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Chinese Patron-Clientelism for the Twenty-First Century: The Rise of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang*

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Patron-clientelism is the central dynamic propelling leadership change in China, and this model of personal association opened a path for China's current top leaders. Patron-clientelism bolsters the key features of the Chinese political system: Leninist political organization, intra-party divisions, conflictual decision-making processes, and the vital roles played by senior figures. Patron-clientelism is characterized by both vertical and horizontal dimensions, and it is accompanied by endemic personalism, factionalism, corruption, and nepotism. Clientelistic ties have shaped all leadership transitions since the Maoist period, and they were most evident in the falls of leaders Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang in the 1980s. Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang are the latest beneficiaries of the patron-clientelistic system. Xi was propelled by his "princeling" background and his association with the Shanghai faction of former top leader Jiang Zemin. Li is the latest scion of the Communist Youth League faction that produced Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao. The recent fall of Bo Xilai illustrates some of the pitfalls of factional and "princeling" leadership.

Keywords: China, Patron-Clientelism, Factionalism,
Politics, Corruption, Princelings, Bo Xilai,
Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang

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I. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

On October, 2012, the new standing committee of the politburo of the Chinese Communist Party was introduced to the world. The new leadership was viewed as a triumph of pragmatism, professionalism, and managerial competence. In reality, this new leadership made its way to the top following conventional political strategies and career patterns. Patron-clientelism remains the best explanatory tool for understanding transitions of Chinese leadership change and the rise of the fourth and fifth generations of leaders.

We find that patron-clientelism is one of the most useful theoretical lenses for examining Chinese politics. It has rarely been used as a primary theoretical explanation of leadership change or policy outcomes. Only a few scholars such as Pye and Oi have used this perspective in specific cases, and it has seldom been applied to intra-elite conflict. Patron-clientelism examines the ways in which individuals with unequal leadership resources manipulate reciprocal relationships to attain career or policy ends. Chinese culture has traditionally emphasized the importance of personal relations, reciprocal ties, and informal decision making in both the economy and politics.

This study examines the rise of President and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Secretary Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang in light of patron-clientelism. It suggests that the nature of CCP penetration of society means that informal, particularistic and often corrupt political relationships are more important than legal or institutional channels. This generates significant informal or personalist network politics.

How do we account for the nature of leadership succession in China? China has moved from the Maoist system of leadership based on ideological purity and loyalty to Mao to a more regularized system of advancement emphasizing expertise and professionalism. However, in both Maoist and contemporary leadership successions, patron-clientelism has become the key mechanism by which officials rise within the Communist Party hierarchy, and by which they are selected for the highest positions in party and government.

Our methodology is qualitative; it employs a time-series, within-unit spatial case study that compares the rise of Chinese elites over the past 30 years, with reference to cases going back to the beginning of the PRC. The narrative case study method, focusing on the political lives of major leaders, is perhaps most appropriate for this kind of study, since it allows an in-depth examination of patron-clientelist relationships. Generally, we have not used primary sources, since party documents and speeches are not very revealing in terms of the nature of patron-clientelism or factionalism. Dealing with concepts that are by nature at least in part sociological and psychological, this article concerns itself primarily with the politics of China. To date, this has not been a major topic of Chinese

political study, but we hope that our effort will draw more attention to the subject.

II. BACKGROUND: KEY FEATURES OF THE CHINESE POLITICAL SYSTEM

The bases of Chinese politics differ greatly from either Western or other Asian political systems. The Chinese system follows the Leninist model, with some modifications since the 1970s. Key features that remain since the Maoist era are ideological based institutional arrangements, the leading role of the state in determining economic policy, centralization of decision making, and lack of clarity in leadership succession. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) retains its central role in setting policy, determining ideological direction, and deciding promotion of top leaders. The party and government operate side-by-side as entwined entities, and both function as hierarchies from the top leaders to local government and party cells within enterprises and schools. Local and provincial governments gained some autonomy during the reform era, but the government recentralized various functions during the tenure of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao (Shurman 1968, Fewsmith 2010).

While the Chinese leadership is characterized by party domination, there is also division among the top leaders. The party generally makes key policy decisions, which are then implemented by the government. Lacking a civil society, elections, or the normal give-and-take of democratic system, the government acts as a stand-in for the society. As the party has over 80 million members, it also claims to represent the overall society. Government officials and top managers of state-owned enterprises also are appointed by the party.

The CCP's continued domination centers on two Leninist concepts: democracy (*minzhu*) and centralism (*jizhongzhi*), which form the larger notion of "democratic centralism," i.e., suggesting some degree of democratic decision making, along with authoritarian policy implementation. Party leaders are elected at every level but, in reality, are chosen through informal political processes. Participation at each level is limited due to a variety of political norms, lower levels are subject to orders from higher levels; lower levels may not appeal decisions that go against them; and all party members must obey decisions of the Central Committee. The Constitution specifies CCP guidance for policy in various areas and does not allow for a separation of powers. Since the founding of the People's Republic, government organs have been frequently altered or closed if they prevented the attainment of CCP policy objectives. All of this gives the party and government great latitude in making decisions and carrying out policy. CCP domination of government shows clearly in Chinese leadership careers. Most top government positions have been held by party members since 1949 (Wang 2002).

One might expect that party control of the government would lead to smooth

decision making, but the leadership often has been conflictual. Observers have downplayed differences among the elites, over-emphasized the amount of consensus during the reform era, and suggested that the only differences have been over the means to carry out reforms. However, the fall of such leaders as Hu Yaobang (1986-1987) and Zhao Ziyang (1989) indicate the degree of conflict among both factions and individual leaders. Such conflicts concerned not only the methods for implementing reforms but also the allocation of power and resources among top leaders and their followers. These fights have, in some cases, helped create new factions around individuals who staked out particular policy positions. Since the main function of such factions is gaining and maintaining political power, and since a secondary function is creation of a support network for leaders, lower ranked officials naturally see these factions as the main method by which they can advance in the party hierarchy (Blecher 2010).

The common “one man in command” description of Chinese leadership over-emphasizes policy consensus among decision makers and discounts the degree of division within the leadership. This academic perspective assumes that the principal factions quickly agreed on overall economic goals following Deng Xiaoping’s defeat of Hua Guofeng for party leadership in 1978, and it further assumes that the only disagreements were over methods. However, ever-shifting factions have remained a key feature of Chinese politics since 1949, mostly centered on the most important leaders and organized around differing policy approaches. They also served as means to attain or maintain political power, and to bind leaders with clients, i.e., followers, within the power structure. Leadership differences over the pace and methods of reform marked the reform period, as shown by the bourgeois liberalization program in 1984, the downfalls of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, and the post-Tiananmen retrenchment program (1989-1990). Since Tiananmen, the party has demonstrated its adaptability through mild political reforms and a gradual opening of membership, yet factionalism and elite politics remain important (Dreyer 2012; Shambaugh 2008).

Deng Xiaoping undertook only minimal political reforms, but the system became more open and totalitarianism lessened considerably. The Maoist charismatic leadership and personality cult were downplayed, while rule of law and institutional decision making were emphasized. Such leaders as Wan Li suggested that more scientific and democratic processes would foster a better exchange of ideas, while Deng promoted collective decision making and majority voting. It is fair to say that during the period in which Deng served as paramount leader, China transformed itself from “revolutionary totalitarianism” to “reformist authoritarianism.” The Chinese system is not a Western-style legal-rational one, and neither institutions nor decision making have been substantially changed (Wan Li 1986; Ren Min Ri Bao 1987; Oksenberg 1982; Lieberthal 1995).

Chinese leadership was generally quite elderly until the mid-1990s, and veteran

leaders only gradually retired. Deng felt it important to retain a number of these leaders for policy guidance, while President Yang Shangkun noted a need for unity and continuity following the Tiananmen incident. The Third and Fourth Generation of leaders, whose formative experiences were in the 1950s-1970s, began to replace these senior leaders in the late 1990s. By the 1990s, discussion centered on the First-Line Leaders (*diyixian*), the most senior leaders and managers. They were sub-divided into the second echelon (*diertidui*), who oversaw ordinary party and government administration, and the third echelon (*disantidui*), who constituted younger leaders who were being prepared for higher leadership. The second echelon was made up of mostly elderly leaders who guided policy making as “helmsmen” and had to be consulted on all major decisions, e.g., in the early 1990s they included Deng, Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, and Deng Yingchao (Wilson and You 1990).

Senior leaders often can avoid direct responsibility for policy failure because of the division of labor between top party leaders and bureaucracy. Line bureaucrats often take the fall for ineffective policy, including transfers, demotions, or firings. For their part, upwardly-mobile bureaucrats know that their career success depends on making policies succeed, or at least distancing themselves from failure.

Since the founding of the PRC, leadership succession has always been highly dependent on patron-clientelism. Every important shift of leadership personnel has involved the succession of key leaders who had been promoted through patronage of key leaders. Network politics is a key component of the patron-clientelistic system of China. Chinese leaders have since the beginning of the PRC established networks that operated downward, and followers have joined these networks in order to gain promotion and influence (Cheng Li 2001). Patron-clientelism potentially is one the best explanations of both leadership succession and the gaining and maintaining of power within the Chinese system. Other major explanations deal primarily with one aspect of the system, such as ideology, factionalism, hierarchy, and cultural factors. Patron-clientelism seeks to blend all of these factors together, as relations between patrons and protégés involve multiple career, personal, and ideological components.

III. BACKGROUND: PATRON-CLIENTELISM: THE KEY TO CHINESE LEADERSHIP

To the extent that Chinese patron-clientelism is based on cultural patterns, echoes of PRC-style patron-client ties could be glimpsed throughout Chinese history. These include the Confucian emphasis on hierarchy, reciprocal relationships, the importance of mutual obligations, and personal ties based on familial, regional and education associations. Under China's various dynasties, clientelism was a mechanism to gain access to power, not necessarily to gain power itself. What makes

patron-clientelism since 1949 different is its connection with CCP factionalism and leadership succession. Party cadres, for the first time, had real opportunities for power.

While some scholars refer to clientelism, we use the term patron-clientelism to emphasize the dyadic, reciprocal nature of such relations in China. Patron-clientelism is a “special type of dyadic relationship” between two actors, involving groups of people. The concept derived from anthropology, and was then applied by comparative politics scholars to explain interactions among competing groups in political processes in either developing or developed nations. It is a distinctly informal political process, based on relationship patterns, and instructs political actors on appropriate political and social behaviors. It can function both inside institutions and among individuals, allowing a variety of affiliations through which individuals can attain their goals or guard their personal interests (Lande 1977; Fewsmith 2001).

Patron-client relations involve exchanges between a patron, an actor who has power to give favors, grant protection, or take actions, and a client, the person seeking favors, protection or action. This is most often an “instrumental friendship” whereby an actor having higher socio-economic or political status assists someone with lower status, and receives his/her support in return. Kaufman notes three important attributes of such a relationship: the actors have unequal power resources, they acknowledge the need for reciprocity, and the relationship is kept “particularistic and private.” These relations can operate on either vertical or horizontal dimensions. Horizontal ties include exchanges of similar favors or services, and vertical relationships deal with differences in level or status, along with differing abilities to provide assistance. Vertical relationships tend to be part of networked ties and overlapped relations, so that patrons and clients in political institutions maintain relationships with many colleagues (Kaufman 1974; Cheng Li 2001).

The current study primarily concerns vertical ties. Generally vertical, Chinese patron-client relationships bring together senior and junior leaders, lower level bureaucrats and party cadres. Given its strongly centralized, Leninist political system, China’s patron-client system is distinctly hierarchical and centralized. The very inflexibility of the political system encourages the common resort to informal relationships and decision making. Possibilities for participation or influence in decisions are generally limited, and so informal processes bring in actors from the highest officials to lowliest functionaries. An informal process becomes the chief means by which actors can pursue their career and policy aims.

Ties with patrons are strengthened by affectivity and reciprocity. Affectivity suggests that patrons and their clients develop a strong mutual affinity and loyalty, and feel the need to assist each other. Both believe that the exchange should be reciprocal, i.e., in Lande’s formulation a “mutual aid dyad.” Patrons require the political support of their clients, and their clients desire important resources and

information that can only be obtained from the patron. This relationship must be both voluntary and non-forced if it is to work well, but is always a “lopsided friendship.” A list of personal attributes that affect individual’s place in patron-clientelistic relations would include the following: birthplace, regional grounding, parental connections, education, factional affiliation, experience outside China, wealth, military experience (Lande 1977).

Personalism gained prominence during the reform period. A number of “local emperors,” or authoritarian local government, work unit and SOE leaders gained control of job assignments, licenses, and contracts. With strong economic growth in the hinterland, these local leaders linked the peasantry and local workers with political leaders at provincial and national levels. Among these local leaders, as well as among the national leadership, horizontal ties (*tongzhi guanxi*) grew in importance, though their vertical relations remained their key resource.

Traditional cultural practices have aided the development of Chinese patron-clientelism. *Guanxi* has deep roots in society and is one of the first Chinese cultural concepts learned by foreigners living in China. It is usually translated as “connections,” but goes far beyond the Western notion of working personal acquaintanceships for personal gain, and requires mutual assistance that is reciprocal and long-term. Most such relations are based on extended families, friendships, school ties, and party membership. Many Chinese leaders are noted for varying degrees of family ties, or have been followers of top leaders who preceded them. For instance, Li Peng is a step-son of Zhou En-lai and Jiang Zemin is a son-in-law of Li Xiannian. Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang were protégés of Deng Xiaoping (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984; Cheung 1991; Tian 2007).

Factionalism (*paixi*) pervades the Chinese political system, and the resulting divisions figure prominently in policy debates and struggles for power. Factional membership shifts over time, and policy conflicts can last for years, if not decades. Beginning in 1978, policy struggles among moderates, various shades of reformers, and remaining Maoists determined the course of “socialist development.” Deng quickly promoted radical reformers such as Hu and Zhao, and Chen Yun pushed forward moderates like Li Peng. Deng condemned factional conflict in a 1980 speech, but often used factional struggles for his own ends. *Guanxi* and *paixi* at times conflict, since connections center on personal ties, while factionalism is based on a blend of ideology, policy stances and beliefs about the role of the party and government. Factional struggles often involve high stakes, as defeat can end in the demotion or firing of an entire faction, and in extreme cases prison terms and house arrest for individual faction members. The most severe post-Maoist factional purge occurred after the Tiananmen Incident, when Zhao’s followers were branded as “plotters” who attempted to “overthrow” the party (Nathan 1990; Dang De et al. 1984).

Factions allow limited opportunities for clients to debate and discuss both

personnel and policy issues. Such debate and discussion takes place within the circumscribed parameters of the group. None of this discussion questions the legitimacy of either the party or the state. Clients are usually recruited into factions as students or young adults, either in school or in entry-level government or party positions, and they are expected to bolster their patrons' positions within the party.

The most obvious consequence of Chinese patron-clientelism is corruption (*fubai*). Corruption can be defined as private gain at public expense. Chinese corruption usually includes bribes, lavish gifts, kickbacks, and favors. Corruption is directly connected to traditional *guanxi* activities, and seems to be inherent in Chinese-style socialism. Other factors prompting corruption included centralization of power, absence of government checks and balances, frequent leniency for many corruption cases, and a largely controlled news media that is loath to report corruption cases. China's mixed economy developed fairly quickly, and economic reform actually increased the incidence of corruption. Chinese were told that "to get rich is glorious," yet party cadres and workers were expected to work for low pay. Many felt that corruption was the only way to keep up with rising living standards and inflation. The government maintains various controls and regulations, and still makes major decisions involving the locations of factories, the distribution or sale of certain products and services, and the approval of credit for both SOEs and private companies. This provides multiple chances for corruption, and increases the access points for non-governmental actors to influence bureaucracy. The Deng era shifted from centralized planning to partially free markets, and so money replaced all of the Maoist non-material incentives (Friedrich 1966; Myers 1989; Liu 1983; Lampton 2008).

Nepotism is one of the most common forms of corruption, and this form of favoritism generates much popular anger within China. Wesson argues that nepotism is key to understanding Chinese patron-client relations, or "the cement that holds [it] together and makes it function." Chinese leaders have long handed power to children or followers, who move into positions vacated by their elders. Since only select officials handle the distribution of top jobs and property is officially owned by the state, bureaucrats and party cadres gain substantial "positional goods" that they can provide to favored individuals. This means that family, friends, or protégés are installed in positions from which they can gain financial or political advantages. Since the CCP controls all important appointments, high officials attain advantages in the job assignment process, and so control government patronage. Persons having *guanxi* ties with party and government officials benefit most from informal networks. Beginning in the 1980s, there were an increasing number of "economic crimes" charged to children or followers of high level government and party leaders. The most noteworthy cases involved children of high officials, referred to as party princelings (*taizidang*). From the early 1980s, various corruption cases entailed illegal imports of luxury or regulated goods, and several

celebrated cases involved bribes and kickbacks for family members and associates of local officials (Wesson 1988; Zhonggong et al. 1987).

Despite its deep cultural bases, patron-client relations are often fragile. Vulnerable to corruption and political struggles, patron-client relations are subject to sudden rupture. Political clients are most commonly discarded when clients are seen as disloyal or working against the patron's politics or policies, or do not hold to the reciprocity norm. The most famous cases of patron-client termination were the dismissals of Hu and Zhao. Deng had promoted both leaders, and both stopped giving their sponsor unqualified support at critical junctures, forcing Deng to rethink those relationships. When the paramount leader determined that his pro-tégés were not serving his interests, he severed ties with his clients. Hu came to be seen as ineffective in dealing with student protests in Shanghai and other cities (1986-1987), and his position was undermined by attacks by other party leaders. Deng acceded to their demands and Hu was forced to step down. Similarly, Zhao seemed sympathetic to student protesters at the height of the Tiananmen protests (1989), and other party leaders began to view him as dangerous and disloyal. Deng became angry at his client's behavior and opposition to dealing forcefully with the protestors, and therefore agreed that Zhao should be removed and put under house arrest.

Chinese leaders base their power as much on informal authority as on their formal positions within the party or government hierarchy, and informal networks lubricate the entire policy process. Patron-clientelism is central to China's politics, but the model remains external to the formal political process, since it is steeped in such factors as personal prestige, policy influence, and political patronage. Though they hold extensive institutional power, they more frequently resort to informal means, leaving the formal political system as a "hollow shell."

Systemic constraints within the Chinese system limit the degree to which clients can provide something of value to their clients. Patrons depend on support of their clients, in order to gain and maintain power. Without such support, patrons have found it hard to maintain their positions, or to implement their policies. In return, patrons provide a career ladder for protégés.

Chinese patron-clientelism differs from that of other countries to the degree that it is at once a part of Chinese culture and part of the Leninist state structure of China. It would be most similar to the socialist systems of Vietnam and North Korea, but the Chinese model would share cultural features of hierarchy and reciprocity with Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. Other Asian states such as the Philippines have their own clientelistic systems, but they are often based primarily on exchanges of votes for favors.

IV. DEVELOPMENT OF PATRON-CLIENTELISM: MAOIST TO POST-MAOIST LEADERSHIP CHANGE

Chinese leadership change has only become regularized since 1998, when Li

Peng was replaced by Zhu Rongji as premier. The last two political transitions, from Jiang and Zhu to Hu and Wen in 2002-2003 and from Hu and Wen to Xi and Li in 2012-2013, went fairly smoothly. China thus seems to have solved its succession problem for the time being, at least on the surface. Outside observers are unable to view the internal jockeying for power and the deal-making that allows a new leadership team to take power. Given the undemocratic nature of top leadership selection, informal decision making remains vital to the process of choosing potential leaders, elevating them to higher positions, and eventually tapping them as members of the CCP standing committee, party secretary, and premier.

Previous changes to leadership were violent at worst, chaotic at best. During the Maoist period (1949-1976), two of Mao's designated successors, Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao, were summarily removed from high positions. Both died under mysterious circumstances, Liu in prison and Lin in an airplane crash as he apparently fled to the Soviet Union. Mao's third successor, Hua Guofeng, managed to hold all three of the top positions in party and government, but was outmaneuvered by Deng and lost all of his jobs by 1981. The most dramatic post-Maoist changes occurred in the falls of Hu Yaobang and Zhao.

Hu may have been partly responsible for precipitating student protests, as his proposals for political reform may have encouraged student protests in late 1986. Several conservatives opposed to furthering economic reforms saw these protests as an opportunity to criticize Hu. At the end of the year, Deng suddenly accepted their criticism and called for Hu to resign. Hu waited until January to step down, and his contrite confession of mistakes probably saved him from punishment beyond losing his position; Premier Zhao replaced him as party secretary. Various factors contributed to his fall: his promotion of Communist Youth League colleagues over other faction members, his lack of policymaking experience, his alienation of several key leaders and, most importantly, his loss of Deng's support (Report of ... 1987; Delfs 1987).

Zhao faced a difficult policymaking environment as price reforms created public discontent and as popular anger at corruption and nepotism boiled over. Moderates and conservatives began to criticize economic performance and, like Hu, attacked his ideas for political reform. Amidst disquiet about inflation, students seized the occasion of Hu's death to begin protesting. Zhao took a gentle approach to the demonstrators, calling for understanding and talks, and his apparent airing of differences within the government set much of the leadership against him. Deng agreed to Zhao's hasty removal from office, agreeing with Li and others that Zhao had worsened the crisis. Zhao's defiant attitude when called to explain his actions sealed his fate. Unlike Hu, he was stripped of all his party privileges and held under house arrest for the rest of his life. Several factors account for his downfall, including his perceived failure to manage the economic reforms and, his angering of his mentor Deng, and a toxic leadership climate that echoed the power struggles

of the 1950s-1960s, when heirs apparent Liu and Lin met horrific ends (Cheung 1991; Lieberthal 1990; Ming Pao News 1989).

V. DEVELOPMENT OF PATRON-CLIENTELISM: JIANG ZEMIN TO HU JINTAO

Jiang Zemin was never considered a charismatic leader. Selected as a compromise candidate, he was a key member of the Shanghai faction and appeared sufficiently resolute to resist popular protests but nevertheless committed to continuation of the Deng era economic reforms. He only gradually consolidated power, first by being reelected as party secretary in 1993, and then being chosen as president. He had to tread carefully, since the hardline Li Peng (adopted son of Zhou En-lai), the “butcher of Beijing” who imposed martial law on the capital in 1989, remained as premier. As architect of the reforms, the semi-retired Deng Xiaoping (fully retired from 1993) continued as an unseen presence. Deng had handpicked Jiang, and everyone knew that he was beholden to the former paramount leader.

Deng’s death in early 1997 was a watershed that symbolized the passing of the Second Generation of Communist Party leaders. It also provided a chance for Jiang to consolidate his hold on the key organs of power. He moved his allies among the Third Generation into the party, the government, and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). A newly reorganized leadership was presented at the Fifteenth National Party Congress. Jiang’s economic czar Zhu Rongji replaced Li as premier, and his low-key professionalism fit more comfortably with Jiang’s flamboyance. Jiang took the position of chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, while Politburo member Qiao Shi, a Jiang rival, was removed.

Serious problems of corruption and income disparities among regions plagued Jiang’s later years, as it has over the past decade. Meanwhile, an end-of-century economic slowdown created worries that China’s growth model had been exhausted. Little did anyone know in 2000, that China would experience growth rates consistently above ten percent for most of the next decade.

Despite rumors of his death in 2011, Jiang has remained quite active in the inner circle of the party since he stepped down from his final official position in 2004, and he emerged as a major player at the 2012 party congress. He reportedly criticized his successor’s record, tried to place key Shanghai faction allies in the standing committee, and proposed policy changes in the leadership report to the congress. Jiang wants to return China to the road of reform that he and Zhu followed in the 1990s, and he apparently feels that Hu Jintao was too cautious and backslid by allowing the SOEs to dominate more of the economy. Jiang also seeks improved economic relations with Western countries, which will help China’s

private sector grow and mature in more fields (Wong 2012).

Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao skillfully maneuvered to place themselves in the top political positions. Hu had the strongest possible champion in Deng. The paramount leader, as one of his final acts, insisted that Hu be placed on the standing committee, implicitly selecting him as Jiang's successor. The elderly leader had been impressed with Hu's "firm and resolute" response to Tibetan riots when he was party leader there, and so Deng felt that the party in his hands would remain safe from "chaos" (Lam 2011). Hu succeeded by not challenging Jiang in any substantive way. Serving in thankless provincial positions, and then moving to the capital as vice president, Hu mastered sublimation of his own ambition. His personality served him well, as he was softer, humbler and more introverted but still more approachable than the expansive Jiang. Hu made sure to promote Jiang's ideological and policy stances, especially the Three Represents concept. Scholars noted Hu's ability for "trimming his sails" to fit with various patrons through the years. Even so, Hu has always defined himself well, and so he avoided the fawning behavior of Mao's two designated successors, Lin Biao and Hua Guofeng. Hu spent much time during the 1990s designing his own policy initiatives, and he usefully employed the Central Party School to glean the best policy schemes. At the Sixteenth Party Congress in 2003, he quietly promoted many of his allies, and there was little opposition to his election as party secretary.

Hu fostered an alliance with Wen Jiabao and various State Council bureaucrats. Like Hu, Wen is a cautious survivor whose rise had been smoothed by powerful allies. Despite serving under Zhao Ziyang, his career had not been damaged by Tiananmen. He was recognized as a capable administrator (widely noted as a "latter-day Zhou Enlai" who could ably coordinate rival ministries) by Premier Zhu Rongji. In the run-up to the 2003 Congress, Hu and Wen decided on a division of authority: Hu would take party matters, along with diplomatic, military and Taiwan issues; Wen would handle economic matters and State Council (i.e., domestic) issues. Meanwhile, Jiang's Shanghai faction lost clout, though several members retained high positions (Lam 2006).

Hu Jintao thus skillfully maneuvered to the top of Chinese leadership. Avoiding the mistakes of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang in the 1980s, he effectively used personal connections to maintain support of party leaders, while continuously building his network and establishing his hold on the party before he was officially named to as party chief and president. As Hu Jintao rose in the hierarchy, he made sure that his actions were not perceived as threats to top leaders, especially Jiang.

VI. DEVELOPMENT OF PATRON-CLIENTELISM: DOMESTIC POLITICS IN THE LATE HU ERA

Hu and Wen confronted a number of difficult public health issues, natural

disasters, and socio-economic crises during their tenure. The country did not win plaudits for its handling of the SARS crisis of 2003, in which over 800 Chinese died, nor for its management of the product quality scare of 2007, nor for its response to the Sichuan earthquake of 2008. In most cases, the government hid the truth, only grudgingly acknowledging the scale of the problems. Even more difficult was the rising annual toll of civil disturbances (that soared past 100,000 in the second half of the decade), mostly centered on economic grievances. Beijing reacted defensively to foreign criticism of its crushing of popular protests in Tibet in 2008 and in Xinjiang in 2009. While the Wen government promoted economic growth, it provided little more than lip service for legal or banking reform, or for patching the tattered social safety net. The environment deteriorated badly, with air, water and soil as badly polluted as the poorest developing countries. Inequality, already a major problem by the 1990s, became more pronounced as an issue in economic-related protests. Small changes were made to the onerous *hukou* social registration system, but many urbanites and especially peasants had only limited access to health care or public education. Wen was widely praised for his crisis management skills and his empathy for disaster victims, but much of his tenure was preoccupied with putting out proverbial fires, not initiating new policies.

The Hu-Wen decade produced a mixed legacy: strong economic growth beginning with China's accession to the World Trade Organization and ending with only a slight dipping of economic growth during the global financial crisis and recession. International opinion widely noted that the character of China's stimulus package, announced in late 2009, differed greatly from its American, European, and even Japanese counterparts. Many praised a Chinese effort that largely focused on infrastructure improvement, though others noted that the package was the only factor maintaining high growth. Much of the economic success was owed to difficult choices made in the 1990s under Jiang and Zhu, i.e., to cull poorly performing SOEs, to privatize housing, to reform the banks, and to push for WTO membership. China became the largest automobile market in the world, and one of the largest producers of solar cells and electricity-generating windmills. Shopping malls sprouted in every major city, and foreign businesses could be found throughout the country; Starbucks had 750 outlets, for example. Beijing's grandest accomplishment was the successful staging of the 2008 summer Olympics (Larson 2012). Millions escaped poverty, but growth has slowed down significantly. State-owned companies regained much of their former dominance.

Despite a roaring economy, the political status quo remained unchanged. Very little was done beyond well publicized campaigns to curb endemic corruption. In his final speech as party leader, Hu noted this problem, but gave no hints about how he would fight it. Hu also made no effort to liberalize the political system. In the same speech, he asserted that "we must uphold the leadership of the party," and used particularly authoritarian language throughout. For instance, he referred

to the need to uphold Mao Zedong Thought, and to not create a Western political system or follow the “wicked way” of altering the party’s direction. Hu even resorted to the traditional tactic of appealing to Chinese cultural values to underline loyalty to the regime. Hu and Wen also refused to reassess issues from the past, such as the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre, the house arrest of former party leader Zhao (when he died, they even denied him a public memorial until public pressure forced their hands), and the government’s heavy handed developmental approaches that favor the Han people over ethnic peoples in Tibet and Xinjiang. The government stepped up monitoring of the Internet (the “Great Firewall of China”), and detained various dissidents and activists in a major crackdown in 2011 (New Leadership ... 2012, On the Way Out ... 2012, Tatlow 2013).

VII. CASE STUDY: THE RISE OF XI AND LI

The new party leader who took the helm in November, 2012 was calm and confident. Xi Jinping spoke in standard Mandarin Chinese, not the dialects that so marked all of his predecessors going back to Mao. He largely avoided ideological posturing or contentious foreign policy issues, such as Taiwan or the Senkaku islands, focusing almost entirely on domestic issues. He called for the “great revival of the Chinese nation,” and addressed his domestic agenda directly: “Our people ... yearn for better education, stable jobs, more satisfying income, greater social security, improved ... health care, and a more beautiful environment” (Larson 2012).

Like Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, China’s new leaders rose quietly through the ranks to the top positions. Xi Jinping is one of the CCP’s princelings, son of Xi Zhongxun, who served as a general in the revolution and was later vice premier and one of the first generation leaders. He received every benefit of an elite upbringing, with the exception of his being sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. Like Hu, Xi consciously adopted a relatively low profile and was generally vague on policies that he would pursue; this made him more palatable to the various CCP factions. He is a “networked person” with both strong family ties and broad central government, provincial government, and military connections. All this has given him greater self-confidence than the more diffident Hu, and his final swift ascent indicates his ability to gain support from senior officials and colleagues, even though Hu expressed no clear preference for Xi (Shi 2012).

All of Xi’s experiences prepared him for leadership. Born in 1953, his father was both Minister of Propaganda and Education and vice premier, until purged from government in 1962. Accordingly, young Xi grew up in the comfortable surroundings of the Zhongnankai, the top leadership’s residence and work compound in Beijing. His father was imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution. From

1969 to 1975, Xi was sent to work as an agricultural worker in Liangjiahe in Shaanxi province, from whence his family came. He was described by local acquaintances as friendly and helpful, though initially lonely because of the separation from his family. He spent evenings reading Marx and Mao because those were the only available reading materials, and he applied nine times before being accepted into the CCP. Unlike many of the “sent-down youth” during the Cultural Revolution, he seems to have gained much practical experience in Shaanxi, and was so well liked that a group of villagers sent him off when he was accepted to the elite Tsinghua University in 1975. He has stayed in touch with some of his friends from that time, and his apparent natural rapport with ordinary people dates from his early experience in the country (Yuan 2012; Foliath and Wagner 2012).

After Mao’s death, Xi’s father returned to party work and became CCP secretary in Guangdong province, where he helped guide Deng’s new special economic zones (SEZs). Upon graduation, Xi became secretary to Geng Biao, a personal friend of his father. Geng held several key party and government positions, including vice premier, member of the Politburo standing committee, and secretary general of the Central Military Commission. Xi’s mentor assisted his rise through the party. Unlike Hu and Jiang, Xi gained military experience by working at the CMC, and he has maintained good relations with the military.

Xi’s father moved up to the Politburo and party secretariat in 1982, and the young Xi got his first political appointment as deputy party secretary at Zhengding in Hebei province, where he applied his knowledge of rural affairs. At that time, he took his now well-known trip to Iowa, where he gathered information about agriculture and tourism. He was reportedly impressed by the friendliness of Americans, and made a point of visiting his former host family when he traveled to the U.S. in early 2012. He later became governor in Fujian and Zhejiang provinces after serving various party and government roles in both provinces, and was widely regarded as a quite effective provincial leader. His last major position before promotion to central government leadership was as Shanghai party secretary. He thus gained much experience working in three of China’s most developed provinces (Yuan 2012; Delaney 2010).

In Fujian, Xi promoted Taiwanese investment and took a keen interest in promoting better relations with Taiwan. As governor, he launched a campaign to clear all citizen complaints. A noteworthy example of his pragmatic style was his handling of a major power plant construction project. American contractor Bechtel and other foreign investors were upset about bureaucratic resistance to the project. Xi met with American investors and assured them of his support for the plant and, without directly intervening in the dispute, a compromise was reached to allow the project to be finished. In Zhejiang, he strongly supported such local businesses as Geely, an emerging automobile producer, and Alibaba, which became one of

China's leading internet businesses. After a pilot program for local elections proved successful, he promoted it throughout the province, and the CCP party school noted it as a model to be followed elsewhere. He also mounted a major anti-corruption campaign, which may have helped him land his last provincial assignment in Shanghai. He kept his spotless reputation and did not indicate any political weaknesses, but also did not undertake any political reforms (Xi Jinping 2012; Foliath and Wagner 2012).

Xi is a long-standing member of the Shanghai faction, led by Jiang Zemin. Xi became protégé of both Jiang and former vice president Zeng Qinghong by the 1990s. This faction generally advocates economic liberal policies, and it has promoted the economic development of China's coastal provinces, especially Shanghai. In most political matters, the faction is neither strongly liberal nor oppressively conservative. Jiang supported Xi for membership on the central committee, and Xi was added as an alternate member in 1997. He then moved up to the Politburo standing committee in 2007, becoming vice president in 2008. He took several trips abroad while vice president, and was noted for acting carefully while trying to cultivate consensus with China's international partners (Delaney 2010).

Jiang worked very hard to elect his protégé, and was able to best Hu for control of the new standing committee in 2012. Jiang gained five of seven seats for leaders associated with him or at least on good terms with both Jiang and Hu. Jiang's victory was symbolized by his entering the hall with Hu and sitting next to him during the proceedings. Even so, Jiang does not carry the same weight as Deng did within the party during the early reform era. Power within the CCP is much diffuse than in the past, and Jiang merely took advantage of divisions within the leadership to get his way. His defeat of the more authoritarian Hu may create more opportunities for the party and bureaucracy to liberalize the economy and political system, but Hu and his CYL and other allies may still be able to block sweeping action (Wong 2012).

As the son of a prominent party leader, Xi is also considered part of the more diffuse princeling faction. Generally associated with reform-minded pragmatism, these leaders tend to be supported by business and middle class, but they have also been attacked for benefiting from nepotism and *guanxi*. Their association is based entirely on their common background, not upon ideology or policy positions (Delaney 2010). Paralleling the princeling group is the technocratic group (*jishu guanliao*), based on engineering or legal backgrounds. Most members of the Politburo Standing Committee since the late 1990s have such professional and school associations, and attended elite universities such as Qinghua and Beijing Universities (Dittmer 2000).

From the beginning of his career, Xi has cultivated a reputation as an honest, incorruptible official. From Zhengding onward, he has made anti-corruption measures central to his administrative program, though he occasionally promoted

officials who became embroiled in corruption scandals. He was selected as Shanghai party chief to replace the disgraced Chen Liangyu. In his brief time in China's largest city, he made a point of refusing to live in the official residence in the former French Quarter, and did not use a special train to visit a neighboring province (Xi Jinping 2012; Foliath and Wagner 2012). Xi's final accession to party leader went fairly smoothly, with only one hitch. He went missing for roughly two weeks during September, 2012, fueling rampant speculation in international news media about the state of his health. China's official news media did not discuss his absence, and various news stories suggested that he had been injured in sports activities, or had been in a car accident, or had experienced a heart attack, or even had been physically attacked by someone (Yuan 2012; Foliath and Wagner 2012).

Xi's methodical, careful ascent contrasts with the swift rise and spectacular fall of Bo Xilai. Like Xi, Bo is the son of a key Maoist leader who suffered in the Cultural Revolution. Like Xi, he was punished for his familial association, in Bo's case by serving five years in a prison camp. Like Xi, he also served as a local or provincial official in three provinces, and was a member of the Politburo. Unlike Bo, however, Xi was low-key, hesitant to speak English, and did not openly campaign for higher positions. Bo seemed a likely candidate for membership on the standing committee when he was brought down by one of the biggest political scandals since the 1980s. His wife, Gu Kailai, was charged with the murder of Neil Heywood, a British businessman who apparently was attempting to pressure her to pay higher commissions for him to move her money to foreign banks and buy luxury London real estate. She might have got away with the murder until Wang Lijun, the Chongqing police chief, confronted Bo with the case, was threatened, and then tried to defect to the American consulate in Chengdu. Consular officials convinced Wang to leave, and the case broke open. Bo was relieved of his positions and charged with abuse of power, corruption, and "improper sexual relations" with various women. Gu was convicted of murder and received a suspended death sentence, which may be commuted to life in prison (Foliath and Wagner 2012).

Li Keqiang's biography shares some features with Xi. He was a sent-down youth, though he only worked in the country for two years (1974-1976), and joined the CCP the same year as Xi. He attended an elite school, Beijing University (Beida), where he studied law as an undergraduate and later economics as a graduate student. Li is the only top Chinese leader to ever win a competitive election, as he was elected to the Beida student assembly in the early 1980s. He advanced through provincial positions, in his case in Henan and later Liaoning provinces, on the way to membership on the central committee. Like Xi, he was noted for his low-key demeanor and work ethic. He was selected as vice premier at the same time that Xi became vice president (Li Keqiang 2012; Li prepares... 2012).

Unlike Xi, Li was not strictly a princeling, but his father was a county level party cadre in Anhui province, where Li was born and raised. He built his career in the powerful CYL faction. A leader of the group from his days at Beida, he met Hu Jintao in the early 1980s, and the latter became his mentor. Hu headed the organization in the mid-1980s, and Li held top CYL posts a decade later. This is important because nearly a quarter of all central committee members are CYL members. Hu promoted his protégé and tried to get him named as his successor, but he decided to compromise with the princelings and Shanghai faction. Li apparently got along well with premier Wen Jiabao, and was made leader of the central committee small group on finance and economics before being named vice premier. As vice premier, he took a leading role in crafting China's policy responses to the global financial crisis and Great Recession (2007-2009).

Li held various positions in Henan province from 1988 onward, becoming governor (1998-2004). While respected for his hard work, Li did not try to cultivate the kind of man-of-the-people image that Xi perfected in Fujian and Zhejiang. As Henan governor, Li confronted a serious AIDS scandal, when tainted blood was mixed with general supplies and thousands were infected with the HIV virus. He responded to reports of the crisis by cracking down on news media and AIDS activists, and the provincial government tried to hide the extent of the calamity for about five years. Li occasionally has been criticized for indecision, and has neither the forcefulness of Zhu Rongji nor the quick reactivity of Wen Jiabao, but he is considered a competent economic manager. He is also much more confident and comfortable than Xi in using English, since he studied the language while an undergraduate and his wife is a professor of English language and literature (Li Keqiang 2012; Li prepares ... 2012).

The new Politburo standing committee members also have benefited from the patron-client system. Five of the seven are associated with Jiang. Beside Xi, they are: Zhang Dejiang, head of the National People's Congress; Yu Zheng Sheng, National People's Consultative Congress head and Shanghai CCP leader; Wang Qishan, secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection; and Zhang Gaoli, executive vice premier and Tianjin party leader, considered a Jiang protégé. Liu Yunshan, head of the CCP propaganda department, is friendly with both Jiang and Hu. Hu's only ally is Li (Badkar 2012; Beech 2012).

The experience of Xi and Li indicates several realities of current Chinese patron-clientelist politics. First, factionalism is much looser and less ideological than in the past. Second, administrative competence and popular support have become more important than ever, as illustrated by the importance of Xi's performance as governor and his rapport with ordinary people. Third, after three peaceful transfers of power since the late 1990s, China's domestic political change has become more regularized and institutionalized, what Nathan calls "authoritarian resilience" (Delaney 2010). Fourth, Xi and Li will only hold circumscribed power.

Like Hu and Wen, they will have to consult with and listen to at least half of the standing committee who are aligned with Jiang, along with perhaps twenty other “senior leaders” in party and government (On Way Out 2012).

VIII. IMPLICATIONS OF PATRON-CLIENTELISM AND LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The swift trial and conviction of Bo Xilai for corruption in August–September, 2013 was unsurprising, given the near-universal conviction rate in Chinese criminal trials. What surprised observers was Bo’s spirited defense of his record and attacks on his wife and others who testified against him. It eerily echoed Gang of Four leader Jiang Qing’s vocal self-defense at her trial in the late 1970s. More importantly, Bo’s arrest and conviction removed a potential rival for Xi, and could be the opening move in a campaign to discredit Xi’s other factional rivals. Such campaigns harken back to the Maoist era, and have accompanied every major leadership transition since the 1960s. As before, the rise of a new leadership group has also been linked to a crackdown on dissent, this time especially among China’s growing Internet and blogging communities (Zhang 2013). As with other such efforts, persecution of rival factions is likely to slacken once the current leaders are confident of their positions (Going Down ... 2013). Li sees the Bo case as an indication of a “stagnant” system, not the supposed “resi-lent authoritarianism” posited by various observers (Cheng Li 2012).

What are the implications of the rise of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, for Chinese politics in general and for patron-clientelism specifically? First, patron-clientelism provides resilience to the Chinese political system, making it perhaps a more politically stable Communist regime than the later Soviet Union and more flexible than North Korea or Cuba. As a well-supported member of the Shanghai faction and a leading princeling, Xi seems much more assured in leadership and more confident in style than the diffident and wooden Hu Jintao. The return of the Shanghai faction to the height of power may indicate their domination of Chinese political life for the next decade. Thus, the current leadership group has an outwardly more solid appearance than its predecessors. Various observers thought that a secure Xi leadership might lead the way toward political reform, something often talked about but not acted upon by Wen Jiabao. Xi’s early moves indicate movement in the opposite direction, toward greater central control of both politics and the economy.

Second, despite frequent talk about the unpopularity of privilege in Chinese society, Xi’s rise illustrates that the princelings are here to stay. Bo fell from power not because he was a princeling, but because his enemies used his self-inflicted scandal as an opportunity to undo him. While his fall shows that even princelings are not immune to political disaster, Bo’s near-impunity for over a decade illus-

trates the sense of socio-political entitlement still held by this quasi-class. Xi was not at all harmed by his princely background, and it positively aided his swift rise. That observers now discuss the princelings as being members of a distinct but vaguely defined faction is emblematic of their continued key role in the party. It is likely that prominent sons of party leaders will play key roles in the next leadership transition, in 2022-2023.

Third, patron-clientelism remains a central fact of Chinese political life. The last three leadership transitions since 1989 have been played out within the structure of clientelist relationships and factionalism. The Shanghai faction rose to prominence with Jiang Zemin, were somewhat eclipsed with the elevation of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, and came back into their own with Xi's triumph. If they were able to come back to life, Maoist or Deng era leaders would probably be quite comfortable operating within the current political milieu, and could easily reestablish ties with the remnants of their former networks. Post-1989 leaders have learned well the lessons of the falls of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang: to succeed at the top, one must cultivate thick clientelist ties throughout the party, must show deference to senior leaders and to members of other factions, especially before their leadership positions are solidified, and must not take policy positions that are too far ahead of mainstream leadership opinion, especially on political and economic reform issues, dissent, and party orthodoxy. To survive at the top, one must be cautious and stake out conservative ground (in the sense of incremental change) on the most important policy questions.

Fourth, following from the third, the current Chinese political system is therefore inimical to democratization. Western scholarship and punditry have long suggested that the advent of economic modernization and prosperity could mean that eventually demands for democratic inclusion by the nascent middle class will be overwhelming and unavoidable. This suggests that it is only a matter of time before fundamental political reform comes to China. The continued domination of clientelistic politics, factionalism, and princeling privileges-along with the effective suppression of mobilized public opinion and dissent-indicate that there continue to be few channels for effective participation by the middle class, working class, migrant workers or farmers. Pre-modern Western polities had plenty of outlets for political and social expression, and these gradually eroded the legitimacy of aristocratic control of governments. China does have a vibrant Internet and blogging culture, as well as perhaps 170,000 protests per year by workers, farmers and local activists. If anyone can marry China's burgeoning netizen culture with the growing milieu of economic protest and the gathering economic interests of the middle class, an irresistible political movement could take root. It will have to stand as a reverse mirror image of everything the party is now: eschewing clientelism, preventing factionalism, and rejecting princely privileges. Given China's endemic political culture, this new democracy movement would have to work

mightily to head off the revival of such practices once it takes power. The last time China tried the democratic route, during the republican period, the experiment ended in widespread corruption, warlordism, and feckless authoritarianism.

Fifth, clientelism and factionalism drive policy-making as much as they do leadership change. Mao and Deng were able to take the party and government in radically different directions because they placed key allies throughout the top ranks of both organizations. Similarly, Jiang's and Zhu's efforts to consolidate and expand the reforms of the 1990s, and the more cautious Hu-Wen approach to addressing the political economic issues of the twenty-first century, were shaped by the degree of control held by them and their supporters. The confident Xi and Li debuts on the national stage could indicate that they have greater freedom to undertake favored policy initiatives than their immediate predecessors.

So, what can we say about China's political future? Since 1978, China has created one of the most audacious political experiments in modern history: a largely liberalized economy and the encouragement of individual initiative and innovation, on one hand, and the maintenance of authoritarian one-party rule, on the other. As China's economic development gathers speed and as China moves from low-tech to high-tech manufacturing, this disconnect between economic maturation and political stasis may become increasingly untenable. The continued separation of the elites and the populace is likely to become a source of tension for the generation now coming of age, which never knew the endemic privation or ideological struggles up to the early 1980s. The Chinese political elite's recruitment system is not as effective as it once was, and so the CCP has opened its ranks to business people and professionals. This may create new political constituencies and entirely different sources of clientelism. Meanwhile, the public are excluded from party participation, let alone decision making. Democratic theory suggests that authoritarian regimes may experience a crisis of legitimacy when developing countries reach a certain level of per capita income; scholars disagree over what level this is, or even if a particular level has any direct relationship with political development. In any case, the size of China's economy has doubled in the last decade, and may double again by the early 2020s. It is not unreasonable to suggest that continued high economic growth will create extreme political pressures that the clientelistic Chinese regime will find difficult to manage. Whatever happens, patron-clientelism and factionalism are likely to be part of the eventual political settlement.

IX. CONCLUSION

During his years as a guerrilla and civil war leader, Mao exhorted party cadres to learn from the people: to gain strength from the peasants, to treat them with kindness, to pay for everything taken from them. At the Yen'an base in nor-

thern China, factions were discouraged, and major rectification campaigns rooted out, among other things, sectarianism and dogmatism. But 3,000 years of political culture cannot be overturned in one moment of history. Patron-clientelism emerged as a major factor of Chinese leadership in the 1950s, and became central to the political struggles of the 1960s and 1970s.

China's political system remains a fertile ground for patron-clientelism. A key ingredient of China's political culture, clientelism has combined with factionalism and personalist relations to shape all political transitions and major policy initiatives since the 1960s. Xi and Li are the latest leaders to rise to the top on the strength of clientelistic ties and factionalism, and so far they appear to be confidently exploiting this system. The fall of Bo reveals the Janus-headed nature of political selection: leaders who emerge from the client-faction pool and trumpet their princeling backgrounds may gain a sense of entitlement that can create the conditions for their downfalls. The nature of personal ties within the leadership means that a huge gulf remains between the political elites and the masses that the party is supposed to represent. Continued reliance on such informal politics mechanisms as patron-clientelism may mean, in the next decade, that the overall system could reach a crisis of legitimacy.

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