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Informal Institutions in Autocracies: Analytical Perspectives and the Case of the Chinese Communist Party

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Abstract

Analyses of the shape and functioning of systems of political rule need to address informal institutions, which exist alongside and can relate to formal institutions in various ways. In this paper, I first discuss some analytical foundations of the study of such institutions. I then suggest that a focus on political regimes – understood as the configuration of formal and informal institutions shaping and reflecting the access to and the exercise of political power – can be particularly useful for analysing the shape and functioning of autocracies. Finally, I use such a regime focus to study the Chinese Communist Party and its leadership succession process, which is characterised by increasing institutionalisation and complementary as well as substitutive relations between formal and informal institutions.

Keywords: informal institutions, political regimes, autocracies, Chinese Communist Party, political succession

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Informal Institutions in Autocracies: Analytical Perspectives and the Case of the Chinese Communist Party

Patrick Köllner

Article Outline

Introduction[1]

Over the past twenty years, it has become increasingly acknowledged that political science has to address not only formal but also informal institutions, as well as the relations between the two. The fact that interest in informal institutions has significantly grown since the early 1990s is no coincidence. The manifold political, economic and social transformation processes occurring in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union; the end of the Cold War; and other local developments have not only opened up new opportunities for relevant observations but have also underlined the empirical importance of informal institutions in the context of such processes and beyond.

Together with the insights generated by recent research on formal entities such as political parties, elections and parliaments in autocracies,[2] the analysis of informal institutions promises substantial potential for understanding and explaining the shape and functioning

of authoritarian systems of political rule. Against this background, I set out to achieve two aims with this paper. First, I want to delineate the importance of informal institutions in authoritarian and other systems of political rule. By way of introduction, I briefly discuss why the study of informal elements in politics matters. Thereafter, I present some conceptual and broader analytical foundations of the study of informal institutions. Second, I show how a focus on political regimes can guide an institutionally oriented analysis of the shape and functioning of authoritarian and other systems of political rule. I then illustrate such a regime focus with reference to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and, more specifically, the issue of political succession at the top of the country's state party, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In a brief final section, I summarise the main points of this paper.

Informal Institutions in Politics

According to Harold Lasswell, the central question in politics is: 'Who gets what, when, how?'[3] The authoritative allocation of political goods of a material and immaterial nature – including political offices – can take place in different ways. In liberal democracies, formal institutions are of central importance in this context. They demarcate in a transparent and enforceable manner the areas of responsibility, the duties and the powers (and limits thereof) of central political actors as well as the procedures involved in political deliberation and decision-making. Following a broad understanding of institutions, such formal institutions are comprised of rules, norms and agreements – regardless of whether they are fixed (i) in terms of laws, organisational statutes, treaties and other legally binding documents or (ii) in the form of customary law including tribal, clan and other indigenous law.[4] A different modus for arriving at political outcomes consists of the establishment and subsequent use of informal (i.e. not legally framed but not necessarily illegal) inter-subjectively shared relational structures, behavioural and procedural modes, which are often only known to the 'insiders' involved.[5] When such structures and modes are not used in an arbitrary or random manner but are based on rules, norms and agreements, we are faced with informal institutions.

Formal and informal institutions are not mutually exclusive. In practice, both types of institutions are used and, indeed, often combined in different kinds of systems of political rule. Even consolidated democracies, having experienced numerous free and fair elections as well as peaceful changes in power, host various informal institutions alongside their better-known formal counterparts. The strength or efficacy of both formal and informal institutions depends substantially on their stability and enforcement, which – in turn – are based on how much political actors value these institutions.[6]

The basic interest accorded by political elites and other political actors to the use, maintenance and expansion of more or less institutionalised informal relational structures and behavioural and procedural modes can be easily explained in rational terms. Informal relations and practices open up room for manoeuvre beyond formal institutions, which can

be quite rigid and often require high transaction costs. Formal institutions can also involve obligations in terms of accountability and transparency that not all political actors gladly submit to. The use of informal relational structures can increase the control and steering possibilities of ruling elites beyond and in addition to extant formal institutions. Such institutions can thus help to accumulate and to retain power.[7] The purposes and the kinds of informal relational structures and behavioural and procedural modes used by political actors are affected by the specific systemic political context. For example, in autocratic 'predatory states', in which the state's resources are looted by the ruling elite,[8] material benefits can be maximised through the usage of informal relational systems and practices. Also, where there is no (or only rudimentary) rule of law – as is the case in autocratic and some hybrid political systems – rulers do not have to fear sanctions when using informal institutions that are clearly illegal, such as corruption.

In the following section, I address some basic analytical foundations of the study of informal institutions, which are also relevant for analyses of such institutions in autocracies. In this context, I also address the possible relationships between formal and informal institutions.

Analytical Perspectives on Informal Institutions

Institutions, Formal and Informal

In the social sciences and economics, both broader and narrower definitions of institutions are employed.[9] Pulling the different perspectives together, Richard Scott postulates that 'institutions are comprised of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements, that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life'.[10] As Shmuel Eisenstadt noted, every society tends to establish institutions to solve ever-recurring basic problems.[11] Institutions can offer orientation aids and help to reduce, or at least deal with, conflict. At the same time, the establishment of institutions can lead to conflicts when different interests clash with each other. Institutions can affect political actors by:

a) structuring their interests and the incentives these actors are facing;
b) shaping the access to and the distribution of power resources (including information); and
c) defining available (or appropriate) behavioural modes.[12]

While formal institutions constitute political actors and their powers (e.g. constitutional stipulations concerning executives and legislatures), informal institutions simply increase or reduce the likelihood of certain modes of (inter)action. They thus form a kind of 'filter' for political actions.[13] Formal as well as informal institutions can increase the predictability of political processes and decisions and thus help to reduce uncertainty.[14] In short, formal and informal institutions can contribute to steering and integrating the political realm by helping to

provide order and orientation.[15] As will be explained below, informal institutions can conflict with formal institutions but do not have to.

While a substantial part of the empirical literature on informal institutions has pointed to their negative consequences in terms of reducing or undermining the efficacy, efficiency, stability or legitimacy of the political systems and organisations concerned, there are also numerous examples of 'socially efficient' and other informal institutions emanating effects that are positive from a collective point of view.[16] Much depends on whether informal institutions are used by political actors for selfish reasons to circumvent extant formal institutions or whether the actors use informal institutions to solve collective action problems.[17]

Consequently, the concrete effects of informal institutions have to be uncovered empirically. Doing so first requires determining which significant formal and informal institutions exist in the political system concerned. Subsequently, one needs to examine how these institutions are used and how they relate to each other. The respective stability and enforcement of formal and informal institutions and their relationship(s) to each other give us vital clues as to how authoritarian and other systems of political rule operate in practice (see also the following section).

It is important, though, not to overlook the immanent limits of institutionally oriented analyses. Formal and informal institutions do not determine political outcomes on their own. Rather, institutions serve as parameters within which competing interests face and clash with each other. Interests and the ideas underlying them thus constitute vital driving forces, which cannot – or can only insufficiently – be explained from an institutional perspective. The same holds true for the preferences and abilities that political actors bring into political processes.[18]

As long as one is aware of the general limitations of institutional approaches to understanding and explaining political action, institutionally oriented studies can help to improve our analytical knowledge about political processes and structures. One also has to bear in mind that in no way are all informal phenomena in politics institutionally based. Arbitrariness also constitutes a central moment of politically relevant action. One should thus be careful not to overstretch the analytical lens of informal institutions by applying it to all kinds of informal phenomena – doing so would indeed turn 'informal institutions' into a catch-all concept of limited analytical value.[19]

How Formal and Informal Institutions Relate to Each Other

In analytical terms, it makes sense to focus not just on specific informal institutions within political systems, organisations, and so forth, but to consider the respective overall institutional constellations. Formal and informal institutions can relate to each other in different ways within such setups. At the most basic level, formal and informal institutions can compete with or support each other. There is of course also the possibility that they just exist

alongside each other without much interaction. Focussing on established democracies, Julia Azari and Jennifer Smith have recently distinguished three functions that informal institutions can fulfil within institutional setups. First, they can complete or fill gaps in formal institutions. Second, informal institutions can help to coordinate the operation of overlapping institutions. Third, informal institutions can work in conjunction with formal ones to regulate the same kind of political behaviour. In all three instances, informal and formal institutions largely complement each other.[20]

Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky have presented a broader typological approach to informal institutions.[21] They take into account two dimensions affecting the relationships between formal and informal institutions – namely, the effectiveness of both types of institutions (whether they are applied or not) and the direction in which they pull (whether they lead formal and informal institutions to similar political outcomes or not) (see Figure 1). Notably, Helmke and Levitsky thus do not take the effectiveness of formal institutions for granted.[22] In some cases, the effectiveness of formal institutions may actually depend on whether informal institutions that are part of the same institutional setup pull in the same direction.[23] Looking at the full range of systems of political rule, it is also important to note that formal institutions may not constitute the most important institutional parameters affecting the actual behaviour of political elites in autocracies (and even in hybrid systems).

Figure 1: A Typology of Informal Institutions

Outcomes	Effective formal institutions	Ineffective formal institutions
Converging	Complementary	Substitutive
Diverging	Accommodating	Conflictive

Source: Helmke and Levitsky, "Informal Institutions," 14.

„Complementary informal institutions", to use Helmke and Levitsky's terminology, are closely aligned with extant formal ones and support the operation and functionality of the latter.[24] Such informal institutions can be used pragmatically to fill in gaps left by or found in formal institutions. They can also help to speed up political processes and to reduce transaction costs. Complementary informal institutions basically increase the overall stability and/or efficiency of the institutional setups of which they form part.[25] Complementary institutions can often – but not solely – be found in established democracies,[26] in which formal institutions are strong and effective because they rest on social norms that accord with them.[27] In hybrid and autocratic systems, on the other hand, there is often a lack of such norms buttressing formal institutions – especially at the elite level.[28]

"Accommodating informal institutions" are, in essence, informal institutions that may not be in open conflict with the stipulations of formal institutions but certainly run against

the spirit of these institutions. Helmke and Levitsky suggest that accommodating informal institutions:

> are often created by actors who dislike outcomes generated by the formal rules but are unable to change or openly violate those rules. As such, these institutions often help reconcile these actors' interests with the existing formal institutional arrangements.[29]

While accommodating informal institutions may not increase the efficiency of the overall institutional setup concerned, they can at least increase its stability by reducing the demand for institutional change. Power cartels and old-boy networks as well as corporatist and consociational structures and procedures are classic examples of such accommodating informal institutions, which can be found in different systems of political rule. They are particularly prevalent in (post-)socialist systems.[30]

When informal institutions pull in a different direction to or aim for outcomes distinct to those of extant formal institutions, and the latter are not applied (or sufficiently enforced), we are faced with 'competing informal institutions'. In such a constellation, it is the informal institutions that are efficacious. Informal institutions such as patron-client networks or systemic corruption shaping the operation of numerous autocracies and hybrid political systems openly contradict the formal institutions that exist in these systems.[31] Competing informal institutions are especially prevalent where – in the context of decolonisation and state-building – formal institutions imported from the 'West' were grafted on to existing tradition-based informal institutions and the rules, obligations and authority structures linked to the these institutions.[32] Tradition-based informal institutions can exhibit a high degree of staying power. Sometimes, such institutions are fused with new formal institutions as, for example, in neo-patrimonial governance arrangements, which can be found in both hybrid and authoritarian systems of political rule.[33]

Finally, 'substitutive informal institutions' de facto replace extant formal institutions when both types of institutions pull in the same direction, but formal institutions are not applied or (sufficiently) enforced. Substitutive informal institutions exist particularly in the context of weak state structures – for example, in large parts of sub-Saharan Africa.[34] Where formal rules (including laws) are only weakly enforced, tradition-based informal institutions can survive more easily; additionally, other informal relational structures, behavioural and procedural modes can easily arise and continue to exist.[35] A variant of substitutive informal institutions are 'adaptive informal institutions', which replace formal institutions that were never or are no longer effective in terms of delivering public goods.[36] Substitutive informal institutions may also be found where new formal institutions have been created – for example, during transition processes – but ruling elites continue to cling to existing informal institutions (or establish new ones that are more powerful than the new formal ones).[37] If formal in-

stitutions were, however, created only to serve as facades in the first place, conflicting rather than substitutive informal institutions are more likely.

Political Regimes as Analytical Foci

The literature on informal institutions in various world regions signals that such institutions can impact on political structures and processes in all kinds of political systems. They can, however, play out differently depending on the particular political context.[38] Regardless of the political system involved, informal institutions can affect the genesis and development of political regimes and even whole state-building processes. They can also affect the exercise of power in presidential and parliamentary systems of government. More or less institutionalised clientelistic and factional structures and practices, for example, can shape the competition and the cooperation of political elites in autocracies, hybrid systems and sometimes even in democracies.[39] Even though informal relational structures and behavioural and procedural modes can be found in all kinds of political settings, the type of political system in question can shape the concrete gestalt and effects of the informal institutions concerned. For example, with respect to clientelism, Allen Hicken has noted that:

> in democracies, clientelism is a tool for building a loyal network of supporters. In autocracies, clientelism also involves creating socioeconomic dependence on the regime […], and as a corollary political subservience […]. The nature of the regime can also affect the kinds of benefits offered to voters or the nature of the exchange relationship; for example, clientelism in democratic settings tends to be more transactional and less hierarchical than what we observe in autocratic settings. What drives many of the differences between autocratic and democratic clientelism […] is the robustness of political competition.[40]

The existence and the effects of informal institutions can be studied at the level of states, political systems, organisations, policy areas, and so forth. The level chosen depends on whatever the researcher seeks to explain or understand. Analyses of the shape and functioning of political systems of rule can be most easily handled by, or so I would suggest, focussing on the political regimes in question. According to Robert Fishman, political regimes can be understood as:

> the formal and informal organization of the center of political power, and of its relations with the broader society. A regime determines who has access to political power, and how those who are in power deal with those that are not.[41]

In a similar vein, David Waldner defines political regimes as 'the formal and informal rules and institutions that both reflect and shape the distribution and organization of political

power and that constrain to various degrees the actions of power-holders'.[42] Analyses of political regimes as institutional constellations enable insights into the organisation and distribution of power in different systems of political rule. Such analyses can shed light on both the modes and practices involved in gaining access to and exercising power in various systemic contexts.[43] With respect to the latter, one can further distinguish between the routinised relations between the ruler(s) and the members of the state apparatus and the relations between the state and (civil) society.[44]

A regime-centred analysis of systems of political rule allows researchers to focus on one or more of the following components of such regimes:

1) The formal and informal mechanisms of the (s)election of political leaders or rulers and the access to political power, including government posts
2) The procedures of political representation and consultation
3) The rules underlying political decision-making processes and the authoritative decisions based thereon.[45]

Taken together, these components form what may be termed the procedural dimension of political regimes. Researchers might also choose to analyse the behavioural and the attitudinal dimensions of political regimes by asking, for example, whether all relevant actors subscribe to the rules in question. Such an approach can lead to further insights into the strength of relevant institutions. The attitudinal dimension also raises the related question of whether relevant institutions are used and rules are applied because of normative convictions or because of opportunism on the part of the actors involved. Opportunism can negatively affect the stability of a political regime. But of course, even more fragile political regimes can be durable for quite a while.

The analytical focus just sketched can be applied to all kinds of systems of political rule, including autocracies. The analysis of the latter will reflect and bear out the central characteristics of such systems of political rule, in particular the substantial limits on participation and competition in the political realm. For example, the substantially smaller selectorate in autocracies[46] (relevant for the 'access to power' regime component) and the limited political pluralism (relevant for the 'exercise of power' regime component) should come out strongly in regime-centred analyses of autocracies. However, even in non-democratic regimes, rulers usually face limits to their power. They might have to share power – to a smaller or larger degree – with collective actors such as the military, (ruling) parties, parliaments, courts, or local political actors or bodies. Also, rulers might have to bargain with social actors possessing political power resources (e.g. large corporations, landowners, important religious leaders and well-organised interest groups) in the context of exercising power.[47] Last but not least, the forms of access to power and the exercise of power in autocracies will also be shaped by the particular type of rule – that is, whether the autocracy in question is ruled by the military, a single party, a monarch, an individual dictator or some hybrid thereof.[48]

China's System of Political Rule: A Regime-Centred Analysis

In the following, I illustrate the role and development of institutions shaping access to political power with reference to the world's largest and most important autocracy, the People's Republic of China (PRC). Since the foundation of the PRC in 1949, the country has been ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – founded in 1921 and officially consisting of four million grassroots branches and eighty-three million members in 2012. At the apex of China's state party stands the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), constituting the oligarchic core of the CCP. How do leadership transitions at the top of the CCP work? And what role have institutions played in these processes? The governance of leadership succession is a very delicate issue for autocracies in general. Succession issues indeed pose existential challenges for authoritarian systems of rule. Given the destabilising potential of top-level succession, ruling elites in autocracies face strong incentives to manage such succession processes in an orderly manner.[49] Free and fair elections, endowing democratic systems of political rule with vital legitimacy, are not an option in autocracies. Where ruling parties are in power, autocratic leaders can use established party processes to manage top-level succession. And where there are no precedents for such party-based succession, autocratic leaders can try to pass on political power to family members. However, outside of monarchies, cases of successful 'dynastic succession' have been very rare.[50]

Formal and Informal Institutions in the CCP

To understand the role of institutions in governing leadership succession in the case of the CCP, it is useful to first examine the nature of elite politics in the PRC in broader terms. The extensive literature on the topic shows that power relations and dynamics within the CCP, as well as the gestation of material politics connected to such interactions, have been massively affected by relational systems as well as behavioural and procedural modes of an informal kind.[51] Lowell Dittmer and Yu-Shan Wu argue that the informal dimension has always been of 'paramount importance' in Chinese politics, though the nature of informal structures and processes changed in the post-Mao era.[52] While the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) witnessed the 'metastatic' spread of such structures and processes,[53] thereafter – and indeed in response to the preceding tumultuous period in PRC history – various dimensions of CCP rule, including political succession, underwent a process of formal and informal institutionalisation.

The traditional great importance of informal relational systems as well as behavioural and procedural modes in Chinese elite politics contrasts with the lacking strength of formal rules (or indeed their non-existence in some areas). In ideational terms, Dittmer and Wu link the weakness of formal rules to the Confucian disdain for legalism and the resulting limited importance of formal rules in China's socio-historical development.[54] In a similar vein, Frederick Teiwes points to the importance of established views concerning 'just rule' by 'good

men' rather than 'good laws'.[55] Yet, he also notes the importance of the organisational history of the CCP, pointing in particular to the precedence accorded to revolutionary goal-attainment during the first phase of CCP rule. 'As lifelong revolutionaries', Teiwes notes, '[CCP] leaders have consistently placed higher value on protecting the revolution than on formal restraints'.[56]

Until recently, formally defined powers were only of limited importance for the effective exercise of political power in the PRC. For example, although Mao Zedong came to dominate the CCP's first leadership generation, his position was not clearly defined in formal, constitutional terms.[57] And while some central party norms (i.e. Leninist principles of party organisation and related norms of 'democratic centralism' and 'collective leadership') were enshrined in the CCP's party statute and taken seriously for some time at least, they were not applied in a systematic and consistent manner.[58] Overall, China's political system was characterised by a weakly developed legal-rational orientation during the first thirty years of the PRC's existence. Even though Mao clamoured for years for the application of formal party norms and rules, he himself also ignored such institutions repeatedly. Still, normatively oriented party rules retained some degree of efficacy up until the Cultural Revolution and despite a certain erosion of institutional edifices in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[59] During the first phase of the Cultural Revolution, which thereafter developed self-dynamically, Mao did away with such norms or only used them arbitrarily. As Teiwes notes, politics thus became a high-stakes game involving tremendous risks, making 'naked factionalism' (i.e. the use of personal networks for political and sometimes also personal survival) a necessity.[60]

Deng Xiaoping, who headed the second CCP leadership generation, reacted to the terror of the Cultural Revolution and Mao's personalised leadership by both (re)introducing formal as well as informal institutions to act as checks and balances within the CCP.[61] Joseph Fewsmith argues that 'what Deng was doing was not building institutions, or not just building institutions, but rather balancing political forces in a way that would support his agenda and provide political stability.'[62] Deng's attempts to achieve a new equilibrium within the CCP were, however, only to some degree successful in the beginning. Tensions remained between normative, mostly formal rules pertaining to the party's commanding role as well as its internal order (i.e. collective leadership, democratic centralism, Leninist discipline, a ban on factionalism, control over the military) and what Teiwes calls the 'politics of prudence'. The core principles of the latter included the entering of broad alliances, the defence of institutional interests, the maintenance of relational (*guanxi*-type) networks and the establishment of patron-client ties.[63]

Formal party rules still remained basically weak, as Teiwes noted in the early 1980s:

> The formal normative rules are not only ambivalent and politically fragile in the best of worlds, but are particularly inadequate for times of enhanced conflict. The successful politician cannot place too much faith in them but must instead be highly sensitive to the dictates of prudence.[64]

Also, Deng's own position as the CCP's new 'strongman' remained rather nondescript in formal terms. The only important formal position that Deng held for some years was that of chairman of the CCP's Central Military Commission (CMC) from 1981 to 1989. Deng exercised power not *qua* office but *qua* person and by relying on patron-client ties.[65]

As mentioned above, the end of Cultural Revolution marked a crucial turning point or critical juncture in the institutional setup of the Chinese state and the ruling party. Fewsmith argues that the Cultural Revolution itself can be understood in part:

> as a radical breakdown in the relation between formal institutions – the state constitution, the party charter, and the various written prescriptions on the fora in which political decisions were to be made – and the informal rules of the game, in which internalized understanding of power played an important role.[66]

The CCP responded to the chaos of the Cultural Revolution in organisational terms by initiating a multi-step attempt to restore 'normal' intra-party life.[67] Important steps in this regard were Deng's 1980 announcement of 'leading principles' governing political life within the party (marking a de facto return to old party norms) and the 1982 promulgation of a new constitution that did away with the references to the Cultural Revolution. In 1982, for the first time ever, a party congress took place five years after the preceding one (as had long been stipulated in the CCP's charter). Party congresses have continued to take place every five years despite occasional adverse political conditions and/or intra-party tensions. The holding of regular party congresses is no small feat that should be taken for granted – as shown by the experience of neighbouring North Korea. There, in spite of identical stipulations concerning party congresses, no congress of the Korean Workers Party has been held since 1980 – even the party's politburo apparently did not come together between 1994 and 2010.[68]

Different from North Korea's ruling-party–military-regime hybrid headed by the Kim clan, the Politburo – more specifically the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) – forms the centre of political power in China's single-party system. While the Chinese government (headed by the State Council) can initiate important policy proposals, ultimate decision-making power rests with the CCP[69] – at the helm of which is the PSC. Not much reliable information exists on the modes of operation of this top-level organ.[70] However, scholars agree that the norm of collective leadership has become increasingly efficacious since the death of Mao in 1976. This norm, which is formally enshrined in the CCP's statute, had not been applied since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Things began to change after the CCP's second leadership generation had taken power. For instance, collective leadership once again became the norm, while the CCP's fourth leadership generation – including President Hu Jintao – placed great emphasis on consensus.[71] Overall, political decision-making processes have become increasingly rational and embedded in consultative processes.[72] Over the past thirty-odd years, China's political system has thus witnessed a transition from rule by 'strongmen' (Mao and, to a lesser extent, Deng) to genuine collective leadership.[73]

It is also known that a certain sectoral division of labour exists within the CCP's leadership. This found its first organisational expression in 1958 when the so-called leading small groups (LSGs) were established inside the CCP's Central Committee (CC). These leading groups sought to institutionalise the political decision-making and implementation process within the framework of collective leadership.[74] The most important LSGs reporting directly to the PSC are those dealing with foreign affairs; Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao affairs; finance and economy; ideology and propaganda; national security; politics and law; and party development. These core LSGs are usually headed by a member of the PSC (which has consisted of seven members since the 18th Party Congress in 2012, though the CCP's statute does not stipulate a concrete number of members), meaning that each PSC member represents an essential policy area. The personal affiliation of the most important LSGs certainly contributes to making the PSC the CCP's 'operative core group'.[75]

Formally, the PSC is selected by the Politburo (which currently has 25 members; see also the following section) and should thus also be answerable to the Politburo – at least article 10 of the CCP's statute can be read in this way. Perhaps also to increase his own leverage within the PSC, former CCP general secretary Hu Jintao (2002–2012) routinely reported back to the Politburo.[76] In political praxis, the Politburo only confirms decisions taken by the PSC.[77] Alice Miller suggests that some informal rules structuring the ways the Politburo and the PSC operate have also become institutionalised. Such rules concern the frequency of meetings (usually once a week in the case of the PSC and once a month in the case of the Politburo), the necessity for a transparent agenda, the running of meetings (proceeding item by item), the determination of majorities within the PSC (by means of straw polls) and protocol in the absence of (quasi-)unanimity (decisions are deferred).[78]

Since 2002, when Hu became general secretary of the CCP, there have been visible efforts to better balance important institutional interests – of the party apparatus, the state organs and the provinces – in numerical terms within the Politburo. Conversely, security organs such as the People's Liberation Army are only represented by a limited number of representatives within the Politburo. This institutional balance seems to be geared towards guaranteeing collective leadership.[79] From an analytical perspective, this can be understood as a case of informal rules (balancing of institutional interests) buttressing formal norms (collective leadership), resulting in a complementary relationship between the two. Arguably, the current structures and procedures of the Politburo and the PSC are aimed, on the one hand, at institutionally constraining the powers of the CCP general secretary and thus preventing the recurrence of a personalised dictatorship and, on the other hand, countering potential attempts by representatives of particular institutional interests to gain a hegemonic position within the party's leadership.[80]

It is worth repeating, though, that existing knowledge about the gestalt and the functioning of the institutional setup of the CCP's Politburo and PSC continues to be based on flimsy empirical foundations and might only reflect the situation during certain periods of time.

The opaque character of the CCP's top-level operational procedures (including consultation processes with other actors) thus continues to present a real challenge to the study of China's system of political rule.[81]

Formal and Informal Institutions Shaping Politburo Succession

Knowledge concerning institutions that shape succession at the level of the Politburo is, however, based on more concrete evidence. The regularisation of CCP congresses mentioned above is also of importance in this regard because that is where important party personnel decisions are ratified. For example, the so-called third leadership generation including General Secretary Zhao Ziyang (who lost his job in the wake of the Tiananmen Square incident) and Premier Li Peng were appointed at the 1987 party congress. At the 1992 party congress, Ziang Zemin was made CCP general secretary as well as CMC chairman, marking the final transition to the third leadership generation. In 2002, Hu Jintao, who five years earlier had entered the PSC, became party leader – thus signalling the beginning of the fourth leadership generation, which had a strong technocratic flavour.[82]

In view of the total lack of formal rules governing succession and term limits, it does not come as a surprise that personnel changes in the CCP have often been accompanied by substantial intra-party tensions. For the longest time, leaving office was the result of irregular mechanisms such as death, purges and complots, inter alia.[83] In 2002, for the first time ever, a leadership change at the top of the CCP occurred without greater intra-party dislocations, some smaller tensions notwithstanding.[84] While leadership changes have become more regularised, the periods before such changes in the PRC are characterised by significant stress amongst the party-state hierarchy and nervousness about perceived domestic and foreign challenges.

The transition from the second leadership generation, still composed of former revolutionaries, to the more technocratic third generation had already raised questions about procedures and selection criteria.[85] Until today, the CCP has only come up with partial answers framed in institutional terms. At the 2002 party congress, age limits for party leaders were introduced, requiring party leaders having turned sixty-eight since the last party congress to leave the Politburo and the PSC by the time of the next congress. Aside from a very few exceptions, the subsequent application of this new formal norm (termed here the '68 norm') ended the possibility of lifelong leadership tenures and created a system of retirement and succession. At the CCP congresses in 2007 and 2012, this norm was also applied to members of the CC.[86]

Since 1982, the PRC's constitution has stipulated a two-term limit with respect to the president, the prime minister and other important state and government positions. Such term limits have also come to be applied to senior party posts.[87] Taken together, age and term limits mean that the most important leadership changes at the top of the CCP now take place

every ten years. With relevant changes having taking place in both 2002 and 2012, the CCP has moved closer to the institutionalisation of rotation at the top.[88]

Unlike the non-implemented 1997 decision to introduce an age limit of seventy, the '68 norm' was brought into effect in relation to members of the PSC in 2007.[89] The decision to set an age limit was in keeping with then general secretary Jiang Zemin's call for a 'systematisation, standardisation, and proceduralisation' of party life. At least officially, Jiang was pursuing a similar line to Deng.[90] While the '68 norm' and its subsequent application indicate an attempt to institutionalise intra-party governance structures, both the ultimately unsuccessful '70 norm' and of the more successful '68 norm' also sought to end the reign of older party bigwigs. The introduction of such norms was thus also connected to intra-party power struggles.[91]

Jiang Zemin's own political career and power base within the CCP had been closely linked to informal relational networks of the so-called Shanghai clique.[92] As Susan Shirk notes:

> Jiang always revealed ambivalence toward the institutionalization of political leadership. He […] recognized that […] new rules could be used as checks on his power and patronage. […] And, unlike Deng, Jiang […] never pursued institutionalization in a self-conscious manner or claimed credit for it as a political reformer.[93]

It seems that Jiang had hoped to cling on to the post of CMC chairman for some years after his retirement as president and CCP general secretary. Doing so would have facilitated the pulling of strings 'behind the throne', as Deng had done until his demise. In any case, Jiang had to relinquish the CMC chairmanship in 2004.

Under Hu Jintao, Jiang's successor in all three posts, the process of systematising, standardising and regularising intra-party processes progressed further. Hu himself repeatedly emphasised the importance of institutions and rules.[94] A reversion of the institutionalisation process, which some observers had deemed possible, did not occur.[95] Notwithstanding the substantial progress with respect to the consistent application of formal institutions (regular party congresses, the '68 norm', term limits) and the introduction of new informal norms (institutional balancing), the institutional setup governing top-level CCP succession still shows a number of gaps (see below). And while the two rounds of senior personnel turnovers in 2002 and 2012 signal some degree of both stability and durability of the institutional setup, it is still too early to speak of a consolidated regime for top-level political succession in the PRC – we would arguably need to see a few more successful personnel turnovers of this kind.

Gaps within the institutional setup exist with respect to the actual process of selecting Politburo and PSC members. There are formal rules in this regard and these are pretty straightforward. According to article 22 of the CCP's statute, the Politburo, the PSC and the general secretary are elected by the CC in plenary sessions. In turn, the CC is elected by the party congress every five years[96] – in practice, however, party congresses only confirm per-

sonnel decisions made elsewhere. The selection of high-level cadres is fairly centralised and takes place in a top–down manner. While the powerful organisation department of the CCP controls the allocation of the three thousand to four thousand most important positions within the nomenklatura system, the selection of CC members is supervised by high-ranking party officials who come together in small groups to prepare party congresses.[97] In a plenary session at the party congress, the new CC members then ratify the lists of candidates for the Politburo and the PSC. According to a more recent informal norm, the latter body is not supposed to include military leaders, while representation of the People's Liberation Army on the former body has been limited to one or two since 1987.[98] In sum, formal CCP rules for electing senior party officials are substituted de facto by behind-the-scenes bargaining processes, which – at least in part – are based on informal institutions.

The selection of top-level party leaders also occurs without an election. Rather, the new setup of the Politburo is determined by the members of the incumbent PSC. This opaque process is also said to involve influential party elders, such as former general secretaries, who are consulted and may also try to exert real influence. The final composition of both the new Politburo and the PSC is usually ironed out before the party congress at a summer conclave of the incumbent Politburo – in 2002 and 2012, this meeting took place at the ocean resort of Beidaihe.[99] While the transition from the second to the third leadership generation was orchestrated by Deng Xiaoping, the two following transition processes – from the third to the fourth leadership generation and the most recent one (culminating in Xi Jinping becoming CCP general secretary) – both involved intensive bargaining processes centred on the members of the PSC.[100]

It is thus the incumbent PSC rather than the new CC which serves as the (main) selectorate for the following group of senior CCP leaders. The past twenty years have shown that departing general secretaries try, more or less successfully, to install loyal followers in the succeeding PSC, but struggle to instate their preferred successor.[101] Rather, the selection of general secretaries is based on collective negotiation processes involving both power play and persuasion. Amidst much emphasis being put on 'internal democracy',[102] a straw poll amongst around four hundred members of the CC and other 'relevant' comrades also took place before the 17th Party Congress in 2007. Party officials were reportedly presented with the names of two hundred possible candidates for the Politburo. It is, however, unknown in how far the (not publically available) result of that poll influenced the composition of that body or indeed the final selection of Xi as Hu's designated successor.[103] Nonetheless, no such poll was conducted before the 18th Party Congress in 2012.[104]

The still-existing degree of ad-hoc, case-by-case decision-making is also reflected by the fact that formal rules are ignored if this proves necessary for advancing the careers of top-leader designates. In fact, both Hu (in 1992) and Xi (in 2007) were made PSC members despite not having served in the Politburo (as stipulated in the party's charter).[105] One other thing that has, however, become more institutionalised over the past twenty years is that po-

tential general secretaries are groomed by successively serving in high-ranking party and state posts – such as head of the Central Party School, deputy chairperson of the CMC, head of an important LSG, vice president, and so forth. Such step-by-step ascents to the highest office certainly marked the careers of former secretary generals Jiang and Hu as well as the current secretary general Xi Jinping.[106]

To sum up, after the end of the Cultural Revolution – which triggered a collective shock in the PRC – the CCP embarked on a path of institutionalisation of intra-party processes and structures. While such institutionalisation has not always been linear and is also far from complete, it has changed the CCP tremendously since Mao's reign. Increasingly efficacious formal party institutions include the principle of collective leadership and the regular holding of party congresses, as well as newly introduced term limits for party and state leaders. Some informal institutions have also been introduced and used for an extended period, including rules and norms governing the operation – and even composition – of the Politburo and the PSC (e.g. 'institutional balancing', no military leaders in the PSC).

Gradual institutionalisation of efficacious norms and rules has also taken place with respect to succession at the top of the CCP. Generational changes at the helm of the party now take place more often (every ten years or so), and both formal norms (e.g. '68 norm' for senior party posts) and informal norms (e.g. gradual ascension to top-level party and state jobs) have been shaping access to political power over the past ten to twenty years. The resulting institutional setup exhibits both substitutive relations between informal and formal institutions (i.e. institutionalised informal procedures for leadership selection substituting procedures prescribed in the party's charter) and complementary relations. With respect to the latter, the formal party norm of collective leadership has been buttressed by, for example, the informal principle of institutional balancing in high-level party bodies (i.e. the CC and Politburo). Age limits for party leaders also make succession processes easier and more predictable. Despite a lack of (visible) enforcement mechanisms, formal and informal institutions governing leadership succession in the CCP have shown a substantial degree of stability over the past ten to twenty years. It can thus be assumed that such institutions are valued by the relevant actors – something which does not come as a surprise given the tumultuous political history of the PRC. Arguably, certain formal and informal institutions (i.e. institutional balancing, age and term limits) serve as checks and balances within the CCP and are designed to make the recurrence of personalised dictatorships impossible.

In spite of the clear tendency towards institutionalisation of intra-party structures and processes and the concomitant growing importance of both formal and informal institutions, one should not lose sight of the fact that many non- or minimally institutionalised relationships and behavioural and procedural modes continue to influence the internal life of the CCP. Also, where practical necessities and strategic personnel-related considerations conflict with formal requirements, the latter can simply be ignored, as signalled by Hu's and Xi's 'helicopter' ascent to the PSC. Existing formal and informal institutions are certainly not

carved into stone; there is always room for pragmatic adjustments and changes.[107] It can also be noted that the institutionalisation of CCP rules and norms does not just reflect efficiency or legitimacy-related considerations, but also the influence of the power systems of elite actors – for instance, when age limits were introduced for senior party posts.[108]

Increasing institutionalisation of top-level succession processes in the CCP has certainly led to a higher degree of consistency and predictability of such processes, which have also become less conflictual overall.[109] However, institutionalisation has not rendered such processes watertight against the vagaries that bedevil political succession in autocracies. The recent affair surrounding prominent Politburo member Bo Xilai provided a forceful reminder of this. Bo forcefully campaigned for PSC membership ahead of the 18th Party Congress in 2012. As party secretary of Chongqing, he oversaw a number of high-profile populist measures and also orchestrated a nostalgia-tinged Cultural Revolution and Mao cult (see e.g. *The Economist*, 14 April and 25 May 2011). Bo was finally stripped of all party posts in March 2012 after a host of his and his associates' corrupt and other illegal activities had been made public. While the particular decisions leading to this purge remain unknown, it seems quite possible that Bo was perceived by other party leaders as a looming threat to the principle of collective leadership.[110]

Conclusions

Researchers seeking to understand and explain the shape and functioning of systems of political rule need to pay attention to the informal institutions which exist within such systems. Once relevant informal institutions have been uncovered, their relations to existing formal institutions have to be analysed in order to comprehend the resulting overall institutional setup. At the most basic level, informal institutions can conflict with or support formal institutions. Where informal institutions are strong and formal ones are weak, the former can substitute the latter. Substitutive and competing informal institutions are arguably particularly prevalent in autocracies and hybrid systems of political rule in the 'non-OECD world'. The limited acceptance and enforcement of formal institutions imported from the 'West' and the weakness of state structures in some of the countries concerned help to account for this phenomenon. As a tendency (but probably no more than that), established democracies exhibit a better fit between formal and informal institutions, with the latter often complementing the former. The relative strength of formal institutions in established democracies and the oft-subservient character of informal institutions reflect the long-held importance of the rule of law for governing social-exchange relationships in many of today's established democracies.

A focus on political regimes, understood as constellations of formal and informal institutions shaping and reflecting access to and the exercise of political power, can help to guide studies of systems of political rule – including autocracies such as the PRC. The case of CCP rule in the PRC reveals that the strength of both formal and informal institutions can vary,

not least in an inter-temporal comparison. In the PRC, after the turning point of the Cultural Revolution and the end of Mao's dictatorship, the ruling CCP began to establish a firmer institutional foundation for party governance. New formal institutions were introduced and extant ones were finally applied in a more consistent manner. Both formal and informal institutions aimed at regularising succession in the party's upper echelons have also been established and implemented. Access to power in the CCP is today shaped – but not determined – by a fairly complex, if perhaps far from complete, institutional setup involving not only substitutive but also complementary relations between informal and formal institutions. The CCP may not have solved the problem of political succession for good (no autocracy ever does), but institutionalisation has helped to make relevant processes more consistent, predictable and less conflict-prone overall. Compared to the Mao era, the CCP has certainly come a long way indeed.

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2 For a recent, very useful discussion of the role of formal institutions in autocracies see Schedler, "The New Institutionalism."

3 Lasswell, *Politics*.

4 Formal institutions thus often exist in written form but they do not have to. Notably, while formal institutions often proclaim universal standards for everyone affected or covered by them, universal orientation also constitutes no necessary criterion for formal institutions. For example, relevant contracts and agreements can be of a particular nature by applying only to the contractual partners involved.

5 I am following here the lead provided by German organisation sociologist Renate Mayntz, who distinguishes these three kinds of relevant informal phenomena – see Mayntz, "Informalisierung politischer Entscheidungsprozesse," 56.

6 See Levitsky and Murillo, "Variation in Institutional Strength."

7 Radnitz, "Informal Politics," 364.

8 See Evans, "Predatory, Developmental, and Other Apparatuses."

9 See Koellner, "'Informelle Politik'," 13.

10 Scott, *Institutions and Organizations*, 48.

11 Eisenstadt, "Social Institutions," 410, cited in Rothstein, "Political Institutions," 139.

12 For similar arguments see Grzymala-Busse, "The Best Laid Plans," 318.

13 See also MacIntyre, "The Power of Institutions," 102–103.

14 Alexander, "Institutionalized Uncertainty."

15 See Göhler, "Politische Institutionen," 37–43.

16 See Ostrom, "Governing the Commons and Understanding Institutional Diversity", Böröcz, "Informality Rules," and Radnitz, "Informal Politics," 361–365, for examples.

17 Mayntz, "Informalisierung politischer Entscheidungsprozesse," 64.

18 See MacIntyre, "The Power of Institutions," 170–171.

19 For a discussion on the usage and problems of the related concept 'informal politics', see Koellner, "'Informelle Politik'," 9–13.

20 See Azari and Smith, "Unwritten Rules."

21 See Helmke and Levitsky, "Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics," and "Introduction." Compare also Lauth, "Informal Institutions and Democracy."

22 A point more fully explored in Levitsky and Murillo, "Variation in Institutional Strength."

23 See also Grzymala-Busse, "The Best Laid Plans," 331.

24 See Helmke and Levitsky, "Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics," 728–729.

25 See e.g. Dittmer, "East Asian Informal Politics," 306, and Grzymala-Busse, "The Best Laid Plans," 326.

26 For a recent study discussing complementary informal institutions in a young sub-Saharan democracy, see Lindberg, "What Accountability Pressures Do MPs in Africa Face."

27 The 'endogenous' character of formal institutions in the cases concerned may indeed help to explain their effectiveness. On this point, see Przeworski, "Institutions Matter?". The enquiry does, however, not stop there as we are faced not only with formal institutions but also with various kinds of informal institutions, which in turn were created or 'emerged' in the context of different socio-historic and organisational development trajectories.

28 See Helmke and Levitsky, "Conclusion," 280.

29 Helmke and Levitsky, "Introduction," 15.

30 See ibid., 17–18.

31 Keith Darden has, however, argued that corruption can help to buttress administrative control under specific circumstances. See Darden, "The Integrity of Corrupt States." In such cases, corruption might then complement extant formal institutions.

32 See Helmke and Levitsky, "Conclusion," 276–278. For an in-depth discussion of the translocation of formal 'Western' institutions to other parts of the world, see Badie, "The Imported State." For a discussion of 'tradition-based' and 'transition-based' informal institutions see Koellner, "'Informelle Politik'," 15–17.

33 Patrimonialism prevails when rulers treat the state as their private property. 'In patrimonial polities, politicians do not distinguish clearly between what is their own and what is public, the *res publica*. Rather than allocate public resources according to universalistic criteria, politicians do so on the basis of personal connections, bestowing favours on their friends, family, and *parentela*.' Mainwaring, *Rethinking Party Systems*, 179. Neopatrimonialism is characterised by the fusion of legal-rational and personal forms of rule. See Erdmann and Engel, "Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered," and Guliyev, "Personal Rule, Neopatrimonialism, and Regime Typologies." In the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, neo-patrimonial rule has been said to be characterised by the three interlocking elements of clientelism, corruption, and 'big-man' presidentialism. See Bratton, "Formal versus Informal Institutions." For a recent analysis and discussion of neo-patrimonialism in three world regions, see von Soest et al., "How Neopatrimonialism Affects Tax Administration."

34 On the causes of the widespread weakness of the state in the region see Hyden, "African Politics in Comparative Perspective," chapter 3.

35 See Helmke and Levitsky, "Conclusion," 280.

36 See Tsai, "Adaptive Informal Institutions," for a discussion of such informal institutions in the context of the PRC.

37 For an analysis of the 'crowding-out' of formal institutions in (post-)transition contexts, see Grzymala-Busse, "The Best Laid Plans."

38 See also Helmke and Levitsky, "Introduction," 8–13.

39 See e.g. Eisenstadt and Lemarchand, "Political Clientelism," Koellner and Basedau, "Innerparteiliche Machtgruppen," Schmidt et al., "Friends, Followers, and Factions."

40 Hicken, "Clientelism," 297.

41 Fishman, "Rethinking State and Regime," 428.

42 Waldner, "Policy History: Regimes," 11547. Fishman, "Rethinking State and Regime," 428, notes that regimes are 'more permanent forms of political organization than specific governments, but they are typically less permanent than the state'.

43 For a recent, useful conceptual discussion of these two aspects of political rule, see Mazucca, "Access to Power."

44 Waldner "Policy History: Regimes," 11548.

45 Ibid.

46 See Bueno de Mesquita et al., "The Logic of Political Survival."

47 Waldner, "Policy History: Regimes," 11548.

48 See ibid., 11549.

49 See Brownlee, "Hereditary Succession," for a recent comparative study.

50 Ibid.

51 For some decades now, much controversy has centred on the question of how much power dynamics at the top of the CCP have been shaped by intra-party factionalism. Some scholars have even considered factionalism as an 'analytic master variable' in this regard. See Dittmer and Wu, "The Modernization of Factionalism," and, in a similar vein, Nathan, "A Factionalism Model." For different assessments see, for example, Huang, "Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics," and Tsou, "Chinese Politics at the Top." There have been numerous attempts to determine the existence of and competition between intra-party groups based on shared sectoral interests and geographical origins – e.g. in more recent times the 'Shanghai clique', the 'Communist Youth League faction' or the group of 'princelings' amongst party leaders. See recently Lam, "Changing the Guard," "The Rise of the Energy Faction," "The Death of Factions," and Li, "Rule of the Princelings." The question remains though whether such groupings constitute factions in the sense of more stable, durable and collectively acting intra-party groups endowed with a group consciousness of their own. For such a definition of party factions, see Koellner and Basedau, "Faktionalismus in politischen Parteien," 14. Perhaps tellingly, since the massive conflicts between right-wing (reform-oriented, neo-liberal) and left-wing (traditionalist, stability-oriented) CCP factions in the 1908s, the relevant literature has only diffusely referred to 'tendencies', 'interest-based clusters' or 'coalitions' within the CCP's leadership. See, for example, Fewsmith "The 17th Party Congress" and "Elite Politics", Lam, "Chinese Politics," and Li, "The Battle for China's Top," 135–138. What seems clear, however, is that all actors involved in such groupings are united by an interest in the continuing rule of the CCP.

52 Dittmer and Wu, "The Modernization of Factionalism," 478.

53 Ibid., 479.

54 Ibid., 474.

55 Teiwes, "Leadership, Legitimacy, and Conflict," 55.

56 Ibid., 98–99.

57 See ibid., 23–30, 55–56.

58 Ibid., 56. For a discussion of the post-1949 discord over the principle of collective leadership within the CCP, see Sullivan (1986–1987), who outlines the conflicts between proponents of this principle and supporters of strong personalised leadership during the 1950s.

59 See Teiwes, "Politics and Purges in China."

60 Teiwes, "Leadership, Legitimacy, and Conflict," 128.

61 See ibid., 86–91.

62 Fewsmith, "Elite Politics," 154.

63 Teiwes, "Leadership, Legitimacy, and Conflict," 94–99.

64 Ibid., 99.

65 See Teiwes, "The Paradoxical Post-Mao Transition," for a comparison of PRC elite politics under Mao and Deng.

66 Fewsmith, "Elite Politics," 150.

67 Ibid., 150–151.

68 See Koellner, "Nordkorea nach Kim Jong Il."

69 Li, "CCP's Collective Leadership," 6. Since 1993, top-level cross-links between state, government and party have been strengthened. For example, the CCP general secretary has since served (again) as state president. See Lin, "Leadership Transition," 263–264.

70 See Miller "The Politburo Standing Committee," 1.

71 See, for example, H. Lyman Miller, "Hu Jintao," and Li, "The Battle for China's Top," 138.

72 Shambaugh, "The Dynamics of Elite Politics," 105.

73 Li, "CCP's Collective Leadership," 2.

74 Miller, "The CCP," 4.

75 Miller, "The Politburo Standing Committee," 4.

76 Ibid., 5.

77 H. Lyman Miller, "Hu Jintao," 7.

78 Ibid. 4–6.

79 Miller, "The Politburo Standing Committee," 4, also makes this argument. Similar attempts at balancing can be observed in other high-level party organs such as the Central Committee. See Fewsmith, "The 17th Party Congress," 1–2, and Li, "CCP's Collective Leadership," 5.

80 Miller, "The Politburo Standing Committee," 4.

81 For a discussion on the practical and methodological challenges facing the study of informal institutions in autocracies, see Koellner, "'Informelle Politik'," 23–25.

82 See Shambaugh, "China's Communist Party," 152–154.

83 See e.g. Dittmer, "Patterns of Elite Strife," Oksenberg, "The Exit Pattern," and Sandschneider, "Political Succession."

84 Li, "CCP's Collective Leadership," 3. For more details see Lam, "Chinese Politics," 16–28.

85 See e.g. Dittmer, "Patterns of Elite Strife," and Fewsmith, "Elite Politics," 153–4.

86 Earlier on, in the 1990s, a retirement age of 65 was fixed for officials in ministries and in the provinces. See Lin, "Leadership Transition," 257–258. The '68 norm' de facto narrows the window of opportunity open to aspiring party cadres, as top-level party jobs are only available to those that have already served in high party and state positions at the central or regional level. The average age of new Politburo members appointed in 2007 and 2012, was 62 and 61 years, respectively – compared to 72 years in 1982, when Deng consolidated power. Consequently, the introduction of age limits has led to a more rapid turnover at the top of the CCP. See Miller, "The New Party Politburo Leadership," 3, 6–7, and Shambaugh, "The Dynamics of Elite Politics," 110–111.

87 See Manion, "Retirement of Revolutionaries in China."

88 See also Li "CCP's Collective Leadership," 3–4.

89 See Fewsmith, "The 17th Party Congress," 5.

90 Fewsmith "Elite Politics,"157, and Lin, "Leadership Transition," 256.

91 See Fewsmith, "The 17th Party Congress," 5, and Shirk, "Will the Institutionalization," 140.

92 See e.g. Fewsmith, "Elite Politics," 157.

93 Shirk "Will the Institutionalization," 140.

94 Fewsmith, "Elite Politics," 159. See also Miller, "The Case of Xi Jinping," 8–9.

95 See e.g. Shirk, "Will the Institutionalization," 139.

96 The current 18th Central Committee, chosen in 2012, has 205 full and 171 alternate members.

97 According to Fewsmith, "Elite Politics," 155, there has been a trend over the past decade to give CC posts not simply to loyal supporters of top-level politicians but increasingly to active party, government and military technocrats. Fewsmith (ibid.) argues that 'such procedures do not eliminate favoritism or factionalism – patrons can and do plan years in advance to promote the career of their protégées – but it does constrain the way competition can be pursued'.

98 Li, "Preparing for the 18th Party Congress," 5, "The Battle for China's Top," 134, and Miller, "The New Politburo Leadership," 11.

99 Li, "Preparing for the 18th Party Congress," 5. For a discussion on the candidate pool as well as the criteria for potential candidates, see Shambaugh, "The Dynamics of Elite Politics," 110–111, and Li, "The Battle for China's Top," 134–135.

100 Hu had been the front runner for the post of general secretary ever since having been designated in 1992 by Deng as Jiang's successor. See Ewing, "Hu Jintao," 25.

101 Compare Fewsmith, "Elite Politics," 159 and 161, Holbig, "Sinisierung der Demokratie," 5, and Li, "The Battle for China's Top," 135.

102 See e.g. Holbig, "Sinisierung der Demokratie," Lin, "Leadership Transition," 266–274, and Shambaugh, "China's Communist Party," 138–140.

103 Holbig, "Sinisierung der Demokratie," 5, Miller, "The Case of Xi Jinping," 8–9.

104 Li, "Rule of the Princelings," 34.

105 See Miller, "The Case of Xi Jinping," 5.

106 Miller sees Deng's step-by-step retreat from leading posts between 1987 and 1990 as precedence-building for such gradual processes. See Miller, ibid.

107 For a similar assessment, see Fewsmith, "Elite Politics."

108 For some contributions to a related debate on the consequences of party institutionalisation for the resilience, sustainability and legitimacy of CCP rule, see Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience," Heberer and Schubert, "Political Reform and Regime Legitimacy," and Li, "The End of the CCP's Resilient Authoritarianism?"

109 See also Li, "CCP's Collective Leadership,"5.

110 For detailed reports and commentary on the affair, see e.g. the *Financial Times*, March, 15, 16, 19, 22, 2012. For another assessment see Göbel, "What Does the Bo Xi Scandal."

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