Leadership Change, Legitimacy, and Party Transition in China

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Using Max Weber's theory of legitimacy and transition, this article suggests that the biggest challenge for China's new leadership is to transform the Communist Party into an institutionalized ruling party. After analyzing the scenarios of democratization, legitimation, decay, or repression, resulting from the interactions between public contention and the ruling elite, this article argues that the CCP has accomplished the transition from a revolutionary to a reformist party but is now somewhere between claiming to "govern for the people" and "hanging on to power." To become an institutionalized ruling party, the CCP needs to curtail official corruption and control its membership growth. There are, however, some serious political and personal limitations that China's new leaders will have to overcome.

INTRODUCTION

China's leadership changes at the 16th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2002 are significant. First of all, at the 16th Party Congress, six members of the previous Politburo Standing Committee, five of whom were at or above the age of 70, stepped down from the apex of power. The collective retirement of these senior leaders should help institutionalize the informal rule established at the 15th Party Congress that the retirement age for China's top leaders should be 70. Moreover, with the average age of a new Politburo membership at 61 years (the oldest member being 67) in 2002, the 16th Party Congress has not only completed the process of a fundamental generational change in which those who joined the Chinese revolution before 1949 were replaced by a post-revolutionary generation of leaders, but also brought to the power center in large number those who belong to the Chinese "baby-boomer" or the "Cultural Revolution" generation. [1] Furthermore, although the new Politburo is dominated by the "fourth generation" of China's leadership headed by Hu Jintao, members of the "fifth generation" or of the "reform-era" generation have already emerged as a powerful force in the new Central Committee and their political weight will increase in the next decade and beyond.[2]

Leadership changes almost always generate excitement and hope because new leaders can make a difference. We know for sure that new leaders made a difference, sometimes a big one, in the former Soviet Union or elsewhere in East Asia and we would

like to believe they will in China, too. Indeed, only eleven months since the 16th Party Congress, even casual observers cannot fail to notice that the new central leadership seems to favor different priorities and sound different tones. The populist work style of President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, the heightened anti-corruption measures, the increased transparency of the top leadership meetings, the recently announced system of the CCP Politburo reporting to the CCP Central Committee, and Hu's frequent calls for "Building a party that serves the interests of the public and governing for the people" (*lidang weigong, zhizheng weimin*), have raised the expectation that the Hu Jintao regime will be different, and perhaps significantly different, from the Jiang Zemin regime.[3]

What are the implications of new leadership change for China's political future and what can we expect from China's new leadership? Using Max Weber's theory of legitimacy as a general analytical framework, this article seeks to answer these questions, with the political transition of the CCP as the focus.

LEGITIMACY AND POLITICAL CHANGE

The question of political transition is essentially a question of searching for new sources of legitimacy which refers to a popularly shared political attitude that the government's authority is valid and therefore should be obeyed. As one scholar of Max Weber put it, "In addition to the fact that they issue commands, the rulers claim that they have legitimate authority to do so, and hence they expect their commands to be obeyed. In the same way, the obedience of the ruled is guided to some extent by the idea that the rulers and their commands constitute a legitimate order of authority."[4] Obviously the rule will be much easier if the ruled willingly obey the rulers. Trouble begins for any government when the people's attitudes change or the feeling of legitimacy erodes.

Although legitimacy refers to the attitudes of the ruled toward government, the rulers need to be concerned about legitimacy. "Like all others who enjoy advantages over their fellows, men in power want to see their position as 'legitimate' and their advantages as 'deserved,' and to interpret the subordination of the many as the 'just fate' of those upon whom it falls."[5] Rulers have to pay attention to legitimacy because government and legitimacy are not the same thing. Some rulers have never been able to acquire legitimacy. Others enjoyed a degree of legitimacy initially, but ultimately watched their legitimacy erode due to power abuses, corruption, incompetence, or repression. By the same token, just because leaders succeed in establishing a new government does not mean that the regime will be automatically guaranteed legitimacy.

According to Weber, political legitimacy may derive from various sources of tradition, charisma, or rationality/legality. Many regimes, if they do enjoy legitimacy, may have combined or mixed sources of legitimacy. As Weber further suggested, the three forms of domination all have built-in limitations.[6] When the rulers go beyond these limitations, they begin to weaken their own basis of legitimacy. For instance, kings or emperors derived their legitimacy from tradition, but when kings or emperors did not behave as they were expected to behave in terms of traditional norms, they were confronted by an increasingly disenchanted populace. Similarly, when revolutionary leaders betrayed their principles, indulged themselves in luxuries, or descended into factional power struggles, their legitimacy declined precipitously.

Of the three Weberian types of domination, authority based on charisma is the most unstable. Unlike the regimes based on tradition, regimes built upon charisma should expect a

much shorter tenure, even if the ruler, in the most unlikely scenario, always behaved according to expected norms. This is because charisma disappears when the person who had it dies. The biological clock is always ticking for such a regime. Regimes based on revolutionary rationality, on the other hand, will inevitably face the "fatigue" factor: people will become tired of revolution over time. Regimes based on personal charisma and revolutionary rationality therefore need to search for new sources of legitimacy if they are to survive. Sometimes, the dying revolutionary leader may try to recreate the revolutionary dynamism, which typically extends the revolutionary rationality past the point of sustainability.

Besides tradition, personal charisma, or revolutionary rationality, where else would a regime look for sources of legitimacy? Confucian societies elsewhere in East Asia have provided some answers in the model of "developmentalism." In South Korea and Taiwan, for instance, an authoritarian regime headed by a strong man was able to back its political repression with promises and successes of economic development. After two or three decades, however, with the passing of the strongman era and facing a more confident and contentious public, these regimes had nothing but the economic performance to justify their authorities. When the "economic miracle" finally lost its magic power, rationality embedded in constitutional and legal system and popular support manifested by the votes won through open and competitive elections became the new sources of legitimacy. This of course is a highly simplified version of the democratization process in which an initially "hard authoritarian" regime gradually gives way to a "soft authoritarian" regime and finally to an electoral democracy in an increasingly prosperous economy and pluralistic society. But the East Asian developmentalism suggests that legitimacy based on the rationality of development and economic "miracle" may last for two or three decades at most. Without having to resort to bloody and costly repressions, ruling parties in East Asian developmental states had d to search for news sources of legitimacy in order to survive.

Max Weber's theory of legitimacy thus offers a useful framework for us to discuss political transition under the new leadership in China. If we look at political transition as a process of continuous and sometimes tense interactions between the rulers and the ruled, we may suggest a 2 x 2 matrix containing four scenarios. On the one hand, public contention or struggle for political rights could be either "disruptive" or "contained." On the other hand, how the ruling elite responds to public contention depends, at least partially, on whether they rule the country in the "common interest" or in their "self-interest"[7] (see Figure 1).

		Public Contention	
		"Disruptive"	"Contained"
Ruling Elite	"Common Interest" ("Governing for the People")	Democratization	Legitimation
	"Self-Interest" ("Hanging on to Power")	Repression/Collapse	Decay

Figure 1. Scenarios of Political Change

Rule in the "common interest" is difficult to define. Here if we take the words of Chinese President Hu Jintao at face value, it means "Building a party that serves the interests of the public and governing for the people" (*lidang weigong, zhizheng weimin*). More specifically, it means that the rulers genuinely believe that they are running the government with the best interest of the country in mind and for the maximum benefit of the people. They usually have a sense of purpose and sometimes a sense of mission and social responsibility. The rulers may be elitist as they tend to believe they are the best and brightest, but they do feel that they can make important contributions to the overall wellbeing of the people. Rule in the "self-interest" is an alternative scenario in which a regime falls into a status of "hanging on to power" as it begins to lose its basis of legitimacy along with a sense of direction and purpose. Lacking confidence and feeling uncertain about the future of the country, many officials simply use their power to divert public resources to their own pockets while developing a mentality of "get what we can while we can" or "catch me if you can."

Thus in a situation where public contention is contained or struggle for political rights is disorganized and sporadic, if the ruling elite govern the country in the common interest of the people, the rulers may try to shore up the legitimacy of the regime, thus deflating potential social and political tensions. Alternatively, if the rulers are only concerned about their self-interest, they may try to divert the public resources to benefit themselves before it is too late. In a situation where public contention is disruptive or struggle for political rights is massive and fierce, if the ruling elite govern the country in the common interest of the people, we may expect certain progress toward democratization. If, however, the ruling elite govern the country in their self-interest, the rulers may wage repression against a rebellious society. If such repression fails, the regime could possibly collapse.

Whether public contention or struggle for political rights becomes disruptive or remains contained can be determined by its intensity and scale. What happened in Tiananmen Square in May-June 1989 certainly resembled a disruptive public contention. Since then, numerous street protests and petitions over the issues of loss of jobs, unpaid wages, high taxes and fees, demolition of residential houses, real estate speculation, financial mismanagement, and corruption have so far not evolved into a large-scale and prolonged protest movement. If ignored or mishandled, these hitherto fragmented and sporadic street protests could easily become explosive.

The disruptive vs. contained distinction can also be understood in terms of its kind or mode: "procedural," "rhetorical," or "demonstrative."[8] First, those engaged in public contention may use accepted, legal procedures to hold the government and officials accountable. This is a rather contained "procedural" form of public contention. Second, those engaged in public contention may focus on exposing the contradictions of the ideas that justify the regime or use different ideas and discourse to challenge the authorities. This "rhetorical" mode of contention is largely contained still, although in some cases the authorities may conclude that certain ideas, speeches, and statements could have explosive social consequences if not stopped immediately. Finally, those engaged in public contention may "demonstrate to the public how alternative visions of politics might work."[9] Organizing a political opposition or a large-scale protest movement, among others, would fall into this

category. This demonstrative mode of contention is more likely to be viewed by the authorities as disruptive or to lead to repression by the regime.

This leads to the question of "collapse." In recent years, the talk abut the coming collapse of the Chinese economy has caught most of the media attention, although the "Collapsing China" school is not limited to the analysis of Chinese economy only.[10] After the collapse of the Communist regime in the former Soviet Union, anything seems to be possible and we are often advised to think the unthinkable. Some simply do not believe that the Communist Party can be successfully transformed into a democratic party by itself. It has to be forced out of power or it collapses under unbearable pressure. Regime transition therefore takes place only after, not before, the collapse of the Communist Party.

A mild version of the theme of "collapsing China" is the theme of "China in crisis." Here analysts often laundry-list the existing, emerging, and potential crises that the Chinese regime is facing. No one should doubt for a moment that China today faces many governing crises.[11] But this is not new. One could indeed argue that China has always been in crisis. Since the Opium War in 1839-42, when the door of the "Middle Kingdom" was forced open, for instance, the Chinese regimes have been in crisis every decade. The word "crisis" in Chinese means both danger and opportunity. Laundry-listing many dangers that the Chinese regime is facing without spelling out how these dangers might be turned into opportunities gives the mistaken impression that the current regime in China is nearing collapse. Given so many serious crises, however, one needs to wonder why it hasn't collapsed already. The premise of this paper is that the current Chinese regime will not collapse in the foreseeable future and that the Chinese ruling elite will have choices to make regarding legitimation and democratization. Nevertheless, the Chinese regime is facing mounting corruption problems on the one hand and rising demands for democratization both at home and from abroad on the other. This suggests that the new Chinese leadership is under the tremendous political and time pressure to sort out the complex issues of political reforms and political transition before the corruption problems and the socio-economic changes begin to ring the death bell for the regime.

CHALLENGES TO LEGITIMACY

For the recent decade, the CCP leaders have been fighting a difficult and protracted war to pull millions of their officials in line and to put their huge organization in order, but the corruption problems seem to have only worsened. If one remembers that the most publicized cases of corruption during the Mao years involved two officials (Liu Qingshan and Zhang Zishan) at the rank no higher than chief of a prefectural party committee, or if one was shocked in the early 1980s by the first corruption case involving an official at the rank of vice provincial governor, today one should have no reason for surprises. It is not because the corruption cases involving high-ranking officials are rare, but because there are so many. The corruption cases exposed in the last two decades involve one vice chair of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (Chen Kejie), three provincial party secretaries (Chen Xitong of Beijing, Liu Fanren of Guizhou, and Chen Weigao of Hebei), and one governor (Li Jiating of Yunnan). These high-profile cases unfortunately represent only the tip of the iceberg. The following figures are even more telling, if no longer shocking. During a 15-year period from 1987 to 2002, the CCP disciplinary commissions and the state supervision agencies had investigated a total of 2.42 million cases of corruption and other forms of disciplinary violation. Among those who were penalized, 64,996 were

officials at the level of county magistrate/division chief; 5,452 at the level of prefecture commissioner/bureau chief; and 286 at the level of provincial governor/central minister.[12]

Knowing that rampant corruption has been eroding the popular support for the regime, the Chinese leaders have time and again stressed the need and urgency for fighting corruption. As the above figures suggest, the CCP's anti-corruption drives, especially those launched in the 1990s, are serious and not window-dressing. Corrupt party officials, even at the high-level, have been exposed, arrested, or executed. In a sense, the CCP leaders are not merely "killing the chicken to scare the monkey"; they are "killing a good many monkeys" to scare the rest. What puzzles many, including the Chinese leaders, is that the corruption problems have remained rampant even after the CCP's decade-long efforts to curb them.

There are many factors contributing to the rampant corruption problems. In the last two decades, China's open door policies, market reforms, and rapidly growing foreign investment into China have created too much temptation and too many opportunities for corruption, unparalleled and unimaginable during the Mao years when most people remained poor. China's transitional economy and emerging market also provides many legal loopholes and cracks in systems of banking, taxation, asset management, resource allocation, and public funding. Moreover, the CCP's policy shift from "politics in command," class struggle, and mass campaigns to "economy in command," open-door, and development have fundamentally shaken the traditional political and moral standards of the CCP. In the eyes of many officials, "anything goes as long as the local economy is doing fine" or "if the economy must be promoted, the discipline must be loosened."[13]

Corruption per se probably is not likely to bring down the Chinese regime. After all, many other regimes, democratic or otherwise, are also plagued by corruption problems. What is important to ask is why Chinese leaders' repeated warnings about rampant corruption simply fall on deaf ears, why CCP's numerous regulations and codes of conduct amount to nothing more than a "paper tiger," and why the CCP's mechanisms of discipline inspection essentially fail to monitor and control the activities of CCP officials, especially high-ranking officials. Does this mean that the CCP organization and officialdom become increasingly unmanageable? Or worse still, are we witnessing a situation in which hundreds of thousands of officials, lacking legitimacy and only interested in hanging on to power in order to divert the public resources for their own benefit, have developed a mentality of "get what we can while we can" or "catch me if you can." In other words, rampant corruption problems in China could be the manifestation of a much deeper legitimacy crisis.

Whereas the rampant corruption is eroding the legitimacy of the regime, China's socio-economic changes in the recent decade have begun to lead to aggressive public contention and generate noticeable demands for political rights. These days, more and more ordinary Chinese citizens demand that officials live up to their proclaimed principles, that the government delivers what it promises, and that the authorities obey the state's laws and constitution. These activities of public contention often range from writing petitions or refusing to obey orders to taking officials to court or participating in street protests.

While there seems to be a consensus that the Chinese economy and society are today undergoing a historic and profound transformation, there is no agreement as to whether or not China is democratizing. To be sure, democratization is by no means easy in an ancient civilization with a Confucian belief system that favors family and state over individuals and places officials above people. Even though democracy as a source of political strength and

legitimacy has captured the imagination of many generations of Chinese, the Chinese historical search for democracy has often produced disappointing results. Obstacles to democratization in China are formidable and numerous. For instance, in analyzing the possible causes for the failure of earlier democratization efforts in Chinese history, Andrew Nathan came up with a list of nine sets of factors, including a weak belief in democratic principles, frequent internal or external war, militarism, an autocratic political culture, economic underdevelopment, a mass agrarian society of peasants, flawed constitutions and institutions, Chinese democrats' moral failures, and the intensity of elite power struggles.[14]

In recent decade, however, China's fast economic development and rapidly changing society has renewed the hope for democratization as well as the old debate about the causal relationship between economic development and democratization.[15] For some, economic development is either a precondition or a prerequisite for democratization. For others, the link between the two is dubious at best and any causal relationship is hard to prove. Some believe that the economic reforms in the last two decades have greatly improved the prospects of democratization in China,[16] but others argue that the same reform programs have actually delayed China's democratization.[17]

Suggesting that China's democratization is delayed or "late," so to speak, implies that somehow we know *when* democratization is supposed to arrive in China. In comparison to what has happened in the former Soviet Union or East European countries, it does seem that China is now far lagging behind in political democratization. By the East Asian clock, however, democratization is not delayed or "late" in mainland China. It has taken Taiwan and South Korea more than 30 years to accomplish the political transition from a developmental authoritarian state to an emerging democracy. Given the fact that mainland China is much larger than Taiwan and South Korea in terms of population and land, and that developmental policies have been implemented there for only 20 years, it is reasonable to suggest that mainland China needs at least another 20 years before enough empirical data can be gathered to confirm or disconfirm the validity of the modernization-developmentalism-democratization thesis.

For those who study changes in Chinese political culture (including public opinion, political values, and people's attitudes toward government) or village-level elections, democratization is already occurring in China, even though it is incremental in pace and limited in scope.[18] A recent study of China's changing political culture, for instance, argues that China has made meaningful and substantial progress toward expanding the rights and freedom for its citizens and toward becoming a more pluralistic, just, and democratic polity.[19] Academic research on China's civil society has also become revitalized.[20] A recent study of the emergence of "non-governmental organizations" in China suggests that a "quiet revolution" is taking place through which China is becoming more diversified and pluralistic.[21] Pressure for democratization is coming from abroad as well. Through its cooperative projects with the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Carter Center in the United States has been regularly monitoring the Chinese village elections in recent years.[22] Chinese village elections have also drawn the attention of the U.S. Congress.[23] It is perhaps fair to say that if we have not yet witnessed a full-fledged process of democratization in China, we have seen and can expect to see more and more pressure for democratization from the Chinese society.

To compliment the bottom-up approaches to democratization, researchers who take a top-down approach have argued that democratization should be understood as the result of interplay among various political institutions or of strategic choices made by the ruling elite. The "institutional bargaining" and "strategic choice" school has thus drawn one's attention to the crucial role played by the ruling elite under domestic or international pressure for democratization.[24] From these perspectives, China's democratization involves the struggles by the people at the bottom of the society and the reactions by those at the top of the political power. Democracy in China is not one-shot deal or a gift to the people by the ruling elite. It is likely to be a protracted process of political contention. While the bottom-up approaches demonstrate the mounting pressure that the Chinese regime is facing, the top-down approach raises the question of how the ruling elite of the CCP regime may respond to these pressures.

TRANSITON TO A RULING PARTY

The CCP has been in power for more than 50 years and it is not an exaggeration to say that the CCP has been changing as the ruling elite try to cope with a changing economy and society in a changing world. With insight from Weber's theory of legitimacy, we can suggest a process in which the Chinese Communist Party has been transformed from a Maoist revolutionary party to a Dengist reformist party and now perhaps to an institutionalized ruling party. Party transition is not a new idea, of course. Scholars both inside and outside China have suggested and analyzed the possibility, desirability, and difficulty of the CCP making a transition from a revolutionary party to an institutionalized ruling party.[25] I myself made the similar suggestions several years ago when I analyzed the leadership changes at the 15th National Congress of the CCP in 1997. I defined a revolutionary party as a political organization aimed at destabilizing the state and transforming the society through political campaigns and ideological education, and a ruling party as a political organization that effectively controls the state and implements policies within society. Whereas the former calls for class struggle and mobilization, the latter stresses stability and order.[26]

Until the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 the CCP essentially functioned as a revolutionary party. One of the important sources of legitimacy for the Mao Zedong regime in the 1950s was the charisma of Mao and of other revolutionaries such as Zhu De and Zhou Enlai. But Mao's revolution did initiate a number of important social reforms. The CCP's programs of land reform and women's liberation, among others, had convinced many that Mao Zedong was their rightful leader and that the CCP regime was legitimate. The ideals and promises of a new China, a new future, egalitarianism, and the declaration that "the Chinese people have stood up" had captured the imagination of millions of people.

Since the late 1970s, socio-economic changes have generated a different political environment in which the Mao-styled revolutionary party leadership declined in political relevancy. The Leninist concept of a vanguard party's absolute leadership became increasingly incompatible with the needs of the new economy and society. Unlike the Mao regime, therefore, the Deng Xiaoping regime built and consolidated its political power on the principle of economic rationality, exemplified by the "four modernizations." With the programs of economic reform and open-door policies plus the promises of a prosperous society, Deng was able to win the hearts and minds of the Chinese people through most of the 1980s. Deng also promised or initiated new political, legal and legislative reforms to

shore up popular support for his regime.[27] I will suggest that during the Deng Xiaoping era, the CCP by and large completed the transition from a revolutionary party to a reformist party. The end of mass campaigns in the early 1990s, the declining salience of ideological debate in the mid-1990s, and the elimination of the so-called "counterrevolutionary crimes" in 1997 are further indicators of this transformation.

It is important to point out that an institutionalized ruling party is not the same as a party that is simply hanging on to political power. When the Mao regime lost its revolutionary rationality during the Cultural Revolution and Mao himself lost much of his charisma in the later years of his life, especially after the Lin Biao incident, the regime essentially fell into a status of hanging on to power without much legitimacy, purpose, or a sense of direction. After the 1989 crackdown in Tiananmen Square, the Deng regime also became dangerously close to becoming one that was simply hanging on to power. It was the remaining personal prestige of Deng and, more importantly, the rejuvenated rationality of economic development that finally gave the regime a certain purpose, a sense of direction, and an extended lease on legitimacy.

In many ways, the Jiang Zemin regime represented a continuation of the policies of the Deng regime, although Jiang's rulership was on shakier political ground than the Deng regime had been. This is due to the fact that, despite his efforts to imitate Deng or even Mao, Jiang lacked Deng's personal charisma, while Deng's almost single-minded pursuit of high economic growth at the expense of everything else had led to serious problems of overinvestment, bad bank loans, widening income gaps, and rising unemployment. Today, as the Chinese economy becomes increasingly integrated with the world economy, it may become more vulnerable to changes in the global market. A regime dependent on economic performance can be a fragile one.

The smooth return of Hong Kong and Macao to China's control and Beijing winning the right to host the 2008 Summer Olympic Game helped boost the popular support for the Jiang regime. But these big events and the national pride associated with them cannot be a long-lasting source of legitimacy. No wonder Jiang Zemin, seemingly belatedly, finally worked out the so-called theory of "Three Represents" -- The CCP should represent the advanced productive forces, represent advanced culture, and represent the fundamental interests of the vast majority of the Chinese people -- in order to win the support of the people.

It seems clear that the Jiang regime has not been able to accomplish the process of party transition from a reformist party to an institutionalized ruling party, despite Jiang's calls for "keeping up with the times [*yushi jujin*]. The CCP under Jiang was somewhere between "decay" and "legitimation." On the one hand, signs are clear and present that the CCP faces overwhelming problems of rampant corruption, poor discipline, and declining morale among its officials. Without a sense of direction and purpose, many party officials manifest an attitude of "get what we can while we can" or "catch me if you can." On the other hand, from the "talk about politics" to "governing the country through law," "governing the country through moral education," and finally to "Three Represents," Jiang has vigorously sought to give millions of officials a sense of direction and purpose.

What should we expect from the Hu Jintao regime? Experiences in other countries suggest that the ruling elite under pressure may try to ease controls over civil liberties while manipulating elections, a strategy called "liberalization without democratization" or, vice

versa, limiting civil liberties while opening the electoral process, a strategy often referred to as "electoral authoritarianism." In the end, though, these strategies could give the regime only temporary relief from mounting public pressure without offering a stable and long-lasting source of legitimacy. In search for a more stable and institutionalized source of legitimacy, many governments sooner or later have chosen popular elections and use the electoral rationality to sustain the regime.

Political legitimacy built on the rationality of popular elections would seem to be the ideal choice for the current Chinese leaders. This is what former U.S. President Jimmy Carter argued in front of the Chinese students at Beijing University recently, "It is beneficial for all citizens to feel that they are involved personally in the shaping of their own destiny and for leaders to know that their political futures depend upon honoring promises and meeting the legitimate needs of those who have put them in office."[28] In principle, Hu Jintao and his leadership team are not likely to reject that option. In his latest speech at the Politburo meeting, for instance, CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao stressed, "We must enrich the forms of democracy, make democratic procedures complete, expand citizen's orderly political participation, and ensure that the people can exercise democratic elections, democratic decision-making, democratic administration and democratic scrutiny."[29] It must seem symbolically significant that in one paragraph of his speech, Hu Jintao mentioned the word of "democracy" six times. The difficult question is how to get there from here.

Supposedly, the Hu Jintao regime can come up with new ways to adapt to popular demands for political rights and participation, to try to co-opt potential opposition, to allow more representation and competition, to introduce more transparency, responsibility, and check on officials, or to "use inner-party democracy to promote people's democracy"[30] These understandably cautious steps toward building more legitimacy will certainly help, but often one wonders whether limited political reforms will ultimately prove to be inadequate. But to expect the Hu Jintao regime to complete the transformation of the CCP from a revolutionary party to an electoral party within ten years is perhaps asking too much too soon.

Moreover, democracy is not a cure-all medicine. That's why open and competitive elections alone cannot guarantee stable governance. Ten years after the "third wave" of democratization changed the regimes in the former Soviet Union and East European countries, what two theorists of democracy argued in 19991 seems to have proved to be generally true: -- "democracies are not likely to appear more orderly, consensual, stable, or governable than the autocracies they replace."[31]

Having worked inside the system for many years, Hu Jintao and his leadership team know perfectly well the fragile nature of the regime. That's why, in his speech on the 82nd birthday of the CCP on July 1, 2003, Hu Jintao specifically called for building CCP's "ruling capacity" [*zhizheng nengli*].[32] The reasonable expectation therefore is for China's new leaders to complete the transition of the CCP to an institutionalized ruling party that is capable of preventing further decay of the regime and of governing a fast changing Chinese society. The Hu regime may be advised to start with some necessary transformation of the CCP at the basic organizational level and at the top leadership level.

PARTY TRANSFORMATION

By any measurement, the CCP is a colossal organization. It is not only the largest political party in the world, but also rivals a middle-sized nation-state in the United

Nations.[33] The CCP organization is a huge network of party committees, branches and groups that penetrate the political, economic and cultural sectors of Chinese society, including 3.5 million party organizational cells, of which 730,000 are located within China's vast countryside.[34] Such an organizational behemoth as the CCP must be the envy of any leader and any ruling party anywhere in the world. Indeed, if each of the 66 million CCP members behaved according to the party's constitution and principles, the Chinese regime under the CCP leadership would seem both invincible and indestructible. If the CCP organizational cells at all levels had been able to monitor their members and officials effectively, China's corruption problems would not have flared out of control.

Organizational Overhaul

Since the mid-1980s, the CCP organizations have been expelling their members at an average rate of 28,000 per year. For instance, between 1983 and 1987, 153,000 individuals were expelled from the party.[35] Between 1988 and 1992, 154,000 individuals were expelled from the party.[36] Between 1997 and 2001, 124,000 individuals were expelled from the party.[37] Despite the fact that many CCP members were expelled from the party in recent years, the CCP membership has continued to grow by an average of more than 1 million each year since 1997, with the exception of 2002[38] (see Table 1).

Table 1. CCP Membership Changes, 1997-2002

Year	Total membership	Net change	Percentage change
1997	60,417,000	***	***
1998	61,877,000	1,460,000	2.42
1999	63,221,000	1,344,000	2.17
2000	64,517,000	1,296,000	2.05
2001	65,749,000	1,232,000	1.91
2002	66,355,000	606,000	0.92

Source: http://www.16congress.org.cn/english/e-16dd/graph/ September 15, 2003.

If the membership continues to grow like this, how is it possible for the CCP to transform itself from a mass party to an institutionalized ruling party? With a membership of 66 million, the CCP organization has already grown too large to be an effective ruling party. Many of the CCP members are likely to have contributed little to effective governance. They may even create difficulties for Chinese government agencies doing what they are commissioned to do at both central and local levels. If we take a look at the occupational structure of the CCP membership, it is clear that millions are redundant as far as governing is concerned (see Table 2).

Table 2. Occupational Structure of CCP Membership (As of June 2002)

Category	Number	Percentage of total membership
Industrial workers, laborers in township enterprises, farmers, herdsmen and fishermen	29,913,000	45.1%
Government officials, Managing personnel, PLA officers and soldiers, Armed police	14,112,000	21.3%
Retirees	10,924,000	16.4%
Professionals	7,701,000	11.6%
Others	3,705,000	5.6%

Source: http://www.16congress.org.cn/english/e-16dd/graph/index.htm September 15, 2003.

Let us begin with the last category first because the category of "Others" seems an intriguing one. It will stretch one's imagination to think who might fall into this category. Does this refer to private entrepreneurs? There cannot be that many (3.7 million) already in the CCP, even though the door has been open to them for a few years. Since we don't know for sure who the "Others" are, we have no idea whether this part of the CCP membership could be reduced. This is nevertheless a sizable part of the CCP organization accounting for 5.6% of the total CCP membership.

What is more surprising is the category of "Retirees" that includes 10.9 million members and accounts for 16.4% of the total CCP membership.[39] It is quite understandable that some, or perhaps all, of the retirees who are party members wan to remain in the party until they die. But how would this help the CCP govern as a ruling party? If the rationale is that ageing members of the society are not longer capable of working full-time or even part-time and therefore they retire from their work to enjoy the remaining years of their life, why wouldn't the same rationale apply to CCP members? Several years ago, there was some discussion about appropriate retirement age for the CCP members. Today scholars and official think tanks can try to invent new ways to keep these retirees informed and connected to the party, but a life-long membership in the CCP only reduces the party's overall organizational effectiveness.

Furthermore, 29.9 million members (45.1% of the total CCP membership) of workers and farmers assure that the CCP remains a mass party. If the CCP still intends to be a class-based mass party that is primarily, if not exclusively, open to industrial workers and farmers, then this would be the way to go. But if the CCP attempts to move toward an institutionalized ruling party, representing the interests of as many Chinese people as possible, which, after all, is what Jiang Zemin's theory of "Three Represents" seems to imply, then the CCP needs to adjust the percentage of representation by workers and farmers. This does not necessarily mean that the interest of workers and farmers should be

or will be ignored, just as a 45% percentage of representation in the CCP hasn't really guaranteed the basic political and economic rights of the Chinese workers and farmers.

Finally, if the CCP were to limit its membership to approximately 21 million members (14.1 million government officials, managing personnel, army officers and soldiers, and armed police, plus 7.7 million professionals), this would prove more than adequate for the purpose of governing. This would still make the CCP the largest political party in the world and will seem to enhance the CCP's governing capability instead of weakening it. Lest we forget, when Mao Zedong took over mainland China from Chiang Kai-shek in 1949, there were fewer than 4.5 million CCP members. By 1954 when the first constitution of the People's Republic of China was adopted, the CCP still had a membership of only 7.9 million members, 12% of what it is today.

Leadership Transformation

While the CCP membership needs an overhaul, the party transition cannot hope to go forward without some necessary transformation of the top leadership. First of all, the new leaders who are taking over power are often characterized as "technocrats." With the exception of Wen Jiabao who was trained as a geologist, all the other eight members of the Politburo Standing Committee were trained as engineers. Engineers are known to be problem solvers; they prefer certainty to instability, they like right-or-wrong answers instead of ambiguities, and they are most comfortable discussing specific projects. However, it is also true that these leaders have worked quite a number of years in the Chinese Communist Party and government bureaucracy to get where they are today. There can be little doubt that if Hu Jintao is known to be, as one analyst put it, "pragmatic (befitting his technocratic outlook), cautious, and compromising (ready to work with both wings of the party), but still inclined to press reforms in politics and the economy,"[40] his colleagues in the Politburo Standing Committee shouldn't be too much different. If so, will their professional training, career experience, and personal qualities limit their capabilities of political imagination? In other words, will they suffer from a relative lack of vision regarding the future political shape of China?

Secondly, the new political power center is dominated by provincial chiefs and economic administrators. Of the nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee, six have had extensive work experience as provincial chiefs. Among the other members of the Politburo, ten are either the current provincial chiefs or have worked extensively in provinces. Wen Jiabao, the third ranking member of the Politburo Standing Committee and the new premier of the State Council, is known for his low-key leadership style and for his economic management skills. The only female member in the Politburo, Wu Yi, has spent most of her career promoting China's foreign trade. Another Politburo member, Zeng Peiyan, is in charge of the State Development and Planning Commission. There is nothing in principle to prevent local leaders and economic administrators from becoming national leaders with broad political vision. That personal transformation, however, remains to be made by some, if not all, of the new Politburo members.

Thirdly, the newly institutionalized retirement age for China's top leaders means that six of Hu Jintao's colleagues sitting on the Politburo Standing Committee will either reach their retirement age or be close to it when the next party congress convenes in 2007.[41] Do they expect to sit at the top of China's political hierarchy for more than five years? If not, what do they hope to accomplish within one term of five years? Does the realization of the

age limit give them a heightened sense of responsibility or one more reason for "muddling through"? Of the nine Politburo Standing Committee members, only Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, both born in 1942, and Li Changchun, born in 1944, are likely to serve one more term after 2007, barring the unforeseeable. But even that gives them only five more years. An expected tenure of ten years for Hu Jintao is shorter than that of his predecessor, Jiang Zemin. Hu Jintao doesn't have a lot of time on his hands.

Fourthly, there are reasons to believe that the new Politburo Standing Committee has yet to become a collegial collective decision-making body. Some of the nine members never really wanted to be promoted to the apex of the Chinese political power. Others need time for adjustment due to the speedy nature of their promotion. While some are looking for more opportunities to prove themselves, others are looking forward to smooth sailing toward the final exit from the top leadership. They have different political patrons to please and various regional or bureaucratic constituencies to respond to. "Collective wisdom" and consensus on major political reform is perhaps too much to hope for at this moment.

Finally, the new Chinese leadership could be easily overwhelmed by the protracted problems of rising unemployment, rampant corruption, widening income gap across the social sector and across the region, and losing social control. Political balance of power at the top may also be jolted by severe domestic or international crises that may erupt all of a sudden. After coming to power, the new leadership immediately faced the crisis of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The new regime has survived the SARS crisis and even won high praise from the international community for bringing the crisis under control. But the firing of the Beijing Mayor and the Minister of Health due to their mishandling of the SARS problem suggests that the new leadership has not come out of the SARS crisis politically unscathed. If anything, one can be sure that more challenging tasks and crises ahead will further shake up the new leadership.

CONCLUSIONS

Using Max Weber's theory of legitimacy and transition, this article suggests that the biggest challenge for China's new leadership is to transform the Communist Party into an institutionalized ruling party. After analyzing the scenarios of democratization, legitimation, decay, or repression, resulting from the interactions between public contention and the ruling elite, this article argues that the CCP has accomplished the transition from a revolutionary to a reformist party but is now somewhere between claiming to "govern for the people" and "hanging on to power." If the 13 years of the Jiang Zemin regime were necessary to finally end the history of the CCP as a revolutionary party oriented at political campaigns and class struggle and to reaffirm the CCP as a reformist party whose legitimacy was primarily built on the rationality of economic development and market reforms, the Hu Jintao regime today is at a historic crossroads.

The author of this article does not believe that the Chinese regime is facing an imminent collapse or that China's new leadership headed by Hu Jintao would be a "do-nothing" regime. The current level and form of public contention in China still allows the ruling elite to make strategic choices regarding democratization, legitimation, or decay. To become an effective ruling party, the CCP needs to curtail official corruption and control its membership growth. There are, however, some serious political and personal limitations that China's new leaders will have to overcome. It remains to be seen whether the Hu Jintao regime will be successful not merely at reformulating Jiang Zemin's theory of "Three

Represents" or even Mao Zedong's slogan of "Serve the People Heart and Soul," but also at completing the final phase in the CCP transition from a class-based, mass revolutionary party to an institutionalized ruling party. Given the worsening corruption problems and mounting governing crises along with internal and external pressures for democratization, it is almost too dangerous to think that China's new leaders could afford to squander another decade without addressing some of the pressing issues of political transition.

Notes

[1] Cheng Li, *China's New Leaders: The Fourth Generation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); David M. Finkelestein and Maryanne Kivlehan, eds., *Chinese Leadership in the Twenty-first Century: The Rise of the Fourth Generation* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

[2] For an analysis of the fifth generation of Chinese leaders, see Cheng Li, "The Emergence of the Fifth Generation in the Provincial Leadership," *China Leadership Monitor*, issue 6 (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Spring 2003), available at http://www.chinaleadershipmonitor.org/20032/default.htm. September 15, 2003.

[3] For an analysis of Hu Jintao's "new ideas" and new initiatives, see Joseph Fewsmith, "Studying the Three Represents," *China Leadership Monitor*, issue 8 (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Fall 2003), p. 6, available at http://www.chinaleadershipmonitor.org/20034/jf.html. September 15, 2003.

[4] Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), p. 292.

[5] Ibid, p. 294.

[6] Ibid, pp. 296-297.

[7] For lack of better terms, here I simply borrow the terms from Aristotle.

[8] John A. Guidry and Mark Q. Sawyer, "Contentious Pluralism: The Public Sphere and Democracy," *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 1, no. 2, June 2003, p. 277.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Gordon G. Chang, *The Coming Collapse of China* (New York: Random House, 2001); Charles Wolf, K. C. Yeh, Benjamin Zycher, Nick Eberstadt, and Sung-Ho Lee, *Fault Lines in China's Economic Terrain* (Rand, 2003), available at http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1686/. Accessed on September 15, 2003.

[11] Minxin Pei, "China's Governance Crisis," *Foreign Affairs*, September / October 2002.

[12] These figures were complied from the following sources: Research Office of the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee, ed., *Chronology of Party Building: From the 14th National Congress to the 15th National Congress* [Dang de jianshe dashiji: shisida-shiwuda], (Beijing: Dangjian duwu chubanshe, 1997), p. 34, p. 263; Ru Xin, Lu Xueyi, and Shan Tianlun, eds., *Social Blue Paper: 1998: Analysis and Prediction of China's Social Situation* [*Shehui lanpishu, yijiujiuba nian: zhongguo shehui xingshi fenxi yu yuce*], (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1998), p. 70; and Work Report by the CCP Central Disciplinary Commission delivered at the 16th National Congress of the CCP, 2002.

[13] Research Office of the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee, ed., *Collections of Speeches and Comments on Party's Organization Work*, 1997, p. 5; p. 66.

[14] Andrew J. Nathan, "Chinese Democracy: The Lessons of Failure," *The Journal of Contemporary China*, Fall 1993, pp. 3-13. See also Andrew J. Nathan, *China's Crisis: Dilemmas of Reform and Prospects for Democracy* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1990) and Elizabeth Perry and Ellen Fuller, eds., "China's long march to democracy," *World Policy Journal*, vol. 8, no 4, 1991.

[15] Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Prerequisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Democracy," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 53, September 1959, pp. 69-105; Larry Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered," *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 15, March-June 1992, pp. 450-499.

[16] Shiping Zheng, "Development and Democracy: The Chinese Experience" in Sunder Ramaswamy and Jeff Cason, eds., *Development and Democracy*: *New Perspectives on an Old Debate* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002), pp. 229-251.

[17] Mary E. Gallagher, "Reform and Openness: Why China's Economic Reforms Have Delayed Democracy," *World Politics*, vol. 54, April 2002, pp. 338-372.

[18] Tianjian Shi, *Political Participation in Beijing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Shiping Hua, ed., *Chinese Political Culture, 1989-2000* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001); and Yang Zhong, *Local Government and Politics in China: Challenges from Below* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003).

[19] Suzanne Ogden, *Inklings of Democracy in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), pp. 353-391.

[20] Ian Johnson, "The Death and Life of China's Civil Society," *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 1, no. 3, September 2003, pp. 551-554; Baogang He, *The Democratic Implications of Civil Society in China* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

[21] Zhang Ye, "China's Emerging Civil Society," Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies Working Paper, The Brookings Institution, June 2003, available at http://www.brookings.edu/fp/cnaps/papers/ ye2003.htm. September 15, 2003.

[22] The Carter Center, "Carter Center Delegation Report: Village Elections in China," March 5, 1997, available at http://www.cartercenter.org/documents/1155.pdf. Accessed on September 15, 2003; "Cater Center Delegation Report: Village Election in China and Agreement on Cooperation with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, People's Republic of China," March 2, 1998, http://www.cartercenter.org/documents/1156.pdf. September 15, 2003.

[23] The United States Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Village Elections in China: Roundtable Before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, One Hundred Seventh Congress, Second Session, July 8, 2002 (Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002).

[24] Kevin O'Brien, *Reform Without Liberation: China's National People's Congress and the Politics of Institutional Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Shiping Zheng, *Party vs. State in Post-1949 China: The Institutional Dilemma* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Murray Scot Tanner, *The Politics of Lawmaking in China: Institutions, Processes, and Democratic Prospects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and *Elite Politics in Contemporary China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001).

[25] For instance, circulating in the Internet is a document entitled, "Some Thoughts on the Transition from a Revolutionary Party to a Ruling Party," attributed to Pan Yue, a reform-minded official in the central government. See also Baogang Guo, "Sustaining Political Legitimacy in China: Challenges Ahead," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Philadelphia, August 28-31, 2003.

[26] Shiping Zheng, "China's Leadership After the 15th Party Congress: Changes and Implications," in Xiaobo Hu and Gang Lin, eds., *Transition Towards Post-Deng China* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2001), pp.140-141.

[27] Deng's personal prestige added to the strength of the CCP, as was made clear during the political crisis of 1989. Deng's nearly 20 years of rule is often cited as one of the major reasons why China has been able to maintain political stability while pursuing unprecedented economic reform and social change, the 1989 crisis and removal of two party general secretaries notwithstanding. In comparison, during the same period (1978-1997) the former Soviet Union and later Russia has seen the change of five top leaders: from Brezhnev to Andropov in 1982, Chernenko in 1984, Gorbachev in 1985, and Yeltsin in 1991.

[28] Jimmy Cater, Speech delivered at Beijing University on September 9, 2003, available at http://www.cartercenter.org/viewdoc.asp?docID=1474&submenu=news. September 15, 2003.

[29] Joseph Kahn, China's Leader Calls for 'Democratic' Changes," *The New York Times*, October 2, 2003.

[30] This was suggested by Jiang Zemin in his speech on July 1, 2001.

[31] Philippe C. Schmitter & Terry Lynn Karl, "What Democracy Is… and Is Not," *Journal of Democracy*, Summer 1991.

[32] Fewsmith, "Studying the Three Represents," Fall 2003, p. 6.

[33] For instance, the CCP membership is larger than the population of France, the United Kingdom, Italy, or South Korea and doubles the size of the population of Iraq or Malaysia.

[34] Research Office of the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee, ed., *Collections of Speeches and Comments on Party's Organization Work Since the 14th National Congress* [Shisida yilai dang de zuzhi gongzuo yanlun ji], (Beijing: Dangjian duwu chubanshe, 1997), p. 307.

[35] Ma Zhenggang, *Anti-Corruption: Measures Across the Century* [Fan fubai: kua shiji de duice], (Beijing: Hongqi chubanshe, 1998), pp. 148-149.

[36] Research Office of the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee, ed., *Chronology of Party Building*, 1997, p. 34.

[37] *People's Daily*, July 1, 2002.

[38] It remains to be seen whether the slower growth of the CCP membership in 2002 is an aberration or the beginning of a new trend in which the CCP membership growth is finally slowing down either because more unqualified members are expelled, more ageing members naturally pass away, fewer new members are recruited, or a combination of all these factors.

[39] It is worth noting that, as of June 2002, only 22.3% (14.8 million) of the CCP members were under 35 years old and only 4.6 % (3 million) were under 25 years old. Ibid.

[40] H. Lyman Miller, January 2002, "The Succession of Hu Jintao," *China Leadership Monitor*, issue 1, part 2 (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Winter 2002), available at http://www.chinaleadershipmonitor.org/20011b/default.htm. September 15, 2003.

[41] They are Luo Gan (born in 1935), Huang Ju (born in 1938), Wu Guanzheng (born in 1938), Zeng Qinghong (born in 1939), Jia Qinglin (born in 1940), and Wu Bangguo (born in 1941).