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1. Welcome

Welcome to the course CCS102 Government and Politics in China, a 5 credit unit (CU) course.

This Study Guide will be your personal learning resource to take you through the course learning journey. The guide is divided into two main sections – the Course Guide and Study Units.

The Course Guide describes the structure for the entire course and provides you with an overview of the Study Units. It serves as a roadmap of the different learning components within the course. This Course Guide contains important information regarding the course learning outcomes, learning materials and resources, assessment breakdown and additional course information.

2. Course Description and Aims

CCS102 Government and Politics in China reviews the political development of China from 1949 to the present from the dual perspective of the state and the society. We will first look at how power is structured in the party-state and how the system has evolved under various leaders, before delving into central-local relations and governance in the minority regions. Moving from state to society, we will then survey the forms of political participation and contention through which the Chinese people seek to influence government policy. The course concludes with a reflection on the Chinese political model in view of China’s domestic challenges and its global ascendance.

Course Structure

This course is a 5-credit unit course presented over 6 weeks.

There are five Study Units in this course. The following provides an overview of each Study Unit.
Study Unit 1 – Introduction to Chinese Politics

This introductory chapter to the course describes and explains important concepts, approaches and puzzles relating to the study of Chinese politics.

Study Unit 2 – History and Foundation of Chinese Politics

This study unit highlights notable developments in China since the Mao era and introduces students to important components in Chinese politics, including its Leninist party-state structure, its leadership transitions, as well as the role of ideology and propaganda in modern China.

Study Unit 3 – China’s Party-State: Fragmented Authoritarianism

In Study Unit 3, we look at the structure of the Chinese party-state in the post-Mao era, its key political institutions and innovations, as well as the governance challenges China faces today.

Study Unit 4 – Political Participation and Contention

Shifting the focus from the state to the society, the three chapters in this study unit shall examine political participation and its limitations in Chinese society.

Study Unit 5 – The China Model and Challenges Ahead

This concluding chapter to the course focuses on the China model, its appeal and limitations, as well as its implications for China and the rest of the world.

3. Learning Outcomes

Knowledge & Understanding (Theory Component)

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge in contemporary Chinese politics.
2. Apply concepts in political science to Chinese politics.
3. Explain Chinese political phenomena using political science theories.
4. Identify the main actors and institutions in shaping Chinese politics.
5. Define the basic patterns of political changes and alternatives in Chinese politics.
Key Skills (Practical Component)

By the end of this course, you should be able to:
1. Analyze current news events on China and interpret the events appropriately.
2. Comment on the political challenges and prospects for the People’s Republic.
3. Discuss the basic patterns of development in Chinese politics.

4. Learning Material

The following is a list of the required learning materials to complete this course.

Required Textbook


Other recommended study material (Optional)

Your study guide also links you to websites, videos and articles to enhance your learning and assist you in doing your TMAs.

5. Assessment Overview

The overall assessment weighting for this course is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Weight Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 1</td>
<td>Pre-Class Quiz 1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 2</td>
<td>Pre-Class Quiz 2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 3</td>
<td>Tutor-Marked Assignment 1</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 4</td>
<td>Tutor-Marked Assignment 2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination</td>
<td>Written Exam</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following section provides important information regarding Assessments.

**Continuous Assessment:**

There will be continuous assessment in the form of two pre-class quizzes and two tutor-marked assignments (TMAs). In total, this continuous assessment will constitute 50 percent of overall student assessment for this course. The quizzes and TMAs are compulsory and are non-substitutable. These assignments will test your knowledge and understanding of the course content. It is imperative that you read through your Assignment questions and submission instructions before embarking on your Assignment.

**Examination:**

The final (2-hour) written exam will constitute the other 50 percent of overall student assessment and will test your knowledge, understanding and application of the course content. To prepare for the exam, you are advised to review Specimen Exam Papers available on Learning Management System.

**Passing Mark:**

To successfully pass the course, you must obtain a minimum passing mark of 40 percent for each of the two TMA components. That is, students must obtain at least a mark of 40 percent for the combined assessments and also at least a mark of 40 percent for the final exam. For detailed information on the Course grading policy, please refer to The Student Handbook (‘Award of Grades’ section under Assessment and Examination Regulations). The Student Handbook is available from the Student Portal.

**Non-graded Learning Activities:**

Activities for the purpose of self-learning are present in each study unit. These learning activities are meant to enable you to assess your understanding and achievement of the learning outcomes. The type of activities can be in the form of Formative Assessments, as well as Activities and Reflections found in your Study Guide, some of which may be discussed during class.
6. Course Schedule

To help monitor your study progress, you should pay special attention to your Course Schedule. It contains study unit related activities including Assignments, Self-assessments, and Examinations. Please refer to the Course Timetable in the Student Portal for the updated Course Schedule.

*Note:* You should always make it a point to check the Student Portal for any announcements and latest updates.

7. Learning Mode

The learning process for this course is structured along the following lines of learning:
(a) Self-study guided by the study guide units. Independent study will require 3 to 6 hours per week.
(b) Working on assignments, either individually or in groups.
(c) Classroom Seminar sessions (3 hours each session, 3 sessions in total).

*iStudyGuide*

You may be viewing the iStudyGuide version, which is the mobile version of the Study Guide. The iStudyGuide is developed to enhance your learning experience with interactive learning activities and engaging multimedia. Depending on the reader you are using to view the iStudyGuide, you will be able to personalise your learning with digital bookmarks, note-taking and highlight sections of the guide.

*Interaction with Instructor and Fellow Students*

Although flexible learning – learning at your own pace, space and time – is a hallmark at SUSS, you are encouraged to engage your instructor and fellow students in online discussion forums. Sharing of ideas through meaningful debates will help broaden your learning and crystallise your thinking.

*Academic Integrity*

As a student of SUSS, it is expected that you adhere to the academic standards stipulated in The Student Handbook, which contains important information regarding academic policies, academic integrity and course administration. It is necessary that you read and understand the information stipulated in the Student Handbook, prior to embarking on the course.
STUDY UNIT 1
INTRODUCTION TO
CHINESE POLITICS
Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:
1. Discuss the various concepts of politics.
2. Differentiate an area studies approach from a comparative approach to studying Chinese politics.
3. Describe the current debates, puzzles and areas of inquiry in Chinese politics.
4. Explain the modernization theory and assess its applicability to countries.
5. Use available resources to conduct research on Chinese politics.

Overview

This introductory chapter to the course describes and explains important concepts, approaches and puzzles relating to the study of Chinese politics. It also presents to students various tools and resources they may tap into when conducting research on Chinese politics.
Chapter 1 Studying Chinese Politics

1.1 What is Politics?

What comes to mind when you think of politics? Do you equate politics with “government”? Is politics a public or private affair? Who are the actors in politics and why do people engage in politics? Is politics necessarily conflictual?

While most people may have an intuitive understanding of what politics is, defining politics is not a straightforward matter. Whatever your answers to the above questions are, your understanding of politics is neither right nor wrong. This is because politics is essentially a contested and loaded concept, one which even experts and authorities cannot agree upon. Nonetheless, there are four broad views of politics (Heywood 2013, 3–12):

- Politics as the art of government
- Politics as public affairs
- Politics as compromise and consensus
- Politics as power

Take note that each notion of politics comes with its own assumptions and connotations. For instance, defining politics as “public affairs” evokes further questions about the division between private and public affairs, such as this: do civil society and its activities fall in the private or public realm?

In contrast to the negative connotations of politics as self-serving and contentious in popular imagination (think “office politics”), the portrayal of politics as compromise and consensus conjures up a positive image in the tradition of democratic politics. Politics, in this perspective, is a peaceful process of deliberation and conciliation to resolve conflicts without resorting to brute force or bloodshed. This liberalist conception, however, may not dovetail with the nature of politics in authoritarian regimes.
While politics as the art of government represents a narrow concept confined to “what concerns the state,” (Heywood 2013, 3) politics as power is a very broad definition that encompasses virtually all human groups in the struggle for scarce resources. This is the essence of political scientist Harold Lasswell’s famous definition of politics as “who gets what, when and how.”

Chunked Lesson Recording: “Studying Chinese Politics”  
(Access via iStudyGuide)
1.2 Why Study Chinese Politics?

If we adopt Heywood’s definition of politics as “the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live” (Heywood 2013, 26), the next question we may ponder is: how does Chinese politics concern us? In other words, why study Chinese politics?

Gilley (2014, 144) sums up the pivotal role of politics in China:

China in the reform era…is a remarkable lesson in the autonomy of politics – why politics cannot be reduced to economic conditions or changes. The [Chinese Communist] party created China’s economic miracle with early political reforms, managed the consequences with a judicious mixture of repression and accommodation, and rebuilt its institutions and ideologies to ensure they would remain compatible with rapid socioeconomic development. Mao’s theory of socioeconomic change – “politics in command” as he called it – is one part of his legacy that seems firmly embedded in reform era China (emphasis mine).

Just as politics during Mao’s era and the reform era have shaped China in significant ways, politics under incumbent leaders shall continue to influence socioeconomic development in contemporary China. Today, the importance of Chinese politics cannot be overemphasized given China’s status as a global economic powerhouse – it has overtaken the U.S. as the world’s largest trading nation and largest foreign direct investment (FDI) recipient, and is now the second largest economy. With its newfound economic might, China’s influence on the world is likely to expand, especially in light of its more assertive foreign policy and initiatives such as One Belt, One Road (yidai yilu 一带一路) and Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Hence any major political changes within China will impact not only its own economic progress, but shall have rippling effects on world economy and countries that have close economic ties to it, among which is Singapore.

The rise of China will undoubtedly be one of the great dramas of the twenty-first century. China’s extraordinary economic growth and active diplomacy are already transforming East Asia, and future decades will see even greater increases in Chinese power and influence.

– G. John Ikenberry
China is Singapore’s top trading partner in both imports and exports. Since 1997, China has also been Singapore’s top investment destination. The two countries have also collaborated in a number of bilateral projects, namely the China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park, Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-city and the upcoming project in Chongqing. Understanding China and Chinese politics, therefore, is vital to maintaining good Sino-Singapore relations so that Singapore may continue to leverage China’s economic prowess, such as through its role in AIIB and as an offshore yuan trading centre.

Read this and ponder on the role of politics in this diplomatic “snag” between Singapore and China. Why was Beijing upset over then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s visit to Taipei as well as PM Lee’s subsequent support for Japan’s bid as a permanent member to the United Nations Security Council?

Hint: Recall what you have learned in CCS101 The Making of Modern China.
1.3 Puzzles and Debates

Lee Kuan Yew raised some important questions about China:

With China’s economy growing at 9.7% per annum from 1978 to 2006, it is an important engine of growth for its ASEAN neighbours. Chinese society is changing dramatically and at great speed. It is reforming and modernizing. Can this growth be sustained? What changes in its political structures will become necessary? What impact will Chinese political, economic and defence policies have on ASEAN?

– Speech at the East Asian Institute’s Tenth Anniversary Lectures at Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore, 19 June 2007

Recalling Heywood’s definition of politics on page 2 of this chapter, it follows that the study of politics on the whole generally seeks to explain causal relationships between phenomena, identifying and linking a cause of a phenomenon to its consequence. In the study of Chinese politics, the questions may revolve around change and continuity in the political system. Some key questions, which we would try to address in this course, include the following:

- What are the driving forces for change in Chinese politics?
- Why have Chinese politics undergone such profound changes in 20th century?
- Why has the Chinese polity remained relatively stable in the last few decades?
- What are the main contradictions in contemporary Chinese politics and society?
- Will modernization lead to China’s democratization? (Liu 2011, xi-xii)

Scholars and experts will look for clues to these questions by identifying patterns, processes or regularities in Chinese politics. Today, those who study Chinese politics fall into two broad camps, the area studies specialists versus the comparativists. The former emphasizes the uniqueness of Chinese politics that may not be generalizable to other contexts whereas the latter looks for commonalities between Chinese politics and that of other countries. This fundamental difference is exemplified in their approach to the study of Chinese politics, which each has its own merits and flaws.

China studies scholars usually focus on topics that are relatively narrow-based. Their often empirically-rich studies tell us much about China, but hardly shed light on broader issues about political systems beyond China and across regions. As such, single-country studies are often faulted for making little theoretical contribution to the discipline and failing to inform political or social thought.
Comparativists, in contrast, study and compare political systems across countries and regions in a systematic manner, seeking to explain similarities and differences as well as relating them to larger political phenomena (Wiarda 2002, 1).

Why are comparisons so important? As Lichbach and Zuckerman (2002, 4) suggest, “Because events of global historical significance affect so many countries in so short a period of time, studies of single countries and abstract theorizing are woefully inadequate to capture epoch-shaping developments.” In other words, comparativists strive to derive universal laws from comparative analyses, which may then be generalized to, applied and tested on other regions or countries.

However, one weakness of the comparative method is that there are usually too few comparable cases and too many variables (“small N”). One way to mitigate this limitation is not only to extend an analysis geographically but also longitudinally, which means to compare case across time (Lijphart 1971, 685–86).

Refer to Table 1.1 on page 15 of Joseph 2014. 1. Look at the column on China only. Do the figures on China alone tell you much about the country? 2. Now look at all the columns. What conclusions about China can you draw now? How is a comparative approach useful?

A good case in point is the modernization theory. Modelled on the developmental patterns of the Western world, early concepts and theories of development and modernisation hold a straightforward, if naïve, belief, that modernisation equals a movement from an agrarian, repressive, poor, dependent and violent society to an industrialised, democratic, affluent, autonomous and orderly one.

This dichotomy of a backward versus a modern society assumes the modernization is a comprehensive process in which the goals of development complement one another. However, events and conditions in the decolonized third world sparked concerns and debates over the arduous and circuitous path of modernization, in contrast to the less hazardous experience of the already developed and industrialized nations. As the sanguine prediction of all good things coming together failed to materialize, an alternative view of the compatibility of development goals emerged. Building on the experience of third world nations in the throes of modernization, scholars suggest that the individual goals of economic growth, equity, stability, autonomy and democracy are conflictual and do not always go hand in hand.
Today, one of the major debates about China centres around its developmental model that combines capitalism with authoritarianism. Touted as an alternative to the Western model of development, the “Beijing Consensus” or “China Model” (Zhongguo moshi 中国模式) has gained prominence with China’s ascendance and its spectacular economic progress over the last few decades. At the end of this course, we shall revisit and reflect on the significance and implications of the China Model, for both China itself as well as other developing nations.

1.4 Areas of Inquiry

The study of Chinese politics may be categorized into several broad areas of inquiry, some of which are more amenable to comparative analyses and informed by political or social theories than others. They are:

- Elite politics/ factional politics/ informal politics
- Bureaucratic politics/ centre-local relations
- Political institutions and processes
- Political development
- Political economy
- Political culture
- Ideology
- State-society relations
- Policy and event-centred studies (Joseph 2014, 18−26)

Note that these broad areas of inquiry are discussed separately in your textbook for convenience only; they are not mutually exclusive. Depending on the research topic and question, a study of Chinese politics may span a few areas of inquiry. For instance, a study that captures the complexity and dynamics of factional politics or elite politics not only examines the interaction of elites or factions within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); it must also consider the institutional setting under which the elites or factions operate, as well as the structural, cultural or ideological factors that may influence their behaviour, failing which the study may turn out to be simplistic and misleading (Guo 2013, 17).

Students are required to critique a news commentary and write a research paper of 2,500 words as part of your continuous assessment for this course. Some resources you may tap into for these assignments are listed in Appendix 1.1. You should also keep

CONCEPTS

1) Culture is “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life” (Geertz 1973, 89). Examples of cultural factors are citizens’ attitude towards a political system, social capital, etc.

2) Structural factors refer to large scale processes and institutions that both constrain and enable human action, such as capitalism, urbanization, and political organizations.

ACTIVITY 1


Search JSTOR on the SIM Library website, find and cite one journal article on each of these topics in Chinese politics: 1. Elite politics; 2. Political institutions and processes; and 3. State-society relations.

READ

1.5 Organization of this Study Guide

This study guide is organized into three main sections, with an introductory chapter and a concluding chapter. Section I follows this introductory chapter and covers the foundations of Chinese government and politics. The chapters in Section I highlight important political developments in China over two periods – 1949-1976 under Mao Zedong and from 1976 to the present day under Deng Xiaoping and his successors – with a focus on the evolution of political ideology in the People’s Republic, the CCP’s legitimacy, and the outcome of Reform and Opening Up.

Section II surveys the formal and informal political institutions in China, highlighting the vehicles and loci of power and distinctive features of the party-state that differ from those of a democracy. Section III turns its attention to state-society relations. The chapters in this section shall describe and assess the efficacy of various forms of political participation in China, the role of civil society and the media, as well as state responses to the rapidly changing social landscape.

Finally, the concluding chapter of this study guide discusses the prospects of political reform under President Xi Jinping and the challenges China faces today. It examines the China Model, and invites students to ponder on its relevance and implications for the rest of the world.
Summary

Key Points of Chapter 1:

- Politics is a contested concept that may be defined as “the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live” (Heywood 2013, 26) in search of conflict resolution.

- Chinese politics is important not only in shaping China’s domestic socioeconomic development; the rise of China as a global power also means that Chinese politics shall impact the rest of the world, including Singapore that has close economic relations with it.

- Area studies specialists and comparativists approach Chinese politics differently. Debates revolve around the contribution of each approach to political or social thought and the applicability of Western theories to China.

- Research on Chinese politics has to take into account not just political interactions, but also the structural, cultural or ideological factors that may influence political behaviour.
References


Appendix 1.1

Useful Resources

1) Area Studies Journals (available online @SIM Library)
   - China Quarterly
   - China Journal
   - Journal of Contemporary China
   - Modern China
   - China Perspectives
   - Numerous e-books available online@SIM Library

2) Databases and other publications (available @SIM Library)
   - China Academic Journals Full-test Database (CAJ) (in Chinese and in selected disciplines)
   - China Doctoral/Masters Dissertations Full-text Database (in Chinese and in selected disciplines)
   - Political Science Complete (political science journals may contain papers on China)
   - China Quarterly Forecast Report
   - China Economic Review
   - EIU Country Reports (see China page)
   - Marketline Advantage (find data on China)
   - Factiva (find relevant news reports)

3) Websites
   - Northwestern University Library: http://libguides.northwestern.edu/c.php?g=114769&p=749723 (recommended websites for Chinese studies)
   - Country Studies: http://countrystudies.us/china/
   - China Brief: http://www.jamestown.org/chinabrief/
   - China Leadership Monitor: http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor
   - East Asia Forum: http://www.eastasiaforum.org/
   - Rand: http://www.rand.org/topics/china.html
   - China Digital Times: http://chinadigitaltimes.net/
   - China Media Project: http://cmp.hku.hk/
STUDY UNIT 2
HISTORY AND FOUNDATIONS OF
CHINESE POLITICS
Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the party-state structure in the Mao era.
2. Identify key leaders, events and developments in China since the Mao era.
3. Define and apply the concepts of political culture, institutions and nationalism to Chinese politics.
4. Describe the patterns and variations in China’s post-Mao succession politics.
5. Comment on the ideological adaptations under the CCP regime.
6. Explain the implications of rising nationalism on China’s foreign policy and international relations.

Overview

This study unit highlights notable developments in China since the Mao era and introduces students to important components in Chinese politics, including its Leninist party-state structure, its leadership transitions, as well as the role of ideology and propaganda in modern China. Chapter 2 briefly reviews key events from the rise of Mao Zedong to his death in 1976. Chapter 3 describes reform and resistance in the Deng Xiaoping era, and assesses the achievements of successive Chinese leaders after Deng. Chapter 4 explains the Chinese leaders’ modifications of the communist ideology and evaluates the relevance of ideology in today’s China.
Chapter 2 Power and Struggles in the Mao Era

China’s development under Mao Zedong’s leadership was spasmodic, a pattern of lurching from politically induced crisis to crisis.

- Lieberthal 2004, 86

This chapter briefly reviews the key developments from the rise of Mao Zedong to his death in 1976, with the aim of answering the questions raised in your textbook: “What were the causes of the major turning points during the Maoist era, and what do they tell us about Mao’s rule?” (Teiwes 2014, 113). In so doing, this chapter shall examine the structure and locus of power in the Mao era, as well as how these had changed while Mao ruled China. As we trace the PRC’s swift descent from its “Golden Years” of 1949-1956 to the subsequent turbulent decades, you are urged to ponder the bigger issues underlying Teiwes’ questions cited above, i.e. what are the perils of the concentration of power in the hands of a single person, or even a single party? How may such political risks be best averted?

Not long after it was founded in 1949, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) underwent two decades of turmoil under the leadership of Mao Zedong. Amidst a string of Mao-initiated campaigns, the Great Leap Forward (*dayuejin 大跃进*) and the Cultural Revolution (*wenhua dagemin 文化大革命*) in particular resulted in cataclysmic upheaval, widespread suffering and the colossal loss of human lives, most notably the tens of millions that starved to death during the three years of Great Famine (1959-1961) and the more than one million that died over the Cultural Revolution decade from 1966 to 1976 (Meisner 1999, 353–54).

These catastrophes, as many have pointed out, were largely the consequence of disastrous policies orchestrated by Mao and carried out by his radical or blind followers. But why was Mao able to act according to his whims, eschew responsibility for his repeated miscalculations and continue to hold sway in the party despite his excesses?
CONCEPT

Political culture refers to “the specifically political orientations – attitudes towards the political system and its various parts, and attitudes towards the role of the self in the system” (Almond and Verba 1989, 12). It is the bridge between micro and macro-politics, linking the attitudes of individuals to the type of political system in which they are situated.

How would you describe Singapore’s political culture?

Clues to this puzzle lie in the politics of the day, shaped not only by Mao’s towering stature over his colleagues, but also CCP’s institutions and the Chinese political culture. In the words of Teiwes, Mao could absolve himself of blame “because of the absolute power he had accumulated through the combination of his record of revolutionary success, the centralizing forces of the Leninist party organization that he built, and the authoritarian strain in traditional Chinese political culture” (Teiwes 2014, 115). We shall examine these factors one by one in the sections that follow.

WATCH

Chunked Lesson Recording: “History and Foundations of Chinese Politics” (Access via iStudyGuide)

WATCH

To refresh your memory of modern Chinese history, watch this short documentary “Mao’s China – One Man’s Revolution” (BBC 20th century history file).

READ

2.1 The Rise of Mao

Mao Zedong was born into a peasant family in Hunan in 1893 (Schoppa 2014, 61). A founding member of the CCP, Mao began his rise to power during the Long March and was elected Chairman by the party’s Political Bureau (Politburo) at Zunyi of Guizhou Province in January 1935 (Bianco 1971, 73). Some argue that the cult of Mao Zedong originates from the Long March, which took a staggering toll on the CCP and imparted a sense of destiny and unity to the 10 to 20 percent “Long-Marchers” who survived the harrowing experience to finally arrive in Yan’an of northern China (see Figure 2.1). Over the Yan’an era (1935-1947), Mao and his name took on “a certain mystique and sense of awe” (Meisner 1999, 36). For instance, Edgar Snow, a journalist who interviewed Mao, wrote in 1937 that “Mao had the reputation of a charmed life. He had been repeatedly pronounced dead by his enemies, only to return to the news columns a few days later, as active as ever” (Snow 1968, 67).

Having said this, Mao’s rise to be the CCP’s top leader was not solely based on his godlike image in popular consciousness. Though that image had certainly been constructed through incessant propaganda, it was also underpinned by Mao’s real accomplishments in the early years. All in all, Mao’s military brilliance, his leadership in bringing the party to revolutionary victory as well as his shrewd political moves had contributed to his esteem among fellow party cadres and the consolidation of his power (Teiwes 2014, 74).

![Figure 2.1 The Long March](Source: Wikimedia Commons, Accessed 17 August 2015)
Mao spent considerable time and effort on studying military tactics and strategies, which he put into good use over the course of the Long March and in Yan’an, earning him the trust and respect of rank-and-file Communists. At the core of Mao’s military strategy was the Northeast, which Mao believed to be pivotal for the success of the Communist revolution. After CCP’s victories over Chiang Kai Shek’s Kuomintang (KMT) in Northeastern China, Mao attained a godlike status among party members for his “military genius” (Westad 2003, 199). His reputation and stature within the party and among the populace grew tremendously:

During the civil war, because of his role as a military leader, he had become identical to the party, not just in the eyes of the rural population… but also for many in the party’s core membership. The victory had proven Mao right, and even those of his colleagues who had resented his reductionist politics, his quick changes of heart, or his peasant manners now saw him as the personification of the party’s success. His likeness was everywhere in the CCP-held territories, and the general reverence in which he was held – as a peasants’ substitute for the “good emperor” – contributed significantly to the institution of party rule in the coastal provinces and south of the Yangzi (Westad 2003, 260).

The consolidation of Mao’s leading position in the CCP was achieved with a few organizational changes. In 1943, the party decided to grant Mao the authority to exercise his discretion on crucial matters. From 1942 to 1944, Mao launched a “thought-reform” or rectification campaign which endorsed his policy approach and established him as an orthodox Marxist theorist, deflecting criticisms of him as a poor Marxist (Lieberthal 2004, 50; Teiwes 2014, 74). Mao Zedong Thought was subsequently adopted as the guiding ideology of the CCP. A new Maoist leadership was also formed at the Seventh Party Congress in 1945 in Yan’an (Teiwes 2014, 74).

From 1935 to 1945, Mao forged unity within the party by staffing the Politburo with not just his supporters but former opponents as well. At least half of the 1945 Politburo consisted of leaders who had held opposing views from Mao on important issues. Membership was also marked by continuity and stability, and drawn from various factions other than Mao’s own (Teiwes 1990, 18). The wide distribution of power extended to positions beyond Politburo appointments and lower in the hierarchy, thus reducing factional strife and deepening party members’ loyalty (Teiwes 2014, 75).

Beyond the party, Mao supported a united-front doctrine to embrace all Chinese people who recognized CCP’s leadership (Fairbank and Goldman 1998, 317). Notwithstanding the waning and waxing of CCP membership, by 1945 CCP members
had swelled to an alleged 1.2 million from 30,000 about a decade ago; its armed forces also grew from 92,000 to 910,000 over the same period (Zarrow 2005, 276; Fairbank and Goldman 1998, 310). As the Yan'an era drew to a close, CCP had nearly 2.8 million members and governed around 100 million people in 19 base areas (Lieberthal 2004, 48).

What is a Leninist State?

A Leninist state has the following characteristics:

- Total penetration of state organization into society
- State domination of the economy
- Control over public speech
- Extensive control over personnel matters
- Supervision of citizens through systems of secret police and dossiers (McCormick 1990, 7-8)

After leading the party to revolutionary victory in 1949, Mao came to be widely perceived as the founding father of the PRC, credited with bringing peace and order, overhauling a system of exploitation, embarking on economic building, as well as driving out the foreign forces to restore China’s national pride (Teiwes 2014, 73). Mao was held in such reverence that CCP cadres were loath to doubt his decisions, even when he was wrong. A common refrain of high ranking officials, according to Lieberthal, is this: “We felt Mao could see farther than we could see and could understand more than we could understand. Therefore, when we did not understand Mao, we assumed that he was right and we were wrong” (Lieberthal 2004, 54).

What resulted from officials’ blind faith in Mao was bandwagon politics, in which the CCP leaders second-guessed the inscrutable Mao so that they could follow his lead. This may be attributed, in part, to Chinese political culture, which has been described as a paradoxical mix of a yearning for strong authority and resentment of the demands that authority imposes on the individual, underpinned by a desire for harmony or conflict avoidance (Solomon 1971, 4). It may therefore be argued, as Lieberthal does, that Mao’s power “drew deeply from the widely accepted tradition of relying on a good leader to produce results, rather than monitoring performance, restricting prerogatives, and limiting tenure” (Lieberthal 2004, 85). To avoid cultural determinism, however, in the next section we shall examine the institutional factors that contributed to Mao’s dominance in the Chinese political system.
2.2 Party-State Structure under Mao

A number of factors shaped China’s party-state structure in the 1950s and 1960s. They are:

1. The experience of the revolutionary cadres before 1949;
2. The revolutionary cadres’ “rural orientation”;
3. China’s longstanding political culture of authoritarianism, elitism, etc.; and

With USSR assistance in the 1950s, China under Mao embarked on the rebuilding of the state and the economy. The new Chinese government prioritized the development of heavy industry, emulated Soviet-style central planning and copied the command economy system as well as the Leninist political structure, which is described as “a party-state political system that is created and led by a Leninist party, which dominates, controls and integrates the state as a party-state establishment and as its instrument to carry out its visions, long-term and immediate goals, political actions, and policies” (Naughton 2007, 56–60; Guo 2013, 24).

The essence of the party-state structure built by Mao is its centralizing forces. Decision making was concentrated in the party-state in a society where social forces were weak or non-existent. The monopolization of power by the elites reinforced the traditional authoritarian strain in the Chinese political system. The party-state’s penetration of society also meant that there was little chance of moving up the social ladder outside of the bureaucracy, resulting in stiff competition for cadre positions which bestowed political, social and economic benefits to the office holder (Lee 1991, 399).

Another flaw of the system is its ideological primacy. Blind adherence to the Leninist principle of democratic centralism conflated policy debates with power struggles. Lee explains: “because losing a policy debate was equated with being ideologically incorrect, policy debates frequently ended with political purges. Conversely, once an official policy was adopted, it became extremely difficult to adjust or change the policy without victimizing the cadres who had benefited from, supported, and earnestly carried it out” (Lee 1991, 398).
In 1949 the CCP had a membership of close to five million. CCP cadres were a disciplined and dedicated lot in a tightly knit organization, from which a new political structure of the state was forged. From the beginning there is little distinction between state and party organs in the People’s Republic. Most party leaders concurrently held high positions in the state administrative bodies. The blurred boundary between the state and the party pervaded from the top – Mao Zedong was both CCP Chairman and Chairman of the PRC – to the lowest level of the state structure. Party organs were also installed in social and quasi-governmental bodies, such as the trade unions, peasant associations and so on (Meisner 1999, 63).
The key power holders in 1949 were the 44 members of the CCP’s Central Committee. Within the Central Committee, power resided in the 14-member Politburo, among whom the most influential were the five persons in the Politburo Standing Committee in 1949: Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De and Chen Yun (Meisner 1999, 63-64) (see Figure 2.2).

Mao’s supremacy was evident as the man who headed the three pillars of power: the party which took command of political matters, the State Council which oversaw the state bureaucracy and the economy, as well as the Central Military Commission (CMC) that controlled the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). In 1953, Mao augmented his power by demanding that all Central Committee documents must be signed off and approved by him (Teiwes 2014, 81). Such centralization of power in the hands of a single leader would lead to dire consequences, as we shall see in the next section.

![Figure 2.2 Mao and Zhou Enlai (left) in Yan’an, 1937](Source: Wikimedia Commons, Accessed 17 August 2015)

### 2.3 From Centralized to Absolute Power

At the Eighth Party Congress in 1956, Mao suggested dividing the Politburo Standing Committee into a first line and a second line. Mao would take the second line, handling only the most important matters. This was supposedly to allow other leaders to build a reputation for themselves so that Mao’s passing would not upset China’s development (Tang 1969, 74).

The Golden Years of the PRC under Mao’s consultative leadership, which gave specialists CCP leaders room to design policies in their area of expertise while the Chairman himself served as a “synthesizer and arbiter of policy decisions” (Teiwes...
2014, 80), quickly came to an end. Despite his lack of economic expertise, Mao took control over the economy in 1958 and pushed for ridiculously high production targets in the name of the “Great Leap Forward.” Premier Zhou Enlai, who was in charge of economic matters, was brushed aside when he tried to reason with Mao on the problem of over-investment. The Chairman’s insistence on impractical economic policies led to severe food shortages. Tens of millions of people perished in the famine during the catastrophic Great Leap Forward (for details see Teiwes 2014, 88–89 and the video on Mao’s Great Famine in this chapter).

In the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward, Mao’s say over CCP’s affairs was diminished from 1959-1962 (Tang 1969, 75). In September 1962 at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee, however, the Chairman retaliated to regain lost ground. He first removed the division between the first and second line, followed by a redoubling of efforts to reinstate Mao Zedong thought as the authoritative ideological guideline of the party (Tang 1969, 77).

![Figure 2.3 Backyard Furnace for Steel Production in 1958 during the Great Leap Forward](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great_Leap_钢精炼炉_(18952623615).jpg)

*Figure 2.3 Backyard Furnace for Steel Production in 1958 during the Great Leap Forward (Source: Wikimedia Commons. Accessed 6 September 2015)*

Watch this [video](#) on Mao’s Great Famine.
Even as the Chinese society was struggling to recover from the Great Leap disaster, Mao was already hatching a plan for yet another grand revolutionary campaign – the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, born out of his unhappiness with the “bourgeois” inclinations of the party and society. Concerned with what he perceived as the ideological decay of the Chinese people and party members, the Chairman urged party leaders to embark on a “cultural revolution” at the 1965 Politburo meeting (Meisner 1999, 313).

The campaign quickly spiralled into mayhem as the masses heeded Mao’s call and took over. Young and radical Red Guards went on a violent spree to destroy pre-revolutionary historical heritage and persecute “bad class elements” such as intellectuals, party elite and their children, former rich peasants and landlords. China’s President Xi Jinping was one of those victimized by the Red Guards. It was
estimated that hundreds of thousands to over one million died from torture, suicide, beatings and killings at the height of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1968 and the subsequent suppressions (Teiwes 2014, 98, 102).

Figure 2.4 “Struggle Sessions” and the Destruction of Confucian Relics during the Cultural Revolution. (Source: Photographs courtesy of Wang Youqin)

Figure 2.5 Slogan on the Campus of Shanghai’s Fudan University during the Cultural Revolution: “Defend the Party Central Committee with our blood and life! Defend Chairman Mao with our blood and life!” (Source: Wikimedia Commons. Accessed 14 September 2015)
Amidst the mayhem, Mao’s personality cult reached new heights. Mao Zedong Thought was gospel, the sole yardstick to determine what was right and what was wrong (Tang 1969, 81). The Chairman’s image was ubiquitous, appearing in public buildings, private homes and on the streets. In July 1966, news of Mao swimming nine miles in the Yangzi River made headlines in the press, furthering deifying the 72-year-old leader. In the following month, a million young Red Guards flocked to the Tiananmen Square to receive the personal blessings of their revered Chairman – their “great teacher, great leader, great supreme commander and helmsman…” – while waving the Little Red Book and cheering “Long live Chairman Mao!” (Peking Review, 1966, 5–9).

Figure 2.6 Mao meets the Red Guards at the Tiananmen Square
(Source: Photograph courtesy of Wang Youqin)

How is Mao Zedong depicted in Figures 2.7 and 2.8? What purpose(s) do such posters serve?
In 1967, factionalism and infighting among Red Guards escalated into power seizures in various parts of China, and Revolutionary Committees – mostly led by the PLA – ruled in place of local governments. At the top echelons, following Mao’s suspension of the Politburo, the Central Cultural Revolution Group and the Central Special Case Examination Group grew in power; the latter evolved into an instrument of “witch-
hunting” targeting high level officials including Central Committee members who were usurped, arrested and even tortured (Teiwes 2014, 101).

When the party-state apparatus was being dismantled from 1966 to 1968, there were no other stable and viable sources of authority to take over. All this while, Mao reigned over the uncertainty and retained his supreme position, even as things veered off course. Party leaders were confounded by the Chairman’s ambiguous stance (Teiwes 2014, 98). The lack of institutional constraints on Mao’s power meant that he alone presided over all matters and could promote or remove top officials at his whim (Lieberthal 2004, 54–55).

As the leader who built institutions of the party, army and state in Communist China, therefore, Mao was also responsible for the near destruction of these institutions with the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Not only had the Cultural Revolution thrown the Party organization and the government bureaucracy in disarray, it also overturned the established relationship of authority in the Chinese society (Tang 1969, 90). The radical and factionalized mass organizations, which were supposed to target “powerholders taking capitalist roads,” were attacking all persons in power indiscriminately. With the expulsion of leading party cadres – themselves the symbols of authority – the authority structure of the party-state also unraveled (Lee 1991, 400).

The absence of clear rules and institutions exacerbated the anarchy during the Cultural Revolution. McCormick explains the vicious cycle of upholding authority through arbitrary means amidst the chaos:

Campaigns, interventions, arrests, and purges could create a climate of fear and conformity, but without rules and institutions central authority could be maintained only through more campaigns, interventions, arrests, and purges. Even then each successive campaign further undermined the state’s administrative capacity…Campaigns debilitated rules and routines, increasing the ability of cadres at all levels to respond to their personal agendas and diminishing supervision from above or below (McCormick 1990, 4).

Mao’s firm belief in class struggle as the driving force in socioeconomic development had caused untold suffering and disillusionment among the Chinese people. By the time he passed away in 1976, years of infighting and purges had sowed deep mistrust within the bureaucratic system and severely undercut its capacity. The elevation of one man’s power to override all came at the expense of the entire nation, and China’s leaders who succeeded Mao in the late 1970s faced the mammoth task of overhauling
a crisis-ridden system on the verge of collapse, for the survival of both the party and the young nation.

Reflect

In assessing the errors of the Great Leap Forward, the CCP’s 1981 “Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People’s Republic of China” reads, “Although Comrade Mao Zedong must be held chiefly responsible, we cannot lay the blame for all those errors on him alone.”

How far do you agree with the above statement and why?
Chapter 3 Reform, Crisis and Leadership Succession

3.1 Economic Reform

China entered the reform era from the late 1970s after the demise of Mao Zedong. The impetus for reform was the Cultural Revolution and its calamitous consequences for the Chinese society, economy and political system, which convinced post-Mao leaders of the pressing need for drastic reform (Yang 1996, 4-6). Deng Xiaoping and other rehabilitated elites who survived the traumatic experience recognised that there was no other way for the CCP to stay in power and regain the confidence of the disillusioned populace. The CCP had to improve the lives of the populace and deliver the economic goods to boost its precarious legitimacy, even if this entailed jettisoning the Maoist principles of egalitarianism and collectivism (Lieberthal 2004, 127 & 130).

In 1978, the National People’s Congress (NPC) adopted the Four Modernizations programme, which singled out agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology as main areas for reform and investment. Notwithstanding the targets drawn up under the programme – including doubling the 1980 industrial and agricultural outputs and quadrupling the 1980 GNP by the year 2000 – there was no blueprint for reform at the onset (Agelasto and Adamson 1998, 2).

Reforms first took off in rural China, where the burden on peasants over the past three decades was alleviated (Naughton 2007, 88). The state gave rural collectives the leeway to experiment with payment schemes for farmers as well as the organization and marketing of agricultural products; it also increased state procurement for agricultural output, thus providing to farmers the material incentives that were previously lacking under collectivisation. Agricultural decollectivization eventually took shape, in the form of the household responsibility system (HRS) (Naughton 2007, 89). By 1983, the HRS was implemented in almost all parts of rural China, contributing to a boom in agricultural production.

Along with decollectivization, the state supported the development of free markets and the diversification of rural enterprises (Selden and Perry 2010, 5). Farmers channelled their resources into non-farm businesses, in township and village enterprises (TVEs) that spread across rural China. By 1987, income generated by TVEs became the dominant source of total rural income, exceeding that by agriculture (Oi 1999, 1).

Yet the economic reforms also came at a price. The establishment of markets and the commodification of goods and services led to new price structures and shortages of
key consumer goods. A growing number of workers in State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) were laid off as the reforms kicked in. In 1984, the CCP granted more autonomy for SOEs, which were to pay taxes based on profits instead of a fixed rate. The reduced tax revenue from SOEs prompted the government to print more money to finance its investment, contributing to inflation. Escalating consumer prices of basic goods such as food and clothing rose further because of the 1988 price reform, compounding the economic woes and anxiety of the Chinese people who were used to more stable prices in the previous decades (Gilley 2014, 126-27; Shirk 1993, 326; Davis and Vogel 1990, 11). Corruption also became a widespread and serious problem.


### 3.2 The Tiananmen Crisis

Over the decade from 1978 to 1988, China’s GDP increased by an average of 10 percent per year and GDP per capita doubled (Gilley 2014, 127). Yet rapid economic progress was accompanied by a growing groundswell of discontent, fuelled by inflation, anger at corruption, as well as greater expectations for political reform.

In the spring of 1989, the death of Hu Yaobang, respected by many because he espoused the rehabilitation of over one million Chinese who were persecuted under the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution, sparked a massive protest at Tiananmen Square in Beijing. In two months, what began as a student protest at Tiananmen Square had spread across different strata of Chinese society and to more than 300 cities in China. Intellectuals, workers, entrepreneurs and even CCP officials joined the demonstrations.

The protest persisted despite the declaration of martial law. On June 3 and June 4, Deng and the senior CCP leaders decided to mobilize PLA soldiers to end the Beijing protest. Up to thousands of civilians were killed. Zhao Ziyang, who had earlier expressed his empathy with the people’s demands for democratization and anti-corruption measures, was deposed in late June, derailing Deng’s succession plans.
(Gilley 2014, 131). The political backlash from party conservatives such as Premier Li Peng brought about a retrenchment of reform from 1989 to 1990, albeit without the endorsement of many provincial and local leaders. Deng ultimately overcame the conservative forces with his 1992 Southern Inspection Tour (Nanxun 南巡), during which he exhorted local leaders to forge ahead with economic reform (Qian 2006, 237).

China witnessed two decades of spectacular economic growth from the 1990s (see Figure 3.2). Today, the Tiananmen episode has been virtually erased from modern Chinese history in mainland China whereas Chinese societies outside of mainland China such as Hong Kong and Taiwan still hold commemorative events on the anniversary of the June 4th Massacre every year (Figure 3.3).
Figure 3.2 China’s GDP Growth, 1990-2010
(Data source: Marketline Advantage)

Figure 3.3 June 4th Commemorative Events in Hong Kong over The Years
(Photographs: Wikimedia Commons, Accessed 28 September 2015)

Watch this video on the Tiananmen massacre on June 4, 1989. Do you think the bloody crackdown on protestors was justifiable? Why does the Tiananmen massacre remain a taboo subject in China today?
3.3 Deng’s Successors

3.3.1 Jiang Zemin

Handpicked by Deng Xiaoping in 1989 to replace Zhao Ziyang, Jiang was initially perceived to be of Hua Guofeng’s ilk, i.e. a politically weak leader whose power stemmed solely from his patron (Li and White 1998, 236). Few would have foreseen Jiang’s deft manoeuvrings to remove his rivals from 1992 when he officially took over as the CCP’s General Secretary, much less how Jiang managed to hold onto power as Chairman of the CMC even after he stepped down as party chief in 2002. Li and White (1998, 237) opine that Jiang had handled Deng’s death and Hong Kong’s return to China very well, and demonstrated some flexibility in the Taiwan issue and his foreign policy, proving to his detractors that he was more capable than they thought he was.

In addition, Jiang as a leader subscribed to relatively consensual and less volatile elite politics, unlike his two predecessors Mao and Deng who adhered to strongman rule. Under Jiang, writes Gilley, “each leadership faction, defined more by geographical base, personal ties, and institutional affiliation than by policy or ideological difference, got its fair share of appointments…” (2014, 135).

Policymaking was also more institutionalized. Take the restructuring of the Taiwan affairs policy apparatus for example. The CCP Taiwan Affairs Office and the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office were merged into the six-member Taiwan Affairs Leading Small Group (TALSG) headed by Jiang. Unlike in the past when Deng had the ultimate say over Taiwan affairs, the decision-making process became more regularized, formalized and delineated (Chu 2000, 196).

Jiang also oversaw a few significant developments during his tenure:

1. 1999, Clampdown on Falun Gong
In April 1999, 10,000 members of a Qigong practising group Falun Gong (法轮功) staged a silent sit-in outside Zhongnanhai where China’s top leaders reside. The group was protesting magazine reports that claimed Falun Gong was a superstitious cult, and it demanded recognition as a legitimate religious group. The massive rally shocked Beijing. Three months later in July, Falun Gong was outlawed and more than 5,000 of its practitioners were arrested (McCarthy and Turner 1999).

Beijing won the bid for the 2008 Olympics in July 2001, after its 1993 failed bid for the 2000 Games. The hosting of the Olympics would serve China’s domestic as well as
international interests. Not only would the Olympics be an engine for growth and development in China, the prestige that comes with it would enhance China’s standing in the world, and, in turn, boost national pride and a sense of unity among its people. All these factors would also bolster CCP’s legitimacy to rule (Ong 2004, 35).

3. 2001, China’s accession to World Trade Organization (WTO)
After years of difficult negotiations, China was accepted as a formal member of WTO in November 2001. Premier Zhu Rongji was a key supporter of China’s efforts to regain its seat in WTO. The reasons behind Chinese leaders’ determination in gaining WTO accession despite serious domestic opposition were chiefly economic. WTO membership would drive reforms at home and allow China’s exports to continue its growth. Politically, China would gain some clout over international trade issues and rules that have impact on it (Prime 2002).

3.3.2 Hu Jintao
Like Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao was handpicked by Deng Xiaoping to be China’s top leader. However, unlike Jiang’s reign which was marked by a number of important milestones, China under Hu had fewer achievements to boast of. This has led many observers to label the decade under Hu and Premier Wen Jiabao as a period of stagnation (Shi 2012). Short of joining the chorus of criticisms against Hu, however, we may assess his legacy in terms of the contradictions and/or the disparity between official rhetoric and reality, and in light of Chinese politics under Hu’s successor Xi Jinping so far:

1. **Growth and sustainability.** During Hu’s tenure, China overtook Japan to become the world’s second largest economy in 2010, but this was largely the outcome of reforms undertaken by Jiang and former premier Zhu Rongji. On the surface, China under Hu had made huge economic strides, fortifying its position as a global economic powerhouse. Yet as China specialist Kerry Brown points out, the era of economic growth was also “an era of deepening social and structural issues, of political stagnation, and of the failure to properly solve the problems of all-round growth” (Shi 2012). This was despite Hu’s emphasis on sustainable and equitable development, embodied in his conception of a “harmonious society” (hexie shehui 和谐社会). The means to this end, moreover, was the state’s strenuous efforts in maintaining social stability (weiwen 维稳), for which the government budgeted RMB624 billion in 2011, an enormous sum that even exceeded China’s military expenditure (Yuen 2014). The maintenance of social stability at such great expense cast doubts upon its sustainability.
2. **Intra-party democracy and institutionalization.** Hu had been an advocate for collective rule and intra-party democracy (*dangnei minzhu* 党内民主), which encompasses within-party political reforms such as competitive elections to select CCP officials, decision making through voting by party members, and better regulation of the movement of high level officials among others (Li 2009; Cho 2004). “Under Hu Jintao, the CCP has consolidated this trend towards the institutionalization of processes,” note Duchâtel and Godement, “But it lacks institutions to deal with leadership change at the most senior level, and succession is still deemed to result from competition and jockeying between top leaders and factions within the CCP” (2009, 5). This is evident from the succession politics involving Xi Jinping (see section 3.4 of this chapter).

3. **China’s peaceful rise (**heping jueqi** 和平崛起)**? Although Hu had assured the rest of the world of China’s benign intentions as an emerging power, in the last two years of his leadership China began to take an increasingly assertive stance towards disputed territories in the South and East China Seas (see Figure 3.4) as part of the pursuit of its **core interests**. This “strident turn” was fuelled not only by a growing confidence in China’s abilities vis-à-vis the western powers, but also the nationalist sentiment at home. By upholding China’s proclaimed sovereignty over the disputed territories, the Hu leadership was presenting itself to the Chinese people as the protector of national pride, thus enhancing its legitimacy to rule in spite of the domestic governance challenges it encountered (Zhao 2012). Taking a step further, Hu’s successor, Xi Jinping, has not only adopted a more nationalistic tone in his “China Dream” rhetoric, but has taken a more aggressive approach towards the South China Sea disputes, undermining China’s own proclamation of its “peaceful rise.”
Figure 3.4 Disputed Territories in the South China Sea
(Source: Wikimedia Commons, Accessed 17 September 2015)
3.3.3 Xi Jinping

You may read about China’s incumbent President Xi Jinping in your textbook. More about Xi’s leadership, policies and new initiatives may be found in the concluding chapter of this study guide.


Figure 3.5 Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping (left to right)
3.4 Succession Politics

Authoritarian regimes are often confronted with succession quandary, and the CCP is no exception. Because succession was not institutionalized, i.e. not governed by hard and fast rules, leadership transition was dictated by patron-client relationship, and prone to power struggles and purges detrimental to the political system.

A core leader such as Mao would designate his successor, who has to tread a fine line between assuring the leader of his loyalty and building his own base of support. The protégé or successor-designee could be purged by the core leader should the latter suspect the protégé of usurpation – this was precisely what happened to Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao (Lieberthal 2004, 149). After witnessing the destabilizing outcome of succession politics under Mao, how have post-Mao leaders endeavoured to change the system? In other words, has power succession after Mao become more institutionalized, governed by rules and norms rather than the whim of a single leader?

CONCEPT

Institutions, broadly defined, encompass formal organizations as well as informal rules and procedures. They are agents as well as objects of political processes (Thelen and Steinmo 1998, 2; Hall and Taylor 1996, 938). Institutions have a few salient features:

1. Institutions regulate behaviour that pertains to universal and enduring problems in society.

2. Institutions regulate individual behaviour in specific, structured and persistent ways.

3. Regulation is sustained and legitimized by norms and sanctions.

Scholars are divided on this issue. In trying to explain China’s “authoritarian resilience,” Nathan highlights four aspects of institutionalization under the CCP regime:

1. The increasingly norm-bound nature of its succession politics;
2. The increase in meritocratic as opposed to factional considerations in the promotion of political elites;
3. The differentiation and functional specialisation of institutions within the regime;
4. The establishment of institutions for political participation and appeal that strengthen the CCP’s legitimacy among the public at large (2003, 6–7).

He suggests that these institutional changes have contributed to the adaptability and survival of the CCP, defying the conventional wisdom that authoritarian regimes are inherently weak due to its institutional flaws.

Gilley, however, has a different view. He argues that there are limits to authoritarian resilience. Beside citing evidence of how functional divisions have been disregarded and political participation curtailed under the CCP regime, Gilley also uses the Jiang-Hu leadership succession as illustration (2003, 20–23). He suggests that the choice of new leadership was in the hands of Jiang, Li Peng and Zhu Rongji instead of the entire 21-member Politburo, meaning that collective leadership was not realised. Moreover, new members of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) were selected based on factional fealty, and promotion criteria were breached at the convenience of senior leaders (Gilley 2003, 20–21).

We may examine how China’s top leaders after Mao, with the exception of Hu Jintao, had expediently subverted the norms of succession:

**Deng Xiaoping**

To his credit, once Deng Xiaoping usurped Mao’s designated successor Hua Guofeng and became the new leader in 1978, he did take some initiatives to ensure that the next leadership transition would be smoother. He reined in his own power by assuming only one of three important positions, as Chairman of the CMC. Deng also selected two successors and gave them room to cultivate their own followers and power base. Furthermore, he urged his peers to retire and refrain from meddling in the succession arrangements, and introduced some regularity to procedures and institutions (Lieberthal 2004, 150–52).

Yet Deng eventually failed to eradicate the unpredictability of succession politics. This may be attributed to a few factors:
1. Although Deng was not holding all the top leadership positions, he continued to wield power behind the scenes as the paramount leader;
2. Just like Mao, Deng purged his two successor-designees Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang;
3. Even after Deng retired from his formal position in 1990, he still took an active role in politics;
4. In 1987, he undermined the institutions he built by flouting the rule that the CMC head must be a member of the PBSC (Lieberthal 2004, 152–54; Shirk 2002, 301).

**Jiang Zemin**

Unlike Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, Jiang Zemin, Deng’s third and final chosen successor, had the advantage of being able to cultivate his own power base in the years when Deng was in poor health. As Lieberthal observes, Jiang “enjoyed both Deng’s protection and protection from Deng – the former because Deng was still alive and venerated and the latter because Deng was too feeble to orchestrate an effort to replace Jiang” (2004, 155).

Like Deng, Jiang also breached his own rules. To get rid of his rival Qiao Shi, Jiang introduced the age-70 retirement rule for Politburo Standing Committee members at the CCP’s 15th Congress in 1997. Jiang himself, then 71, was exempted (Shirk 2002, 301). Five years later, Jiang jealously held onto his power when the time came to hand over the reins to his successor Hu Jintao. Although he stepped down as party chief at the 16th Party Congress in 2002, Jiang kept his position as chairman of the CMC. He was 76.

In addition, the Politburo Standing Committee was expanded from seven to nine members. This, apparently, was to allow Jiang to place six of his loyalists on the Politburo Standing Committee (Lieberthal 2004, 156; Pei 2003, 81; Yang 2003, 27). Through these manoeuvrings, Jiang was thus able to continue to influence Chinese politics for years after his official retirement, complicating Hu Jintao’s rule and hampering his consolidation of power.

**Xi Jinping**

At the 18th Party Congress in 2012, Xi Jinping became China’s President in a clean transition of power. His predecessor Hu Jintao did not retain the position of CMC chairman as Jiang Zemin did. As such, at his inauguration Xi has assumed the three top positions of party general secretary, state president and CMC chairman all at once.

However, behind the smooth leadership transition were intense power struggles. Many observers thought that succession in China had been well institutionalized to ensure a smooth 2012 leadership succession; that is, before the Bo Xilai saga. Bo Xilai was purged largely because of his aggressive efforts to win himself a seat in the Politburo Standing Committee. Li rightly points out that “While Bo has been purged possibly for his alleged crimes and his ‘violation of party rules,’ until a more legitimate mechanism to select leaders is implemented these problems will continue to undermine the leadership unit and the Party’s governance capacity” (Li 2012, 603).
Analysts have called Xi “the most powerful” Chinese leader after Mao. Since taking office in 2012, Xi has further centralized power by forming and heading two informal but influential decision-making bodies called “Leading Small Groups” (lingdao xiaozu 领导小组) – one for the Comprehensive Deepening of Reform and another for national security (see Chapter 6 for more details). Xi’s role in these two new groups, in addition to his leadership in at least four other existing groups that handle internet security, finance and economy, Taiwan affairs and foreign affairs, shall boost his capacity to rule (Huang 2014; Miller 2014). It remains to be seen if Xi’s manoeuvrings to bypass his political opponents in the Politburo may worsen factional conflicts.
Chapter 4 From Communism to Nationalism

4.1 The Death of Communism?

Profound transformations in today’s China has led observers to declare the increasing irrelevance of communism. Some, like Daniel Bell, has spelled the death of the communist ideology in China. On the basis that under the CCP, “Few Chinese believe it will abolish the market economy and lead the march to higher communism,” Bell further suggests that today’s CCP remains a communist party in name only. While Bell believes the CCP is still Leninist in its party-state structure, he argues that it no longer possesses the defining traits of a communist party, “such as the idea that class conflict is the motor of history, a commitment to the idea of communism at home, and support for revolutionary overthrow of capitalist regimes abroad.”

Other scholars, however, believe that communism is still relevant in China. Joseph, for instance, asserts that in spite of all the drastic changes over the last few decades, the CCP “still proclaims allegiance to Marxism-Leninism and reaffirms its commitment to the building of socialism with the ultimate goal of reaching the truly egalitarian communist stage of human society” (2014, 150). In support of his statement, Joseph cites Beijing’s Central Party School where party cadres study subjects including ideology, and the “theoretical work” conferences that the CCP often holds (2014, 185).

Ideology, defined as “a systematic or comprehensive set of values and beliefs ("ideas") that provides a way of looking at and understanding the world or some aspect of it” (Joseph 2014, 149), had certainly been very influential in the Mao era. As we have seen in Chapter 2 of this study guide, Mao Zedong framed the political struggles he orchestrated in terms of communist thought, such as how the Great Leap Forward was intended to propel China’s transition to communism, and how a cultural revolution was necessary to eliminate the “bourgeois” tendencies in the CCP and Chinese society. The CCP, in its early years, was also deeply committed to realizing the socialist goals propounded in Marxist theory. As Meisner argues,

For however far Maoist revolutionary practice departed from the premises of Marxism, the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party emerged from their lengthy rural revolutionary experience without having abandoned their vision of a socialist future for China. This vision played a crucial role in determining the policies that the victorious revolutionaries initially pursued (1999, 103–104).
Yet as circumstances have altered greatly, to what extent does the communist ideology still function as the “operational code” of Chinese leaders today (Joseph 2014, 150)? This is the key puzzle we shall try to solve in this chapter. Other important questions to bear in mind are:

- Is communism still alive in today’s China?
- What is the role of ideology in Chinese politics?
- How has nationalism been inculcated in the Chinese?
- What is the content of Chinese nationalism?


Discuss the relationship between Socialism, Capitalism and Communism.

**4.2 Adapting Ideology to Suit China**

Indeed, it is the ideological adaptability and its political manifestations that help explain the remarkable longevity of the PRC as one the world’s few remaining communist party-states (Joseph 2014, 150).

Orthodox Marxism has been adapted substantially in various ways to suit the conditions in China, as manifested in the revolutionary role of peasants instead of proletariats in Mao Zedong Thought, and later by Deng Xiaoping’s “Building Socialism with Chinese characteristics” as well as Jiang Zemin’s theory of the “Three Represents.” In fact, the CCP’s attempt to push for China’s transition to socialism in the early 1950s is in itself a departure from the central Marxism proposition that capitalism precedes socialism, and that socialism may not be realized without the material conditions of capitalism. Socialism was the first step towards communism after the collapse of capitalism. In other words, socialism is the “lower stage of communism,” a transitional phase after the capitalist system breaks down and before communism is established (Joseph 2014, 152).

Meisner describes the “cruel historical paradox” that confronted the CCP leaders in the early days. He writes,
For it was precisely the failure of modern capitalism to develop in China that had permitted socialist revolutionaries to come to power there in the first place, while it was also precisely that failure that denied to revolutionaries in power the material means to realize their socialist goals...The Communists were thus both the beneficiaries and the victims of the retardation of modern capitalist development in China and the consequent heritage of economic backwardness. Possessing state power, they had no alternative but to use that power to pursue a non-capitalist road to socialism (1999, 104–105).

The first Five Year Plan (1953-1957) was devised with precisely the socialist transformation of China’s economy in mind. The core of the plan was 156 large-scale industrial projects imported from the Soviet Union and Eastern. It also entailed the abolition of private ownership, especially during the “High Tide of Socialism” from 1955 to 1956. Rural households were organized into agricultural cooperatives under collectivization, which achieved a 98% enrolment by the end of 1956 (Naughton 2007, 66–67).

After the tumultuous Mao era, Chinese society faced a threefold crisis of faith (sanxin weiji 三信危机) – a crisis of trust in the party-state, a crisis of confidence in China’s future, and a crisis of faith in socialism (Chen 1995, 27). To restore confidence, Deng Xiaoping initiated China’s transition to a market economy with a series of economic reforms. The collectivization of land under Mao was reversed and pieces of land were contracted to individual households; rural communities managed their own township and village enterprises outside the planned economy, and foreign businesses could operate in special economic zones (Naughton 2007, 87).

How was the market transition rationalized in ideological terms? In 1984, Deng Xiaoping explained,

…we have repeatedly declared that we shall adhere to Marxism and keep to the socialist road. But by Marxism we mean Marxism that is integrated with Chinese conditions, and by socialism we mean a socialism that is tailored to Chinese conditions and has a specifically Chinese character (Deng 1984; emphasis mine).

“Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” therefore, justifies the introduction of market economy and allowing practices of capitalism – including private ownership of property and businesses, and the profit motive – to drive China’s economic growth. Moreover, orthodox Marxism posits that socialism is the transitional phase of development that ensues after the unravelling of the capitalist
system. Thus in the primary stage of socialism, it is not inconceivable to use some features of capitalism in the building of socialism (Joseph 2014, 178–79).

Whereas the communist ideology had shaped political behaviour and policy-making in Mao’s time, this seems to have been turned on its head in the post-Mao era. Ideology, in other words, has been bent when it is politically expedient to do so. As Chen argues, the notion of “building socialism with Chinese characteristics” serves as a “catch-all concept” to justify policies that depart from socialism. “On the one hand, ‘socialism’ denotes the one-party rule of the CCP and predominant state ownership of the means of production,” writes Chen, “The ‘Chinese characteristics,’ on the other hand, encompass all kinds of pragmatic policy initiatives, which are deemed ‘applicable’ by Deng and his associates to the Chinese reality but do not conflict with the one-party rule or a predominant state-ownership of the means of production” (1995, 29–30).

In 2000, Jiang Zemin further refashioned Marxism with his theory of the “Three Represents.” He claimed that CCP has popular support because it always represents 1. the development trend of China’s advanced productive forces, 2. the orientation of China’s advanced culture, and 3. the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. While Mao had been wary of capitalist influences on Chinese society, Jiang embraced capitalists, rationalized as part of China’s “advanced productive forces,” by allowing them to join the CCP.

In light of the substantial adaptations of the communist ideology in the post-Mao era, how far is today’s CCP still committed to the goal of building a classless communist society? Or is the party merely paying lip-service? Clues to this may be found when we juxtapose CCP rhetoric with reality. Consider what Deng said in 1984 when he propounded the building of socialism with Chinese characteristics:

Capitalism can only enrich less than 10 per cent of the Chinese population; it can never enrich the remaining more than 90 per cent. But if we adhere to socialism and apply the principle of distribution to each according to his work, there will not be excessive disparities in wealth. Consequently, no polarization will occur as our productive forces become developed over the next 20 to 30 years (Deng 1984).

After three decades of reform and opening up, China’s income gap has widened sharply as indicated by its gini coefficient. In 2012, its gini coefficient was 0.474, only slightly lower than that of the U.S. (see Figure 4.1). World Bank data also shows that from 2002 to 2007, the income ratio of China’s richest 10% and the poorest 10% grew from 19:1 to 25:1. In 2009, the income of urban residents was also 2.33 times higher than that of rural residents. Market-oriented reforms, including the dismantling of
SOEs, the suppression of independent trade unions that protect labour rights, have also undercut the socialist ideology. In addition, rampant and endemic corruption plagues the country and the party, where CCP officials, their children and their cronies have amassed great wealth through connections and are themselves the capitalists under a supposed socialist system (see Figure 4.2). According to a report dated June 2008 by China’s Central Bank, up to 18,000 corrupt officials and employees of state-owned enterprises have fled China or gone into hiding since the mid-1990s. They are suspected of embezzling 800 billion yuan, or USD123 billion (Aredy 2011).

Figure 4.1 Gini Index (Absolute) of China and the United States
(Source: Marketline; National Bureau of Statistics China; United States Census Bureau)
In China’s pursuit of economic development, therefore, the meaning of socialism has been repeatedly adapted and has become increasingly ambiguous. Capitalism, conceived as the means to achieve socialist ends, has now become an end in itself. While the CCP may still pledge allegiance to socialism and communism, the goal of building a communist China as envisioned by Mao seems a remote possibility. It is an irony that capitalism, hence the material conditions for socialism, is now in full force in China because of Deng’s reforms, but socialism is more or less dead. Today, it seems highly improbable that China under CCP can undo the capitalist system it has created to take the path to socialism and communism.

### 4.3 Inculcating Nationalism

In his speech on 9 June 1989 just after the Tiananmen crackdown, Deng Xiaoping said: “It was because of this, because of our poor performance in ideological and political work and because of the incomplete legal system, that violations of the law and discipline, corrupt practices, etc. all came about. I have told foreign guests that during the last ten years our biggest mistake was made in the field of education, primarily in ideological and political education – not just of students but of the people in general. We didn’t tell them enough about the need for hard struggle, about what China was...”
like in the old days and what kind of a country it was to become. That was a serious error on our part.”

CONCEPT

Gellner defines nationalism as “a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent.”

He further defines nationalist sentiment as “the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle.” A nationalist movement is one that is driven by nationalist sentiment.

Gellner cites several ways in which this nationalist principle may be breached:

“The political boundary of a given state can fail to include all the members of the appropriate nation; or it can include them all but also include some foreigners; or it can fail in both these ways at once, not incorporating all the nationals and yet also including some non-nationals. Or again, a nation may live, unmixed with foreigners, in a multiplicity of states, so that no single state can claim to be the national one” (Gellner 1983, 1).

The Tiananmen Square massacre revealed the bankruptcy of the communist ideology in the rapidly changing post-Mao China. Few might still believe in Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought but the CCP’s continued adherence to it as the official ideology had resulted in an ideological vacuum. Fashioning nationalism, which serves as an ideological glue that keeps the nation intact and the CCP in power, thus took on great urgency for the communist regime. As Zhao observes, “Pragmatic leaders have fashioned nationalism, because it has the effect of removing differences within the country and replacing it with a common, hegemonic order of political values. Nationalism has been used to rally popular support behind a less popular communist regime and its policies by creating a sense of community among citizens” (2000, 17).

Since the Tiananmen crackdown, therefore, the CCP has systematically promoted nationalism to shore up its legitimacy. In 1991, the party launched a patriotic education campaign to address its legitimacy crisis in the post-Tiananmen era. Two official documents were issued in August 1991 – “Notice about Conducting Education of Patriotism and Revolutionary Tradition by Exploiting Extensively Cultural Relics” and “General Outline on Strengthening Education on Chinese Modern and Contemporary History and National Conditions” (Wang 2008, 789). All schools had
to take not more than three years to incorporate the requirements drawn up in the General Outline into their curriculum. Modern Chinese history has also become a compulsory core course in Chinese high school since 1992 (Wang 2008, 792).

In August 1994, the CCP Central Committee issued another document, the “Outline on Implementing Patriotic Education,” which mandated the introduction of patriotic education throughout the country. The Outline also called for local governments to construct “patriotic education bases” such as museums, memorial halls and so on as part of the patriotic education campaign (Wang 2008, 790, 794).

In the new narrative and curriculum on nationalism, the focus is no longer on class struggle as the driving force for historical progress. Through substantial revisions of schools’ history textbooks, there was a shift away from the “victor narrative” of CCP as the “vanguard of the Chinese working class” to a national humiliation discourse. For instance, instead of stressing the internal and ideological clashes between the CCP and the KMT in the anti-Japanese War, the narrative emphasizes the international and ethnic conflict between China and Japan.

In addition, textbooks approved after 1992 adopt the “China as victim” narrative, focusing on how the Chinese suffered under the brutal treatment of foreign powers. The patriotic education campaign, in short, has furnished Chinese youth with details about China’s traumatic and humiliating past, which culminated with the CCP leading the country to revolutionary victory and national independence, putting an end to foreign incursions and national humiliation (Wang 2008, 791–92).
The CCP’s narrowly defined “patriotic nationalism” demands uncritical devotion not just to the state but also to the CCP regime (Shen 2004, 123). Yet not all Chinese nationals are amenable to China’s patriotic education, and not all agree that loyalty to the country is coterminous with loyalty to the communist regime. In 2012, Beijing’s attempt to introduce the controversial patriotic education to the former British colony of Hong Kong met with a setback as thousands, including secondary school students, rallied against it. The plan was eventually shelved (read this).

Figure 4.4 Protests against National Education in Hong Kong, 2012
(Photographs: Wikimedia Commons, Accessed 2 October 2015)


What are the tools and means the CCP has used for patriotic education?
4.4 Mounting Nationalist Sentiment and Implications

At the end of the twentieth century, Sinologist Lucian Pye observed that “The Chinese today feel that they have not been getting the respect that is their due in the light of all the positive changes since the end of Mao’s rule, but they are unable to articulate exactly what ideals, principles and values they believe their country stands for, and for which others should respect them” (Pye 1999, 574). How has this changed today, as China became the world’s second largest economy and continues its ascendancy as a great global power?

In Pye’s opinion, as an instrument of the CCP, Chinese nationalism is “thin” in content (1993, 126). Zhao notes that the core of Chinese nationalism rests on the conviction of China’s unjust treatment and exploitation by other powers (Zhao 2013, 553). A widely-circulated poetry on the Internet exemplifies Chinese grievances over perceived Western bias and prejudices against their nation (see Box). Embedded in such nationalistic discourse is a strong sense of “victimisation” and deep resentment towards the West for not just the past humiliation but also its present day criticisms of China over its poor human rights record, environment pollution among others. Nonetheless, other than denouncing the hypocrisy of the West, which may be valid in some ways, the Chinese nationalistic discourse is still woefully wanting in the articulation of its beliefs and values.
What Do You Really Want from Us

When we were the Sick Man of Asia, we were called The Yellow Peril.
When we are billed to be the next Superpower, we are called The Threat.
When we closed our doors, you smuggled drugs to open markets.
When we embrace Free Trade, You blame us for taking away your jobs.

When we were falling apart, You marched in your troops and wanted your fair share.
When we tried to put the broken pieces back together again, Free Tibet you screamed, It Was an Invasion!
When we tried Communism, you hated us for being Communist.
When we embrace Capitalism, you hate us for being Capitalist.

When we have a billion people, you said we were destroying the planet.
When we tried limiting our numbers, you said we abused human rights.
When we were poor, you thought we were dogs.
When we loan you cash, you blame us for your national debts.

When we build our industries, you call us Polluters.
When we sell you goods, you blame us for global warming.
When we buy oil, you call it exploitation and genocide.
When you go to war for oil, you call it liberation.

When we were lost in chaos and rampage, you demanded rules of law.
When we uphold law and order against violence, you call it violating human rights.
When we were silent, you said you wanted us to have free speech.
When we are silent no more, you say we are brainwashed-xenophobes…

What do you really want from us?
Think hard first, then answer … Because you only get so many chances.
Enough is Enough, Enough Hypocrisy for This One World.
We want One World, One Dream, and Peace on Earth (Anonymous)
Without a coherent and common set of beliefs and values at its core, contemporary Chinese nationalism has remained reactive instead of proactive (Zhao 2000, 2). There has been a surge in nationalism in the 1990s and the 2000s (Wang 2008, 799). Popular nationalism is often kindled when the Chinese feel that their sovereignty is being violated, when they are insulted by foreign criticisms, or when memories of past humiliation are evoked. For instance, after studying readers’ letters, essays and poems mailed to Guangming Daily newspaper in the days following the Belgrade bombing, Gries gathers that these expressions of popular opinion indicate a sense of outrage that Chinese sovereignty was infringed and Chinese self-respect was insulted (Gries 2001). In 2012, Chinese people also took to the streets to protest against Japan’s claim of sovereignty over disputed islands in the East China Sea. The anti-Japanese protests turned violent when demonstrators vented their anger at Japanese establishments in China (see more images here).

Nationalism cuts both ways. Although it may serve to boost the legitimacy of the CCP, rising nationalist sentiment may also pressure the party to respond to it and adopt an uncompromising position when dealing with sensitive international issues. “Once the public has been mobilized through nationalistic appeals,” Downs and Saunders explain, “elites can become trapped in their own rhetoric and choose to pursue risky security strategies rather than jeopardize their rule by not fulfilling popular nationalist demands.” As a result, “Even though nationalist myths are primarily aimed at a domestic audience, other states may misinterpret them as a serious threat and respond in kind, giving rise to a security dilemma” (Downs and Saunders 1998-1999, 115). The
dilemma of the CCP regime stems from the conflict between its foreign policy and domestic propaganda. While the dissemination of nationalist propaganda remains crucial strategies for legitimation and internal unity, playing to nationalist sentiment may damage China’s ties with important economic partners and hurt its national interest.

Some propose that Chinese nationalism, while initially fuelled by the state, has evolved beyond its control. This is not only the outcome of patriotic education, but also a result of growing Chinese confidence with the rise in China’s global economic status (Hoffman and Larner 2013, 189). From 2008, the CCP government has apparently become more ready to boost its nationalist credentials and heed popular calls to take a hostile position against Western powers and to be more aggressive in maritime territorial disputes, particularly in the East China Sea and South China Sea (Zhao 2013, 535). This “strident turn” in Chinese foreign policy is driven by a few factors, namely:

1. The convergence of Chinese state nationalism and popular nationalism;
2. The relative strength of China vis-à-vis western nations especially after the global downturn, from which China rebounded quickly;
3. Increasing domestic political uncertainties especially during the leadership transition which compelled the CCP to rely more on nationalism for legitimation (Zhao 2013, 544; Ross 2011, 47).

Xi’s “Chinese dream” (Zhongguomeng 中国梦) that emphasizes material wealth, national pride, and subservience to authority exemplifies this recent convergence of state and popular nationalism. In this discourse of a Chinese dream, “Love of country” is conflated with “love of the Communist Party.” Although the notions of democracy, human rights, and modernization are also brought up, they are usually accompanied by a caveat – “with Chinese characteristics” – and re-interpreted so as to be congruent with the Communist Party authoritarian rule (Link 2015).

The “shallow appeal” of materialism and national pride has been generally successful. Link notes that many Chinese, especially urban youth, have subscribed to the idea that being a Chinese today means being “materialistic, nationalist, and aggressive” (Link 2015). There remains, however, an inherent weakness in the discourse of the “Chinese dream,” which stresses patriotism and materialism but remains silent on the moral treatment of fellow human beings. This lacuna cannot be filled as long as the CCP regime insists on the Chinese model of development of economic liberalization without political democratization, and withholds granting its people greater autonomy and rights.
Analysts today are concerned, rightfully so, that the Chinese government’s continued reliance on nationalism might lead to a more confrontational foreign or military policy in order to boost its legitimacy among the Chinese people (Joseph 2014, 186). Zhao suggests that “If this type of nationalism prevails in shaping the foreign policy making of a rising China, it would make compromise extremely difficult if not impossible on issues that China deems as its core interest and thereby push China to adopt increasingly bellicose foreign policies” (2013, 553). As it is, the world is already witnessing China’s territorial aggrandizement through the construction of airstrips in the contested territory of South China Sea.

**REFLECT**

“[I]deology may well serve as a mask or rationalization for preserving the power and privileges of a particular group (including an economic class or political party)” (Joseph 2014, 150). Discuss this in the context of post-Mao China.
Summary

Key Points of Chapter 2:

- Mao Zedong built his esteem in the CCP through his military brilliance, his leadership in bringing the party to revolutionary victory, and his political strategies in fostering party unity.

- Mao’s godlike image was deliberately constructed through incessant and ubiquitous propaganda.

- Centralizing features of the Leninist party-state structure placed power firmly in the hands of Mao Zedong.

- The authoritarian proclivity of Chinese political culture also contributed to Mao’s supremacy in the CCP leadership.

- Rules and institutions were arbitrary under Mao, and their near destruction aggravated the anarchy during the Cultural Revolution.

Key Points of Chapter 3:

- Reforms under the aegis of Deng Xiaoping had boosted China’s economy and improved the livelihood of its people.

- At the same time, however, reforms had also resulted in widespread corruption, unemployment and escalating consumer prices. There was also a greater desire for political reforms and democracy.

- The groundswell of social discontent erupted into massive protests at the Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989, which was suppressed by force and ended in bloodshed on 4 June 1989.

- China has seen three leadership successions in the post-Mao era. Leadership transition, however, was still plagued by institutional deficits, factional conflicts, bitter competition and purges of political opponents.
Key Points of Chapter 4:

- The communist ideology has undergone several adaptations to suit the changing conditions in post-Mao China.

- Nationalism has been systematically inculcated in the Chinese people to fill the ideological vacuum after the bankruptcy of communism and to justify CCP rule.

- Mounting nationalist sentiment, however, poses a conundrum for the Chinese government in its foreign policy and international relations.

- Chinese foreign policy, especially with regard to contested territory in the East China Sea and South China Sea, has taken a strident turn since 2008.
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STUDY UNIT 3
CHINA’S PARTY-STATE:
FRAGMENTED
AUTHORITARIANISM
Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:
1. Demonstrate knowledge of China’s party-state structure in the post-Mao era.
2. Identify the key political institutions and institutional changes in the post-Mao era.
3. Define and apply the concepts of democracy and the separation of powers to Chinese politics.
4. Contrast the western democratic model to China’s intra-party democracy.
5. Explain the causes and problems of fragmented authoritarianism in China’s central-local relations.
6. Discuss the challenges to Chinese governance in Tibet and Xinjiang.

Overview

In Study Unit 3, we look at the structure of the Chinese party-state in the post-Mao era, its key political institutions and innovations, as well as the governance challenges China faces today. Chapter 5 gives a broad overview of the party-state and introduces the concept of democracy, which is then used in Chapter 6 as a yardstick to examine the Chinese notions of “one-party democracy” and “intra-party democracy.” Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 discuss longstanding issues in China’s governance through two dimensions: local protectionism and tensions in the minority regions of Tibet and Xinjiang.
Chapter 5 China’s Party-State Structure

Navigating through China’s party-state behemoth is a daunting task. In whom and which institutions does real power reside? How does power flow? What is the relationship between party organisations and state institutions? These are some of the issues the chapters in this study unit shall try to address.

For beginners, here are some general principles to guide you through: First, China is a party-state; this means the boundaries between the party and the state are nebulous, and the Communist Party commands and presides over all political institutions, party or state. Second, there is often a huge discrepancy between how power works in theory, such as what the Constitution of the PRC declares, and how it really works in practice. Third, in Chinese politics, informal rules or norms are at least as important as formal institutions – you have already had some inkling of this when reading about succession politics in Chapter 3. Fourth, the size of a political body is not equivalent to its political clout. Taken together, points two and three essentially mean that you should avoid a literal reading of official documents and reports published by the CCP government and its mouthpiece, as well as look beyond formal institutions and their said functions to truly understand how Chinese politics work.

CONCEPT

The State

According to Charles Tilly, a state is an organization that has these characteristics: 1) It rules over the population in a territory; 2) It is autonomous; 3) It stands in distinction from other entities that function within the same territory; 4) It is centralized; 5) It is divided into coordinated components (Tilly 1975, 70).

Although this chapter centres on China’s political system, we may sometimes discuss the communist party-state in light of other political systems. A comparative approach has several merits, as briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter of this study guide. To reiterate, a comparative approach illuminates the virtues and weaknesses of the case in comparison, i.e. the Chinese political system. It also broadens your perspective and ability to see beyond a single instance, so that you may better assess how similar or different the case study is in relation to others. For instance, the CCP leadership often insists that “western” democratic values are at odds with Chinese culture and values; however, once you compare mainland China with Taiwan, which runs a democratic multi-party political system in a predominantly Chinese society, then the CCP leaders’ assertion seems suspect. In what follows, we shall first touch on the U.S.
political system as a preamble to a detailed examination of the Chinese political system.

Refer to Tilly’s definition of the state in the Box. How is this different from the concept of a nation that you learned in Chapter 4? Discuss.

Chunked Lesson Recording: “China’s Party-State: Fragmented Authoritarianism” (Access via iStudyGuide)

5.1 Political Systems and the Separation of Powers

A political system comprises the formal and informal institutions concerned with making decisions on the use, production and distribution of resources in a society. Formal political institutions, for example, may delineate the roles and responsibilities of the executive, legislature and judiciary, as well as the election process for political leaders. Informal institutions such as norms and rules may also form part of the political system (Scott and Mcloughlin 2014, 7). The government is the policymaking component of a political system.

Political systems may be broadly classified into three types – democratic, authoritarian and totalitarian – by the distribution of power and accountability. If the three kinds of regime are placed on a continuum of consensual-non-consensual, a democracy would be found at the consensual end whereas a totalitarian regime would be located closer
to the non-consensual end, and an authoritarian regime would fall somewhere inbetween (Almond 1956, 403).

Democracy is a highly contested concept that may be construed in narrow procedural terms such as election and the policy-making process, or more broadly to encompass civil and political rights and freedoms. Nonetheless, at the very minimal, a democracy has to hold regular, competitive, multi-party elections where citizens vote for their political leaders. This is known as the minimalist or procedural definition of democracy. A fundamental principle of a democratic political system is that it derives its power from the people, who exert direct or indirect influence on how they are governed through various forms of political participation. Democracies may be further divided into parliamentary systems and presidential systems. Typically, a democracy has three branches of government, the executive, legislative and judicial, each of which serves as a check on the other two and vice versa. Figure 5.1 illustrates how the separation of powers functions to safeguard against tyranny within the U.S. political system.

Figure 5.1 Separation of the Powers in the U.S.
Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes are non-democratic. In a totalitarian system, the government seeks to control and even transform all aspects of society. China under Mao and Nazi Germany under Hitler are examples of totalitarian regimes. According to Linz, the following elements are simultaneously present in a totalitarian regime: “an ideology, a single mass party and other mobilization organizations, and concentrated power in an individual and his collaborators or a small group that is not accountable to any large constituency and cannot be dislodged from power by institutionalized, peaceful means” (Linz 2000, 67, 70).

In-between democracies and totalitarian systems on the consensual-non-consensual continuum are authoritarian regimes, which, by Linz’s widely cited definition, are “political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones” (Linz 1964, 255). Because a large number of regimes that are neither democratic nor totalitarian may fall into this category, Linz and others further differentiate between subtypes of authoritarian regimes, such as military, corporatist and personalistic.

Unlike in democracies, the exercise of power in both totalitarian and authoritarian regimes is largely arbitrary, and concentrated in the hands of an individual or a clique. As of 2015, Freedom House rated 89 out of 195 countries as Free, where people are entitled to considerable political rights and civil liberties. However, the majority – 106 countries – fell short of democratic standards.

What explains the existence of such a large number of non-democratic regimes? Madison’s quote at the beginning of this section conveys a powerful message: Because men are not angels, checks and balances must be in place in a system where men are governed by men. This reflection on human nature and governance seems hard to impugn. If what it conveys is a universal truth, then how may systems of government that intentionally shun or limit checks and balances be justified? What about a system such as China’s?

In China, the CCP leadership has repeatedly cautioned against “blindly copying the Western political system.” In 2011, for example, former chairman of the NPC Wu Bangguo enunciated the “Five Nos” in CCP-governed China, spelling out the party’s rejection of multiparty politics, the separation of powers, diversification of the party’s guiding thought, a federal model, and privatization.

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1 “Mentalities” here refer to emotional ways of thinking that are not codified (Linz 2000, 162).
The model China prefers, in the words of the CCP General Secretary and President Xi Jinping, is the seemingly oxymoronic “one-party democracy.” Xi said China “must adhere to the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China that places the party in charge of the country and the responsibility of guiding it toward one-party democracy,” cautioning that any attempt to change this system is not only unconstitutional but may also put CCP rule and the future of China in jeopardy (Mattis 2012; emphasis mine).

Clearly, the “one-party democracy” Xi Jinping cited is neither what is conventionally understood as democracy in the western context, nor what democracy means as we defined earlier. In addition, the CCP has frequently extolled “inner-party democracy” (dangnei minzhu 党内民主). To what extent do checks and balances exist in China’s one-party state? We shall examine this as we look into the workings of the Chinese political system and its institutions in this chapter and the next.

Figure 5.2 The Flags of the PRC and the CCP

5.2 The State Structure

A Chinese government [website](#) lists the state organs of the PRC, including, in descending order of importance, “the National People’s Congress, the President, the State Council, the Central Military Commission, local people’s congresses and local people’s governments at various levels, organs of self-government in national autonomous regions, the people’s courts and the people’s procuratorates.” The [National People’s Congress](#) (NPC), China’s legislature, is described as “the supreme organ of state power,” which purportedly elects China’s President. According to the [Constitution of the PRC](#), the NPC is also vested with the power to elect the chiefs of four other state organs. They are:

- The State Council, which is the “executive body of the highest organ of state power” headed by the Premier;
- The Central Military Commission, which “directs the armed forces of the country”;
- The Supreme People’s Court, the “highest judicial organ”; and
- The Supreme People’s Procuratorate.

On top of that, the NPC is also authorized to remove the chiefs of the above state organs, including the President (see Articles 62 and 63 of the [Constitution](#)). Now if you believe every word you read in the Constitution, you may think China’s political system is not really different from that of a western democracy. However, as cautioned earlier, there is a huge gap between China’s power structure as delineated on paper and that in reality.
Refer to Figure 6.2 on page 200 of your textbook. The dotted lines in the diagram indicate the flow of power as described in the Constitution, that is, the President, State Council, Central Military Commission and Supreme People’s Court, are empowered by the NPC. In reality, however, unlike the U.S. system where the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government serve as a check on each other’s power, in China the CCP leadership has overriding authority over the legislature and the judiciary. In the words of a China expert,

the Party stands aloof, assumes overall responsibility and coordinates all sides of the government, congress, political consultative conference, and the masses organizations. If the latter are the bones and fleshes of Chinese body politics, the Party is undoubtedly its brain, its nerve center and its sinews (Xia).

Through its nomenklatura system, comprising lists of and potential candidates for top party and government positions that are subject to the party’s appointment and dismissal, the CCP monopolizes power over the country’s elites in all state and party apparatuses, including the legislative and judicial system, universities, religious
bodies and even hospitals (Lieberthal 2004, 234). Leading officials in state and non-party institutions concurrently hold party posts, and party committees are implanted in not just state institutions but also SOEs, private companies and NGOs as well (Lawrence 2013, 4). Party penetration of society is a distinctive feature of the Leninist system that is described earlier in Study Unit 2.

In the past decades, the NPC had been responsible for drafting and formalizing a noteworthy corpus of laws, thereby contributing to the making of China’s legislative system, which was virtually non-existent under Mao (Lieberthal 2004, 176). However, the NPC is hard put to shake off the label of a “rubber stamp,” given that a full plenary session has always deferred to decisions pre-ordained by the CCP and its powerful Politburo. Till date, the legislature has rejected neither a law nor a Party nominee for top political leaders.

In the “election” of Xi Jinping as China’s President in 2013, for instance, 2,952 NPC delegates voted in favour of it, with merely three abstentions and one vote against. The NPC’s rubber stamp voting is also a consequence of the modus operandi that takes place backstage: a bill that is put to formal vote is fait accompli. In other words, it has already secured broad support and is guaranteed passage whereas one that lacks support is not presented for balloting at all to forestall open opposition.

In the eyes of the Chinese communist regime, law serves largely as a tool of the party. This instrumentalist view of law underpins the difference between rule of law and rule by law. In theory, China’s legal system is that of parliamentary supremacy, meaning that the executive and the judiciary are subordinate to the legislature (Delise 2014, 226). In reality, however, the legal system is subject to party oversight and manipulation. For instance, by the time high ranking CCP leaders such as Zhou Yongkang and Bo Xilai are formally charged in court, their sentence has already been pre-determined by party organs such as the Discipline Inspection Committee.

The most important legal institutions in China are the people’s courts – divided into four levels, the people’s procuracy and the public security (civilian police) organs. At each level of the people’s courts, the party political-legal committees hold the authority to oversee the courts. The CCP may encroach on and undermine judicial independence in various ways, such as through the participation of CCP committees in the adjudication of cases, the appointment and dismissal of leading cadres in courts, and controlling the financial arrangements of local courts (Gechlik 2003). Notwithstanding party control of the legal system, there has been extensive efforts to build a legal system in the post-Mao era, including the enactment of hundreds of laws, the state organs’ adoption of regulations at the national level and below, and the creation of a larger pool of professionally-trained lawyers (Delise 2014, 227–28).
Major Meetings

1) National Congress of the CCP (中国共产党全国代表大会)

This is the biggest party meeting of around 2,000 party representatives that takes place once every five years. At the meeting, delegates vote to “elect” the CCP leadership, in support of personnel decisions that are made beforehand. Each Congress's name is abbreviated in Chinese as the number of the Conference followed by da (大), short for dahui (大会 ”conference”).

2) CCP Central Committee Plenary Sessions (中国共产党中央委员会全体会)

The Central Committee of close to 400 party members convenes at least once a year over the five-year term of the National Party Congress. There are usually seven meetings or “plenums,” and each has a specific agenda. In Chinese, the plenum’s name is abbreviated as the number of the plenum followed by the Chinese characters zhong quan hu (中全会) in short. For example, the First Plenum is 一中全会, the Second 二中全会 and so forth.

3) Two Sessions or Lianghui (两会)

Lianghui refers to the largely ceremonial annual meetings of two assemblies, the National People’s Congress and the CPPCC. The former is China’s legislature whereas the latter is an advisory organ with absolutely no decision making power. Each comprises more than 2,000 delegates.
Do you know that there are other political parties beside the CCP in China? These parties are represented in the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), an advisory body with no decision-making power.

Table 5.1 Non-Communist Political Parties in China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Founding Date</th>
<th>Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China Revolutionary Committee of the Kuomintang</td>
<td>Jan 1948</td>
<td>80,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Democratic League</td>
<td>Oct 1941</td>
<td>180,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Democratic National Construction Association</td>
<td>Dec 1945</td>
<td>100,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Association for the Promotion of Democracy</td>
<td>Dec 1945</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Peasants and Workers’ Democratic Party</td>
<td>Aug 1930</td>
<td>90,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Zhi Gong Dang</td>
<td>Oct 1925</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiusan Society</td>
<td>Dec 1944</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League</td>
<td>Nov 1947</td>
<td>2,100+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Yew 2011)

5.3 The Party Structure

The Constitution of the CCP declares that “The highest leading body of the Party is the National Congress and the Central Committee elected by it” (Chapter 2 Article 10). Under the CCP Constitution, the National Congress of the Party is empowered to elect the Central Committee and the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, whereas the Central Committee in plenary session elects the Political Bureau (Politburo), the Standing Committee of the Politburo and the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party (Chapter 3 Article 19, 22). However, as with the power structure described in the Constitution of the PRC, how power really works within the party is vastly different from what is written on paper.

Figure 5.4 illustrates the discrepancy. Whereas the Party Constitution describes a bottom-up process in the “election” of members of various party organs, the actual process is top-down (Li 2014, 196). The term “election” is also a misnomer in this context – as we have seen in Chapter 3 of this study guide, the process to determine who shall assume leading party roles involves the personal choice of senior leaders as well as factional rivalry characterized by contentious, behind-the-scene bargaining and tussle. Upon the conclusion of the power struggles, the resulting personnel decisions are then presented as a fait accompli to party members in lower level party organs, who will vote as a mere formality, in an overwhelming endorsement of the personnel decisions.
The Central Committee and its Departments

Day-to-day affairs of CCP are managed by the Central Committee. Some of the most important departments under the Central Committee are:

- **CCP Central Committee General Office** (中共中央办公厅 Zhonggong zhongyang bangongting): This is the nerve centre of the party which provides a wide range of administrative support to the leadership to ensure its functioning. Among its responsibilities are the provision of security services to leaders, overseeing their living and logistics arrangements and so forth.

- **CCP Central Organization Department** (中共中央组织部 Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu): This department manages the list of nomenklatura and maintains confidential records of CCP members used for assessing their eligibility for appointments. The department’s control over party members’ political career makes it “a focal point of internal CCP lobbying and backroom power-brokering by senior officials” (Dotson 2012).

- **CCP Central Propaganda Department** (中共中央宣传部 Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu): All mediums including media outlets, education institutions,
historical and cultural facilities fall under the purview of this department, which controls the content that is transmitted to the people of China.

- **CCP United Front Work Department (中共统一战线工作部 Zhonggong tongyi zhanxian gongzuobu):** The department manages relations with groups beyond the CCP so as to win their support for the party and its goals. It also runs state-controlled organizations such as the All-China Federation of Labour Unions.

- **CCP International Liaison Department (中共中央对外联络部 Zhonggong zhongyang duiwai lianluobu):** The department’s key role is in engaging foreign political parties, beyond the jurisdiction of official state-level diplomatic relations.

- **CCP Central Discipline Inspection Commission (中共中央纪律检查委员会 Zhonggong zhongyang jilü jiancha weiyuanhui):** As a watchdog agency for corruption, the Commission is constrained by its lack of autonomy from the Party and the politicized nature of corruption cases.

- **CCP Policy Research Office (中共中央政策研究室 Zhonggong zhongyang zhengce yanjiushi):** The Office provides policy advice and support for the Politburo (Dotson 2012).

**The Politburo Standing Committee**

At the apex of power are the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) unveiled at the 18th Party Congress in 2012. The number of PSC members have not been consistent in history, varying between five and eleven. At the 16th Party Congress in 2002 when Hu Jintao took over as Party General Secretary from Jiang Zemin, the number of PSC members was increased from seven to nine to allow aides of the retiring Jiang to fill the additional seats. The number of seats remained constant following the 17th Party Congress, and each was tied to a particular policy area or portfolio, leading some China watchers to suggest that institutionalization had taken shape in the PSC. That observation has now proven to be premature with not only the reduction of PSC seats in 2012, but also a devolution of responsibility of two portfolios – propaganda, and security and intelligence – to members of the full Politburo for undisclosed reasons (Dotson 2012).

Among PSC members, the first-in-command is the General Secretary (formerly Party Chairman in the Mao era), whereas the rankings of other leaders have varied over time. From the 1990s, PSC members have held the concurrent positions of the Party General Secretary, State Premier, NPC Chairman of the National People's Congress, CPPCC Chairman, the Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, and the first-ranked Secretary of the Secretariat. The 18th PSC members who took the
seats in 2012 and their respective portfolios are listed below in descending order of ranking.

Table 5.2 The CCP’s 18th PSC members (2012-2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official Title</th>
<th>Portfolio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xi Jinping 习近平</td>
<td>Party General Secretary, Chairman of the Central Military Commission, PRC President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Keqiang 李克强</td>
<td>PRC Premier, Party Secretary of the State Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Dejiang 张德江</td>
<td>Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu Zhengsheng 俞正声</td>
<td>Chairman of the CPPCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liu Yunshan 刘云山</td>
<td>Head of the Party Secretariat, President of the Central Party School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Qishan 王岐山</td>
<td>Secretary of the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Gaoli 张高丽</td>
<td>PRC Vice Premier, Deputy Party Secretary of the State Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Lawrence 2013; Dotson 2012)

Leading Small Groups (lingdao xiaozu 领导小组)

As shown in Table 5.2, each PSC member has a portfolio which he oversees. Policymaking is carried out in informal and somewhat secretive caucuses known as “leading small groups.” Leading small groups are not formalized organs and little is publicly known about them, apart from the snippets of information reported in state-controlled media such as People’s Daily (Miller 2008, 2014). There is no bureaucratic record of these bodies, which also lack standard operating guidelines or rule. This, however, does not diminish their policymaking clout:

In theory, leading groups are supposed to issue guiding principles, rather than formulate concrete policies. In practice, however, their recommendations, particularly those of groups including one or more Standing Committee members, are often taken to represent a consensus…In many cases, the party leadership will adopt a leading
group’s recommendation with little or no modifications. That can make the panels more powerful than ministries, which merely implement the policies they make (Huang 2014).

Leading small groups may be classified into three types according to their terms:

1. **Permanent small groups** deal with broad and the most important policy areas, including the Central Committee’s leading small groups for Taiwan affairs, foreign policy, ideology and propaganda, finance and economics among others. They are usually headed by a member of the Politburo Standing Committee.

2. **Term-oriented small groups** are set up to supervise a specific task and are usually dissolved upon the completion of their task. Some examples are the Central Committee’s Beijing Olympics Preparation leading small group, and the leading small group for Comprehensive Deepening of Reform (中央全面深化改革领导小组) led by Xi Jinping.

3. **Task-oriented small groups** are more common and may exist at lower levels of the political hierarchy. They are set up in response to emergencies such as natural disasters, social unrest and so forth. For example, a leading small group to oversee disaster relief for the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake was led by former premier Wen Jiabao (Miller 2014).

Now that you understand the basic structure and functions of the Chinese party-state, recall the minimalist definition of democracy. Do you think China’s “one-party democracy” and “inner-party democracy” fulfil the minimal requirements of a democracy? Why or why not?
Chapter 6 Institutional Innovations and “Intra-Party Democracy”

In repudiating western models of democracy, the CCP leadership has come up with its form of “democracy” that would not jeopardize its rule. Short of overhauling the one-party system, the party has touted “intra-party democracy” or dangnei minzhu (党内民主) as the alternative way forward.

The search for institutional improvements that would not upset the CCP’s grip on power is prompted by profound socio-political transformations as well as the party’s changing composition over the past decades. Not only has the CCP expanded tremendously in terms of size, the educational and occupation profiles of members have also undergone drastic changes.

Party membership increased 17 times from 5 million in 1949 to 85 million in 2013 (Li 2014, 203). In line with the rise of the middle-class and the capitalists since the reform era, the CCP has also been transformed from a party dominated by farmers, peasants and workers, into one with more diverse membership from various social strata, such as entrepreneurs, professionals, managers and technical personnel in the private sectors (Li 2014, 205). Among the political elites, there is also a rise in the number of technocrats and those with higher education.

The growing diversification of the party and of Chinese society entails the co-optation and integration of varied interest groups, which the CCP tries to address through a number of institutional innovations within the party system. Key measures include allowing limited intra-party electoral competition, expanding power-sharing or collective leadership among the party elite, and imposing restraints on the exercise of power (Lin 2004, 268).

6.1 Within-Party Institutional Innovations

Limited Intra-party Electoral Competition

To enhance the roles of its party congresses, the CCP has, since the 1980s, introduced some competition into its intra-party elections at various levels of party organizations except for the top echelons (Guo 2012). This is achieved through fielding more candidates than positions, i.e. “more-candidates-than-seats election” (cha’e xuanju 差额选举), in contrast to elections with an equal number of candidates and seats (deng’e xuanju 等额选举). For example, there may be 310 candidates standing in an election for a 300-member Central Committee. The 10 candidates who performed the worst in

SU3-16
terms of the votes garnered in a secret ballot will be eliminated (Li 2009, 7). On average, the number of candidates vying for a seat in the Central Committee has exceeded the number of seats by around 5% (Lin 2004, 271).

Party Congress delegates are elected through either one of these electoral processes: “public recommendation, public election” (gongtui gongxuan 公推公选) or “public recommendation, direct election” (gongtui zhixuan 公推直选). Note that these are not, in any sense, popular elections with universal franchise. The terms “public” and “direct” merely refer to electoral colleges of party members in varying degrees of inclusiveness, ranging from 200 to as many as a few thousand members. “Direct” elections allow all party members in a locale to cast their ballots whereas “public” elections limit voter participation to only those in the party and government departments or those with close ties to them (Fewsmith 2006, 4–5).

Nonetheless, the CCP’s efforts to make intra-party elections more competitive may not be efficacious. Competition in intra-party elections is limited because candidates are usually nominated by party leaders at the higher level. According to the Party Constitution, while local Party Congresses may elect Party Committees at the same level, party organizations at the higher level also have the authority to appoint or transfer the top leaders of lower-level party organizations. Provincial party secretaries, for instance, are usually appointed by the centre and not elected by provincial Party Congresses. Even if the provincial Party Congress gets to cast their vote for the provincial Party Secretary, the election is but a formality because the only candidate is either incumbent or predetermined by the centre (Lin 2004, 274).

Collective Leadership

In the Hu Jintao era, there was an emphasis on collective leadership (refer to Chapter 3). As stated in Hu’s report to the 17th Party Congress, the CCP should strive to improve the system of “collective leadership with division of responsibilities among individuals” so as to “prevent arbitrary decision-making by an individual or a minority of people in the Party” (Li 2007). This power-sharing arrangement would ensure that the Party General-Secretary’s role was the first among equals instead of the “core” leadership (Miller 2008, 6).

A number of institutional innovations has been undertaken to facilitate collective leadership. At the local level, some measures to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of Party Secretaries and standing committee members include increasing meeting frequency and allowing the full membership of local Party committees to deliberate on important decisions. Major decisions of the Party are supposed to be determined by a Party committee vote. These include decisions on socioeconomic policies, large construction projects, major financial expenditure, and important personnel decisions. For personnel appointments, two-thirds of members must be
present to vote and a candidate must garner at least two-thirds of the ballots to be confirmed. In 2009, for example, Zhejiang voted on the appointments of 56 municipal- and bureau-level leaders by secret ballot. However, note that this has neither been implemented at all levels and all provinces, nor administered in the election of Politburo members, and higher Party and state leaders (Li 2009, 8–9). At the national level, it is hard to transform the Party Central Committee into a genuine policy-making institution because of its large membership size and the scattered locations of members. Currently, the Committee convenes on an average of once a year (see Chapter 5 of this study guide).

**Institutional Restraints on the Exercise of Power**

The CCP has also introduced rules and norms to safeguard against the abuse of power. Whether these innovations have been sufficiently institutionalized to become regular and binding on behaviour, however, remains to be seen.

1. **Term limits:** There is a term limit of 5 years for leading positions in the party and government. An individual cannot hold the same post for more than two terms. Nonetheless, the revised [1982 PRC Constitution](#) stipulates two-term limits for top state posts and not party posts. Article 66, for example, states that “The Chairman and Vice-Chairmen of the Standing Committee [of the NPC] shall serve no more than two consecutive terms”; Article 79 declares that “The term of office of the President and Vice-President of the People’s Republic of China is the same as that of the National People’s Congress, and they shall serve no more than two consecutive terms”, and Article 87 pronounces the same term limits for the Premier, Vice-Premier, and State Councillors of the State Council.

2. **Age limits:** These apply to posts at the higher levels. At the 1997 15th CCP National Party Congress, Politburo members over the age of 70 – with the exception of Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin – stepped down. The age limit appears to be lowered at the 2002 16th Party Congress, when Politburo members at the age of 68 and above went into retirement. Subsequently at the 17th Party Congress in 2007, the practice endured and was extolled by state media (Dotson 2012).

Today no members of the Party Central Committee, Politburo, and Standing Committee shall be considered for a second term in these leadership bodies once they reach 68 years-old or above (Li 2014, 213). By this informal rule, therefore, all members of the 18th Politburo Standing Committee (see Table 5.2 in Chapter 5) except Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang are expected to step down at the 19th Party Congress in 2017 because of their advanced age.
3. Law of avoidance in the appointment of local leaders: Non-natives are almost always appointed to be provincial party secretaries, police chiefs among other leading positions at the local level.

“Bipartisanship” and Within-Party Balance of Power

On top of the above formal and informal rules, some China watchers argue that competition between two factions – the “populist coalition” and the “elitist coalition” – within the CCP serves as inner party checks and balances. According to Li, the former is made up of former Chinese Communist Youth league officials (known as tuanpai 团派) who constitute Hu Jintao’s power base, whereas the elitist coalition consists mainly of “princelings” (taizidang 太子党) whose parents were high-ranking officials as well as the Shanghai gang of leaders who climbed the political ladder when Jiang was the Party chief in Shanghai in the 1980s (Shanghaibang 上海帮 or Jiangxi 江系). These two rival factions seemingly share equal power in terms of leadership composition and check each other because of their different policies and priorities.

6.2 Limitations to Intra-Party Democracy

Li claims that the above rules and norms ensure that turnover rate for Chinese political elite is high, such that “no individual, faction, institution, or region can dominate the power structure” (Li 2014, 213). Yet he appears to contradict his own assertion of inner-party checks and balances when he writes of recent developments in the party’s factional rivalry. Li suggests that

overall, the princelings have apparently gained the upper hand in most key civilian and military organization, perhaps due to their powerful connections. In any case, their obvious ascendancy is likely to reinforce public perceptions of the convergence of power and wealth in the country. More worryingly, it might spell the end of bipartisanship and lead to a vicious power struggle, potentially undermining the legitimacy of the political system and threatening the stability of the country at large (Li 2014, 217).

The problem with China’s one-party system is that informal rules can always be breached and exceptions can be made as long as a leader amasses enough power to overcome within-party resistance. For example, as described in Chapter 3, nominally retired CCP officials such as Deng and Jiang might continue to wield power behind the scenes as “Party Elders” after they stepped down, holding sway over key policy decisions and personnel appointments.
Strongman Leadership: Blessing or Curse?

Li (2014, 210) also proposes that CCP has shifted from strong-man rule to a “more collective leadership.” But the notion of collective leadership is questionable, as we see from how Xi Jinping has concentrated power in his own hands since taking over the reins from Hu Jintao. It is generally agreed that Xi has become the most powerful Chinese ruler since Deng, and perhaps even since Mao (see this, this and this). Xi Jinping, at his inauguration, has assumed the three top positions of party general secretary, state president and CMC chairman all at once. Subsequently, he has amassed further political clout through the creation and leadership of informal but important policymaking vehicles known as leading small groups (lingdao xiaozu 领导小组).

Watch this short introduction video on Xi and China’s leaders.

Leading small groups help political leaders circumvent resistance and exert control over a broad policy area. President Xi Jinping himself oversees six important Central Committee groups, including the Internet Security and Informatization (中央网络安全和信息化领导小组), the leading small group for Deepening National Defence and Military Reform (中央军委深化国防和军队改革领导小组), and the leading small group for Comprehensive Deepening of Reform ( overarching group presiding over matters in six domains: party construction, discipline and supervision, democracy and justice, culture, society, and economy and ecology) which were new policy panels set up at the 18th Central Committee’s Third Plenum in November 2014 (see Figure 6.1).

In a departure from the norm, Xi has also placed himself at the helm of the Finance and Economy leading small group (中央财经领导小组), which had always been under the charge of the Premier for the last 20 years. On top of these, Xi is head of the National Security Commission (国家安全委员会) created at the Third Plenum, which has four broad functions: 1. Craft a national security strategy in view of the growing complexity of the world; 2. Enact a legal framework for national security; 3. Define and prescribe national security policies, and 4. Address national security threats in restive regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang (Lampton 2015, 770–71).
Observers point out that Xi would likely consolidate power much sooner by installing himself as head of these groups. However, some also raise concerns over the potential abuse of power, as was the case with Mao Zedong, who, in 1966, put five loyalists including his wife Jiang Qing on the leading small group on the Cultural Revolution to orchestrate the mass uprising and eliminate his political rivals. Whether Xi’s strongman rule turns out to be good or bad for China depends on how he uses his power, which brings us back to Madison’s axiom on the difficulty in governance: “you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.” In a non-democratic system without a separation of powers, what mechanisms are in place to ensure that a leader will not abuse his enormous power?
“Intra-Party Democracy” in Comparative Politics

In comparative political analysis, the feasibility of a single-party democracy is supported neither by existing theories nor by empirical comparative democratization studies. Taiwan’s democratization illustrates this. Before Taiwan’s democratic transition in 1986, Chiang Ching-kuo planned to reform the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) before implementing broader reforms to the entire society. Yet KMT’s authoritarian internal structure remained stubbornly in place and failed to change until many years after Taiwan’s democratic breakthrough (Lin 2004, 275).

Robert Michels, who formulated the “iron law of oligarchy” way back in 1911, has already dismissed the possibility of intra-party democracy even in a wider democratic system. Recent studies also find that intra-party democracy undermines the quality of popular democracy (Wu 2015, 310).

In his study of China’s Party Congress, Wu cautions that the adoption of some democratic forms in authoritarian systems is in fact intended to bestow authoritarian legitimacy and serves as “resistance to democratic transition.” Wu concludes that there is no evidence to show that an introduction of some democratic forms in an authoritarian system will lead to its eventual democratic transformation (Wu 2015, 313).

ACTIVITY 1

Li suggests that inner-party elections with multiple candidates are intended to “gradually make China’s Party-state system more open, competitive, and representative, without relinquishing the CCP’s ‘leading role’ or weakening its ‘governing capacity’” (Li 2009, 8). How far do you agree with this statement? Discuss.
Chapter 7 Central-Local Relations: Fragmented Authoritarianism

7.1 The Organization of Local Government

Local governance in China is administered through 22 provinces (not including Taiwan), five autonomous regions, four municipalities directly under the central government, and two Special Administrative Regions (SARs) of Hong Kong and Macau (Saich 2015, 155). There are five levels of local government in China (see Figure 7.1), although the village at the bottom of the hierarchy is not a formal level of government. Within this hierarchy, each administrative level is responsible for overseeing the work done by lower levels. Provincial and local governments have been given greater autonomy in economic policy making but are ultimately subordinated to the upper level governments and the central government.

The dominance of the CCP is also built into the system. There are two key political figures at each level of administration below the central government – the Party Secretary of the party committee and the head of government. The Party Secretary serves as the policy maker whereas the head of government is responsible for administrative work and implementing party policy. The former, as the first-in-command (yibashou 一把手), is always ranked above the latter (erbashou 二把手) although both are party members and are appointed by higher level party committees in practice (Guo 2013, 138–39).

For example, the Mayor of Chongqing (重庆市市长) is the head of government in Chongqing, one of the four municipalities directly under the central government. Under the dual party-government system, however, the mayor has less political clout than the Chongqing Municipal Party Committee Secretary (重庆市委书记), who is the de facto political chief of the municipality.
### Figure 7.1a Municipality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROVINCIAL LEVEL</th>
<th>PREFECTURAL LEVEL</th>
<th>COUNTY LEVEL</th>
<th>TOWNSHIP LEVEL</th>
<th>VILLAGE LEVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Municipality</td>
<td>County</td>
<td>Township</td>
<td>Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Town</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Sub-dist</td>
<td>Native Town</td>
<td>Neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>Municipality</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Sub-district</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region (SAR)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sora</td>
<td>Gaqa</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 7.1b Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROVINCIAL LEVEL</th>
<th>PREFECTURAL LEVEL</th>
<th>COUNTY LEVEL</th>
<th>TOWNSHIP LEVEL</th>
<th>VILLAGE LEVEL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Municipality</td>
<td>Sub-provincial level city</td>
<td>Township</td>
<td>Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous region</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prefectural</td>
<td>County</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Prefectural level city</td>
<td>County level city</td>
<td>Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>Municipality</td>
<td>Prefectural</td>
<td>Autonomous county</td>
<td>Ethnic Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region (SAR)</td>
<td></td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Sub-district</td>
<td>Neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sora</td>
<td>Gaqa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tiao/Kuai Guanxi: The Complex Matrix

China’s multilevel nationwide bureaucracy may be understood in terms of tiao/kuai (条/块), which refers to the vertical bureaucracies (tiao) from the centre to the locality and the horizontal ones (kuai) within a geographic region. The crisscrossing of the vertical and horizontal bureaucracies constitutes the intricate web of tiao/kuai relations (tiao/kuai guanxi 条块关系). In this complex system, horizontal bureaucracies usually predominate (tiekuai jiehe, yikuai weizhu 条块结合，以块为主).

For a country as vast and diverse as China, the coordination of policy implementation is a highly complex process. Party dominance in the system compounds this complexity. Imagine this: If you work in an environment department in a county, do you take orders from the upper-level environment bureau at the province, or do you defer to your county government?
This dilemma stems from the situation of one official having more than one superior in different offices and locations. In this circumstance, the official has to determine which of his or her superiors has priority. The official shares a binding “leadership relationship” (lingdao guanxi 领导关系) with the boss that takes priority over others, whereas with the other he shares a nonbinding “professional relationship” (yewu guanxi 业务关系) (Lieberthal 2004, 187).

To administer a policy entails substantial coordination and negotiation between different bureaucracies, which often have plural and conflicting economic and jurisdictional interests (see Box). At the same bureaucratic rank, actors and agencies cannot impose binding orders on each other. Any actor or agency may also frustrate policy adoption or implementation with relative ease, leading to policy gridlock (Lieberthal 2004, 188). Such structural tensions contribute to a “protracted, disjointed and incremental policy process” termed “fragmented authoritarianism” (Saich 2015, 245; Lieberthal 1992).

A Case Study in Fragmented Authoritarianism

Notwithstanding the fact that environmental protection is itself a compound issue that extends across different sectors and institutions, circumstances in China have caused further fragmentation in the environmental governing structure:

1. The state agencies in charge of forestry, water and fishery have existed way before the State Environmental Protection Agency, predecessor of today’s Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), was established in 1988.

2. To carry out environmental protection, therefore, the MEP has to take over administrative responsibilities from other existing state agencies. This involves “deep reconfiguration of administrative domains, power allocation and personnel setting” prone to generating tension (Wu 2013, 109).

3. Nature conservation in China, for instance, has been under the charge of the forestry sector. The national and local government agencies involved in implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora are within the forestry bureaus and not the environmental protection bureaus. To add to the complexity, the 300 over national-level nature reserves in China are governed by a number of state agencies, including the National Bureau of Forestry, the National Bureau of Oceanic Affairs, Ministry and Land and Resources, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, and the MEP (Wu 2013, 108–109).
7.2 Fragmented Authoritarianism

There are several potentially serious problems that beset China’s vast and complex bureaucratic system. They are:

1. **Overload** at the top, when lower-level officials shun responsibility by leaving decisions to upper levels;

2. **Gridlock** resulting from power fragmentation across various functional bureaucracies and territories;

3. **Lack of accurate information** in a system that impedes the development of independent information sources and because the multi-layered bureaucracy tends to generate distortions;

4. **Indiscipline, corruption** and petty dictatorship because there are opportunities and incentives for officials to flout rules, pursue their self-interests and hide their misdoings (Lieberthal 2004, 188).

Local governments frequently engage in local protectionism (*difang baohu zhuyi* 地方保护主义), which may be broadly defined as “the adaptation and mutation of national laws and regulations to suit the interests of local officials and which are at a variance with the initial intent of Beijing” (Mertha 2005, 793). Local protectionism is captured in a pithy Chinese saying, “shangyou zhengce, xiayou duice” (上有政策，下有对策), which means the lower levels have measures to counter upper level policies. Nevertheless, the central government is not entirely powerless in reining in errant local officials and checking local protectionism.

First of all, through the *nomenklatura* system Beijing controls the appointment of the highest-ranking cadres at the provincial level (see Chapter 5 of this study guide). Through a “one-level down” system in which leading local officials are appointed by their immediate superiors, the central government directly appoints and removes around 7,000 party cadres at the provincial level. This is a formidable mechanism through which Beijing may reward and punish provincial officials, such that it is unlikely any of them may go against Beijing’s wishes for long (Saich 2015, 162; Lieberthal 2004, 236).

In addition, the central government can always adjust the central-local balance of power through centralization or decentralization. That is, when Beijing feels that a local government is too powerful, it may centralize power upwards and vice versa. For instance, Beijing experimented with “soft centralization,” involving simultaneously the centralization of bureaucracies from the township/county to the
provincial level, and decentralization between the centre and the province (Mertha 2005, 792). Having said this, the undertakings to re-centralize control have been carried out with varying degrees of success, depending on the particular policy sector.

Having said so, central-local relations should not be conceived as a zero-sum game (Jae 2001, 52). In the words of Lieberthal and Oksenberg, the Chinese state is “a blend of national uniformity and provincial autonomy” (1988, 138). The centre and the locales are dependent on each other – the centre relies on the locales to implement and adapt central policies to local peculiarities while the latter seeks rewards from the former in exchange for its compliance with central policies. Furthermore, the leverage the centre exerts over each locale and vice versa differs according to their relative bargaining power determined by wealth, strategic importance, and the clout of the leader (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, 139). This symbiotic relationship of mutual dependence, together with the political structure described above, are replicated at each level of government.

As Tanner and Green (2007, 644) point out, in the study of Chinese politics few issues have been more central than that of the balance of power between central and local governments in China, and how that balance influences state capacity and policy. In what follows we shall examine the central-local balance of power in three policy sectors.

1. Fiscal Relations

Central-local tax-sharing is a widely studied topic and it provides an apt illustration of how Beijing manages and recalibrates its relations with the provinces. The division of finance has always been the key site of the tug-of-war between the centre and the provinces. Prior to the 1993-94 fiscal reforms, Beijing had decentralized fiscal powers to the local governments. Under a contracting system where revenue-sharing was decoupled from expenditure needs, local governments were to remit a lump sum to the centre and provincial governments had to self-finance their expenditures from the revenues they retained. Only around one-quarter of total state expenditure took place at the centre, whereas the local levels bore heavy responsibility for social welfare and infrastructure financing. This resulted in a situation in which the provinces, especially wealthier ones like Guangdong, controlled increasing amounts of revenue and the centre less. By 1993, local government’s share of total fiscal revenue was 78% and the central government’s share of expenditures was only 28.3% (Saich 2015, 172–74).

To arrest the decline in the central government’s fiscal capacity, the 1993-94 reforms introduced a tax-sharing system aimed to increase the centre’s share of state revenue to at least 60%. On the one hand, the reformed system has successfully boosted the central government’s capacity to redistribute revenues more equitably among provinces and to finance important state policies. On the other, however, it has
increased the financial burden on local governments, pressuring them to find their own sources of revenue to fund the obligations from top-down (Saich 2015, 172–77). Table 7.1 illustrates China’s tax-sharing system today.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central Taxes</th>
<th>Central-Local Shared Taxes</th>
<th>Local Taxes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business tax and urban maintenance and construction tax of railways, head offices of banks, head offices of insurance companies</td>
<td>Value-added tax: central 75%, local 25%</td>
<td>Business tax (other than that of railways, head offices of banks, head offices of insurance companies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value-added tax levied by the customs</td>
<td>Stock trading stamp duty: central 97%, local 3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption tax levied by the customs</td>
<td>Local enterprise income tax: central 60%, local 40%</td>
<td>Urban land use tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income tax of central enterprises</td>
<td>Personal income tax: central 60%, local 40%</td>
<td>Fixed asset investment adjustment tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income tax of local banks, foreign-funded banks and non-bank financial institutions</td>
<td>Resource tax: tax on offshore petroleum resources to central, others to local</td>
<td>Urban maintenance and construction tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tariff</td>
<td>Urban real estate tax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security exchange tax</td>
<td>Resource tax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle purchase tax</td>
<td>Vehicle and vessel license tax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessel tonnage tax</td>
<td>Deed tax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Land appreciation tax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tobacco tax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: Yew 2009; Wang and Herd 2013)

Besides allocating different revenues to the central and provincial governments, the 1994 tax-sharing system clearly designates expenditure responsibilities between the top two levels of governments. Between any two tiers of governments at the provincial level and below, however, leaders at the higher level have the upper hand in the
assignment of revenue and expenditure responsibilities. As a result, fiscal power has shifted upwards while work responsibilities have cascaded downwards, meaning that revenues converge in the hands of upper level governments whereas expenditures are passed down to lower level governments. Furthermore, local governments’ discretionary power in granting tax breaks was curtailed and tax collection was also centralized (Yew 2009).

2. The Judicial System

Unlike the central government’s relative success in regaining control over fiscal policy, recentralization drives in the judicial and public security systems have been less successful. Post-1999 reforms of the judicial system to this end have seen uneven results: judicial professionalization has made better progress than institutional changes.

From the 1980s, the judicial system has been fraught with inconsistencies and fragmentation across departments and localities, partly because legal institutions have to serve the interest of local governments in promoting economic development (Chen 2012, 500-501). In 1999, the Supreme People’s Court issued Document No. 28 on the reform of the People’s Courts. The document highlighted the two major flaws in China’s judiciary, poor adjudication and judicial fragmentation, which were to be rectified through professionalization and institutional rearrangements (Chen 2012, 504).

The professionalization of judicial officials through standardized practices would, presumably, motivate them to consider factors beyond their self-interests and allegiance to local bureaucracy when performing their duties, thus inhibiting the centrifugal propensity (Chen 2012, 515). Binding regulations on judicial ethics, including the avoidance of the conflict of interests, were introduced to curtail irregularities. Over a decade from 1995 to 2005, the professionalization reform yielded a tenfold increase in the number of better-educated judges who hold a college degree (Chen 2012, 505-507).

In contrast, institutional reforms were less successful. The fundamental cause of local protectionism and judicial rent-seeking – local government control over court funding – was mitigated through the partial centralization of budgetary powers but not eliminated nevertheless. Attempts to boost the judges’ adjudicative capacity vis-a-vis the local authority had also fallen short because of resistance from the court bureaucracy. A bigger flop was the recentralization of personnel administration to place the courts under the direct supervision of the court at the next higher level, as it means an erosion of local governments’ authority over parallel courts and hence their ability to defend local vested interests. All in all, despite ten years of judicial reform, local protectionism remains the prevailing issue that weighs down judicial
professionalism, judicial rent-seeking rages on, and law scholars and journalists still complain about the localization of court interests that have obstructed the national unity of adjudicative work and law enforcement (Chen 2012, 514).

![Graph showing rank equivalents among government organs](http://www.zhihu.com/question/20390829). Accessed 28 December 2015

3. The Public Security System

As with the judicial system, China’s public security system is also beset with problems caused by decentralization. Financial, personnel and institutional issues have incentivized local security units to comply with the wishes of parallel governments rather than their security leadership one level up. A highly decentralized or localized policing system has not only stood in the way of central security policies; it has also contributed to police abuses, corruption and the predatory behaviour of security officials.

From the 1950s, local party committees have been given the authority to oversee public security officials at the corresponding level. Today, although the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) supposedly helms public security work nationwide, local party committees have considerable power in interpreting and implementing central policy (Tanner and Green 2007, 653). For instance, to set up new bureaucratic units in the system, public security bureaus at the county level must seek approval from their vertical leadership two levels up. Nonetheless, this regulation has been frequently flouted and internal offices at county levels have been established without upper level approval. Moreover, the types of police personnel are diversified and the majority are not directly subordinated to the MPS or the public security system (Tanner and Green 2007, 654–55).
Local government control over the funding and revenue sources of parallel public security departments is a strong motivation for police officials’ compliance to the local authority, resulting in widespread police abuses, predatory practices, and police sidelines such as operating karaoke bars and brothels (Tanner and Green 2007, 667). Decentralized policing has negative consequences for public security professionalization, intelligence sharing and anti-corruption efforts. Upper levels do not have access to reliable information sources required to enforce discipline and maintaining public order. Within the system, oversight organs do not have strong incentives to report honestly to the centre. These include internal police departments as well as external state and party-based oversight organs. Self-policing, therefore, is characterized by “secretive, ‘in house’ investigations, low rates of cases being handed over to the formal legal system and relatively weak punishments” (Tanner and Green 2007, 661).

Although Beijing may leverage on its power over policy directives and laws, the appointment and removal of provincial leaders and personnel quotas among others, pervasive insubordination in the public security system shows that these have not translated into competent central control over local policing. For example, Beijing has hardly exercised its power to rotate security chiefs among the provinces, most of whom stayed in the same province for their entire career, over which they amassed tremendous clout to challenge central authority. In the domain of public security, therefore, Beijing’s reach into the localities has been shallow (Tanner and Green 2007, 657–58).

You should now read:


Chapter 8 Challenges to Chinese Rule in Tibet and Xinjiang

Tibet and Xinjiang are two of China’s five autonomous regions equivalent to the status of provinces. They share a number of similarities: the two regions are the largest but sparsely populated territorial units; they have a high concentration of ethnic minorities; and they are the sites of protests and ethnic conflicts in which Tibetans and Uyghurs have challenged the rule of the Han Chinese-dominated CCP (Joseph 2014, 32). As autonomous regions, Tibet and Xinjiang have some room to adopt national policies according to their culture and religion but there is no question that Beijing presides over these policy decisions.

Chinese governance of the minority autonomous regions is underpinned by China’s national minority policy provided in Article 4 of the PRC Constitution and China’s Law on Regional National Autonomy (LRNA) passed in 1984 and revised in 2001. According to Article 4 of the PRC Constitution, “Regional autonomy is practised in areas where people of minority nationalities live in concentrated communities; in these areas organs of self-government are established to exercise the power of autonomy.” Nevertheless, the limits to that autonomy are clearly set in Articles 4 and 5 of the LNRA, which state respectively that local governments of minority autonomous regions “shall exercise the power of autonomy within the limits of their authority as prescribed by the Constitution, by this Law and other laws,” and that they “must uphold the unity of the country and guarantee that the Constitution and other laws are observed and implemented in these areas.” In this light, some scholars argue that the so-called minority autonomy is no more than a vehicle for the central government’s assertion of authority and its intervention in local affairs (Davis 2008, 232).
Figure 8.1 Tibet Autonomous Region
(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_Tibet#/media/File:Tibetmap-en.png
Accessed 10 December 2015)

Figure 8.2 Xinjiang Autonomous Region
You should now read:


**Ethnic Unrest and Tensions in Tibet and Xinjiang**

The two minority autonomous regions have seen numerous protests against Chinese rule in the past decades. From 1988, there was a wave of demonstrations in Xinjiang – Yining (by Kazakhs), Urumqi, Yarkand, and a major uprising in Baren in April 1990 (Hess 2010, 417). The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent creation of independent states in Central Asia, such as Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan have emboldened the Uyghurs seeking secession from China (Hao and Liu 2012, 207). More recently, a deadly riot broke out in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region: on 5 July 2009, a peaceful protest involving about 1,000 Uyghurs spiralled out of control, leading to what some believe to be the “most violent turbulence that had occurred in Xinjiang since 1949” (Hao and Liu 2012). According to official estimates, 197 people died and more than 1,700 were wounded in the riots (Bovingdon 2014, 445).
Tibetans took to the streets to call for independence in 1987 after talks between the Tibetan-government-in-exile and Beijing stalled and the Tibet issue was internationalized. The decade after 1989 saw more than a hundred protests of varying scale (Barnett 2014, 415). In 2008, the year of the Beijing Olympics, a wave of protests took place across the Tibetan Plateau, starting from the anniversary of the 10 March 1959 uprising. As the Olympic torch made its way to Beijing in spring, it encountered numerous anti-China protests by Tibetans and their supporters. From 2011, Tibetans adopted another form of resistance: self-immolation. Most of the cases took place in Tibetan areas of Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu (Barnett 2014, 418-420; see Figure 8.4).
Unlike the Tibetan movement which has been largely peaceful and non-violent, anti-China resistance in Xinjiang has been associated with terrorism. The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is a small Uyghur separatist group that appears to have ties to al-Qaeda. Other Uyghur organizations and individuals, whom the Chinese government has labelled as terrorist, have not been identified to be so by other governments (Bovingdon 2014, 428–29).

Unresolved historical issues, a fundamental clash between the CCP and the ethnic groups in their religious worldviews, and the flawed policies of the CCP, have altogether contributed to the intractable governance problems and the pervasive tensions in Tibet and Xinjiang today. We shall look into these issues in the following sections.

1. Historical Issues and Autonomy

The seeds of secession and ethnic tension were sowed even before the founding of the PRC. In the CCP’s 1931 Jiangxi Constitution, the party promised that non-Han nationalities would be granted the right to “complete separation from China, and the formation of an independent state” once the party came to power. Yet ten years later, this commitment was revoked even before it was implemented (Barnett 2014, 408). The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region was established by the CCP in 1955. The
party reneged on its promise to give the region national autonomy and did not relinquish central control over it (Hess 2010, 416).

In 1951, the CCP and the Tibetan government signed a Seventeen Point Agreement stating that Tibet was now part of China but the existing political system under the Dalai Lama would remain unchanged. The Agreement, however, did not apply to the eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau – Kham and Amdo – within the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan, where harsh land reforms and attacks on the monasteries led to widespread conflicts culminating in the 10 March 1959 uprising. Following the failed rebellion, the Dalai Lama and tens of thousands of Tibetans fled to India. The Seventeen Point Agreement was soon revoked (Barnett 2014, 409–411). In 1965 Beijing conferred “local autonomy” to Tibet, renamed the Tibet Autonomous Region. Tibet and 12 other prefectures and counties in the eastern Tibetan areas were to appoint a Tibetan as their governor or chairman and they would have a local legislature.

Figure 8.5 Mao Zedong meeting the Dalai Lama (right) and the Panchen Lama in Beijing, 1954
However, as power in China resides in party organs and not in government bodies, local autonomy has remained largely in name only (Barnett 2014, 412). This is true of the situation in Tibet, Xinjiang and other minority autonomous regions. In a 1997 report, the International Commission of Jurists raises the concerns that although “Tibetans are in positions of nominal authority, they are often shadowed by more powerful Chinese officials” and “every local organ is shadowed by a CCP committee or ‘leading group’” (Davis 2008, 237). The marginalization of minority party cadres could also be due to prejudice and inherent mistrust over their loyalty to the party. For example, in Document No.7, released in 1996 prior to the launch of the Strike Hard campaign, the CCP Central Committee suggests that more Han cadres from the PLA and the bingtuan should be posted to the county and township governments in Xinjiang in order to counter national separatist forces (Hess 2010, 421).

More recently, a 2007 report prepared by Minority Rights Group International and Human Rights in China points out that all five CCP party secretaries of minority regions are Han Chinese men. The report notes that “Minority leaders are therefore typically viewed as ‘puppets’ who, despite holding fairly high positions such as chief of a government department, are usually ‘assisted’ by a Han deputy who, along with the local Party leadership, controls actual policy formulation” (cited in Davis 2008, 238). Uyghur cadres, carefully handpicked by the CCP, hold relatively little autonomous decision-making power. Their role is more instrumental, serving to mitigate the perception of Han Chinese dominance in governing Xinjiang (Hess 2010, 419). This has contributed to the impression of Uyghur officials as lackeys to their Han superiors (Hess 2010, 409–410).
In fact, some evidence suggests that the level of autonomy in the minority autonomous regions is lower than that of Han majority provinces. The 2007 Minority Rights Group report points out that a basic self-governing regulation has not been passed in the five autonomous regions because the central government has not given its approval. While minority autonomous regions have to seek central approval of self-governing regulations, other provinces in China are exempted and only have to report local laws to the centre for record purposes (Davis 2008, 237).

**Strike Hard Campaign**

Beginning in 1983, the Chinese government has implemented regular “strike hard” (yanda 严打) campaigns to clamp down on serious crime in society. Some observers, however, point out that such tactics have been employed in this decade increasingly to fight separatism and what the state perceived as illegal religious activities.

The minority regions were the target of the 1996 round of Strike Hard Campaign, with thousands being arrested and swiftly punished in an expedited process (Zhang and McGhee 2014, 44). The campaigns, however, might have backfired. In Xinjiang, government repression has unified the Uyghur community through “shared grievances” against the Chinese state, thereby increasing the difficulties in governing the restive region (Hess 2010, 418).

**Clash of Religious Worldviews**

The freedom of religious beliefs in China is affirmed in Article 4 of the PRC Constitution, as well as Articles 10 and 11 of the LRNA. Article 4 stipulates that “No State organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion, nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion.” Nevertheless, this clashes with the CCP’s religious worldview, declared by the Central Committee of the CCP in Document 19 (1982): “We Communists are atheists and must unremittingly propagate atheism.” Party members and cadres, in accordance with this avowed aversion to religion, were forbidden from openly practising religion. Politically, the CCP also perceives religion to be undesirable, given that it may be a source of political opposition and a threat to the party-state (Hess 2010, 410). Religious policy under the CCP, therefore, has been formulated not with the aim of upholding religious freedom, but to keep it under control and prevent it from evolving into a threat to the party (Hess 2010, 411).
The conflicting religious worldviews of the ethnic minorities and the CCP have negative repercussions socially as well as politically. Uyghur cadres who may not openly embrace and practice Islam are estranged from the wider Uyghur community (Hess 2010, 426; see also Hao & Liu 2012, 218). This has undercut the role of Uyghur cadres as intermediaries between the Han-dominated CCP and the Uyghur population, which in turn hampers the integration of Uyghurs into the Chinese society, resulting in ethnic tensions and conflicts (Hess 2010, 407).

2. Other Controversial Policies

Language and Education Apart from its encroachments on religious freedom, the Chinese government has also implemented a language policy that ultimately marginalizes the ethnic minorities. From the 2000s, Xinjiang’s multilingual education system underwent reforms to give predominance to Mandarin spoken by the Han Chinese. Mandarin, rather than Uyghur was favoured as a medium of instruction in schools. Not only were a number of Uyghur-language schools merged with Chinese-language schools, in 2002 Xinjiang University also renounced its bilingual approach, discontinued the use of Uyghur and began to conduct lessons in Mandarin only (Hess 2010, 423). Foreseeably, the nurturing of highly educated and Mandarin-speaking Uyghur elites would pose a serious obstacle to the CCP’s local governance of Xinjiang because of the language barrier between the former and the wider Uyghur-speaking ethnic community (Hess 2010, 409–410).

Education also serves as a state apparatus of indoctrination. In his speech at the Fifth Regional Meeting on Education in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, Party Secretary Chen Kuiyuan said that the success of education is measured by whether “graduating students are opposed to or turn their hearts to the Dalai clique and in whether they are loyal to or do not care about our great motherland and the great socialist cause” (Chen 1994 cited in Bass 2008, 40). To this end, primary school lessons in Tibet centre on “nation-building” as defined by the CCP. According to Bass, they teach Tibetan children the following: “(1) the fundamental role of the CCP (and the Han Chinese) in bringing social and economic advancement to Tibet; (2) an interpretation of Tibet’s Buddhist heritage as a non-religious cultural/architectural heritage that is part of a common Chinese cultural heritage; (3) a spirit of unity with other nationalities in China and the identification of Tibet as an “unaliensable part of China”; (4) an appreciation of modern socialist Tibet and an understanding of the pre-1950 Tibetan

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2 In the string of violent attacks in 2008, Uyghur officials, cadres and security forces members, seen as “collaborators with the ethnic Han Chinese,” were often targeted by Uyghur militants (Hess 2010, 426).
society as an oppressive society at the stage of feudal serfdom; (5) the value of economic development” (Bass 2008, 42).

This has resulted in an education system that is often divorced from the reality that the Tibetan community experiences (see BOX). In addition, many of the lessons also adopt well-known Tibetan songs, verse and literature to bring across socialist messages. For example, the imagery of unity in a traditional Tibetan wedding song was conveniently transplanted from the bride and groom to describe the relationship between Tibet and China. The original lyrics – “One, we are the weft/Two, we are the warp/We should live together/Like a silk katag” – had its last line doctored to “Tibet and China” (TAR People’s Publisher 1997 cited in Bass 2008, 44).

**Bowdlerized Tibetan Language Textbooks**

Educators were tasked to delink Tibetan culture from Tibetan Buddhism. As a result, traces of Buddhism were almost entirely erased from the primary school textbooks.

A comparison of the 2001 edition of Book One with the 1993 edition illustrates this change in the curriculum. In Book One, students learn Tibetan words with the aid of pictures. A number of religious images in the 1993 edition, such as a thangka (Buddhist painting), a dorje (a drum used in Buddhist ceremonies), a chorten (a reliquary), and a ba (a mask used in Buddhist ritual dances), have been expurgated from the 2001 edition. The preface to one of the new editions alludes to this change, claiming to have “got rid of useless old words” (TAR People’s Publisher 2001a, 2001b cited in Bass 2008, 43).

**Go West Policy: Han Migration to Minority Regions**

The Chinese government has encouraged Han Chinese to migrate to minority regions in a bid to assimilate minority ethnic groups as well as to dominate the local urban economies (Davis 2008, 230). The bingtuan (兵团), a militarist body that originated from the Mao era and reports directly to Beijing and the CCP, has been instrumental in fulfilling the dual goals of Han migration to Xinjiang and the maintenance of regional security in the territory. In addition, the group also runs many lucrative businesses under the name “China Xinjiang Group” (Bovingdon 2014, 437).
While the “go west” policy has been implemented in both Tibet and Xinjiang, the outcomes have so far been different. Unlike the larger number of Chinese settlers in Xinjiang, those to Tibet have been transient with an average stay of 5-10 years, perhaps owing to the harsh conditions on the elevated plateau. This is reflected in the population make-up in the two regions: in TAR Tibetans constitute 90% of the population, whereas in Xinjiang Uyghurs and other minorities make up 61% of the population (Barnett 2014, 417, 421). As of 2009, there were reportedly 2.5 million bingtuan members in Xinjiang (Bovingdon 2014, 437).

Alongside the influx of Han Chinese under the go west policy, the Chinese government’s “great western development” (西部大开发) plan has brought about significant economic progress in the two minority regions. According to official sources, the central government’s investment in Xinjiang amounted to 386 billion yuan or 25.7% of the total from 1950 to 2008; the subsidies given to the region also totalled 375 billion yuan. From 1978 to 2008, Xinjiang’s GDP per capita grew 28 times (Hao & Liu 2012, 206). As with Xinjiang, the TAR was heavily subsidized for infrastructure construction and urbanization, including the Qinghai-Tibetan railway that was completed in 2006. Economic growth has generated an increase in income and has given rise to the middle class in the region (Barnett 2014, 416–18).
Yet uneven development and unequal distribution of income, both real and perceived, have bred resentment and a sense of relative deprivation among the minorities despite improvements in living standard for most. Southern Xinjiang is populated by mostly Uyghurs, who are farmers. In the north Han Chinese are the majority, and a large percentage reside in cities. In Ürümchi, for example, Han Chinese constitute about three-quarters of the population and they make up 94% of the population in Shihezi, an urbanized bingtuan settlement (Bovingdon 2014, 439). Some Uyghurs feel that the central government’s development plan is designed to transfer oil and gas from the Uyghur region to the Han region. Uyghurs also lament that the Han migrant workers steal their jobs and treat the Uyghurs and their culture with disdain (Hao & Liu 2012, 217). This seems to corroborate the observation that some job advertisements seek to recruit only those who are fluent in Mandarin, such that most Uyghurs are excluded (Bovingdon 2014, 438). Figures show significant inequality among the different ethnic groups and regions in Xinjiang; the GDP per capita of cities or prefectures in Xinjiang, moreover, is inversely related to the minority population ratio (Hao & Liu 2012, 214). In short, Uyghurs’ suspicion that Han Chinese were the key beneficiaries of Xinjiang’s economic growth is not unfounded.
Discuss the pros and cons of economic development in Tibet and Xinjiang under the CCP.
Summary

Key Points of Chapter 5:

- The dividing line between the party and the state is fuzzy in China.
- The CCP’s notion of one-party democracy is a perversion of the western concept of democracy.
- Contrary to what the PRC Constitution proclaims, the CCP leadership has overriding authority over the legislature and the judiciary.
- In practice, the dynamics of within-party elections are top-down instead of bottom-up.

Key Points of Chapter 6:

- The growing diversification of party membership and of Chinese society has prompted the CCP to implement various institutional innovations without loosening its grip on power.
- To promote “intra-party democracy,” the CCP has allowed limited electoral competition, expanded power-sharing or collective leadership among the party elite, and introduced restraints on the exercise of power.
- The effectiveness of these measures, however, remains to be seen.

Key Points of Chapter 7:

- Despite extensive party penetration into the five levels of local government, the policy process in China remains fragmented.
- This is largely due to the complex multilevel bureaucratic system of crisscrossing tiao/kuai administration.
- The extent of local protectionism varies across different policy sectors.
- The central government’s leverage on local governments may not always be effective in curbing local protectionism.
Key Points of Chapter 8:

- The CCP has faced challenges to its rule in the minority regions of Tibet and Xinjiang.

- Through both violent and non-violent means, dissidents in the two minority regions have called for secession from the Chinese state and for greater autonomy.

- Pervasive tensions in Tibet and Xinjiang may be attributed to unresolved historical issues, incompatible religious worldviews, and the CCP’s hardline approach to assimilate the minority ethnic groups.

- The fruits of economic development in the two regions have not been evenly distributed.
References


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STUDY UNIT 4
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND CONTENTION
Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Define and apply the concepts of political participation and contentious politics to China.
2. Describe the various forms of political participation in China and comment on their merits and flaws for Chinese citizens.
3. Discuss the interactions between the Chinese state and the society in political participation.
4. Appraise the extent to which political participation has contributed to China’s democratization.
5. Analyze how the law in China has been used to curb or promote citizens’ political participation.

Overview

Shifting the focus from the state to the society, the three chapters in this study unit shall examine political participation and its limitations in Chinese society. Chapter 9 introduces the concept of political participation and the forms of political participation. The chapter looks into two forms of elections in China, namely village elections and the elections of local legislators at the township and county levels. Chapter 10 investigates citizens’ contacting of state and party authorities through the Letters and Visits system. It also explores how citizens may lodge lawsuits against the state. Finally, Chapter 11 turns its attention to contentious politics and collective action against the state, with an emphasis on resistances by villagers and workers.
Chapter 9 Elections and Voting in China

Recall the definition of politics adopted in this Study Guide: Politics is understood as “the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live” (Heywood 2013, 26). In the preceding chapters, we have examined the role of the state in Chinese politics through the lens of modern Chinese history, the foundations and structure of the party-state, and central-local relations. The chapters in this study unit shall delve into the role of the Chinese people in politics: under China’s authoritarian system, how have the Chinese people created, maintained and changed the rules that govern how they live? To answer this question, we may look at the forms of political participation in China.

9.1 Political Participation

What do we mean by political participation? Huntington and Nelson define it as “activity by private citizens designed to influence governmental decision-making” (1976, 4–7). They have also provided a clear explication of the components of political participation. Some points are worth recapitulating here to elucidate the meaning of political participation. First and foremost, political activity is strictly the domain of private citizens. That rules out the political activity of political professionals, whom the authors defined as “someone whose primary calling is politics or government,” such as government officials, party officials, and professional lobbyists. In other words, political participation is restricted to the activities undertaken by citizens in their private capacity on a part-time and intermittent basis, such as citizens voting in an election.

In addition, Huntington and Nelson are concerned only with activity aiming to influence government decision-making in the following ways: “changing decisions by current authorities, toward replacing or retaining those authorities, or toward changing or defending the existing organization of the political system and the rules of the political game” (1976, 6). Furthermore, they suggest that, to a certain degree, the scope of government activity delimits the amount of participation in a society (1976, 5). The observation has significant implications for political participation in a non-democratic context such as China, whose government extends its tentacles into many aspects of social life. While widespread state penetration of society has not erased all signs of political life, it does mean that a substantial amount of citizen participation in such a context is government-mobilized, or perhaps of a covert, illegal, and risky nature. This is to say that there is little room or space for autonomous political activity by the citizen, as evident from the nascent civil society and the functioning of the corporatist structure in various arenas in China (Chan 1993; Pearson 1994; Unger 1996; Wank 1995). Moreover, government-sanctioned political involvement is also limited.
although the ill-defined line between legal and illegal participation has given rise to a host of covert but prevalent activities to influence government actions, such as bribery and cronyism or nepotism through *guanxi* (关系). Lastly, under China’s system, political participation aims to influence policy implementation, more so than policy making per se (Cai 2004, 428).

By the scope of the above definition, some common forms of political participation in China are:

1. **Voting**
   - Vote in local elections: village elections, neighbourhood elections, and elections of county-level deputies to the People’s Congress

2. **Contacting**
   - Contact a government official at any level on a social or community problem
   - Contact a government official at any level on a personal problem

3. **Protesting**
   - Take part in a protest, march or demonstration on some local or national issues

These forms of political participation shall be examined in this Study Unit. In the following sections of this chapter, we shall first look into political participation through voting in China.

**WATCH**

Chunked Lesson Recording: “Political Participation and Contention”
(Access via iStudyGuide)

**READ**

9.2 Village Elections

Village self-government was introduced in China in the late 1980s for instrumental reasons. According to Shi, mid-level officials committed to democratic values in the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) played a critical role in facilitating village reforms (1999, 389). Proponents believed that granting villagers the right of self-governance was the key to arresting the regime’s crumbling legitimacy in the countryside and alleviating peasant discontent over corrupt and incapable village government (Kelliher 1997). Village elections not only serve as “a pressure valve to let peasants vent their dissatisfaction, but one means to point the responsibility for continued poverty and poor leadership in villages away from the central authorities” (Oi 1999a, 626). Furthermore, by granting peasants the right to self-government, state policies might be better enforced (Kelliher 1997, 70–75).

Over the past three decades since their implementation, however, grassroots elections in Chinese villages have been beset with problems. On the part of the local officials who run the show, misimplementation of electoral procedures and fraudulent practices to rig or manipulate voting results taint the openness, competitiveness and fairness of the elections. On the part of the peasant voters, ignorance about electoral procedures and laws, apathy, and a lack of political or civic consciousness defeat the purpose of elections (O’Brien 2001). Voting as a form of political participation has been limited in its empowerment of Chinese peasants. As Cai observes, “[I]nasmuch as voting may not be initiated by citizens, and its effectiveness in addressing their specific needs is limited, it is unlikely to serve as the most effective form of political participation when citizens face specific problems” (Cai 2004, 429).
The Organic Law on the Village Committee

The Organic Law on the Village Committee (cunmin weiyuanhui zuzhifa 村民委员会组织法) was approved by the 23rd Session of the Standing Committee of the Sixth National People’s Congress on 24 November 1987 and revised in 1998. Implementation of the Organic Law is at the discretion of the local government. According to article 29 of the 1998 Organic Law or article 20 of the 1987 provisional version, “The standing committees of the People’s Congress of the provinces, autonomous regions and centrally-administrated municipalities may formulate implementation procedures and measures of this law based on the law itself and the specific circumstances in their regions” (Falü Fagui 2005). As a result, each province has its own set of specifications on the implementation of the law spelled out in the province’s “Enactment of the Organic Law” (村民委员会组织法办法). To complicate matters, each province may also set its own rules for elections in the province’s “Enactment of Village Committee Elections” (村民委员会选举办法).
With the revision and expansion of the Organic Law in 1998, the political reforms spearheaded by the Chinese government seem to have taken another step forward. The instances of peasants recalling cadres suggest that some of them have now turned the tables and proactively used it to achieve their goals of expelling corrupt or incompetent local officials. This corroborates the findings of some scholars who argue for a rising civic consciousness among Chinese villagers and the emergence of more well-educated peasants who engage in “rightful resistance” backed by the law (Li and O’Brien 1996, 30; O’Brien 1996; Guo 2001, 432).

The term “diaomin (刁民),” meaning “shrewd and unyielding people,” has become a label for better-educated rural contenders, who engage in “rightful resistance” (Li and O’Brien 1996, 30; Li 2001). These resisters frame their grievances in terms that are certified by the state, and use central policies and laws to challenge local officials who have departed from them. Such political consciousness can also be observed through the voting behaviour of some villagers (Shi 1999; O’Brien 2001; Kennedy 2002; Li 2003).

For instance, through a survey sample of over thirty villages in northwest China, Kennedy concludes that villagers display a “high level of voter sophistication” (2002, 482). Using the nomination method of a candidate as a key independent variable, Kennedy finds that villagers are able to differentiate fair elections from cosmetic ones. A nation-wide survey also reveals that people with a stronger belief in democratic values and their own efficacy in influencing politics are more likely to vote in semi-competitive and non-competitive elections (Shi 1999).

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1 The Chinese term is derogatory.
Village Elections and Democratization

Some western researchers dealing with village elections in China seem to be hopeful that grassroots level elections will propel the country’s democratization. In an overview on village elections, Schubert suggests that the small group of experts in this field is “optimistic about village elections going beyond the given institutional frame laid out by the Communist Party, eventually bringing about political democratization “from below” (2002, 3).

In this perspective, peasants are perceived to be as the “most important agent” in putting an end to authoritarianism (Schubert 2002, 4). Government officials spearhead political reforms and peasants, in turn, advance the reform process (Shi 1999, 389). This argument, however, is a departure from Western theories that emphasize power relations among the elites at the point of regime transition and their pivotal role in the third and fourth waves of democratization in a number of countries from 1974 onwards (Huntington 1991, 579; McFaul 2002). Any evidence of peasant agency also has to be weighed against the pervasiveness of flawed and selectively implemented electoral procedures in village elections, such as rigging and non-secret ballot. In contrast to the optimism of experts in the field, other Western and Chinese scholars are sceptical about democratization from below as a plausible alternative to elite-driven reforms from above (Schubert 2002, 1). All in all, while current research with survey data does provide evidence of the gradual formation of a civic consciousness among the Chinese peasantry, it is clearly precocious to say that such rudimentary evidence augurs democratization from below.

The Local State Structure

The local government in China is made up of officials in the township and village levels, as shown in the table below. Under China’s “one-level-down management,” officials at each level are granted the authority to appoint their subordinates. This “has encouraged cadres to be hyperresponsive to their immediate superiors at the expense of other interests,” write O’Brien and Li, “and it has increased the ability of superiors to get their underlings to carry out unpopular policies” (1999, 171). The relationship between village and township governments is thus symbiotic, with the former depending on the latter for career prospects and the latter on the former for policy implementation. Although the arrangement of one-level-down management is imposed on village cadres, the symbiotic relationship between the two levels often evolves into “a bond based on vested interests” (Guo 2001, 426).
Table 9.1 Township and Village Levels of the Local State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leading Cadres</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party secretary</td>
<td>Party secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Township head</td>
<td>Village committee chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Township party vice secretaries</td>
<td>Enterprise management committee director (not in all villages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Township vice heads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Oi 1999b, 100)

In explaining the extent to which a village cadre executes top-down policies in a selective manner, we must take into consideration all the incentives he or she faces, “both those that emerge from the day-to-day environment and those structures into the situation from on high” (O’Brien and Li 1999, 168). A village cadre has multiple objectives, such as promotion, status, independence from superiors, personal profit and commitment to the village (Rozelle and Boisvert 1994, 28; Chiang 1999). These are carefully deliberated in the management of his relationship with superiors, the village Party branch, and fellow villagers.

While responsiveness to the town or township superiors may provide incentives to village cadres in the forms of career advancement and additional material benefits, these incentives above must also be weighed against those from below. It can be argued that since elected village cadres are usually local residents, kinship bonds, friendship ties and the fear of reprisals may strengthen the cadres’ commitment to the villagers’ welfare. Furthermore, in the circumstance that the election is fair, open and competitive, elected village cadres are also more or less accountable to their constituents (Zhong and Chen 2002, 688).

The marriage of the two organs of power at the village level – when elected Village Committee members hold concurrent positions in the village party branch (两套班子，一套人马) – may also weaken the village government’s autonomy. When the institutions are separate, conflicts and disputes may arise between the Party branch and the Village Committee, since their basis of legitimacy is not the same: the Party secretary is appointed by the higher levels in the CCP while Village Committee members are elected. In these circumstances, town or township officials may prefer to side the former, as Party secretaries are less accountable to villagers and more responsive to their superiors. To prevent power struggles between the two institutions, a widely adopted practice is to allow Village Committee members to hold concurrent
positions in the Party branch through the “two-ballot system,” in which Party secretaries run for the post of Village Committee chairperson (Guo and Bernstein 2004). The merger increases the responsiveness of the single village leadership group to their superiors, but it also has the undesirable effect of subjecting village elections to the manipulation of the town or township government. In the words of Alpermann, “The ability of the township to adjust members of the village leadership gives the township a crucial edge over village residents in structuring the incentive of village cadres and severely compromises the meaning of elections” (2001, 53–54).

Some Chinese policy analysts see the township government as the “weakest link in the structure of power” (Li 2002, 707). Extending direct elections to the township level will induce elected officials to be more accountable to their constituents, thereby reducing the township government’s self-serving manipulation of village elections and increase the autonomy of village-level government. Till date, however, elections for township heads – state cadres of the lowest level of administration – are still a contested issue in China.

9.3 Elections of Deputies to Local People’s Congresses

According to the Electoral Law of the PRC on the National People’s Congress and All Local People’s Congresses, the deputies to people’s congresses at the county and township levels will be directly elected by voters. Under the electoral law, all citizens of the PRC who are above eighteen years old have the right to vote. Political parties, social organizations and voters in groups of ten and above may nominate candidates to stand for elections. The three types of candidates in local people’s congresses elections are shown in Table 9.

Dependent candidates are pre-selected by party committees. The upper level CCP committee will recommend a list of candidates to the county level party committee, which will then call for a meeting with other parties and official mass groups. After deliberation, more candidates are added to the list. According to He, these officials typically serve as the additional candidates in the pre-selected list: “the head of particular county CCP departments, including the heads of the organizational department, the publicity department, the united front department, the head of the political and law committee and the head of the discipline and inspection committee…some department directors of CPCSC, along with representatives of eight democratic parties and official mass groups” (He 2010, 315).

Independent candidates had stood in local peoples’ congresses elections from 1981 throughout the 1990s, but did not become a force to reckon with until the 2003 county level people’s congress elections. There is some evidence that supports an increase in
the number of independent candidates in 2006–2007 over 2003 (He 2010, 312–13). Independent candidates in Beijing and Shenzhen had won elections against government-nominated candidates, though these are far and few between (Ji and Quan 2004).

Who are these independent candidates in China, and how are they different from the dependent candidates? Although candidates nominated by organizations are not independent candidates, not all the candidates nominated collectively by voters are independent candidates either. This is because some dependent candidates are also nominated by a group of voters who are mobilized by the party. Furthermore, CCP membership is not a useful distinction: not all the dependent candidates are CCP members but not all the independent candidates are non-CCP members too (He 2010, 321–22). One key difference is that the independent candidates have to campaign by themselves while dependent candidates do not have to (He 2010, 326). By He’s definition, the independent candidates “are those that have a strong desire to be elected as delegates; and it is they themselves who mobilize the voters to nominate them as initial candidates, to ensure that they become final candidates, and vote for them on the Election Day.” They may be further divided into four types:

1. The “idealist intellectual,” who may be university students, university teachers, and lawyers.
3. Heads of SOEs, such as heads of government departments, public sectors, and companies.
4. Grassroots elites, mostly from the countryside. They may be private entrepreneurs and heads of village committees (He 2010, 322–26).

In general, the significance of elected deputies to local people’s congresses is questionable on a few counts. Though some have argued for the growing political influence of the local people’s congresses (Lin 1992-93; Cho 2002), others have labelled them “rubber stamps” and noted their ineffectiveness in supervising the government. This is related to how the candidates are nominated and the fairness of the elections. As mentioned above, most candidates are nominated by the party branches of the CCP and they are usually leaders and cadres of government bodies and SOEs (Yi 2003). Non party-nominated candidates standing in local elections face many barriers from local party members and government officials who often intervene to ensure that the candidates they favoured are elected (Ji 2004). Government-favoured candidates who are elected in this way align their interests with the state and not the grassroots. In this sense, local elections are neither fair nor competitive and this diminishes the citizen’s motivation to vote.
Furthermore, voters are to register at their respective constituencies according to this simple rule stipulated in the provinces’ enactment of the electoral law – “employees should register according to their danwei, residents their hukou and students their schools” (职工跟着单位走，居民跟着户口走，学生跟着学校走). However, as citizens become increasingly more mobile, this inflexible rule has resulted in complications.

Eligible voters who may find it difficult to vote fall into four categories: voters who are displaced from their hukou, work units or schools and those who have no danwei at all. To alleviate the problem, members who belong to what is termed the “floating population” may transfer their registration to their current place of residence or work through a somewhat cumbersome process. The voter has to first apply for the transfer at the original constituency or the place of hukou registration. The original constituency will then provide two documents as proof that the voter is eligible to vote and that he has yet to vote in his original constituency. With these documents and the original hukou document, the voter can then register at his desired constituency, which may be his new place of residence or work location. Considering the time and money required for the transfer, it is doubtful that underprivileged members amidst the floating population will make the effort just to exercise their voting rights in what may be perceived as “cosmetic” elections.


Read the following reports on independent candidates running in the election of deputies to local peoples’ congresses. What obstacles did the independent candidates encounter? What do these incidents reveal about the law and its enforcement in China?

“Alarmed by independent candidates, Chinese authorities crack down”

“Independent candidate ‘eliminated’”

“No short supply of independent candidates in Chinese Local People’s Congresses”
Chapter 10 Contacting and Suing the State

China’s transformation in the reform era has generated widespread disaffection, tensions and resistance in society. In urban China, the restructuring and closing down of SOEs and collective enterprises from the 1990s had cost millions of Chinese workers their jobs and the social welfare such as housing and healthcare attached to their work units (danwei 单位). At the same time, rapid urbanization has given rise to a host of problems relating to land and property. Demolition and eviction, disputes over the transaction of village land, and inadequate compensation for expropriated land have fuelled discontent in the countryside as well as in urban areas. As market reforms continue apace, a growing number of urban residents is employed in non-state sectors, resulting in an enfeebled work unit system. While aggrieved workers were inclined to contact leaders of work units in the past, today they tend to turn to the state to seek redress for the injustice they suffer (Cai 2004, 429).

This shifting social landscape has contributed to mounting unrest in recent years. According to the 2005 Blue Book of China’s Society, the number of group incidents in China increased from 10,000 to 60,000 over one decade from 1993 to 2003. In 2009 there were reportedly 100,000 collective protests in China, a number that has nearly trebled in a decade (Shan 2012). Not only does the growing number of conflicts undermine social stability, it also poses a threat to CCP rule. In the previous chapter, we learn about how village elections and self-governance were introduced to alleviate rural discontent and salvage the CCP’s weak legitimacy. Similarly, the other legitimate forms of political participation in China – contacting state authorities and legal contention – are also instrumental in serving as a valve for the Chinese people to vent their displeasure and accommodate their wishes without jeopardizing the CCP’s grip on power. In this light, political participation in China may be aptly described as “managed participation” (Cai 2004).

One point needs to be highlighted before we delve into two other forms of state-sanctioned political participation in the rest of this chapter: in practice, the forms of political participation in China rarely take place in isolation. Usually, aggrieved citizens employ a combination of both lawful and unlawful means to influence government decisions, including contacting higher levels of government, ousting village cadres, sit-ins at government offices, blocking roads and street protests (Bernstein and Lü 2000; Jing 2000; Bianco 2001; Guo 2001; O’Brien 2002; Thornton 2004). Because there are hardly any other legal channels for collective contention beside contacting state authorities and filing law suits, the Chinese people often resort to civil disobedience to make known their grievances and to make authorities take heed, especially after being repeatedly frustrated in their appeal efforts.
For instance, Beijing Jiangtun villagers petitioned twice to the Beijing municipality to no avail and it was only after blocking a road that officials were finally pressured to return their overdue land compensation. Similarly, Anhui Longgang villagers had collectively petitioned for many times to no avail; hence they resorted to blocking a busy road in the city on three consecutive days. The Anhui provincial committee office acknowledged that the number of appeals had seen a sharp increase mainly because some state agencies either took collective petitions lightly, or had failed to give a timely response, or had lapsed in the implementation of solutions (Chu 2004).

Find these journal articles through the SIM library website and read them:


10.1 Contacting the State: Letters and Visits

The System

China has an established appeals system constituted by task forces, reception offices, and complainants offices at the various administrative levels and a complaints bureau set up by the Central Party Committee and the State Council in 1986 (Cai 2004, 429–432). Today, on top of handling complaints and petitions through letters and visits, the Letters and Visits Offices (信访科 xinfangke) can also be reached via telephone calls or email (Thireau and Hua 2003, 86). Petitioning collectively or individually to higher levels (上访 shangfang) such as the party and government organs, the people’s congress and legal departments is the most frequently used form of contention against state actors in China. The existence and formation of shanty town-like “complainants’ villages” (上访村 shangfangcun) near to state organizations handling appeals, where itinerant complainants congregate and stay, attest to the prevalence of this form of contention in China.

Reforms from the early 1990s have opened up a Pandora’s box of social issues – the central complaints bureau acknowledged that 80 percent of the appeals were related to problems arising from reform and development (Cai 2004, 433). For example, the Guangdong province, as one of the earliest coastal cities to adopt the open-door policy
resulting in the influx of migrant workers, has always experienced a high number of visits and petitions from its population. In 2003 alone, the province saw close to ten thousand petition cases. From the later 1990s, between 400,000 and 500,000 appeals were received yearly by the central complaints bureau whereas 100,000 were received by the complaints bureau of the NPC annually. In the whole of China, complaints departments in both Party and government agencies at the county level and above received around 10 million appeals every year (Cai 2004, 433–34).

Figure 10.1 A Petitioner’s Multiple Letters to China’s Top Political Leaders, including then President Hu Jintao.

Types of Appeals/Complaints

Labour grievances is a key category of complaints. Complainants or petitioners often include laid-off workers from SOEs who are unable to find re-employment and workers whose employers owe them salaries and pensions. For example, in Shenzhen, a city with a huge population of migrant workers, the typical problems raised to the Letters and Visits Offices were “late or partial payment of wages, excessive overtime work, arbitrary dismissal, refusal to sign a contract.” Collective appeals usually involve a group of workers employed by one company and who were in the same predicament (Thireau and Hua 2003, 91–93). Although workers may cite the Labour Law in their petitions, they also frequently use other principles, norms or rules to legitimize their cause. As Thireau and Hua suggest, “Complainants may sometimes mobilise specific legal provisions, but the dominant pattern is one in which the content of the law is reinterpreted and, through rather loose connections, used to discuss general normative issues” (2003, 102).

While workers in the city typically direct their grievances at a factory management, peasants usually lodge complaints against local officials, especially those who have violated a Party policy, a law or a state regulation, such as cadres who buy luxurious cars or embezzle public funds, etc. (Thireau and Hua 2003, 91; O’Brien and Li 1995,
Some of the hottest issues frequently cited in appeals in the countryside include “excessive fees; favouritism in contract disputes and land distribution for new housing; and preferential enforcement of birth control measures” (O’Brien and Li 1995, 760). As with the workers, informed peasants may also cite the law, i.e. the Organic Law of Villagers’ Committees and the Administrative Litigation Law, to defend their interests (O’Brien and Li 1995, 758, 781). The written petitions are usually physically carried by a group of villagers to the township government or the higher levels should the township ignore their complaints. Appeals to higher levels may be efficacious because the upper level can simply command the lower level officials to resolve the issue. Moreover, top-down intervention can also expose otherwise covered-up transgressions by the lower levels (O’Brien and Li 1995, 777–78). The outcome, nevertheless, is unpredictable and the odds are usually against the villagers. As O’Brien and Li point out, “Lodging a complaint is a lawful action that takes a quasi-legal form, but adjudication is essentially a political matter, whose outcome hinges on whether a given group of complainants works out how to blunt the many advantages village cadres have by organizing effective collective action” (1995, 780).

State Response

Petitioning is not a means for the people to express unhappiness with a national policy or state-sanctioned policy. Instead, it is basically a tool to counter non-state sanctioned local policies and practices (O’Brien and Li 1995, 759). The CCP government is wary of citizens’ action that may undermine its authority and as such, it is tolerant towards demands of a non-political nature but not of political ones. Institutional and policy factors are also in place to ensure that this form of participation will not create social instability in China.

The regulations of the State Council stipulate that a collective appeal is permitted if it involves no more than five participants and is peaceful in nature (Cai 2004, 440-41). Nonetheless, some higher-level local governments adhere to these guidelines in managing appeals: no collective and/or recurring appeals, and no appeals to the centre. To keep to these guidelines set by the higher-level government, lower-level officials may silence the aggrieved complainants through repressive measures. Local governments who were targeted in complaints may also deploy cadres to form another queue outside the complaints bureaus of central Party or government bodies in a bid to intercept petitioners who are queuing to make their case heard in person (Cai 2004, 439, 446; Fang 2013, 12).

There is no time frame within which state agencies must respond to appeals, resulting in the long waiting time for complainants. It is not uncommon for state agencies to shun their responsibility in addressing appeals, sometimes because they lack the financial or political power to resolve issues. Some agency may even handover an appeal to another department, which may then pass on the problem to another. Due
to the large number of complaints that authorities have to handle, less important cases brought up to the higher levels are referred back to the local governments (Cai 2004, 445). This neglects the fact that petitioners appeal to higher levels precisely because their appeals have been ignored or mishandled by the lower levels. While appeals have frequently been ignored by state agencies, they may escalate into more contentious actions such as protests, which, in turn, pressure local governments and sometimes the centre to resolve the issue.

The Effectiveness of Lodging Complaints

In general, collective appeals are more likely to see results than individual complaints because the former may escalate into more disruptive actions and therefore put more pressure on the government. Appeals made in person are also more effective than letter writing which is more likely to be ignored by officials. Citing the results of a survey, Yazhou Zhoukan (亚洲周刊) reports that only 0.002 percent of complainants managed to solve their problems through appeals (Jiang 2004).

To sum up, the odds of success are slim for citizens who attempt to seek redress through letters and visits. The large volume of appeals and the agencies’ limited resources or power in handling appeals are contributing factors. Local officials may also retaliate through various means to up the ante for complainants, taking harsh repressive measures towards individual complainants and organizers of collective appeals. They may be beaten up, put under house arrest, jailed, kept under strict state surveillance, or even checked into mental institutions and labour camps in extreme cases.

Although appeals and complaints may be addressed if higher-level authorities decide to side with the complainants and pressure local officials to resolve the issue, more often than not letters are ignored. Frustrated petitioners have to resort to contacting higher-level authorities in person, which is sapping and requires time and money that they may not have (Cai 2004, 444, 451). As a report points out,

Standing between any Chinese citizen and the central government are four layers of government at the township, county, municipal and provincial levels. For some citizens in the countryside, there may be an additional layer of government that is not officially a government – the Village Committee or the Village Party Branch. To go all the way to Beijing to reflect an issue presents enormous difficulties for the common people.
Despite the hurdles and risks, every year during the two meetings (lianghui 两会) of the NPC and the CPPCC, petitioners from all over China head to the capital to seek audience with the Beijing authorities. They are typically subject to strict supervision and repression by the local police in the capital. According to a 2007 report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, before the “complainants’ village” near the Southern railway station in Beijing was completely torn down, about 2,000 petitioners could be found there at any one time. The number could swell to 10,000 when there are important political events taking place in Beijing such as the lianghui. In August 2009, the central government released a document on its opinion to strengthen the letters and visits system. The document recommends that problems should be resolved at the grassroots level without involving Beijing, following this principle: “keep small matters to the village, big matters to the township, and disputes at the grassroots” (小事不出村，大事不出乡，矛盾不上交).

See Singaporean photojournalist Sim Chi Yin’s photographs that portray the plight of petitioners in Beijing here. Why do China’s petitioners go all the way to Beijing despite the hardships they have to endure?

**Instrumental Purposes of the Letters and Visits System**

1. It offers a form of legitimate political participation and pre-empts protests. By providing an outlet for aggrieved citizens to air their frustrations and seek redress, the system helps to nip the problem in the bud and maintain social stability to a certain extent.

2. It monitors government officials. Complaint bureaus at the local level regularly collect information from complainants and funnel it to state or party organs. This is an important conduit through which the state knows about corrupt or misbehaving officials. By creating uncertainties for state administrators, the appeals system also constrains their power.

3. It allows the state to obtain information on social problems. As a rare channel of contact between the state and society in China where the watchdog role of the media is curtailed, petitions are useful in reducing the information asymmetries among governments at different levels (Thireau and Hua 2003, 87; Cai 2004).
10.2 Legal Contention: Suing the State

Beside contacting government authorities through the letters and visits system, another legitimate form of political participation for the Chinese people is suing the state. This is made possible by the Administrative Litigation Law (ALL) which was put in force in 1989. Nonetheless, although many in China had then hailed the promulgation of the ALL as a milestone in the building of China’s legal system and democratisation, the lack of judicial independence (see Chapter 9 of this study guide) in China has rendered the ALL a weak weapon that citizens may use against state officials “who act arbitrarily or who employ undue coercion” (O’Brien and Li 2004, 75; He 2011, 260).

As with petitions, suits may be filed individually or collectively. Litigation is also one of many actions such as petitions and visits to government authorities citizens take to make their grievances heard and seek justice (O’Brien and Li 2004, 76). Typically, litigation is also a last resort for citizens when all other means have failed. Based on national statistics from 1987 to 2010, He finds that 30% to 57% of the administrative cases ended up in withdrawals by plaintiffs (He 2011). This high rate of withdrawal is not surprising, in view of the difficulties a plaintiff encounters in taking the litigation path.

The enactment of the ALL has been marred by state interference and feigned compliance. The costs and risks of litigation are also high for plaintiffs – from getting the court to accept a case to finally winning a suit and getting the court rulings enforced (O’Brien and Li 2004, 76). Local officials try all means to “preempt, derail or undermine administrative litigation.” To prevent citizens from gaining awareness of their legal right to sue, local officials may intentionally impede the nationwide law education (pufa 普法) campaign. For instance, they may block citizens’ access to official regulations and documents, or they may deploy the police to stop citizens who try to disseminate relevant information (O’Brien and Li 2004, 77–78). They may also stop lawyers from providing legal advice to litigants.

Once they decide to lodge a suit, the next hurdle litigants face is to convince the court to accept their case (O’Brien and Li 2004, 80). Note that the CCP is not subject to litigation, so party secretaries and party committees cannot be sued even with the ALL. As you have learned in Study Unit 3, in China the dividing line between the state and the party is fuzzy, and local government officials use this to their advantage. To ward off law suits, officials may name Party cadres as the persons performing the action that is targeted in a lawsuit, such that the case cannot proceed (O’Brien and Li 2004, 80).
In other instances, the party may use its power to forbid a court from accepting a case (O’Brien and Li 2004, 81). Recall what we learn about the absence of separation of powers between the three government branches in China, and the problem of local protectionism in the judiciary system. Before any local court accepts a lawsuit targeted at local officials, it usually seeks the opinion of the party and government at the same level (O’Brien and Li 2004, 82). Given that a local court is beholden to the same level government for its funding and for its personnel administration, it is unlikely to accept a lawsuit against the local government’s orders.

The struggle does not stop after a lawsuit is accepted by a court. Officials may employ various means to force litigants to withdraw a suit: they may pressure judges, interfere with legal proceedings, or impose their demands through an inquiry or exchange of views into litigation (O’Brien and Li 2004, 83). The court’s bias in favour of local officials is often evident. According to He (2011, 266),

There have been instances of the court asking an agency to make certain concessions as conditions for the plaintiff’s withdrawal, and in absence of any concession from the agency, instances of the court attempting to sway a plaintiff by bluntly informing him that “if you do not withdraw, you will lose the case”. In one extreme case, the court even expressly encouraged promised (sic) the plaintiff to withdraw his case: “as long as you withdraw, we will return all of your litigation fees.”

During the proceedings, government officials may deliberately absent themselves from the court, or they may be uncooperative by refusing to answer questions in court (O’Brien and Li 2004, 84). The resulting delays have been very frustrating for the plaintiffs. In face of the numerous hurdles they face in litigation, citizens may turn to the upper levels, deputies to local people’s congress and the media to publicize their plight. Nonetheless, even when litigants prevail against all odds and win a case against the local state, their grievances may not be redressed: Local governments may ignore court rulings, refuse to enforce the rulings and resentful officials may also retaliate against the litigants (O’Brien and Li 2004, 93).

Read the following reports on Chinese President Xi Jinping’s crackdown on human rights lawyers. What does the crackdown reveal about China’s rule of law?

“The day Zhao Wei disappeared: how a young law graduate was caught in China’s human rights dragnet”

“The anatomy of a crackdown; China’s assault on its human rights lawyers”
Chapter 11 Protests and Acts of Civil Disobedience

11.1 The Dynamics of Contention in China

Protests and other acts of civil disobedience may be grouped under contentious politics, which is also a form of political participation. According to Tarrow, contentious politics “occurs when ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontations with elites, authorities and opponents” (1998, 2). Collective contentious action takes place when people who “lack regular access to institutions . . . act in the name of new or unaccepted claims . . . behave in ways that fundamentally challenge others or authorities” (Tarrow 1998, 3). Such contentious action becomes a social movement when the challenges against authorities are sustained. But in the case of China, contentious action has yet to evolve into social movements due to the lack of sustainability. Most instances of rural and urban resistances cited by scholars are but one-time occurrences or short, episodic outbursts.

Contentious politics is triggered when political opportunities, created by the “shifting institutional structure and ideological disposition of those in power” are seized upon by challengers (McAdam 1996, 23). In China, the principal political opportunity that has arisen with reforms is a more relaxed political environment in the post-Mao era. It can be argued that the central state capacity to exercise control over society has been on the decline under Mao’s successors (Bianco 2001, 245; Bernstein and Lü 2000, 757).

The advent of the Internet in China in 1994 and the popularization of the Internet have transformed the contentious politics landscape in Chinese society (Yang 2009, 2). By the end of 2014, there were 649 million internet users in China, increasing by 31.7 million from 2013. This internet user population alone has exceeded the entire population of EU by more than 100 million. In addition, 85.8% of all internet users in China are mobile internet users, which numbered 557 million at the end of 2014 (CNNIC 2014). The size of users of mobile instant messaging reached 508 million by the end of 2014, representing an annual increment of 76.83 million or 17.8%.
The Study of Contentious Politics

Research on protest activity or “contentious politics” has proceeded on a separate path from that on the other forms of participation. In the 1960s, protest behaviour is not generally perceived as a form of political participation (Nelson 1987, 132). Rather than paying attention to psychological attributes that lead one to engage in protest and violence (Gurr 1970), theories and models developed since the 60s focus on rational calculations (Olson 1965, McCarthy and Zald 1977), collective identities (Polletta and Jasper 2001), and structural factors (Tarrow 1998) that contribute to involvement in contentious politics. A recent framework proposed by McAdam et al. centres on the dynamics of contentious action, elucidating the processes and mechanisms instead of accounting for participation by individual actors (2001).

![Figure 11.1 Internet Usage and Penetration Rate in China](image)


The growing popularity of the Internet and mobile technology has contributed to contentious political activities in China in two ways. First, it has given rise to a new form of contention – online activism – that may take the form of signature petitions, web campaigns, hacktivism and so forth in the cyberspace (Yang 2009, 3). Secondly, the Internet is often used to mobilize offline protests by savvy Chinese netizens and activists. The state is highly vigilant in face of the rise of the Internet – it has been
policing and keeping a tight rein on cyberspace activism. On 20 February 2011, for example, in the midst of the Arab Spring which had overthrown the Tunisian and Egyptian governments, more than 200,000 Chinese language tweets were posted in a day. Many of these tweets forwarded the call for Chinese citizens to revolt against the government in a “Jasmine Revolution” (molihua geming 茉莉花革命) that was not to be. Within 24 hours, the Chinese authorities swiftly blocked online calls for protests and on the day of the protest the police was out in force to clamp down on a handful of protestors in the Chinese capital of Beijing (Pyper and Danielewicz).

**Tightening Internet Control**

- From 2005, an estimated 250,000-300,000 commentators, nicknamed “50-cent party” (wumaodang 五毛党), have been mobilized by the government at all levels to manage and shape online discussion.
- Large internet companies such as Baidu must hire censors to police internet content on its websites.
- From 2009, all computers sold in China must be pre-installed with a filtering software.
- From 2010, domain name service providers must verify domain name applicants’ personal information and keep records of their IDs – in line with measures to institute a real name registration system for news websites and major commercial portals.
- In 2011, the State Internet Information Office was set up to regulate the Internet.
- In 2015, the Draft cybersecurity law was published. If passed, the law shall further empower the government to obtain records on and block illegal or undesirable private information.
- The Ministry of public security also plans to set up network security offices in large internet companies (Yang 2014).

On 20 January 2016, in a coordinated move, thousands of Chinese trolls circumvented China’s Great Firewall to log onto Facebook (which was banned in China). They inundated several Facebook pages, including that of newly elected Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen, with the message that “Taiwan is part of China” and engaged in arguments with Taiwanese Facebook users. Read the reports here and here. Why do you think China has to resort to such tactics? What does it hope to accomplish and are these tactics effective?

11.2 Rural Resistance

Beginning from the 1990s, there has been a growing interest in collective action in rural China. In general, scholars point to excessive tax burdens, under-compensation from land sales, expropriation of land, corrupt practices of local officials, and coercive means of implementing policies as the causes of rural resistance (Zweig 2000, 123; Bernstein and Lü 2000; Cai 2003). In making their grievances heard, peasants usually adopt multiple tactics such as open defiance, sit-ins, petitioning to higher levels of government, and protests (Bernstein and Lü 2000; Thornton 2004; Jing 2000; Guo 2001). The scale of collective action in rural China can go up to tens of thousands, though most are still small in scale (O’Brien 2002, 141; Bernstein and Lü 2000, 753–54; Thornton 2004, 87-88).

There has also been an emphasis on increasingly well-informed rural contenders who adeptly use their understanding of relevant laws and policies to their advantage, framing their disaffection as “rightful resistance” backed by central state policies (O’Brien 1996). Though the peasants are still a large but politically weak group in China and that their acts of resistance often do not work in their favour, experts observe that rural discontent is widespread and endemic (O’Brien 2002, 141). This alone underscores the importance of the topic, as pervasive rural discontent is a looming threat to state legitimacy if left unchecked. Why and how do rural residents in China engage in collective action against the local state?

OPPORTUNITIES Favourable policy shifts embolden societal actors. In China, peasants are quick to see the signs of political relaxation and take the opportunity to press their claims (Bianco 2001, 245). According to O’Brien,
Post-Mao reforms have shifted resources to nonstate, local actors and have offered villagers unparalleled opportunities to press new claims. As decollectivization and marketization have made villagers wealthier and less dependent on village cadres, the end of class labelling and mass political campaigns have made them less fearful. As increased mobility and media penetration have made them more knowledgeable about their exploitation and about resistance routine devised elsewhere, so too administrative, electoral, and legal reforms have given them more protection against retaliation and more violations to protest (1996, 41).

The central government’s emphasis on reducing the tax burdens of peasants, for instance, has emboldened disaffected peasants to revolt against local cadres (Bernstein and Lü 2000, 742). In addition, the power of local cadres has also been curtailed with decollectivization, marketization, village elections (when run fairly), higher population mobility, the dismantling of the people’s communes and the implementation of the contract responsibility system (Thornton 2004, 246).

**FRAMING** How do peasants frame their grievances? A frame may be defined as a “schemata of interpretation” that allows individuals “to locate, perceive, identify and label’ occurrences within their life space and the world at large” (Snow et al. 1986, 464). Research has highlighted one particular type of Chinese villagers who have framed their grievances in terms that are backed by central policies and laws. These savvy and better educated contenders, labelled as “diaomin,” engage in “rightful resistance” (Li & O’Brien 1996, 30; O’Brien 1996; Guo 2001, 432). In other words, the resisters borrow the voice of the central government to certify their claims. O’Brien cites some typical retorts of such well-informed villagers to local officials:

They say things such as, “Failing to carry out the ‘three-linkage policy’ . . . amounts to unilaterally breaking a contract. I have the right not to pay the grain tax. You have broken the contract, how can you ask me to honor it?” Or, “Central policy says that after farmers fulfil their contractual obligations, we can sell our grain freely on the market, why don’t you obey? If you don’t listen to the Center, then we won’t listen to you . . .” (1996, 37).

On top of being more knowledgeable about state policies, Guo argues that diaomin possess other qualities that set them apart from other villagers – they are relatively well off and demonstrate “economic independence of the village leaders” (2001, 432). On the other hand, when the villagers’ subsistence is threatened, they may also be driven to resistance (Cai 2003, 676). This is despite that they are more dependent on local cadres for their livelihood than well-to-do villagers. In short, though the price of open resistance may seem high to these less well-off villagers, the cost of inaction is perceived to be even higher.
REPERTOIRE OF CONTENTION Studies also show that the repertoire of contention – defined as the strategies and measures adopted by claimants in confrontation with authorities and opponents – is not limited to legal forms. Villagers may adopt a mixed strategy in combining peaceful and legal forms of contention with civil disobedience, such as occupying public offices and other spaces to inconvenience the authorities and display their displeasures with government inaction (Zweig 2000, 138). They are also not averse to using aggression and violence, such as the 1993 Sichuan riots and the 2000 Jiangxi riots which involved confrontations between villagers, officials and law enforcers (O’Brien 2002, 147; Thornton 2004, 87–88).

An interesting and relatively new vehicle of contention is the mass media. Peasants do not only make use of their access to newspapers and television to gather and disseminate relevant information, they proactively approach the media in order to publicize their case (Bernstein and Lü 2000, 756; Guo 2001, 433–34; Zweig 2000, 138–39). The benefits of such peasant-media alliances are mutual, as “exposés of official wrongdoing can generate a huge audience” for the media (O’Brien 2002, 153). The government is wary of bad publicity, which is especially detrimental for the career of local cadres (Zweig 2000, 139). The position of the contenders, on the other hand, may be bolstered and legitimized if they gain the sympathy of higher level officials (Li and O’Brien 1996, 48).

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY Apart from available political opportunities and other incentives, the notion of a “collective identity” may explain why people participate in collective action. Polletta and Jasper define collective identity as “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution” (2001, 285). This perception of a shared status, according to Polletta and Jasper, may be either experienced directly or imagined. For rural resisters, their perception of a common identity with fellow contenders may derive from proximity (living in the same village or vicinity), bonds and ties such as a common lineage or kinship, or simply because they share the same grievances, interests, or they suffer similar injustice at the hands of authorities (common experience). Collective identity is thus one of the necessary causal mechanisms in collection action.

MOBILIZATION Still, a sense of collective identity alone is not enough. A group of people with some common claims against the authorities has to be mobilized to take collective action. Leaders or activists, social networks, cultural, material and organizational resources are essential to translate grievances into collective action. As noted above, well-informed and resourceful diaomin or “policy-based resisters” often play leadership roles:
Groups of policy-based resisters may, for example, arrange protests after township leaders give glowing introductions to favoured nominees or ban unapproved candidates from running for village office . . . Or, they may even join together to boycott or disrupt improperly held village elections (Li and O’Brien 1996, 48).

In some cases, as Thornton suggests, local cadres take the lead in mobilizing collective action. These low-level cadres “not only suggest strategies for action, but also shape the discursive strategies of the protests as well” (2004, 98). To diffuse information to fellow-villagers, relevant official documents are sometimes reproduced and disseminated (Bernstein and Lü 2000, 756). Villagers may also pool monies to facilitate their contention against higher authorities (Zweig 2000, 125).

In mobilizing fellow villagers, action leaders may appropriate existing traditional networks such as village committees, lineage groups or religious organizations in the absence of modern civic associations (Zweig 2000, 139). Bianco also argues that revolts in rural China today have retained traditional features, being organized by secret societies, clans or religious sects (2001, 250). Furthermore, rural infractions are often galvanized by cultural symbols. In the Dachuan protests against environmental pollution pernicious to the villagers’ well-being, the protestors’ sense of urgency was manifested by the enshrinement of fertility goddesses and their challenge to the factory operators, their wives and children to consume the polluted water (Jing 2000, 151-154). Other rich cultural symbols that strengthen the contenders’ demands are the funeral symbolism (donning white gowns), famous literary characters (bandit-heroes), rituals and beliefs (Jing 2000; Zweig 2000).

All in all, scholars note that rural resistance was increasingly more organized. This is supported by a 2002 report by Sichuan Organization Department, which claims that “over 95 percent of the relatively large collective incidents were directed by leaderships that employed a division of labour, fashioned tactics and masterminded unrest” (O’Brien 2002, 149).

**11.3 Labour Politics**

As with the research on rural resistance, focusing on labour politics generally examines a few aspects of urban collective action, namely the causes and origins of contention, the framing of claims, the repertoire of contention and outcomes. Notwithstanding the fact that both urban and rural resistance are more spontaneous than orchestrated, a notable difference is that analyses of the former often stresses the “large numbers” phenomenon made possible by the congregation of workers at the workplace (danwei 单位) as a critical factor facilitating collective action, while the existence or non-existence of similar rural institutions is hardly touched upon in the research on the latter. Zhou (1993), for instance, argues that the institutional structure of China plays a role in transforming individual behaviour into collective action when large numbers of people congregate in the workplace or danwei.

**TRENDS** Collective labour disputes in China had surged from 12,784 to 21,880 instances or by 71 percent over 2007-2008, as shown in Figure 11.2. According to the *China Labour Statistical Yearbook 2009*, the following provinces experienced the highest
frequency of collective disputes in 2008: Yunnan (1,033 instances), Guangdong (1,897), Jilin (2,123), Shandong (2,338), Beijing (2,656) (Zhongguo Laodong Tongji Nianjian 2009, 471). As the effects of the financial crisis set in, the year 2009 also saw a rise in labour disputes in both scale and frequency, assuming an increasingly antagonistic and violent nature (China Labour Bulletin 2010).

You may also refer to this interactive Strike Map to find out about the frequency and distribution of strikes in China.

![Figure 11.2 Trends in Collective Labour Disputes](source)

Strikes may be grouped into two categories: those to demand for higher wages and other rights such as workplace safety, and strikes to protest against the restructuring/relocation of mostly state-owned factories. Comparing these labour protests with those in the past, we see continuity in collective action by laid-off workers from state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as well as a rising trend of collective action by workers demanding for better pay and work conditions (Chen 2000; Chen 2003; Chiang 2000). The restructuring of SOEs since 1996-1997, for example, has sparked off sporadic protests from laid-off workers all over China. In March 2002, the northeastern China rustbelt cities of Liaoyang, Daqing, Fushun saw a series of large scale protests by thousands of laid-off workers dissatisfied with their severance-packages (Roberts 2002).

The two concomitant trends are supported by statistics on the causes of labour disputes as seen in Figure 11.3. From 2001 to 2007, disputes over remuneration constituted around half the total number of disputes caused by changes to the labour contract, including termination. There was a big jump from 2007 to 2008 when the number of disputes over remuneration doubled from 108,953 to 225,061, to almost on par with that over labour contract disputes.
Workers’ claims have also taken on an increasingly legalistic tone. China’s pursuit of the rule by law has evoked the legal consciousness of urban workers, who often frame their collection action in legalistic rhetoric sanctioned by the state. Such awareness of the law guiding their action, however, is a double-edged sword. While it lends legitimacy to labour contention, it also curbs the spreading and constrains the scale of labour insurgency, as workers cautiously avoid cross-unit alliances that may trespass the boundaries of the law (Lee 2000, 223).

GRIEVANCES Scholars point to managerial corruption, industrial restructuring, unjust and despotic labour practices, non-payment of salary and pension, retrenchment and the breakdown of the social security net as some of the causes of urban resistance. Collective contention erupts when one or a combination of these factors leads to a subsistence crisis or a perceived impending subsistence crisis. In ex ante resistances such as protests against managerial decisions to retrench or restructure, the workers’ concern that their livelihood may be jeopardised is reinforced by a shared knowledge of the plight of already laid-off workers who face subsistence crises. In ex post resistances, simultaneous collective layoffs are more likely to collective action than sequential layoffs (Cai 2002, 337).

There are contrasting viewpoints on how workers perceive their relationship to the state. Though workers sometimes disaggregate the state and blame their plight on local cadres rather than the central state (Blecher 2002), those who see their relation with the state as a social contract harbour more bitter feelings. Pensioners who did not receive their pensions in full, for instance, felt betrayed by the state for failing to keep “basic promises” (Hurst and O’Brien 2002, 357). A typical sentiment is that they have toiled under low wages for the state and thus do not deserve to be mistreated now.
that their country has prospered. The sense of bitterness is reinforced by nostalgia, a fond recollection of pre-reform days under Mao, as exemplified by the words of a worker:

I really miss the time of Chairman Mao. We all got the same wage, 50 yuan. At that time, there was no pain and no worry. Children got parents’ jobs when they graduated from school. Now, it’s all capitalists. When state enterprises allowed private subcontractors, managers become capitalists. They now all have cell phones and frequent nightclubs, no different from capitalists. In the old days, managers came to labour on the shop floor with workers (Lee 2000, 227).

**Trade Unions in China**

Autonomous trade unions do not exist in China. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is subordinate to the state; its workplace unions are subservient to either the management or the communist party organizations at the same level. The ACFTU’s government status prevents it from any kind of labour mobilization against employers. In China, collective workers’ actions, facilitated by congregation at the work place, have been spontaneously organized instead of being mobilized by the unions like in the West. In fact, the role of the ACFTU and its grassroots branches has been to defuse rather than support collective workers’ actions.

**ACTIVITY 1**


Answer these questions:

1. How did the Xiamen residents frame their grievances?
2. How did the sense of collective identity among residents galvanize the protests?
3. What is the repertoire of contention?
4. How were the protests organized?
Summary

Key Points of Chapter 9:

- Political participation refers to citizen activities aimed at influencing governmental decision-making. In China, the common forms of political participation are voting, protests and contacting the state.

- Village elections have been implemented in the countryside for instrumental reasons. So far, these grassroots elections have been plagued by rigging, the misimplementation of electoral procedures and the peasants’ lack of civic consciousness, etc. The structure of the local state also impedes grassroots self-governance.

- Eligible citizens may vote for deputies to local people’s congresses at the township and county levels. They may also run in these local elections. Nonetheless, independent candidates who are not endorsed by the party often face many obstacles when standing in these elections.

Key Points of Chapter 10:

- Petitioning to state and party authorities through the Letters and Visits system is one of the few legitimate forms of political participation in China.

- Petitioners are often at the losing end when they pit their limited resources against the authorities in a protracted process. They may also be punished in various ways in face of retaliation from the authorities.

- Suing the state is permitted under the ALL but aggrieved citizens usually take litigation as a last resort. The odds of success are slim for litigants, who have to surmount many hurdles throughout the process.

Key Points of Chapter 11:

- The popularization of the Internet has given rise to cyberactivism in China. The Internet is also increasingly used for mobilizing offline protests.

- Contentious politics takes place when ordinary citizens collectively confront authorities and elites. The study of contentious politics centres on various components including the political opportunities, the collective identity and mobilization of participants, the framing of grievances, and the repertoire of contention.
• Contentious politics in the form of collective or mass incidents has been growing in China. Rural resistance is usually organized by villagers residing in the same area while labour resistance typically involves workers of the same danwei. Participants in contentious politics may resort to both legal and illegal means.
References


STUDY UNIT 5
THE CHINA MODEL AND
CHALLENGES AHEAD
Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:
1. Describe the key tenets of the China model.
2. Discuss the appeal and limitations of the China model in the domestic and global contexts.

Overview

This concluding chapter to the course focuses on the China model, its appeal and limitations, as well as its implications for China and the rest of the world.
Chapter 12 The China Model?

12.1 Will China Democratize?

In this course, we have learned about the history and foundations of the PRC, its political system, structure and ideologies, and the channels of political participation in the Chinese society. At the beginning of this study guide, we list a few important questions often raised in the study of Chinese politics, which we have addressed to some extent in the preceding chapters. By now you should be able to elucidate the factors and conditions that have influenced Chinese politics from the founding of the PRC in 1949 to the present, the profound changes in Chinese politics in the last century, and the stability of the Chinese polity despite contradictions within the party-state and in state-society relations. One key puzzle, however, remains open-ended, and that is “will modernization lead to China’s democratization”?

Early modernization theory that posits the comprehensive evolution of an agrarian, poor and repressive society to an industrialized, affluent and democratic society has not been supported by the experience of many third world countries. In the study of China’s modernization, ongoing debates have centred on the compatibility of developmental goals including growth, equity, stability, and democracy.

China has undergone spectacular changes in the last thirty over years. Far-reaching market reforms that took off under Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s have transformed it from one of the world’s poorest countries into a global economic powerhouse in the short span of a few decades. In 1980, China’s GNP per capita in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) was only 2.3 percent of that of the U.S.; in 2013, this has increased to around 22 percent.

In terms of human development, China has made remarkable progress too: its human development index (HDI) has improved from 0.42 in 1980 to 0.72 in 2012; the number of rural poor had been halved in the first decade of reform; and adult literacy rate had risen from 67.1 percent in 1980 to an impressive 91 percent in 2006. Even with a household registration system (hukou 户口) in place that restricts physical mobility, more than one-half of China’s 1.36 billion population live in cities today, in comparison to the late 1970s when less than one-fifth of its people are urban residents.

Yet in tandem with its stunning economic performance, China has witnessed a rising incidence of popular protests and social unrest in recent years. Rapid socio-economic changes and technological advancements have contributed to the many challenges the Chinese government faces today. Land disputes, work stoppages and strikes, environmental protests, ethnic and religious conflicts have become increasingly commonplace. Data shows that “mass incidents” (quntixing shijian 群体性事件) such
as these have surged from 8,700 in 1993 to over 120,000 by 2008, and today they reportedly occur at an alarming rate of more than 100,000 every year (Tanner 2014; Pei 2010, 37). The distribution of wealth in China has also been highly unequal, and inequality has been known to be a principal source of instability.

Despite China’s stunning progress and challenges, the Chinese party-state has only taken incremental steps to introduce limited democracy into its authoritarian system. Chinese leaders in the post-Mao era have staunchly stood by “intra-party democracy” or “democracy with Chinese characteristics” as an alternative to the “Western” democratic model. This model of development has been increasingly known as the “China model.” In this concluding chapter, we shall discuss the China model, its sustainability in view of China’s ongoing changes, and its implications for Chinese politics and for the rest of the world.

12.2 What is the China Model?

China’s success has raised a question about whether the China model will replace the American-style of capitalism or Western model of modernization because what China has achieved in the last couple of decades legitimately lays siege to many of our most deeply held notions about the realities of government and economics (Zhao 2010, 419–420).

While there have been debates and doubts on the validity of a China model that is the exact opposite of the Western liberal democratic model, the term has increasingly been used in a more general way to describe China’s developmental approach, “in which a high level of economic growth is achieved without fundamentally changing the communist one-party rule, in contrast to the Western model of modernization that demands a free market system going hand in hand with liberal democracy” (Zhao 2010, 422). In short, the term refers to the mixed strategies of economic freedom with political oppression. As a “pragmatic” and “non-ideological” approach to promote growth while maintaining social stability and the party’s hold on power, the China model has appeal to some leaders of developing, non-democratic countries (Zhao 2010, 431).
In Chinese leaders’ eyes, the West’s economic troubles discredit the “Western model” of democracy, the rule of law, separation of powers, and independent media (Chen 2013, 59).

The appeal of the China model is underscored by various factors. On top of China’s economic achievements under one-party rule over the past decades, the relative decline of the U.S., particularly its policy failure in various arenas, has also given credence to China’s approach to development. Moreover, unlike the U.S. which ties foreign relations to liberalism, China’s diplomacy is mainly shaped by its strategic interests instead of ideological values (Zhao 2010, 432–33). On the other hand, the China model is also limited by this ideological vacuum, and pragmatism alone does not have the universal or moral appeal of the liberal democratic model. Problems such as endemic corruption, social tensions and severe environmental pollution that have accompanied China’s rapid growth not only diminish the appeal of the China model, they also cast doubts over the sustainability of such an approach to growth.

12.3 Is the China Model Sustainable?

The sustainability of the China model remains to be seen. One factor that may upset China’s continued progress is social inequality. There are two contrasting views on the issue. On the one hand, some believe that social inequality does not pose a severe threat to China’s system. In the words of Whyte,

although some individuals and groups experiencing unemployment, downward mobility, and abject poverty may be angry and feel that the current social order is unjust, for the bulk of the population the benefits produced by market reforms far outweigh the disadvantages and promote broad acceptance of the current system as at least relatively just. This broad acceptance of China’s market system helps prevent local grievances and social protests from escalating into general challenges to the system (Whyte 2010, 4).

There seems to be at least some evidence that supports this view. Despite social problems in China and growing inequality, a survey has shown that Chinese citizens are highly tolerant of inequality in their society, more so than the citizens of other societies. In comparison to citizens of other countries, Chinese citizens seem to accept existing inequality in their society and remain sanguine about opportunities of social mobility. They perceive the gap between the affluent and the poor as a matter of merit and not so much a result of an unjust social structure (Whyte 2010, 85–86). Based on his survey on the attitudes of Chinese citizens, Whyte concludes that there is “no evidence that China is heading toward a social volcano due to popular anger over rising inequality” (Whyte 2010, 87). A Pew Global Attitudes Survey (2008) of 24 nations also shows that Chinese citizens are among the most satisfied with their governments. Over 80% were satisfied with China’s economic performance and overall progress, and as high as 65% believed that their government was doing a good job (Zhao 2010, 435).

Furthermore, observers have pointed out that despite their frequent occurrence, most social protests in China have remained isolated and constrained. Chen suggests that such routinized popular contention, instead of threatening the survival of the CCP regime, “has become a form of interest articulation, and as such has actually helped the political system to achieve a certain degree of responsiveness and accountability” (Chen 2013, 57).

On the other hand, others feel that China’s yawning wealth gap and social injustice may jeopardize the country’s social and political stability. Beside China watchers and researchers, Chinese leaders seem to subscribe to this view as well (Whyte 2010, 4–5). Chinese leaders’ emphasis and preoccupation with maintaining social stability
(weiwen 维稳) may signal that the disruptive potential of social tensions and inequality cannot be ruled out entirely.

Yet the all-encompassing weiwen system – which spans everything from secret police agents to the extensive letters and visits system – is unsustainable in terms of manpower, financial expenditure and the social costs. First of all, the system works around a highly centralized power structure, in which state and party officials have to spend considerable time and attention to oversee a broad range of agencies from the police to the surveillance and propaganda organs. The monetary cost of weiwen is also staggering. In 2011, US$95 billion was allocated to the maintenance of law and order, and this alone – not counting the off-budget amount of money that was expended by SOEs, party-state agencies and private businesses – had exceeded China’s military budget in the same year (Chen 2013, 60–61). Finally, critics have also pointed out that the weiwen system is only a short-term solution that has given rise to other long-term problems in its implementation (Chen 2013, 58).

Given the flaws of weiwen, Chinese leaders have modified their approach to social stability, shifting from suppression to pre-emptive measures. The new approach, termed “social management” (shehui zhili 社会治理), merges the provision of social services and economic development with stability maintenance. As Shan explains, the new approach is “a reflection of the government’s concern for domestic social problems due to the changing society and rising protests, and fear of the contagion effects of the Jasmine Revolution in 2011” (Shan 2012). Specifically, it encourages social organizations to take on a bigger and more active role in managing the society. In addition, softer tactics such as co-option, deliberation and negotiation are employed to maintain stability. Although the CCP may desire to contain and resolve social problems through these initiatives, the efficacy of the new approach remains unclear, more so as China’s growth is slowing down (Shan 2012).

12.4 Implications and Concluding Thoughts

Even without factoring in the potential destabilizing impact of power struggles within the CCP, the sustainability of China’s current approach to pursuing growth without substantial political reforms is questionable. The appeal of the China model is also tied to China’s soft power, or lack thereof (Nye 2013). According to a Pew global survey, China’s image is largely unfavourable among the developed world including Japan, Europe and the U.S., while it is mostly positive among the African and Latin American countries. While China’s economic might is a winning factor, its lackluster human rights record continues to tarnish its image among the developed Western nations and two of the most economically advanced Asian countries, Japan and South Korea.
Among Chinese citizens, the attractiveness or credibility of the China model appears to be limited too. According to World Bank data, China is one of the countries with the highest emigration rate in the world. From 2011 to 2015, its net migration rate (total number of immigrants less that of emigrants) is -1.8 million. In comparison, the net migration rates of Canada and the U.S. over the same period are 1.18 million and 5 million respectively. Environmental pollution is a major push factor for Chinese citizens seeking to relocate overseas. Air pollution alone is estimated to contribute to 1.6 million deaths per year in China, amounting to about 17% of all deaths in China (Rohde and Muller 2015). A survey by the Hurun Research Institute shows that affluent Chinese migrate because of the quality of education, pollution and food safety in China, and the top three destinations are the U.S., Canada and Australia.

Many questions remain to be answered. Without substantial political reforms and as China enters an era of slower growth, what shall be the regime’s source of legitimacy? Will Xi’s anti-corruption campaign be effective in rooting out endemic corruption to, in turn, boost regime legitimacy? If China’s approach to development loses currency among its people, will the CCP increasingly turn to stoking nationalist sentiments and a more belligerent military or foreign policy? What are the consequences of this for China’s relations with the rest of the world?

"Establishing, say, a Confucius Institute in Manila to teach Chinese culture might help produce soft power, but it is less likely to do so in a context where China has just bullied the Philippines over possession of Scarborough Reef" (Nye 2013). Discuss.
Summary

Key Points of Chapter 12:

- “China model” is a term that is increasingly used to describe China’s approach to development which combines economic liberalization with political oppression.

- While the China model is appealing because of China’s socio-economic achievements in the past few decades, its attractiveness has been undermined by a few factors including the problems accompanying China’s growth and the questionable sustainability of such a developmental approach.
References


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