heights of the Cultural Revolution started to decline, and people, particularly the Red Guards, started to distrust Mao

because of his purging of once trusted allies. Meanwhile, figures like Deng Xiaoping started to be rehabilitated. Referring back to Figure 4, we even start to see a decline in CC's factional connection to Mao; this is because of the purging of his own allies due to the over-extension of the flattery inflation and Mao's distrust. By Mao's death in 1976, only about 40% of Party cadres were in the Mao faction, still substantial but not the same as the heights of the start of the Cultural Revolution.

Mao's Sovereign's Dilemma

Mao's sovereign dilemma demonstrates his deliberate choice to centralize his leadership by purging opposing factions such as Liu Shaoqi's Northern Bureau. Mao, as a figure who believed he was the "core" of the Party and the Chinese Revolution, became concerned once other factions were checking his power; as such, Mao mobilized his allies and purged thousands of cadres during the Cultural Revolution. Overall, the Mao era demonstrated the height of what a personality cult can achieve, and that was through Mao's deliberate purging of opposing factions. Mao believed that the cult, initially just a legitimacy tactic, could bring extra power to himself in a period where he thought Liu Shaoqi was trying to weaken his legacy. Mao's dilemma was about the legacy of his leadership; he didn't want to fall into the same fate as Stalin. As a result, the Cult of Mao was a tool for the Party and Mao's personal resilience, for which the Party drifted from the original goal of the revolution. However, what resulted in the decline of Liu was the rise of the cult of personality, and with that, all the problems of the cult, including bureaucratic inefficiency, represented by the story of Ma Kan-pu, the decline in bureaucratic

confidence, and the lack of the ability of the state to monopolize violence during the heights of the Cultural Revolution.

Chapter 4: “Dengists”

The Architect of Post-Mao Collective Leadership: Deng Xiaoping

The chaos of the Mao era created structural problems for the state. Though in the short term, political repression may effectively deter disloyalty by raising the cost of continued resistance, repression can have a long-term coercive effect on citizens' anti-government behavior; Mao tied his personal reputation to the Party, the violence of the Cultural Revolution, which undermined Mao's legitimacy, also damaged the institutions of the state (Wang 2021, 463-464). At the same time, Mao promoted Cultural Revolutionaries into the Central Committee; these figures tended to be younger and inexperienced at governing (Chen et al. 2024, 357). In that regard, after the death of Mao, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and the Tangshan Earthquake in 1976, the Party had serious problems coming into the "post-Mao" era. How could a Party that went through intense factional conflict and mobilized itself through forming a cult of personality around its central leader truly reform itself? Though Mao's designated successor, Hua Guofeng, worked to purge the Gang of Four, making them the scapegoats for the worst aspects of the Cultural Revolution, and readjusted CCP balance of factional power by rehabilitating pre-Cultural Revolution cadres, though this had already started to happen after the heights of the Cultural Revolution (Chen et al. 2024, 350). It was primarily Deng Xiaoping who reformed the CCP, back towards a collective leadership and away from the "winner takes all" narrative of the Mao era.

Through the agency of Deng, who, according to Ezra Vogel, wanted to reform the "structures of power" within the CCP, in which leadership must be worked through consensus, through allowing older cadres to return to power, factional politics resumed (Vogel 2011, 381). Deng had to build coalitions with rival factions to build policy through closed-door practices within the Zhongnanhai (Vogel 2011, 381). Though this wasn't an immediate success for Deng, who also had to contend with Hua Guofeng, though the returned cadres like Chen Yun publicly denounced Hua's "Two Whatevers" policy, Hua held onto power (Shambaugh 2021, 104). By July 1977, an official CC document was issued, restoring Deng to the Standing Committee of the Politburo, the party's vice chairman, the vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, and the vice premier (Document Research Center of the CCP CC 2004). After that, Deng, Hua, Ye Jianying, Chen Yun, and Li Xiannian began to appear in public together as the collective leadership of China (Shih 2022, 140). Deng's alliance with Li was clearly motivated: Li represented the most significant single bloc in the military that had close historical ties with Deng (Shih 2022, 140). For his own part, Li likely saw little choice besides supporting Deng because so many older cadres had their allegiance to Deng. In this regard, represented by the shift of Li Xiannian toward Deng, the Party was shifting towards the ideas of Deng Xiaoping and away from the brutality and Party weakening during the Mao era. This gave Deng even more influence and power to make fundamental changes to the country. From Deng Xiaoping's Selected Works, Deng Xiaoping made a speech to leading members of the CCP Standing Committee entitled, "We Must Form a Promising Collective Leadership That will Carry Out Reform." In this speech, Deng argues,

"We should establish a new third generation of leaders worthy of the name. These leaders should win the trust of the people and the Party members. People don't necessarily have to be

pleased with each and every member of the leading group, but they have to be pleased with the group as a collective. They may have complaints of one sort or another about each member of the leading group, but if they are pleased with the group as a collective, that will be all right. For the second generation of leaders, I can be considered as the group leader, but the group is still a collective. By and large, the people are pleased with our collective, because we have carried out the policies of reform and opening to the outside world, put forward the line of concentrating on modernization and brought about tangible results. The third generation of leaders must likewise win the trust of the people and bring about tangible results. We must never close our doors. China can never go back to the days of isolationism. Isolationism brought about disasters like the “cultural revolution”. Under those circumstances it was impossible to develop the economy, improve the people’s lives or increase the strength of the country. The world today is progressing by leaps and bounds; changes are taking place from one day to the next, especially in the realm of science and technology. It will be difficult for us to catch up” (Deng Xiaoping Selected Works, 1989).

Deng established the primary contradiction for the Party in this speech: economic development. When Deng argues, "We must never close our doors," this is part of the liberalization of the "reform and opening" period of the post-Mao era. However, the essential aspect of this new era is the collective and Deng's recognition of the collective–this is the reformed "structures of power" Deng created within the CCP. "For the second generation of leaders, I can be considered as the group leader, but the group is still a collective," Deng publicly recognizes the concept of the "first among equals" that generates collective leadership within the CCP and such, they are creating greater state success because "we have carried out the policies of reform and opening to the outside world, put forward the line of concentrating on modernization and brought about

tangible results." As such, Deng argues that because the collective reformed the Chinese system and followed the new ideological line of "reform and opening," the state has improved. Now, Deng argues that it is the job of the "third generation" of CCP leaders to continue the reform process; however, Deng acknowledges the transfer of the collective leadership from the second to the third; as such, the collective can change. This is a dramatic change from Mao's absolutist rule.

By the 11th Party Congress in 1977, the factional balance of power shifted away from Hua: a new Central Committee was elected with a 30% decline in military representation as well as a new Politburo Standing Committee with Deng allies like Ye Jianying, Li Xiannian, and Hu Yaobang being admitted while the only Politburo members Hua could count on were Mao's former bodyguard and Director of the CCP General Office General Wang Dongxing, Beijing Mayor Wu De, Beijing Military Region commander General Chen Xilian, and Minister of Agriculture Ji Denggui, though most by the 1980s were denominated (Shambaugh 2021, 104). Under Deng, this meant that though he started to demote the Mao era elite, these figures weren't sent to the countryside like under Mao, instead, many, like Hua Guofeng were kept in the CC, resulting in a greater diversity of factions within the CC starting under Deng (Chen et al. 2024, 361). Figure 6 demonstrates the factional ties between two figures, Hua Guofang Mao's designated successor and Hu Yaobang a close confidant of Deng Xiaoping. We can see through figure 6 that Hua by the 1980s started to see a decline of already a small factional base compared to someone like Hu Yaobang, who was part of a wide factional connection with Deng and the growing list of reform technocratic cadres and old Northern Bureau rehabilitated faction members (Shih et al. 2010). This demonstrates not just Hua Guofengs limited experience in the

upper echelons of CCP politics but his inability to expand that factional connection by getting caught in the middle between the Gang of Four and the Reformists.

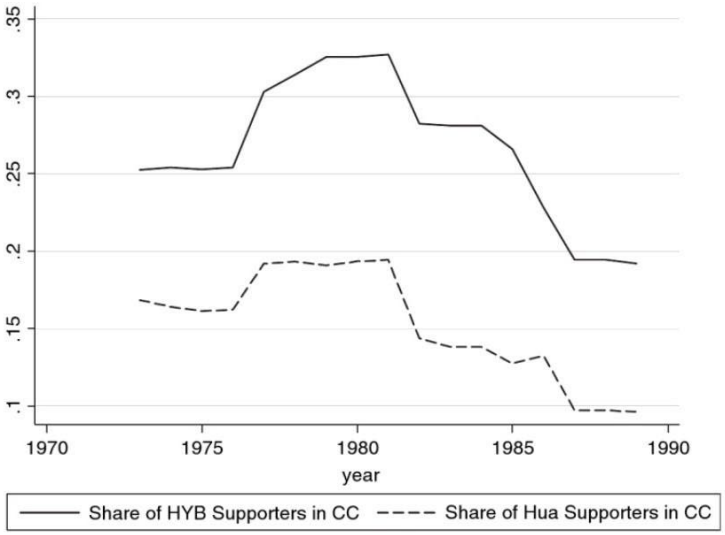


FIGURE 3.5. The share of Central Committee members with common experience with Hu Yaobang and Hua Guofeng, 1970–1990.

Figure 6: "The Share of Central Committee Members with Common Experience with Hu Yaobang and Hua Guofeng, 1970-1990. (Shih et al. 2010, 66).

Deng through his factional connections was able to maneuver against Hua, not just through rehabilitation of his allies, but placing these young cadres into powerful positions. Notably symbolized by placing Hu Yaobang into the position of Director of the Central Committee Organization Department–the institution responsible for Party personnel assignments nationwide, such that Deng and Hu controlled the cadres as a result controlling the trajectory of the Party (Shambaugh 2021, 105). Though power seemed firmly in Deng's hands, he never publicly criticized Hua and allowed him to retain some ceremonial powers–this is the essence of Deng's consensus building. This is what Victor Shih calls the "coalition of the weak," the system Mao created in which no one could completely control the CCP after his death–he promoted weak figures like Hua Guofeng into power who had little factional connection, resulting in a

power sharing relationship within the Party where nobody had total power. (Shih 2022, 139). After his rehabilitation, Deng himself also had incentives to maintain the power-sharing arrangement, thus inaugurating an era of power sharing between Deng and a handful of "immortals," Deng becoming the "first among equals" in this relationship. The subsequent decades of policy oscillation due to disagreement between the "immortals" doubtless frustrated Deng, but it also institutionalized politics within the party to some extent (Shih 2022, 139).

According to Shih, In the 1978–1982 period, Deng rehabilitated scores of Long Marchers from the other front armies and thousands of more junior revolutionary veterans, who filled high-level positions in newly reconstituted party and state organs, including members of Liu Shaoqi's doomed faction such as Peng Zhen, Lu Dingyi, and Bo Yibo (Shih 2022, 141). As demonstrated by figure 7 new entrants into the Politburo in the 1956 8th Party Congress, as well as new and existing CC members in the 11th Party Congress, had similar profiles, having joined the party around the time of the CCP-KMT split in 1927. The wave of rehabilitation that began after the purge of Lin Biao and continued with the "Dengist" rehabilitation produced a Politburo leadership cohort dominated by revolutionary veterans with an average of forty-seven years of party membership and an average of 38.5 years of party membership at the CC level by the 12th Party Congress. At the same time, figure 8 demonstrates though these individuals were being rehabilitated, due to their age and potential deaths during the Cultural Revolution, they never gained their once absolute power–though in the late 70s about 40% of the CC were former Long Marchers.

TABLE 6.1 *Average party tenure of new Politburo and Central Committee entrants: 8th Party Congress to 14th Party Congress*

	8th PC	9th PC	10th PC	11th PC	12th PC	13th PC	14th PC
Average Party Tenure of Politburo Entrants	30.7	35	28.5	44	47.8	36.5	42.4
Average Party Tenure of CC Entrants	28.4	29.4	30.5	37	38.5	36.1	38.4

Figure 7: "Average Party tenure of new Politburo and Central Committee entrants: 8th Party Congress to 14th Party Congress." (Shih 2022, 142).

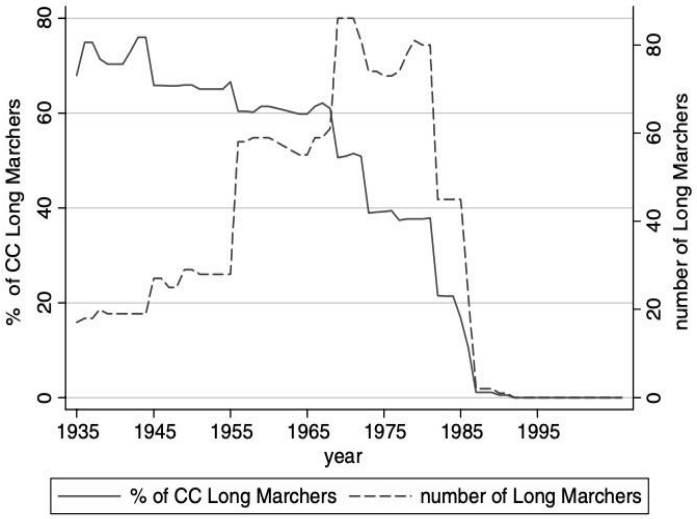


FIGURE 3.3. Percentage of Central Committee members with Long March experience and the number of Long Marchers.

Figure 8: "Percentage of Central Committee Members with Long March Experience and the number of Long Marchers." (Shih et al. 2010, 63).

Rehabilitation also saw an increase in institutionalization within the Party. Unlike Mao, Deng believed in institutionalizing the Party and making the Party a stable, popular pick for the

Chinese population; it wasn't going to be through a cult of personality. Deng would not tolerate the cult that Mao indulged in; virtually no statues of Deng were placed in public buildings, and virtually no pictures of him hung in homes; few songs and plays were composed to celebrate his achievements (Vogel 2011, 377). Instead, Deng relied on attempting to institutionalize the Party, mainly symbolized by the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress in 1978. According to Shambaugh, the Third Plenum deserves the reputation as the single most important meeting of the Chinese leadership in the post-Mao era because it fundamentally and officially shifted the overall focus of Party work from an amalgam of Maoist slogans (think of the Two Whatevers) to a singular mission of achieving "socialist modernization" (Shambaugh 2021, 107). However, it wasn't just moving the Party's focus to economics, but it also opened the Party to reexamine its past and that the "left mistakes" must be "comprehensively reviewed and corrected," the "rule of law" was to be followed, as well as the principles of "collective leadership," in line with this, it was declared that there should be no "personality cults" leaders should only be addressed as "comrade" (Shambaugh 2021, 109). On the Party side, institutions like the Central Party School were reconstituted and staffed by veteran cadres; on the State Council side, in addition to the revival of traditional ministries, new ministerial organizations were also formed to meet the challenges of a reforming economy (Shih 2022, 142). The late 1970s and the turn of the decade saw the creation of the State Economic Systems Reform Commission, State Science and Technology Commission, State Council Export-Import Commission, the Ministry of Urban Construction and Environmental Protection, headed mainly by Long March veterans, followers of different factions staffed the thousands of new positions these ministries created (Shih 2022, 142).

A significant factor of the Deng era is what Cheng Li calls the “circulation of elites” and how it is the key to the survival of any ruling group (Li 2016, 163). The Party’s shift of focus–from ideological slogans to scientific and economic policy–demonstrated that some governing groups could no longer provide the services they once were able to provide, particularly under the Mao era. In this regard, the CCP changed from a revolutionary Party consisting of peasants, soldiers, and workers to a governing Party of engineers and technocrats. At the beginning of the 1980s, the traditional base of the CCP made up 63.4% of the CCP leadership; however, by 2013, they only accompanied 38.3% of CCP members in this regard there started in the 1980s a “technocratic turnover” by 1987 they made up 19% of the CC, and by 1997 they made up half of the CC makeup (Li 2016, 165). This was part of Deng’s goal for a “four-way transformation” of the cadre corps by finding young, educated cadres and promoting them; this saw the rise of figures like Wen Jiabao, Hu Jintao, Li Peng, Zhu Rongji, and Jiang Zemin (Nathan 2003, 10). This is a dramatic reversal from the Mao era, in which many experts were targeted as class enemies.

As such, what Deng Xiaoping established was a "code of civility" amongst the factions and a collective leadership relationship–Deng was a mere "first among equals." Due to the elite turnover and other systems discussed, no individual or faction can dominate the power structure, reinforcing certain forms of checks and balances of collective leadership of the central leader (Li 2016, 94). However, the leader can disrupt specific elite networks when political shocks happen (Wang 2022, 78-79). Once Zhao Ziyang was purged as a result of the 1989 Tiananmen Crisis, a few of his associates were purged, but most were moved into secondary bureaucratic posts, and figures who were pretty conservative and did not agree with the full marketization still held spots in the CC and spoke their opinion like Hua Guofeng (Nathan 2003, 11). As Samuel Huntington

argued, institutionalization demonstrates that state institutions become more complex, autonomous, and coherent, and it equips the regime to adapt to more dramatic changes (Huntington 1968, 12-24). So when the state had dramatic shifts, like the Tiananmen Crisis or the fall of Deng's collective leadership due to the deaths of Deng and the handful of revolutionary elders who made decisions like Peng Zhen, Deng Yingchao, Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, and Nie Rongzhen whom all passed away in rapid succession, the state still was able to function with relative "norms." Thus, though some figures were still purged, many of their faction members still survived within the Central Committee network; Wen Jiabao worked closely with Zhao Ziyang but was still able to become premier in the 2000s. Unlike the chaos during the Mao era, these "rules of the road" and factional collective leadership demonstrate that the state's capacity didn't diminish (Shih 2022, 149).

In this regard, what was the sovereign's dilemma for Deng? Deng's policy of mass rehabilitation limited his ability to achieve absolute power. With veterans from various "mountaintops" once again dominating the Central Committee at the 11th and 12th Party Congress, they also clamored for institutional changes to prevent the rise of another Mao (Shih 2022, 151). As Joseph Fewsmith added, Deng, "both made a virtue of necessity and rallied the veteran party leaders to his cause by turning away from the personality cult" (Fewsmith 1994, 6). Overall, the era of Deng Xiaoping reshaped Party politics in China; he chose to work with other factions, keeping a diverse factional environment in the CC and establishing collective leadership. Though this may have diminished Deng's absolute power, the priority of re-establishing the Party's influence over the state was more important for Deng. The Mao era mobilization system gave way to a Weberian-style bureaucracy; however, Deng had to exist with an indeterminacy of power with other leaders who prevented them from exercising full authority.

It is a system that can weaken the leader's absolute power and then force the leader to make certain decisions that they believe are beneficial for the state through negotiating with elites. In this regard, the sovereign's dilemma under Deng Xiaoping saw the weakening of absolute leadership and the rise of factional elites but who were able to create a strong state–notably surviving the chaos of Tiananmen in 1989 and the deaths of the Long March generation–instead replacing one generation of cadres to the next. Therefore, Deng, through his independent agency, restructured the Party apparatus. However, the structure tends to limit the power of any one person, that they fall into the path of continuity, what Kevin O'Brien argues as, "Continuity, in other words, cannot be ignored, as lessons of history are reapplied and transformed, and also built upon and extended" (O'Brien 2024, 250-251). It seems, in this analysis, Deng broke certain aspects of Chinese continuity. Yes, the CCP was in charge, and he re-established the Party apparatus after the collapse of the PRC's state capacity during the Cultural Revolution. However, the Party's traction and even the Party's structure fundamentally changed away from the trajectory under Mao and Hua Guofeng. From the change of a mobilization Party to a governing Party to the changing of the Party's focus on economic development compared to the arbitrary whims of Mao's lectures. This is particularly important for Deng; yes, compared to Mao, he was a weaker leader, but this is because he allowed the collective to have a say. However, with Deng's focus on the collective and re-establishing the Party's dominance over Chinese society, he, through his agency, shifted specific structures of the Party that are essential for the Party today.

Jiang Zemin: A Changing Party

As discussed previously, new members of the 11th and 12th Politburos and Politburo Standing Committees were surviving or rehabilitated Party veterans. The average age of the Politburo members rose from 61 at the 10th Party Congress to 69.4 at the 12th; the sharp increase in the age and party experience of the CC compared with the 10th Party Congress suggests that Deng had indeed fulfilled his "campaign" promise to rehabilitate veteran cadres (Shih 2022, 157). However, this rehabilitation came with these cadres' extensive networks; many wanted to promote their younger allied cadres, so in 1983, when the reserve cadre list was released, veteran cadres quickly advocated for their pupils (Shih 2022, 158). Jiang Zemin was a major benefactor of this logic. Through Jiang's early experience in the Ministry of Machinery, Jiang befriended Party veterans, including Minister Zhou Jiannan and Yan Wen, a senior cadre with New Fourth Army and Fourth Field Army ties (Yan 2017, 69). Jiang was close with these officials, giving them "lavish gifts" and always tried to be a "nice person," in that regard, at the 12th Party Congress, Zhou Jiannan recommended him for a seat in the Central Committee, and in 1985, Wang Daohan strongly recommended him for the mayoral post in Shanghai (Gilley 1998, 83). These positions paved the way for his eventual appointment to the highest office in the Party. In other words, according to Shih, officials who obtained ministerial rank in the 1980s and the early 1990s had to be adept at appeasing aging veterans, in addition to having technocratic qualifications (Shih 2022, 158).

Shanghai is where Jiang started to accumulate his own faction, known as the “Shanghai Gang.” When Jiang Zemin served as mayor and party chief in the city during the mid-1980s, he

began to cultivate a web of patron-client ties based on his Shanghai associates, he brought many of these factional members with him when he was promoted in the late 1980s early 1990s as General Secretary (Li 2016, 258). Notable figures Jiang brought to Beijing were Zeng Qinghong (his chief- of- staff), You Xigui (his bodyguard), and Jia Ting'an (his personal secretary), and later two of Jiang's deputies in Shanghai, Wu Bangguo and Huang Ju, were promoted to Politburo members and later served as members of the PSC (Li 2016, 258). Early on in this rise, Jiang had to contend with certain factions that opposed his rise, this was due to the other "elders" who had different visions with the Party. Though during the Jiang Zemin era, the "code of civility" continued, opposing faction leaders were allowed to discreetly disagree with the majority faction on policy decisions, key figures who did this were the Yang Brothers: Yang Baibing and Yang Shangkun and Politburo Standing Committee member Qiao Shi (Dittmer 2003, 101). There was a debate going on within the Party between the new civilian rulers, figures like Jiang Zemin and Li Peng, versus the Yang Brothers, who believed that reforms were too slow, and who wanted to promote 100 officers to the 14th Party Congress which would've made the military the dominate factional power (Shih 2022, 149). What protected Jiang was two things, one was his faction the "Shanghai Gang" particularly his advisor Zeng Qinghong who was also a Princling and had extensive factional connection in Beijing–through his support Jiang was able to gain valuable insights and support from figures like Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping's son Deng Pufang who informed Deng of the plot by the Yang's–Deng, who wanted Jiang to rule, forced the retirement of the Yang Brothers (Shih 2022, 149). Deng publicly argued for the unity and stability for collective leadership in his speech. For example, in Deng Xiaoping's Selected Works Deng argues,

"Once the new leading group has established its prestige, I am resolved to withdraw and not interfere in your affairs. I hope all the members will unite closely around Comrade Jiang Zemin. So long as the collective leadership is united and adheres to the policies of reform and opening to the outside world, fundamental changes will take place in China even if our country develops only at a measured pace for dozens of years. I should like you to convey my words to every comrade who will be working in the new leading bodies. This can be considered my political testament" (Deng Xiaoping Selected Works, 1989).

As such, Deng argued as his "political testament" to protect the third generation of collective leadership and continuously follow these new "rules of the road," because collective leadership is "untied and adheres to the policies of reform and opening to the outside world." In that regard, collective leadership and following the stable light of this system will bring continued stability and success for the Chinese nation.

Clearly, any substantial factional power to any group, but particularly the military, was a no go for the leadership. The new civilian leaders, technocrats by trade, were the generational future of the Party. Deng's final gift to Jiang was this ability for the civilian leaders and military leaders to understand their places within the Party. Figure 7 demonstrates this type of code of civility/collective leadership of the "Dengist era" under Jiang Zemin. In this analysis, that of the factional connection of Jiang Zemin, Qiao Shi, and Hu Jintao, there really isn't a period of total factional control within the Central Committee, though one could argue from the period around 1997-2003 Jiang had a substantial "Shanghai Gang" representation. Though these are not the same extent of total domination like Mao.

Figure 1: **Share of Central Committee with Ties with Jiang Zemin, Qiao Shi and Hu Jintao, 1985–2007**

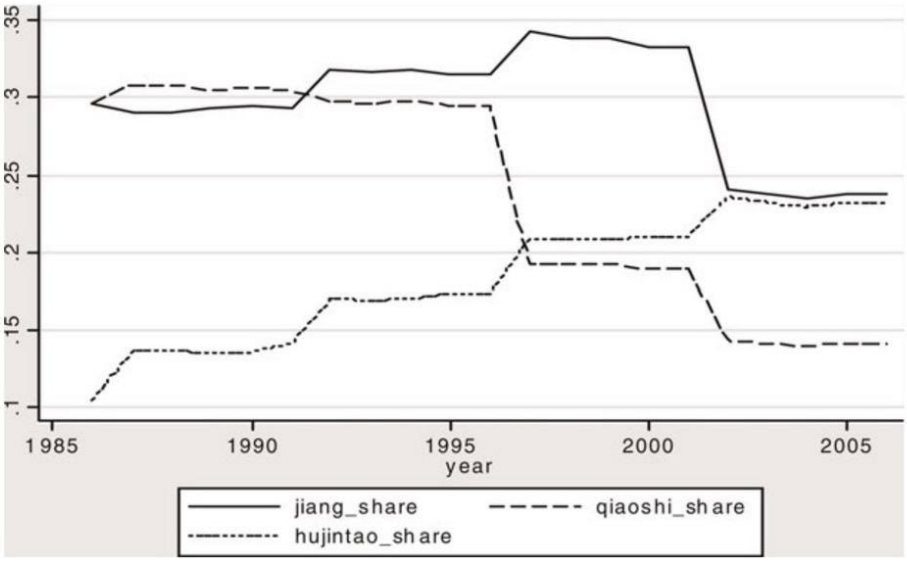


Figure 7: "Share of Central Committee with Ties with Jiang Zemin, Qiao Shi, and Hu Jintao, 1985–2007." (Shih et al. 2010, 89).

According to Dittmer, the Jiang era really had five factions that dominated the CC. Specifically the market focused "Shanghai Gang," figures who have paternalistic connection to Jiang Zemin with notable figures at the time like Zhu Rongji, Zeng Qinghong, Wu Bangguo, and Hua Jianmin; the more conservative "Li Peng Group" individuals connected to former Premier Li Peng during their time at the Ministry of Electrical Power, these figures include Luo Gan, Qian Qichen, Jiang Chunyun, and Li Tieying; the "Qiao Shi Faction" probably the faction most opposed to Jiang due to Qiao's former desire to become Paramount leader, this factions representation sharply declines due to the retirement age limit forced on many of these faction members; the "Old Guard Faction," Party "Second Generation" veterans like Bo Yibo, Song Ping, and Deng Liqun, though not represented in the CC they are powerful "elders"; and finally the Hu Jintao "Youth League" faction which will be expanded upon later (Dittmer 2003, 103-105). With a rise of a relatively balanced coalition of "conservatives" and "liberals" within the

Party, consensus was the dominant apparatus of the Party, through systems like inter-party democracy policy would be negotiated. However, these cadres all had relatively weak factional networks compared to the leaders of the Mao era, these were technocrats with relatively narrow Party experience unlike the Maoists or the Northern Bureau factions (Shih 2022, 152). Though Jiang did masterfully expand his network and spread his allies from Shanghai all across the country (Li 2016, 259). Did Jiang in this regard have his own agency? Or was he just a pawn stuck within the structure of Deng's "changed Party" and the semi-institution of the "Eight Immortals?" Could Jiang have the opportunity to create a "cult of personality?"

Jiang Zemin, similar to Hu Jintao which will be laid out next, had agency. However, these were competent figures who understood the great changes under Deng Xiaoping. The factional model Deng created didn't allow for any figure to totally dominate the Central Committee and purging was a costly matter that Jiang did not have the political capital to achieve. In many ways, as shown previously, Jiang needed other factions and leaders to support his desire to demote "opposing figures" like the Yang Brothers or the institution itself–particularly the age limit–to demote Qiao Shi. Therefore, it does seem Jiang had little choice to "choose his own destiny." However, I argue that Jiang had a choice, and that choice was sticking with the reforms that benefited him. Jiang Zemin wasn't a "Party-man," he was a technocrat/electrical engineer who benefited greatly from the Dengist reforms. These reforms allowed for figures with weaker "factions" to have substantial say in policy making–during the Mao era this wouldn't have happened, instead what Tsou Tang calls the "winner takes all" narrative tended to be the norm, particularly during the Cultural Revolution (Tsou and Nathan 1976, 112-113). The "rules of the road" that the Party structure established benefited the civilian cadres like Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, and Li Peng, also economically China was starting to reap

the benefits of the Reform and Opening Era. At the same time, ideological concepts, like the "Three Represents" continued to bring in a new class of businesses and economic leaders into the Party, continuing this dynamic turning over of Party officials. Therefore, Jiang in many respects had the agency to continue Deng's policy–nobody wanted a "cult of personality" even if Jiang could create one, he wasn't that kind of leader. Like many of the leaders of China at the time, even though some debated to what extent, Jiang wanted to turn the page away from the Mao era and to follow Deng's mantra: "*To Get Rich is Glorious*."

The Collective President: Hu Jintao

The political faction that scholars like Cheng Li argue that has the most direct "code of civility" competition with the "Shanghai Gang" is the "Youth League Faction" also known as "*Tuanpai*" or "League Faction" (Li 2016, 251). Tuanpai figures tended to gain their political experience in rural less developed regions of the country. Notably areas like Gansu, Henan, Tibet, and Guizhou these figures rose through the ranks by using the Communist Party Youth League which created a biographical and factional connection between figures–notably Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao, Li Keqiang, Hu Chunhua, Wang Yang, and Liu Qibao (Li 2016, 279). These figures have voiced concerns about rural healthcare, lenient policy regarding the Hukou, and providing affordable housing. Therefore, in this regard, scholars argue that the Shanghai Gang and Tuanpai can be divided into "Elites" versus "Populists" respectively–most of the policy debates within the "Dengist era" can be framed through this lens. Hu Jintao and his partner Wen Jiabao were leaders who were very "process-oriented" they created leading groups and rapid reaction teams to deal with a wide range of policy challenges-this is inductive of the

institutionalization of CCP politics, policies were largely the result of collective bureaucratic deliberation rather than being arbitrary decided by Hu or Wen (Shambaugh 2016, 227).

The 16th Central Committee from 2002-2007 produces a genuine example of the rise of the Tuanpai and the diverse nature of factional politics within the CCP. Though only demonstrating three factions, these are the most powerful and influential factions within the CCP during this time. These next three figures demonstrate the factional distribution of the 16th Central Committee, dominated by the Shanghai Gang, Princlings, and Youth League. First, Figure 9 demonstrates the Party dynamics of the Shanghai Gang during the 16th Central Committee. The Shanghai Gang witnessed a decline during the 16th Central Committee due to the institutionalized retirement limit, particularly when Jiang Zemin retired in 2004; however, the faction also had some governing problems due to its poor handling of the SARS pandemic (Bo 2004, 336).

Table 6. Members of the Shanghai Gang in the 16th Central Committee (2002)

Name	Birth	Home	CC membership	Rank	Work place	Index
Chen Liangyu	1946	Zhejiang	Full	n/a	Shanghai	4
Chen Zhili (f.)	1942	Fujian	Full	n/a	Education	2
Dai Xianglong	1944	Jiangsu	Full	n/a	People's Bank of China	2
Han Zheng	1954	Zhejiang	Full	n/a	Shanghai	2
Hua Jianmin	1940	Jiangsu	Full	n/a	Finance Office	2
Huang Ju	1938	Zhejiang	Full	n/a	Politburo	5
Meng Jianzhu	1947	Jiangsu	Full	n/a	Jiangxi	2
Wang Huning	1955	Shangdon	Full	n/a	Policy	2
Wu Bangguo	1941	Anhui	Full	n/a	Politburo	5
Wu Qidi (f.)	1947	Zhejiang	Alternate	73	Shanghai	1
Xie Qihua (f.)	1943	Zhejiang	Alternate	80	Baosteel	1
Xu Guangchun	1944	Zhejiang	Full	n/a	Radio, Movie, and TV	2
Xu Kuangdi	1937	Zhejiang	Full	n/a	Academy of Engineering	2
Yin Yicui (f.)	1955	Zhejiang	Alternate	140	Shanghai	1
You Xigui	1939	Hebei	Alternate	158	Central Guard	1
Zeng Qinghong	1939	Jiangxi	Full	n/a	Politburo	6
Zhang Wenkang	1940	Shanghai	Full	n/a	Health	2
Zhao Qizheng	1940	Beijing	Full	n/a	Information	2
Total						44

Sources: Shen Xueming and Zheng Jianying, eds, *Zhonggong Diyijie zhi Dishiwujie Zhongyang-weiyuan* [*The Central Committee Members of the Chinese Communist Party from the First through the Fifteenth Central Committee*] (Beijing: Zhongyangwenxian chubanshe, 2001); *People's Daily* online.

Figure 9: "Members of the Shanghai Gang in the 16th Central Committee." (Bo 2004, 241).

A faction that started to see a rise during the 16th Central Committee were the Princelings, the sons and daughters of the first revolutionary generation of the CCP–mainly the kids of the old Northern Bureau of Liu Shaoqi. They lacked substantial representation in previous CC's because, as shown in the next chapter, the Princelings lacked support from the growing technocrat leaders (Bo 2004, 346). Many of these figures knew each other as children and definitely formed some sort of factional/mutual connection, demonstrated in Figure 10.

Table 7. Princelings in the 16th Central Committee (2002)

Name	Home	Birth	Rank	CC membership	Index
Bo Xilai	Shanxi	1949	n/a	Full	2
Chen Yuan	Shanghai	1945	153	Alternate	1
Dai Bingguo (Tujia)	Guizhou	1941	n/a	Full	2
Deng Pufang	Sichuan	1944	154	Alternate	1
Hong Hu	Anhui	1940	n/a	Full	2
Li Tielin	Hunan	1943	n/a	Full	2
Liao Hui	Guangdong	1942	n/a	Full	2
Liu Yandong (f.)	Jiangsu	1945	n/a	Full	2
Luo Gan	Shangdong	1935	n/a	Full	5
Wang Luolin	Hubei	1938	157	Alternate	1
Wang Qishan	Shanxi	1948	n/a	Full	2
Xi Jinping	Shaanxi	1953	n/a	Full	2
Yu Zhengsheng	Zhejiang	1945	n/a	Full	4
Zeng Qinghong	Jiangxi	1939	n/a	Full	6
Zhou Xiaochuan		1948	n/a	Full	2
Total					36

Sources: Shen Xueming and Zheng Jianying, eds, *Zhonggong Diyijie zhi Dishiwujie Zhongyangweiyuan* [*The Central Committee Members of the Chinese Communist Party from the First through the Fifteenth Central Committee*] (Beijing: Zhongyangwenxian chubanshe, 2001); *People's Daily* online.

Figure 10: "Princelings in the 16th Central Committee." (Bo 2004, 244).

The final factional case during the 16th Central Committee was the Paramount leader and Premiers faction the Tuanpai (CCYL). The Tuanpai continued a sizable prominence during the 16th Central Committee, shown by Figure 11; however, as demonstrated it wasn't total domination, there was a factional balance during this Central Committee, creating factional cohesion (Bo 2004, 362). Hu Jintao couldn't pass all the policies he wanted because his faction didn't dominate, collective leadership was the norm. The 16th Central Committee and the

diversity of factions and individual cadres demonstrates the Party under the "Dengists." A "pluralist" factional debate within the CCP existed where the paramount leader couldn't use arbitrary power to crush the opposition or fundamentally change the state. Instead, collective leadership and certain "rules of the road" of governance emerged inhibiting even the inch of a change to create a cult of personality.

Table 9. CCYL cadres in the 16th Central Committee (2002)

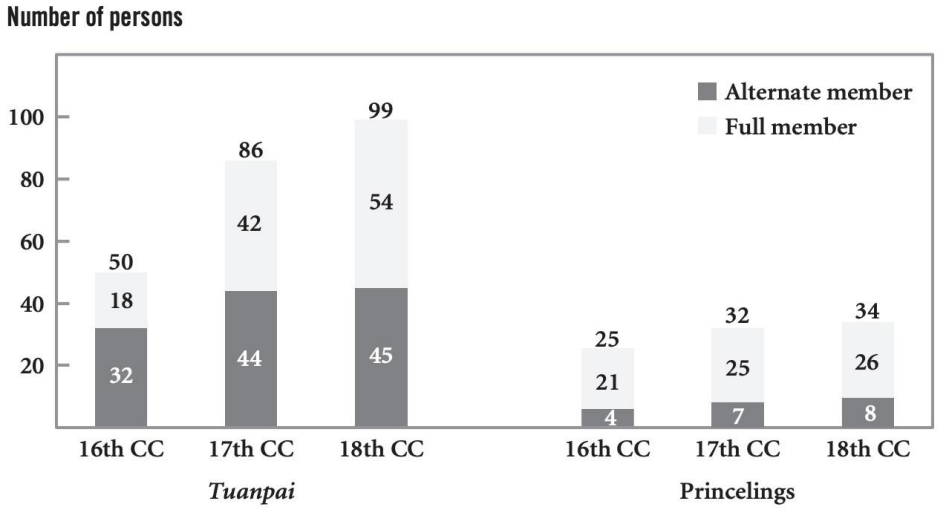
Name	Home	Birth	CC membership	Work place	Title	Index
Politburo						
Hu Jintao	Anhui	1942	Full	Politburo	General Secretary	9
Liu Yunshan	Inner Mongolia	1947	Full	Propaganda	Director	5
Wang Zhaoguo	Hebei	1941	Full	United Front	Director	4
Wang Lequan	Shandong	1944	Full	Xinjiang	Party Secretary	4
Central party institutions						
Liu Yandong (f.)	Jiangsu	1945	Full	United Front	Vice Director	2
Li Dezhu (Korean)	Jilin	1943	Full	United Front	Vice Director	2
Ji Bingxuan	Henan	1952	Alternate	Propaganda	Vice Director	1
Ling Jihua		1956	Alternate	General Office	Vice Director	1
Central government institutions						
Du Qinglin	Jilin	1946	Full	Agriculture	Minister	2
Jia Chunwang	Beijing	1938	Full	Security	Minister	2
Li Zhilun	Liaoning	1942	Full	Supervision	Vice Minister	2
Sun Jiazheng	Jiangsu	1944	Full	Culture	Minister	2
Wang Yang	Anhui	1955	Alternate	Planning	Minister	1
Ye Xiaowen	Guizhou	1950	Alternate	Religious Affairs	Director	1
Zhang Fusen	Beijing	1940	Full	Justice	Minister	2
Zhang Weiqing	Shaanxi	1944	Full	Family Planning	Minister	2
Zhang Xuezhong	Gansu	1943	Full	Personnel	Minister	2
Zhou Qiang		1961	Full	CCYL	First Secretary	2
Military						
Li Jinai	Shandong	1942	Full	Armament	Director	3
Zhang Qingli			Full	Xinjiang	Commander	2
Provincial units						
Qian Yunlu	Hubei	1944	Full	Guizhou	Party Secretary	2
Song Defu	Hebei	1946	Full	Fujian	Party Secretary	2
Ji Yunshi	Jiangsu	1945	Full	Jiangsu	Governor	2
Li Keqiang	Anhui	1955	Full	Henan	Governor	2
Ma Qizhi (Hui)	Ningxia	1943	Full	Ningxia	Governor	2

Figure 11: "CCYL cadres in the 16th Central Committee." (Bo 2004, 248).

When Hu Jintao became General Secretary in 2002, like Jiang, Hu promoted to the Central Committee a massive influx of Tuanpai leaders–many like Li Keqiang and Hu Chunhua were promoted from provincial or city level positions (Li 2016, 283). According to Cheng Li, in 2005 about 150 Tuanpai officials served as ministers, vice- ministers, provincial party secretaries, provincial deputy party secretaries, governors, and vice- governors, this was a major increase in the groups representation compared to the Jiang Zemin era (Li 2016, 283). Figure 12

demonstrates the increase of the Tuanpai faction in the Central Committee compared to Princlings (the sons and daughters of the first revolutionary generation of the CCP), we can see that by the 18th Central Committee Hu successfully established the Tuanpai as a powerful faction that could compete for policy preferences.

FIGURE 7-1. ***Tuanpai*** **and Princelings on the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, 2002–12**



Note and Source: CC = Central Committee. Author's database.

Figure 12: "Tuanpai and Princelings on the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, 2002-2012." (Li 2016, 291).

The success of the Tuanpai was for multiple reasons, one was because Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao were General Secretary and Premier of the PRC allowing them to bring connected allies. However, Hu Jintao's and the Tuanpais' wide factional connection also made this possible. Particularly its connection with universities like Tsinghua where Hu Jintao obtained an education (Li 2002, 2-3). Also, similar to Jiang, Hu Jintao befriended party veteran Song Ping while in Gansu, Song helped Hu with promotions and building his network–mainly Hu replaced Song as head of his faction (Li 2002, 3). However, other factions, like the Princelings, Shanghai Gang,

and others contended for policy influence. Overall, demonstrating the principle of collective leadership–inherently involving more factional competition but also coalition building which resulted in the absence of strong man politics.

For both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, their sovereign's dilemma is similar, though it is from different parts of the Party. Hu's faction was part of the "hinterland" of China, compared to Jiang's Shanghai-based support–both figures benefited from Deng Xiaoping's reframing of the Party towards younger technocrats. Rapidly promoting technocrats with minor party factions to lead the country helped Jiang and Hu rise, but generally, it had the opposite effect on many Princelings. Individually, Jiang and particularly Hu were weak leaders; they could not start cults of personality or change the rules of Party succession because "the coherent elite that can take collective action to strengthen the state is also capable of revolting against the ruler" (Wang 2022, 71). Collective leadership was at its height during the "Dengist era," and while this had the greatest effects on the state, the power, and popularity of the state were high from the skyrocketing economic success and somewhat greater social freedoms–while the elements of the state capacity remained high, people still felt the state in their life, and bureaucrats were productive individuals (Shambaugh 2016, 10). None of the leaders could obtain absolute power like Mao did during the Cultural Revolution; in that regard, they could not create a cult of personality, these were figures Victor Shih calls “always nice people,” not complementary to the cult of personality development (Shih 2022, 151). Instead, the paramount leader and the elite's bargaining determined state-building outcomes, which resulted in longer elite durability and semi-institutionalization of age limits and Party "rules of the road." Compared to the "winner takes all" narrative of the Mao era, the "Dengists" established a norm of Andrew Nathan's "code of civility, " cooperation among elites makes them a coherent collective decision making group,

therefore no faction, particularly the leaders totally dominated. All leaders want power, but to what extent of that power is the difference and that's the agency of the sovereign's dilemma. Both Jiang and Hu supported this period of collective leadership because they were able to obtain powerful status for themselves and their factional groups. Even when Jiang and Hu retired from leadership and passed on the torch to another generation, they had influence as elders, and the next generation was bound to have members of their factions present in the CC and the other highest political bodies of the country.

Chapter 5: The Cult of Xi Jinping: Finally, The Princeling Sits on the Throne

"Xi Jinping is our father, The Party is our mother. Under the Party's protection, We sleep soundly. If we see religious extremists, Bang! We will shoot them." –Uyghar man's folk melody performed on the dutar (Musapir 2024, 181).

Since his inauguration as General Secretary and President of the CCP and PRC, Xi Jinping has rapidly shifted the political dynamics of the "Dengist" consensus. Notably, the consensus pertaining to factional politics and the cult of personality. Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao conceded that collective leadership will become the norm of CCP politics, while that may weaken them individually as Paramount leaders, they will still have factions to spread their influence, and each can prevent the arbitrary and state weakening nature of a cult of personality. However, now under President Xi Jinping this has changed, through the use of the anti-corruption campaign and other state institutions to weaken collective leadership Xi Jinping has dramatically increased the rhetorical and physical use of a cult of personality–notably the ritual and charismatic tools used under Mao, but now in a technological age. Xi has used propaganda and the concept of the "Chinese Dream" to form a direct top-down cult of personality in a technological age. This chapter explains the Xi Jinping phenomenon in high politics in China, through first analysing what makes up Xi Jinping's faction, how Xi used state tools to weaken collective leadership, what makes up Xi Jinping's cult of personality, and finally some serious questions about Xi Jinping's sovereign's dilemma, the future of Chinese leadership, and questioning if the "Dengist" period really institutionalized any form of "rules of the road."

A Xi Faction?

Out of any leader this paper has analyzed, Xi Jinping is the hardest to point to one faction that he embodies. He has clientelist ties to three factions, including the Princelings, the Shanghai Gang, and what many call Xi's own faction, the Shaanxi Gang and his "Iron Triangle," each will be analyzed. First, Jiang Zemin and Xi Jinping have factional ties through Xi's early experience working in Shanghai prior to 2012; this has caused many factional experts to contend that after the retirement of Jiang Zemin and the perceived choice as a consensus candidate between Jiang and Hu–Xi took over generational leadership of the Shanghai Gang, bringing over many of Jiang's factional allies notably current Politburo Standing Committee member Wang Huning and Chinese Vice President Han Zheng as his allies (Wedeman 2024, 39). However, this does not mean that the whole Shanghai Gang had migrated to Xi Jinping. As argued by Andrew Nathan, factions are flexible but self-limiting; when a leader dies or retires, factions shift and are not the same (Nathan 1973, 45). Therefore, this faction is no longer the Shanghai Gang as once described under Jiang Zemin; now, it is a Xi faction that is smaller than the original. This has resulted in two measures for Xi; according to Cheng Li, the figures who stuck around Xi are probably very loyal to him, and this early factional support allowed Xi to pursue his early initiatives to centralize his leadership (Li 2016, 18-19). This relationship is the title Ezra Vogel coined for Xi Jinping as a "micro-manager," compared to Deng Xiaoping, Xi wants to control all elements of the Party through his established central leadership "small groups" where he is the head, marginalizing many traditional Party and state institutions like the Politburo Standing Committee and State Council (Vogel 2021, 694). This may not have been possible without Xi's early support from elements of the Shanghai Gang. However, Xi has also purged elements of the Shanghai Gang, which will be expanded upon later.

On the other hand, Xi Jinping is also a Princeling. Princelings are sons and daughters of the original revolutionaries of the CCP–mainly Long March survivors who, from the 1940s to 1950s, had a "baby boom" in which, per Central Committee member in the 8th Party Congress, they averaged three children, creating a whole generation of "Red Children" (Shih 2022, 161). Xi Jinping comes from this generation; his father, Xi Zhongxun, worked closely with reformist leaders–notably Hu Yaobang, during the Deng era. These Princlings created a cohort through their education; they were able to attend elite schools in Beijing while their parents went to work for the Party; this included schools like Bayi School or Beijing No. 6 High School (Shih 2022, 162). According to Victor Shih, one theory that these elite children came to believe was called the "Bloodline Theory," which postulates a "hereditary transmission of revolutionary loyalty from Party veterans to their children," popularized by the couplet "the son of a hero is a good lad; the son of a reactionary is a hoodlum" (Shih 2022, 164). In other words, this "Bloodline Theory" caused many red children to believe in their self-aggrandized importance to the revolution; thus, when the Cultural Revolution broke out, many joined the Red Guards. Thus, when the reform era started, some of the new influential leaders like Hu Yaobang battled with revolutionary veterans like Chen Yun to not promote Princelings, resulting in a general weakness of Princelings in the Central Committee; however, many went to the new private sector to get extremely wealthy (Shih 2022, 167). There was a general battle between the "Eight Immortals" figures like Bo Yibo and Chen Yun against figures like Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang on how promotions in the Party should work, Deng Xiaoping siding with the latter camp. The ones who did gain employment were skyrocketed heirs, though eventually when the revolutionary veterans died, many Princelings were demoted. However, Xi Jinping himself kept to a low profile taking positions outside of Beijing like a county position in Hebei Province or secretary positions, so an

absence of a Princling rivalry helped Xi as he entered the Politburo at the 17th Party Congress, and once in he was highly successful using his past clientist ties with the current Princling members (Shih 2022, 180). Figure 13 demonstrates Xi's general factional connection during the 17th Politburo in 2007. Compared to figures like Wang Qishan and Bo Xilai, two princlings promoted around the same time as Xi, we can see Xi's clientist connection to CC members, though less than Liu Yandong, a older Princling, Xi's factional connection with figures in the Shanghai Gang is demonstrated, overall benefiting Xi.

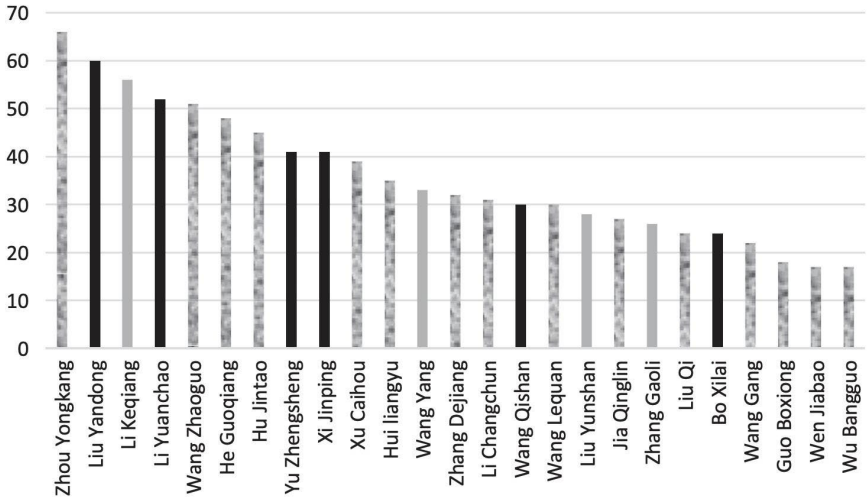
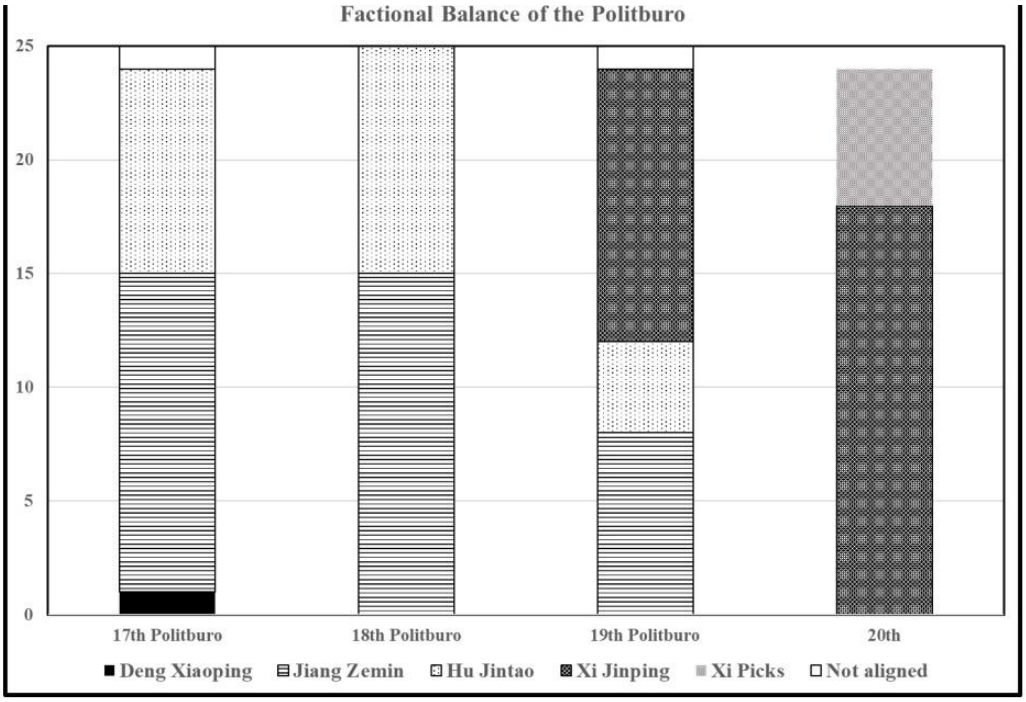


FIGURE 7.4 17th PC Politburo members by the number of ties with CC and ACC members (princelings in dark bars; 18th PC retirees in textured bars)

Figure 13: "17th PC Politburo Members by the Number of Ties with CC and ACC Members." (Shih 2022, 182).

The Shaanxi Gang are Xi's "inner circle" within the CC, the faction directly connected to Xi as the epicenter compared to the Princelings or Shanghai Gang. During the Cultural Revolution, Xi Jinping became a "sent down youth" when Mao sent thousands of urban youths to the countryside to learn from peasants, this period of his life was very impactful and it formed essential relationships that would become known as the Shaanxi Gang (Li 2016, 309). As Xi rose within the CCP, so did the clientist ties he made in Shaanxi. Two of these figures were the most

essential to this faction: Wang Qishan and Yu Zhengsheng–them and Xi formed what Cheng Li calls an "Iron Triangle" (Li 2016, 309). Post the Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao administration the Iron Triangle became the most powerful figures in China, they became "firefighters," particularly Wang Qishan, for Xi, key problem solvers and policy designers during the early turbulent times of the Xi era, notably during the trial of Bo Xilai, the starting of the anti-corruption campaign, and the slowdown of the Chinese economy (Li 2016, 314). Other notable Shaanxi figures include Zhao Leji and Li Zhanshu both members of the politburo and Zhao Leji now a Standing Committee member. Most scholars argue that since the 20th Party Congress in 2022, the CC is dominated by Xi's vast factional connections, if that be Shaanxi Gang, trusted Princelings, or Shanghai Gang members now loyal to Xi. Figure 14 demonstrates the gradual factional change within the Politburo and the absolute domination of factional politics by the Xi faction particularly during the 20th Party Congress the same congress former president Hu Jintao was forced out of–demonstrated as a wide variety of individuals. An argument can be made that this broad factional base helps Xi, yes he has his core allies from the Shaanxi Gang, but also allies that naturally flocked to him because of the generational shift of the Party. Even school friends from Xi's time at Tsinghua, notably Chen Xi, are some of the most influential figures to understand the Xi faction. At the same time, Wang Huning, Xi's chief theoretician has been promoted to the Standing Committee and has shaped the ideological trajectory of the Party for the last three Paramount leaders, including foreign policy–demonstrating a key element now of Xi's broad faction (Shambaugh 2021, 278). In this sense, what makes up a Xi faction is the wide experiences Xi had in his life, as a privileged Princeling and as a sent down youth–very different from the technocrats of the reform era.



Sources: Bo 2004; Bo, 2008; Fewsmith 2008; Lam 2018; Li 2007, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, and 2013; Naughton 2003; and Wu 2019.

Figure 14: "Factional Balance of the Politburo." (Wedeman 2024, 38).

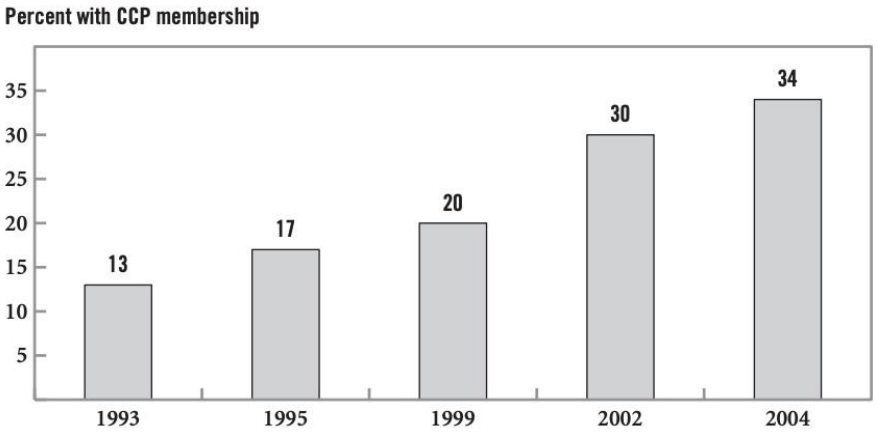
Xi's Takeover of Institutions and the new "Great Purges"

As stated previously, when Xi became head of the PRC and CCP the state was in crisis, Bo Xilai former Party boss of Chongqing and challenger to Xi, was arrested over corruption charges and over the coverup of the murder of British national Neil Heywood by his wife in 2011, corruption was spewing out of the Party, and the economy was slowing down. Xi and his new team were in crisis. In Xi's ideological handbook "*Xi Jinping The Governance of China*," Xi states some of the key issues occurring within the Party:

"On the other hand, we need to tackle problems that are highly political and devastating. For example, some officials do not follow the CPC Central Committee on major issues, or refuse to act according to our Party's political discipline and rules. Some are not loyal to or honest with the Party, feign compliance, practice fraud, or conceal private vice behind a mask of public virtue. Some officials male appointments based on favoritism or for reasons of personal gain. Some angle for official positions, buy and sell posts, or engage in vote rigging. Some gang up in pursuit of private interests, form small cliques, or are primarily driven by political ambition. Such problems are often hidden, and will not become apparent until critical movements. Our solution is to establish criteria for spotting them, put in place an effective mechanism, and deal with typical ones in a timely manner*"* (Xi Jinping 2016, 201).

This isn't directed only towards corruption, but deep down the factional politics of the "Dengist" era. When Xi mentions the negative aspects of the "appointments based on favoritism" or that cadres "gang up in pursuit of private interests, form small cliques," he is pointing out the collective leadership that was occurring in China. Thus, what Xi did early on in his career as General Secretary is correlate collective leadership with all the problems going on with China described earlier. In general, the Chinese population didn't trust politics due to corruption and the influential power of the new capitalist class involved within the Party (Li 2016, 170-171). As demonstrated in Figure 15, ideology shifts, like the Three Represents, brought in a new class of professionals (businessmen and lawyers) into the Party, many elements of Chinese society lost faith with the Party due to these elements (Li 2016, 172).

FIGURE 5-5. Private Entrepreneurs with Chinese Communist Party Membership



Source: United Front Department of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, "2005 nian Zhongguo siying qiye diaocha baogao" [A survey of private enterprises in 2005]. See also www.southcn.com/finance/gdmqgc/gdmqyyrl/200502030218.htm and *Xingdao ribao*, December 13, 2004, 1.

Figure 15: "Private Entrepreneurs with Chinese Communist Party Membership." (Li 2016, 172).

This public distrust and chaos of the Party allowed Xi and his factional allies to pursue broad purges through Party institutions like the anti-corruption campaign headed by Wang Qishan. This isn't the first time anti-corruption campaigns have been used, but it is the most extensive and longest campaign in Party history. According to Fu Hualing, Xi Jinping and the CCP are using anti-corruption campaigns to remove their foes, rein in the bureaucracy, and restore public confidence; collective leadership created a number of power bases that Xi is trying to cut down (Fu 2014, 134). Thus, weakening these powerful figures and their factions can elevate Xi's political support–allowing for the establishment of a cult of personality (Fu 2014, 134). Unlike demotions in the "Dengist" era, like what happened to Zhao Ziyang's factional allies, these are "broad purges" in which a "disruptive shock that reverberates throughout the political system in the form of increased uncertainty about career security and personal safety creates fear" (Li 2023, 818). These campaigns resemble Mao's, through the use of powerful

rhetoric, effective decision making process, swift and severe punishments, and the marginalization of any sense of rule of law (Fu 2014, 136). The rhetoric can be expanded to this quote from *The Governance of China*:

"This is a clear signal to the whole Party and whole of society that anyone who violates Party discipline and state laws, whoever he is and whatever position he holds, will be fully investigated and severely punished. This is not empty talk. We must not let up one iota in terms of governing the Party with strict discipline. We should continue to catch "tigers" as well as "flies" when dealing with cases of leading officials in violation of Party discipline*"* (Xi Jinping 2013, 429).

An example of this purging is Zhou Yongkang, a figure who established himself in the private sector and brought his narrow private sector faction into the Party (Wedeman 2024, 6), though someone who definitely had ties to corrupt activities, he and his faction were entirely purged due to the anti-corruption campaign ultimately dissolving the faction (Meyer et al. 2016, 45). Other sidelinings include Bo Xilai's faction members and the Tuanpai faction members. Particularly former premier Li Keqiang and who was supposed to replace him Hu Chunhua. Though Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang were the two main choices for leadership and a consensus was established between Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao that Party Cadres, about 400, would vote with Xi coming first so becoming Paramount leader while Li would become premier, Xi sidelined Li in most policy decisions (Wang and Vangeli 2016, 35). Hu Chunhua after the end of Li's two term limit was supposedly designated as the Tuanpai successor to Li, but Xi sidelined and demoted him, instead choosing an ally Li Qiang (Wedeman 2024, 17). Other forms of Xi's institutional consolidation, as described earlier, including his "small groups" and new institutions that he

runs, has allowed Xi to become a "micromanager" totally dominating the sectors of power within the Party-state apparatus (Vogel 2021, 694), as demonstrated in Figure 16.

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

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

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

Figure 16: "Top Leadership Posts that Xi Jinping Holds Concurrently, as of May 2016." (Li 2016, 13).

As a result, Xi Jinping, like Mao, has started to elevate his factional allies to the Central Committee though these figures may have very narrow experience in high politics, for example Cai Qi. He created rhetoric that somewhat justifiably correlated the collective leadership of the "Dengist" era to the serious problems going on in China at the time, including income inequality, elite political chaos from the Bo Xilai scandal, and others. Xi in a politically savvy way established the argument, through texts like *The Governance of China*, that the system wasn't

working for the people, that factionalism was a tool for cadres to protect themselves to get rich and betray the core interests of the Party, instead he will fix it. Dealt on the pretext of "anti-corruption", other official statements have pointed explicitly to resistance to Xi's political and policy direction operating against his central leadership (Rudd 2024, 110). Like Mao, Xi argued that the "core of the Party" has drifted from the center to the new economic classes. Xi has pursued a "self-coronation" of core leadership of the Party, in which the Party is required to firmly safeguard Xi's position as the core of the CCP Central Committee and the whole party (Rudd 2024, 109). According to Rudd, new 2020 Party regulations require all members of the Politburo and Central Committee to report to the core leader (Rudd 2024, 109), Xi is no longer just first among equals; he has become China's central paramount leader through purging his factional enemies. New titles given to Xi like "the pilot at the helm" (linghang zhangduo) and the famous quote "With Comrade Xi Jinping as the core of the Central Committee of the CCP, and the pilot at the helm at the core with the whole Party and full unity of people of all ethnic groups in the country, we will surely be able to overcome the various difficulties and that appear on the road forward" (Rudd 2024, 111), demonstrates this absolutist centralization of power around Xi, the Party has fundamentally shifted. Xi used the chaos of Chinese politics to shift the Party's "primary contradiction" away from Deng's "primary stage of socialism," and thus creating a new contradiction within the Party–reestablishing the core, that being Xi Jinping.

The Cult of Xi

In 2017, in a speech to the 19th Party Congress Xi firmly proclaimed: "The Party exercises overall leadership over all layers of endeavor in every part of the country. It doesn't

matter whether it is the government, the military, the people, or the schools; east, west, north south, or the center–the Party rules everything" (Shambaugh 2021, 283). Xi's shift of the Party has correlated with his shattering of collective leadership and rapprochement with the Party's historical resolution of the Mao era, in which the cult of personality has once again become a reality within China. Thus, as argued previously, personality cults are the consequence rather than the cause of established autocracy (Luqiu 2016, 290). Therefore, Xi Jinping had to centralize his political authority by eliminating collective leadership to produce the cult of personality, representing the absolute centralization of power. Xi has adjusted the Party's critical narrative of Mao while instead criticizing Deng's ideological and institutional laxity. The third plenum and 1981 resolution was a direct attack on Mao's ideological errors, particularly the cult of personality; in contrast, Xi's 2021 Party resolution has become much more critical of his predecessors notably their ideological and lax governance, money worship, hedonism, ultra individualism, historical nihilism, and the rise of inequality (Rudd 2024, 294). This shift, away from the "Dengist" era of reforms, to a nostalgic understanding of the Mao era coincides with the rise of the cult of personality. In some quantitative examples, in the 1981 Party resolution, there were zero references to Deng Xiaoping or Deng Xiaoping Thought–which wouldn't be represented in the party until the 1990s; however, in the 2021 resolution, there were 25 direct references to Xi Jinping and in only five years since being Paramount leader Xi Jinping Thought was elevated to official Party status (Rudd 2024, 296). Xi's 2021 resolution runs counter to the narrative of the 1981 resolution, notably on the danger of concentration of power amongst one individual–first among equals was the primary Party function–-Xi has drifted from this narrative, instead he has become the core of the Party and limited the nature of other figures in the Party (Rudd 2024, 297-298). With the weakening of collective leadership, the Cult of Xi has become

ever present within Chinese society. Xi is pursuing a hardcore penetration of Chinese society in a Leninist and Stalinist sense of the term, in which society is now under hegemonic control by the CCP. Notably, through ideology like the "Chinese Dream," through technology, and the propaganda state. Like the Classic of Odes during the times of Confucius, Xi Jinping believes that a firm grasp of political opinion is essential for political longevity (Esarey 2021, 889). Thus, the Party must understand and construct political opinion. According to Esarey, Xi Jinping has sidelined Propaganda Department Director Liu Qibao and Liu Yunshan, instead directing the propaganda apparatus of the Party/state, particularly central media outlets like the People's Daily, to highlight the leading nature of the Party and his central leadership (Esarey 2021, 889). Mentions of Xi within the People's Daily have skyrocketed while other leaders have lacked any sort of mention (Esarey 2021, 893). While television programs talk about Xi's "wise leadership" and following his every utterance–in which a return to the Maoist era of "slogan governance" has returned (Shambaugh 2021, 285). While compared to Mao, who didn't have the vast network of technology to spread his cult, the Party is using a modern tool of ritual objects for Xi worship particularly phone apps regarding Xi Jinping trivia, where you gain social credit points for every trivia answered, Xi essay read, and Xi speech watched (Esarey 2021, 888 and Shambaugh 2021, 285). Unlike Deng, who didn't want his photo in every household or the erection of statues (Vogel 2011, 377), Xi images and slogans are everywhere in the country, notably in Xinjiang, in which slogans like "Xi Jinping is the soulmate of all the peoples of Xinjiang, breathing together and sharing the same fate," are a common site and by 2016 his portrait was in almost every Uyghar household and public space (Musapir 2024, 180). Ideologically, Xi has mobilized his core vision for China, though not that different from traditional Chinese statecraft from Qing Dynasty reformers during the Self Strengthening Movement in the 1870s. For Xi, this

ideological core is to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation–rebranded to the "Chinese Dream" (Shambaugh 2021, 281). Like Mao, Xi is using figures to help create the concepts of the cult of personality for his leadership. That man for Xi is Wang Huning, current member of the Standing Committee and head of the CPPCC. Wang has formulated the "Chinese Dream" placing Xi in the myth-making context of Chinese history as someone who is in the process of ending the "Century of Humiliation," and that Xi is the core leader to change China. The "Chinese Dream" isn't just a propaganda mouthpiece, Xi and Wang have spread it to every aspect of Chinese life including "patriotic education" and ideological worship to Xi in which now throughout Chinese life you cannot escape the Cult of Xi (Fang and Tian 2022, 11-12).

One of the core aspects of Max Weber's charismatic authority is physical appearance and rhetorical speaking ability (Luqiu 2016, 296). The media has emphasized Xi's charisma through images like "Xi Dada" or "Father Xi" representing Xi as the father of the nation, simple things like Xi sitting down and eating dinner at a local restaurant, or Xi playing football in Ireland, these images create a charismatic authority for Xi that is petriant to cult development (Luqiu 206, 296). Compared to Mao, according to Tony Lee who uses the psychological "Big Five Model" to see if Mao and Xi share similar governing "charismatic leadership" traits, Xi shares levels of 'extraversion' and 'openness to experience,' two traits that are relevant to charisma demonstrated by Figure 17 (Lee 2018, 486). Thus, both Mao and Xi possess a personality favoring the development and exercise of charisma.

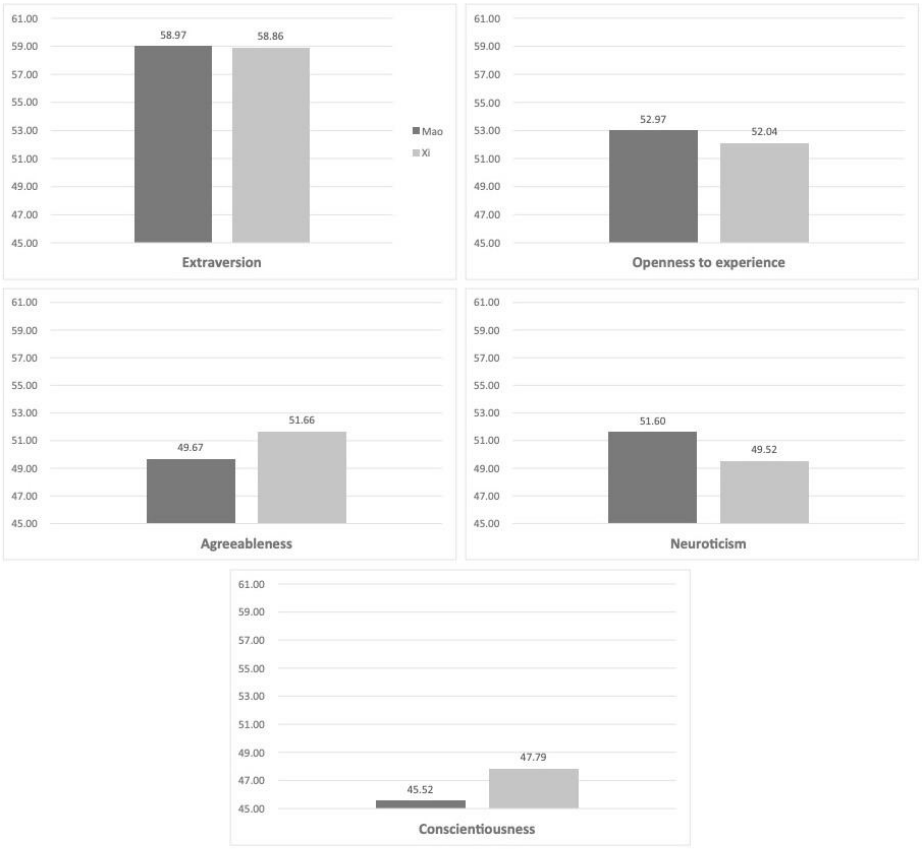


Fig. 2 The Big Five traits in comparison between Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping

Figure 17: "The Big Five Traits in Comparison Between Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping." (Lee 2018, 484).

However, unlike Mao, the Xi cult is almost exclusively a top-down process, and if there are a bottom-up process of cult development they are primarily driven by Chinese netizens, local restaurants, or taxi's but concerns about the surveillance state may create these bottom-up cult development, unlike the revolutionary zeal the Red Guard had towards Mao. Thus, the Mao and Xi cults differ in the two individuals themselves. Though they share elements of charismatic authority, Xi lacks the revolutionary zeal that Mao had. Mao was the Lenin and Stalin of the Chinese revolution. It caused an absolute embrace of him where crowds in a chaotic sense would worship Mao. Though the Cult of Xi has people worshiping Xi and calling him their "father"

(Luqiu 2016, 299), it lacks the totalizing elements of the Mao cult that created an element of "revolution" through the cult. Xi lacks the same prestige Mao ever had, they may be using similar cult methods–both trying to centralize their personal authority, but the two men lack the same processes of gaining power–thus the people's connection to them differ. Though Xi may not deem it necessary to pursue the same actions, he, unlike Mao, has used Party institutions to purge his rivals and has found a different way to change Chinese society compared to a Cultural Revolution. The Chinese people themselves may not buy the Cult of Xi compared to the Red Guards of the Cult of Mao.

Xi Jinping's Sovereign's Dilemma

What is Xi Jinping's sovereign's dilemma? Is Xi a product of agency, as Joseph Fewsmith argues, and thus, did the institutionalization of the Party norms in reality not solidify? As a result, Xi's power grab is just an unveiling of how party politics has always been played, such that Xi could purge rival factions and cement his core rulership, allowing for the establishment of a cult of personality (Nathan and Fewsmith 2019, 169)? Or, as Andrew Nathan argues, is Xi consolidating power within the bounds of institutions while strengthening and creating new ones (Nathan and Fewsmith 2019, 176-177)? As Kevin O'Brien argues, Xi has vanquished his opponents and concentrated power in his own hands, so he has a degree of discretion that has not been seen since Deng Xiaoping (O'Brien 2024, 250). As a result, the words coming out of the Xi Jinping era Zhongnanhai are happening; they are not constrained by the "norms" of the "Dengists," creating a strong argument for Joseph Fewmsmiths agency (O'Brien 2024, 250). The rise of the Cult of Xi is such an example; institutions, perceived or not, like the State Council or

forms of collective leadership, were designed to prevent this unlimited power within one figure, and now they are being dismantled. Xi broke the "rules of the road" established by the "Dengists." Xi is using a mix of old and new, as Timothy Cheek's analysis of Xi's revival of traditional Chinese statecraft for governance like the rectification campaigns argues (Cheek 2024, 878), or Xi's use of modern technology to spread his cult demonstrates (Esarey 2021, 888). However, specific structural and institutional factors have caused Xi to "play ball" in the "Dengist" era of governance. The use of the anti-corruption campaign is a use of existing norms, and the expansion of total surveillance is partially due to the already established institution and norm of monitoring people; Xi has just brought it to the digital age (Fewsmith and Nathan 2019, 167; O'Brien 2024, 252). These scholars, notably O'Brien, argue that the "Xi Jinping Effect" is a mix of structure and agency, that "even Xi is sometimes an object rather than a subject, acted upon rather than acting, as the world situation, Chinese history, his rivals, the bureaucracy, and the society he rules over influence his choices" (O'Brien 2024, 253). This thesis has argued that Chinese paramount leaders have a dilemma of either surrounding themselves with densely networked officials forming collective leadership. As such, these figures can mobilize resources to institutionalize the regime's power, but this causes the weakening of the paramount leader; however, when faced with this dilemma, each Paramount leader has the agency to purge in response, instead replacing these figures with not well-networked individuals loyal to the Paramount leader. Xi is following the latter part of the sovereign's dilemma while using specific institutional structures for his benefit. As such, Kevin O'Brien's analysis is the closest to Xi's sovereign's dilemma compared to Andrew Nathan or Joseph Fewsmith, though both figures have parts of the analysis they are correct upon. What the experience of Xi demonstrates is that structure isn't absolute. A leader can pick and choose what institutions to follow or to break.

Therefore, why is Xi pursuing this specific part of the sovereign's dilemma, and what will its impacts entail on the capacity of the Chinese state? Like the reasoning behind Mao's cult of personality, Xi's cult is also a tool for legitimacy for a Party in crisis. From the late Hu Jintao administration to the start of Xi's, a crisis of legitimacy appeared in China. Corruption, inequality, pollution, globalization, the smashing of many institutional norms by the Bo Xilai scandal, and the apparent conspired coup against the Party by Bo created a legitimate fear within the Party of collapse. Figures like Xi believed that the fall of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was due to the laxity of the Party regarding political and economic reforms and the Party lost its central position within the country; there was a concern that the reformists were doing the same thing. Xi is a Princeling, part of a lineage that established the revolution and the PRC, and also someone who experienced the "Bloodline Theory" of the Princling's during the Cultural Revolution. As such, this theory has impacted Xi Jinping's perception of the importance of his job as a savior of the revolution. Xi Jinping and Bo Xilai share this over-exaggerated importance of their purpose towards the revolution; however, Xi played his cards better– allowing him to take control of the country through his independent agency but using the structures already established within the Party apparatus to purge his enemies. The "Bloodline Theory" created a generation of Princelings that believed the revolution was their duty; as established earlier, the "Dengists" prevented further control by these Princlings, and when Xi Jinping took power in 2012, he was the first of this generation to actually rule. Thus, Xi's use of the anti-corruption campaign and purging of enemy factions was to achieve this concept of the "Bloodline Theory." He alone, not collective leadership, can stop the problems occurring within the Party because it is within his blood that he is the heir of Mao's original revolutionary ideals. As a result, the sovereign's dilemma of Xi is a mix of agency and structure to weaken collective

leadership and create a cult of personality because Xi believes he is the figure that can protect the CCP from falling to the same fate as the CPSU while finally ending the "Century of Humiliation" by bringing the Party back to the core of Chinese life. What does this mean for state capacity? Though it seems like Xi can mobilize the structure of the Party/state apparatus for any of his lofty goals, whether poverty alleviation, tree planting, economic policy, or military policy, there are underlying latent problems that may create long-term instability not far down the line.

According to Cai Xia, a former professor of the Central Party School, who trained thousands of Party cadres and advised CCP top officials, is that from 2012 to 2021, the Party investigated 631,000 section-level cadres, foot soldiers who implemented the CCP's policies at the grassroots level as part of its anti-corruption campaign (Xia 2022, 92). Many of these officials were reprimanded or purged; for example, Wang Min, the party chief of Liaoning Province, was arrested in 2016 based on statements from his chauffeur, who said that while in the car, Wang had complained to a fellow passenger about being passed over for promotion. Wang was sentenced to life in prison, with one of the charges being resistance to Xi's leadership (Xia 2022, 93). This massive turnover of the bureaucracy over minor comments or actions can have serious long-term consequences. Indignation at the elite level is replicating itself further down the bureaucracy. Early in Xi's tenure, as he began to shuffle power, many in the bureaucracy grew disgruntled and disillusioned. But their resistance was passive, expressed through inaction. Local cadres took sick leave or came up with excuses to stall Xi's anti-corruption initiatives (Xia 2022, 102). At the end of 2021, the CCP's disciplinary commission announced that in the first ten months of that year, it had found 247,000 cases of "ineffective implementation of Xi Jinping's and the Central Committee's important instructions" (Xia 2022,

102). In a system where purging is the norm, being forced to follow the slogan policy politics of Xi Jinping Thought, and being mobilized to achieve ambitious economic, climate, and societal goals will result in bureaucrats who just want to survive. They will do the bare minimum to survive, hiding their dissatisfaction or not being sure what to do. Echoes of Ma Kan-pu can be felt within the Chinese bureaucracy today. When the Paramount leader decides to centralize his leadership, the eye of the whole system is on the top leader, unlike the Jiang-Zhu or Hu-Wen administrations, where the General Secretary and Premier stood side-by-side, there was no Xi Jiping-Li Keqiang administration (Xia 2022, 93), and there's no Xi Jiping and Li Qiang administration. Xi is the core of the country. When people, not just members of the governmental system but the average citizenry, start to feel dissatisfied with the Xi administration, will they accept a return to Mao?

"History Doesn't Repeat Itself, but It Often Rhymes." Chapter 6: The Paramount Leaders in Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has argued that through their agency, Chinese paramount leaders have a choice: either purging the elite, thus weakening collective leadership, which will centralize their power, making it longer lasting but negatively affecting state capacity, or choosing collective leadership, weakening their power, but increasing state capacity. Through an analysis of the eras of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping through the sovereign's dilemma, this paper has found that (H1) "Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping deliberately weakened collective leadership; therefore weakening elite cohesion, allowing them to generate a cult of personality, while Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zeming, and Hu Jintao demonstrate the opposite effect" as the hypothesis that has more validity for this study. This research has demonstrated the realities of collective leadership within the "Dengist" era as a weakening effect on the paramount leader; however, at the same time, it demonstrates the deliberate choice Mao and Xi made in purging faction members, thus weakening collective leadership. Overall, this allows them to generate a cult of personality. Mao and Xi pursued this side of the sovereign's dilemma due to legitimacy factors, their own sense of importance and power, a tool to continue their core leadership, and purge factional enemies who might try to weaken their power. The "Dengists" pursued the other side of the dilemma for their reasoning of legitimacy, strengthening state capacity through creating a Weberian-style bureaucracy, making economic success more important than ideological purity, and bringing technocrats into the Party's leadership. Collective leadership existed, which Deng Xiaoping and the post-Mao leadership deliberately decided upon. However, even these figures become objects; outside factors, of course, impact their choices;

however, this is not a factor against their agency; it is a factor that contributes to the "picking and choosing" of Chinese leadership that is part of their rationale for their choices regarding Dilemma.

Deng Xiaoping, a man who was purged during the Cultural Revolution and saw the absolute collapse of state capacity during the Mao era, understood that politics within the CCP needed fundamental reform, notably back to collective leadership. Deng avoided cult development because he believed collective and consensus building would improve the Chinese state, not the arbitrary whims of Maoist ideological slogans. If the Party can avoid killing each other, they can focus on improving the state, helping the Party's resilience. Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao followed Deng's early consensus because they are technocrats, with limited experience in the upper echelons of Party leadership, thus having generally narrow and weaker factions. As a result, the "rules of the road" Deng institutionalized, notably collective leadership, benefited these technocrats more than anyone because it allowed them to rule the PRC without the "winner takes all" narrative of the Mao and Xi eras. Thus, Jiang and Hu followed collective leadership through their agency, and the "code of civility" kept them alive, ruling through consensus.

On the other hand, how resilient is Xi's sovereign's dilemma and cult of personality? The height of the Cult of Mao created the Cultural Revolution, resulting in economic and social turmoil and ultimately being rejected by the following three leaders of the Party. Will Xi do the same? Will he be able to transform society with the cult of personality, or will his successors reject key parts of his leadership? As Mark Twain argued, "History Doesn't Repeat Itself, but It Often Rhymes," some lessons from Mao's choices can elevate and bring to light what is occurring in the Xi era. Through purging opposing factions and promoting members from his own faction, who are often not well experienced in elite politics, Xi is creating what Victor Shih

argued Mao created "a coalition of the weak." For Mao, it was figures like Hua Guofeng, while for Xi, it's figures like Cai Qi and Li Qiang; the future of the Party is uncertain because no clear successor has been chosen, and Xi has surrounded himself with weak officials from his own faction. At the same time, his faction has at least three factions within it, each with opposing interests; as a result, once Xi ″takes his place with Marx," there is a possibility that brutal factional politics resumes, each faction trying to take control of the state, similar to 1976-1978. We know now that whoever replaces Xi Jinping will be part of the seventh or eighth generation of CCP leadership, figures born in the 1990s. The future leadership and the cadres below them will have been born during the heights of the reform era but also have seen the height of the Cult of Xi. As Timothy Cheek has argued, certain aspects of Xi's statecraft, like the revival of rectification politics, are similar to bible study (Cheek 2024, 880); this can have a major impact on how these young cadres view the world–through a lens of Xi Jinping Thought. Thus, we may not know who the next leader could be–most likely a weaker figure than Xi, similar to how Mao promoted a weak figure, Hua Guofeng–but we could know what they think. However, even with indoctrination practices, the cult and its effects on the bureaucracy will have a negative impact on Chinese state capacity, similar to Mao. Thus, this paper argues that similar to Mao, the Cult of Xi probably won’t work as a long term form of resilience. Instead, it is creating serious resilience problems for the future of the Chinese state. This creates the question for previous leaders, if Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao could roll back time, who else would they have chosen? Would Li Keqiang, now deceased, have been chosen instead of Xi, in reality, nobody could have predicted the rise of the Cult of Xi. In many ways, the echoes of the 1970s are on the horizon within China today, if Xi dies, what the future for the PRC is uncertain, similarly to right after the death of

Mao in 1976. As such, Xi Jinping, like Mao or any other leader has not beaten the sovereign's dilemma.

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