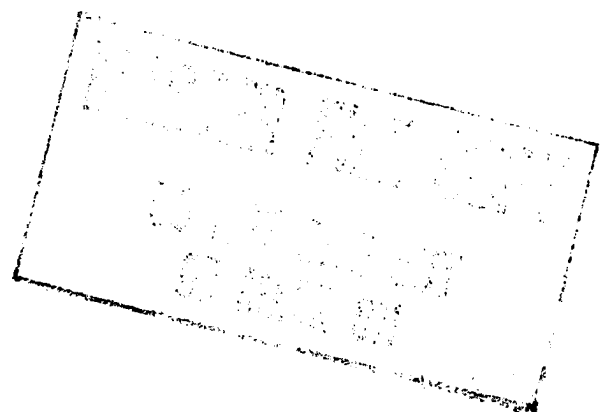




China: Deng's Political System— An Uncertain Future



A Research Paper



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EA 84-10086X
April 1984

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China: Deng's Political System— An Uncertain Future

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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by [Redacted] of the
Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries
are welcome and may be directed to the Chief,
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China: Deng's Political System— An Uncertain Future

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Overview

*Information available
as of 10 April 1984
was used in this report.*

Deng Xiaoping sees the question of succession as not simply a matter of men but of institutions and policies as well. Reform of the political system—the structure of power and the policy process—has preoccupied Deng since his return to power.

Deng wants to prevent the emergence of another Mao Zedong and a repetition of the Cultural Revolution. A more important objective is to modernize China's political system to meet the needs of economic modernization. Deng's ultimate goal is to provide steady, predictable rule through a professional bureaucracy.

We believe that, despite major obstacles and setbacks, Deng and his allies have made some progress toward their political reform goals:

- China's leadership has become more collective.
- Factional struggle has diminished.
- The policy process has become more professional.
- There has been some improvement in the quality of the bureaucracy.

But important aspects of China's political system have not changed:

- It remains highly centralized and authoritarian.
- The Chinese Communist Party continues to monopolize power.
- Power remains vested more in individuals than in institutions.
- The bureaucracy continues to work poorly, especially at provincial and local levels.

In his efforts to reform China's political system, Deng has:

- Attempted to institutionalize collective leadership.
- Re-created the party Secretariat to play the central role in policymaking.
- Sought to rejuvenate and professionalize the leadership.
- Advocated a rational division of labor between the party, the government, and the economic sector.
- Promoted (for a time) a greater degree of "democracy" and freedom in China.

Because of strong opposition, the process of reform has been slow, erratic, and subject to frequent compromise.

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April 1984*



A key to the future will be the balance between innovators and reformers and more conservative elements in China's leadership. China could develop into a highly centralized and orthodox bureaucratic state along the lines of the Soviet Union. China could also become a more pluralistic, although still highly controlled, society combining Marxist, Chinese, and even Western traditions. A third possibility, in our view the most likely, is a muddled outcome, in which authoritarian politics coexist uneasily with more liberal, decentralized economic policies.

A darker course is possible, especially if Deng were to die soon. Should the successor leadership turn out to be weak, a conservative military-civilian coalition might then take over and lead a backlash against many of the reforms promoted by Deng over the past few years.

Addressing the 12th Party Congress in September 1982, Deng disclosed a new awareness of the long time it takes for successful political reform in China. It will now take at least until the end of this century, Deng admitted, to achieve his ambitious reform goals. We agree. Even under the best of circumstances, the task of modernizing China's political system will be slow, protracted, arduous, and uncertain.



Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Overview	iii
Reforming the Party	1
The New Constitutions	1
Decisionmaking	2
Reestablishing the Secretariat	3
A New Power Structure	3
Policymaking	3
Grappling With Retirement	3
A New Role for the Party?	5
“Democratization”	7
Reforming the Bureaucracy	8
Reform at the Top	8
The Plan	8
One Year Later	9
Reform at Provincial and Local Levels	9
Prospects	10
Alternative Paths	10

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**China: Deng's Political System—
An Uncertain Future** 


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If we wait any longer before perfecting our socialist system, people will ask, "How come the socialist system cannot solve those problems which the capitalist system can?"

Deng Xiaoping
18 August 1980

To Deng Xiaoping, the question of succession is not simply a matter of men but of institutions and policies as well. Reform of the political system—the structure of power and the policy process—has preoccupied Deng since his return to power. 

Deng's reforms are intended to restore the faith of the Chinese people in "socialism," a faith badly shaken by Mao Zedong's despotic rule and the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. When Mao died in 1976, his political legacy was a Communist party split into warring factions, a bureaucracy in shambles, and a cynical and disillusioned population. Reforming China's political institutions to prevent the emergence of another Mao and the repetition of another Cultural Revolution is a major objective of Deng's program. 

A second important objective is reform of the political system to meet the needs of modernization. Since his return to power in December 1978, Deng has insisted that administrative reform—establishing a rational, efficient bureaucracy characterized by functional specialization, clear lines of authority, formal rules, and officials selected for competence—is essential for China's economic modernization. Paralleling administrative reform, Deng has called for a fundamental restructuring of China's economic system featuring decentralization of decisionmaking and increased reliance on market forces to increase efficiency and productivity. 

Setting forth ambitious goals is one thing, however, and their achievement, another. Political reform has a long history of failure, in both pre- and postrevolutionary China. Already, there has been a significant reduction in the pace and scope of Deng's political reform program. 




*Deng Xiaoping—
China's paramount leader*

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Reforming the Party

Overconcentration of power in Mao's political system resulted in extreme dictatorship and the disastrous policy errors of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Overconcentration of power in one individual, Deng has acknowledged, is deeply rooted in Chinese culture. It has also been reinforced by the Leninist political system China inherited from the Soviet Union. To prevent this from happening again, Deng Xiaoping has attempted to institutionalize collective leadership as a key element in his reform program. 

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The New Constitutions

Deng has relied heavily on the promulgation of new party and state constitutions to institutionalize collective leadership in China. Reliance on constitutions to bring about change, however, has never worked in China. There have been nine constitutions (party and state) since 1949 and none has basically altered the way China is ruled. 

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General Secretary Hu Yaobang—Deng's chosen successor

To help prevent the reemergence of another Mao, the new party constitution adopted in September 1982 abolishes the post of party chairman and forbids any form of personality cult. It stipulates further that no party leader is allowed to make decisions on major issues on his own, or place himself above the party organization. [redacted]

To broaden the base of authority, the new constitution mandates that the party's General Secretary (Hu Yaobang's new title) be joined on the Politburo Standing Committee by three other top party officeholders: the Chairman of the Military Commission of the Central Committee, the First Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, and the Chairman of the Central Advisory Commission. Although it is not required by the constitution, the state Premier also sits on this committee; thus, all major institutions of power—the party, the government, and the military—are now represented on the highest decisionmaking organ in China, the Politburo Standing Committee. [redacted]

Another institutional check on the power of the party leader appears in the new state constitution (approved December 1982) that establishes the State Central Military Commission. This state organ is tasked with "directing the armed forces," and its creation removes

the party leader from direct command over China's military forces. The Army has received assurances, moreover, that all future chairmen of the party's Military Commission will be selected on the basis of military experience. [redacted]

[redacted] official guidance has also specified that the posts of Chairman of the Party Military Commission, Party General Secretary, and Premier hereafter will be filled by different individuals. [redacted]

Decisionmaking

The new party constitution, together with authoritative Deng pronouncements, spells out, moreover, how party committees are supposed to make policy. All major issues are to be discussed and decided collectively. In decisionmaking, one person will have one vote and the principle of the minority submitting to the majority will be strictly enforced. Once a decision has been made, it will be obeyed unconditionally and enforced vigorously in accordance with the principle of democratic centralism. [redacted]

Collective leadership will also be encouraged by making the meetings of the Politburo and its Standing Committee regular and routine. All offices of Politburo members, [redacted] are to be located in one building to facilitate quick response to calls for meetings. In addition, the agenda of Politburo meetings is to be more formal, with fixed calendar dates to discuss specific issues. Politburo Standing Committee meetings reportedly are now held weekly to avoid bureaucratic logjams. [redacted]

But all of this falls far short, we believe, of institutionalizing genuine collective leadership in China. Although information on the decisionmaking process remains vague, available evidence does indicate that power remains vested in individuals rather than institutions. A strong party leader, such as Deng Xiaoping, can still impose his authority and can sidestep official party and state structures and intrude wherever he wishes. Most major decisions (for example, the decisions to launch the recent anticrime and spiritual pollution campaigns) are still made by a very small

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group of elderly party leaders in the Politburo Standing Committee. Despite all the talk about democracy and majority rule, China appears still firmly caught in the chains of Leninism, which depends on the boot of a strong man—Deng for now—to resolve conflict. [redacted]

Reestablishing the Secretariat

Deng Xiaoping's most important party reform was his first—reestablishing the Secretariat in February 1980. As outlined in major speeches by Deng, Chen Yun, and other top leaders at the time, re-creating the Secretariat was intended to bring about a major change in the institutional power structure of post-Mao China. [redacted]

A New Power Structure. The intent was to shift power in both the making and the execution of policy from the Politburo to the Secretariat. In a metaphor he would repeat many times, Deng asserted that the Politburo and its Standing Committee would now retreat to the second line (where it would concern itself with major policy issues) and the Secretariat would advance to the frontline (where it would handle the day-to-day work of the party). Deng stressed that the Secretariat would “handle everything . . . the voluminous everyday work affecting the party, the government, the armed forces, the civilian population, the educational institutions, the workers, the peasants, the traders, the scholars, and the soldiers.” As in the Soviet Union, the Secretariat would serve as the nerve center of China's political system. [redacted]

Another major purpose of this reform was to transfer power from the first generation of revolutionary leaders on the Politburo to their younger, more professional successors on the Secretariat. In contrast with the membership of the Politburo (some of whom are unsympathetic to Deng's reforms), the Secretariat is staffed by energetic, competent, and enthusiastic supporters of Deng's modernization program. The ultimate objective of political reform, as Deng pointed out at that time, is to put in place a successor generation of pragmatic leaders with specialized knowledge and expertise capable of directing China's modernization. [redacted]

Policymaking. Acting under the supervision of top party leaders (principally Deng Xiaoping and General Secretary Hu Yaobang), the Secretariat now plays the

central role in the drafting of policy (see figure 1). Assisting in the formulation of policy are several research institutes attached to the Secretariat, most notably the Policy Research Office, the Foreign Policy Research Group, and the Rural Policy Research Center. Closely associated with these party organs are two nonparty bodies—the Chinese Academy of Social Science and the Chinese Academy of Sciences—containing China's most prestigious intellectuals, whom the Secretariat tasks when special expertise is required in the drafting of policy. Once major policy documents have been drafted, they are submitted to the Politburo Standing Committee—in exceptional cases to a full or expanded plenum of the Politburo—for discussion and final decision. [redacted]

After decisions are made, the Secretariat plays a leading role in supervising the implementation of policy. Acting with a broad mandate from the Politburo, the concentrated attention of individual secretaries on specific areas of responsibility, and the ability to bring organizational pressure to bear on officials, the Secretariat is uniquely equipped to get results in a cumbersome bureaucratic system that threatens to undermine China's modernization program. [redacted]

Composed of specialists with strong reform credentials and close ties with Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang, the Secretariat has succeeded, we believe, in restoring a more professional, empirically based policymaking process in China. But making policy is one thing and carrying it out is another. Although the Secretariat has had some success in prodding local leaders into compliance, a number of China's provinces [redacted] continue to resist Deng's policies. How to get China's massive party and state bureaucracy—which is full of old, poorly educated people who are resistant to change—to carry out Deng's reform program is a question that, we think, has defied solution. [redacted]

Grappling With Retirement

Deng has indicated in numerous speeches that an issue high on his agenda is how to persuade China's elderly party leaders to retire in favor of younger, more competent successors. The problem with the

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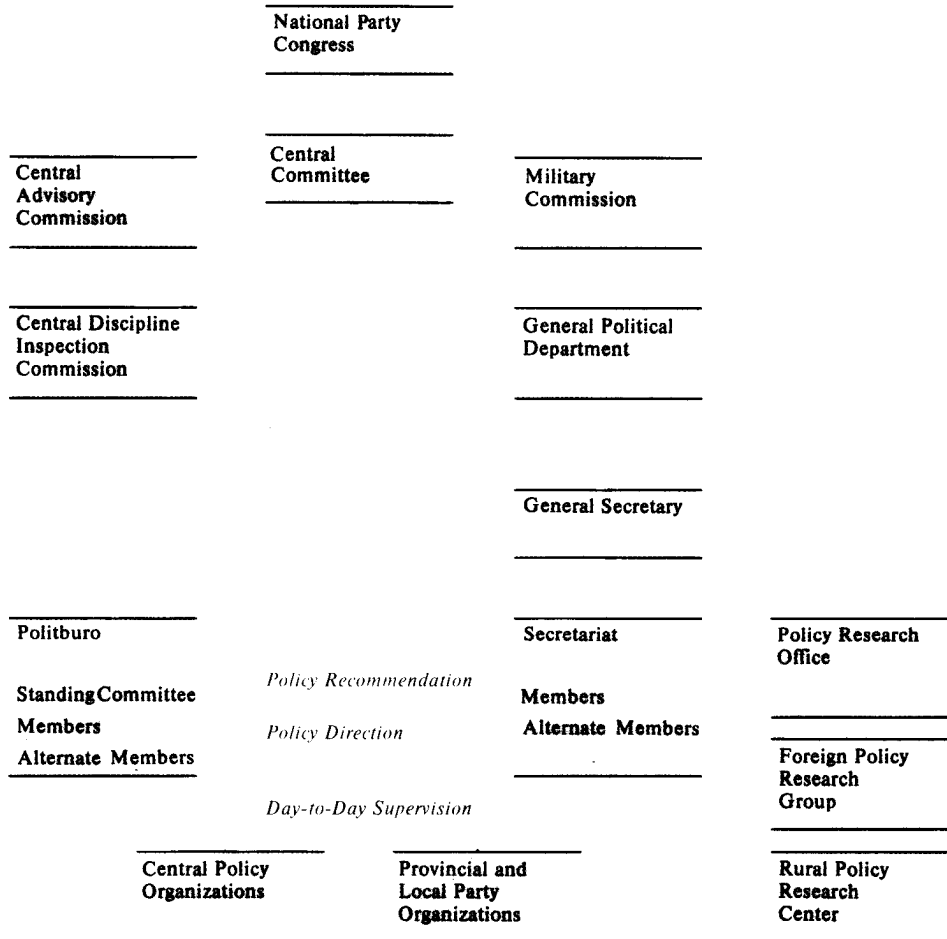
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Figure 1
Chinese Communist Party Organizations



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first generation of revolutionary leaders, according to Deng, is that these leaders lack the energy, the knowledge, and the experience needed to modernize China. [redacted]

Originally, Deng had planned to rejuvenate the party leadership in two ways. The first way, disclosed in early drafts of the new party constitution, was to prescribe age and tenure limits for membership in the central, provincial, and local committees of the party. The second way, also appearing in the constitution, was to establish advisory committees at all levels of the party to which elderly party officials, having resigned their frontline leadership posts, could retire with dignity to provide counsel and advice to their successors. [redacted]

When the new party constitution was adopted at the 12th Party Congress in September 1982, however, all the provisions limiting the age and tenure of party officials had been dropped. Alluding with surprising candor to the struggle over the retirement issue, Politburo member Hu Qiaomu (the principal drafter of the new constitution) stated in an interview after the party congress that "after repeated deliberations in the course of revising the party constitution . . . it was finally decided that no definite restrictions would be set on the tenure of office for leading cadres." [redacted]

Another discordant note at the 12th Congress was the refusal of party elders in China's top leadership to retire to the Central Advisory Commission. Making a mockery of Deng's vaunted youth program, the new Politburo elected at the Congress was in fact older than its predecessor. By no longer talking about his own retirement, the 79-year-old Deng Xiaoping further undermines this program. [redacted]

Deng's plan to change the generational guard in the upper echelons of the party has, we think, failed. We believe that Deng underestimated the tenacity with which China's older officials would hold on to the power, prestige, and perks that go with high office in China. We think, moreover, that Deng has now been forced to compromise on the retirement issue and to recognize that the problem of China's elderly cadres will now take perhaps five to 10 years longer to resolve than he had originally estimated. [redacted]

A New Role for the Party?

A prime cause of China's past failures, according to Deng in a key speech in August 1980, was overconcentration of power in the Communist Party. Under Maoist rule, the party monopolized and intervened in everything. In order to prevent a repetition of the Cultural Revolution, it was necessary to inject checks and balances into China's political system. And in order to modernize, it was essential to establish a rational division of labor between the party, the government, and the economic sector. [redacted]

As spelled out by Deng's heir apparent, Hu Yaobang, at the 12th Party Congress, the party in its new role is supposed to focus on making policy and leave implementation to skilled professionals in the government and economic sector. The party will continue to serve as ideological watchdog and make all decisions concerning the selection, allocation, supervision, and evaluation of officials in China. But because the party is not an administrative or production organization, it should merely guide and supervise administrative leaders and economic managers in the exercise of their functions and powers and refrain from trying to take over. [redacted]

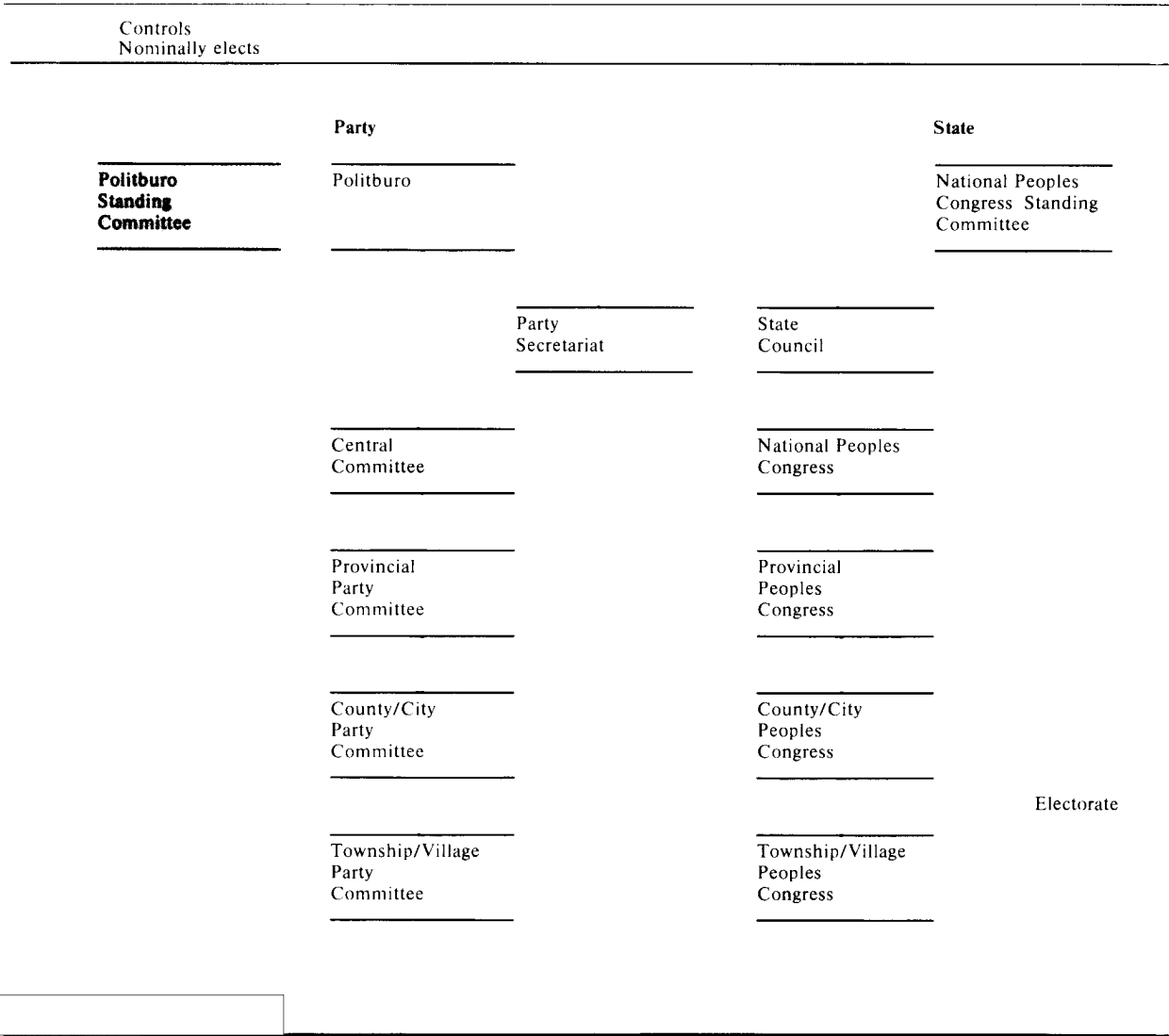
There is no evidence this theoretical division of labor has worked in practice and we doubt it will. There is abundant evidence that the party still makes all major policy decisions concerning government and economic work. In exercising leadership over administration and production, party officials continue to work closely with government and economic officials, who in nearly all cases are party members. All party members working in government organizations, economic enterprises, and institutions still have to submit to party leadership and carry out party policies. With the party authorized to make policy, provide leadership, stay in close touch, and manage the personnel in government and production, we think there is little doubt that it will continue to dominate the political system and run things in China. [redacted]

Indeed, the political system outlined by Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang strongly resembles the pre-Cultural Revolution system in China (see figure 2).

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Figure 2
Flow of Political Power in China



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Based on the Leninist Soviet model, the party under this system is all powerful. There are no limits to party authority, no real separation of powers, and no checks and balances. The party has units inside every organization in society, and party power pervades all phases of life. [redacted]

Caught within this system, China's reformist party leaders face a fundamentally insoluble dilemma: how to restrain the exercise of power while continuing to monopolize it. [redacted] reliance on constitutions and laws to limit party power (for example, the provision in the new State Constitution that the Communist Party must uphold and obey the constitution) has been greeted with derision by party cadres [redacted]. In a system that continues to concentrate power in the hands of a few leaders and stresses obedience to their decisions, there is understandably a widespread perception that laws are immaterial and constitutions irrelevant in China. [redacted]

"Democratization"

Another of Deng Xiaoping's political reforms has been a short-lived experiment with "democracy." Mao's harsh dictatorship, culminating in the Cultural Revolution left the Chinese people in a state of shock. Confronted by an alienated population, Deng felt it necessary to allow a greater degree of "democracy" and freedom in order to restore the confidence of the people in Chinese Communist rule and in "socialism." [redacted]

A major purpose of Deng's democratization program was therapeutic, an attempt to reassure both Chinese and foreigners that there would be no repetition of the Cultural Revolution. To prevent the abuse of power and safeguard civil rights, Deng promised to revitalize and strengthen the legal system—in effect, to establish a rule of law in China. The problem was, as Deng admitted in a major Politburo speech in August 1980, that up to now the concept of a legal system has been weak in China, the customary practice being to regard the words of powerful leaders as law. [redacted]

A second purpose of Deng's proposal to expand "democracy" and freedom of expression was to stimulate enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity in solving

the many new problems encountered in China's modernization. Still another was to provide a means of monitoring, criticizing, and bringing pressure to bear on Deng's opponents at all levels of the party bureaucracy. Although epitomized by the "democracy wall" movement, there were other Dengist democratic reforms during the high tide of reform in 1979 and 1980: the popular election of delegates to county-level people's congresses; the election of workers' congresses in factories; greater freedom for China's intellectuals in literature and art; and, for a time, even authorization for disgruntled groups to openly petition state and party officials for redress of grievances. [redacted]

Instead of engendering popular support for the new Dengist regime, however, young Chinese activists used their newfound freedom to launch an attack on the party leadership and on the fundamentals of "socialism." Confronted with worker strikes, student protests, and growing social ferment, China's leaders became concerned that what was happening in Poland—the ruled challenging their rulers—might also happen in China. Fearing loss of control, Deng conceded in an important speech in December 1980 that there had been too much democracy and freedom during the preceding two years and emphasized the need to uphold four basic principles—"socialism," the leadership of the party, Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, and the dictatorship of the proletariat—to restore order in China. [redacted]

More recently, Deng has presided over a political and cultural crackdown—the spiritual pollution campaign—that has frightened China's intellectuals. Although the campaign was called off early this year, the concern for ideological conformity and social control that triggered it has not abated. The concurrent crackdown on crime, in which (according to varying estimates) perhaps 5,000 were executed, many without trial, has further undermined confidence in the party's commitment to the rule of law. Because these crackdowns have taken place while Deng Xiaoping continues to dominate the leadership, China's political system will remain, we believe, highly centralized and authoritarian. [redacted]

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Reforming the Bureaucracy

The ultimate goal of Deng Xiaoping's political reform program is to establish a system of steady, predictable rule through a professional bureaucracy. Deng is convinced that political modernization under party auspices must accompany any real progress toward economic modernization. [redacted]

After 30 years of Maoist rule, China's bureaucracy is (in Deng's own words) "leftist, swollen, ill educated, old, and irresponsible." Deng's most frequent complaint is that of "irresponsible bureaucratism"—a bureaucratic system in which "people just read documents . . . nobody takes charge . . . decisions which can be made very easily are deferred for half a year, a year, or are never made . . . efficiency is very low . . . the people are very unhappy." Cowed by the violence of the Cultural Revolution and whipsawed by frequent changes in policy, China's officials now routinely defer decisions to their superiors and take refuge in inactivity. [redacted]

An even more fundamental obstacle to reform, however, is the centuries-old Chinese bureaucratic practice of getting things done through "personal relations" (*guanxi*) rather than through institutions. Even under the advantageous conditions of peace, national unity, and foreign assistance that obtained in the 1950s, the Chinese Communists proved unable to escape the personalistic pattern of authority and factional behavior—which the Chinese term "feudal"—that have long characterized China's political life. [redacted]

Recognizing the enormous scope of the task, Deng in January 1982 called for a bureaucratic "revolution" in China. Starting with reform at the top, to be followed by the readjustment of leadership organs at intermediate and lower levels, Deng proposed to reduce the size of the government bureaucracy by a fourth within two years. Some 5 million officials, most of them veteran cadres, would be affected. Only in this way, Deng asserted, would it be possible to promote younger, professionally competent cadres to positions of authority and get the effective leadership needed for China's modernization. [redacted]



Premier Zhao Ziyang—China's leading economic reformer

Reform at the Top

In March 1982, Premier Zhao Ziyang disclosed Deng's plan for reforming the central government bureaucracy. As indicated in Zhao's report, the program is intended to remedy the defects in structure, personnel, and workstyle responsible for the "intolerable inefficiency" of China's bureaucracy. [redacted]

The Plan. To correct defects in organization, Zhao called for a drastic streamlining of the central bureaucracy:

- Reducing the number of ministries, commissions, and bureaus under the State Council by roughly one-half.
- Cutting personnel within the central government by one-third—some 200,000 positions.
- Allowing no more than two to four vice premiers, two to four vice ministers per ministry, and one or two deputy chiefs per department. [redacted]

In personnel reform, Zhao issued guidelines designed to rejuvenate and professionalize China's central leadership:

- Imposing an age limit of 65 for ministers and 60 for vice ministers and department chiefs.

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The State Council: Reforms at a Glance

	February 1982	July 1983	Percent Change
Ministries and state bureaus	55	35	-36
State commissions	13	8	-38
Vice premiers	13	4	-69
Ministers and vice ministers	505	200	-60
Average age of ministers and vice ministers	64	60	-6
Share of ministers and vice ministers with a college education (percent)	37	41	+4

- Stipulating that officeholders in the reconstructed bureaucracy must be qualified both politically and professionally (that is, both red and expert).

To effect a change in workstyle, Zhao called for the establishment of a responsibility system in China's government administration as perhaps the central feature of his bureaucratic reform package. To do away with the endless delays and squabbling characteristic of China's top bureaucracy, Zhao directed each ministry, commission, and department to delineate clearly lines of authority and responsibility, including delegation of power to lower levels to expedite decisionmaking. The program appeared to get off to a smooth start, and in November 1982 Premier Zhao announced that "the basic restructuring" of China's national bureaucracy was complete (see table).

One Year Later. Although the government table of organization has been redrawn and personnel have been cut somewhat, Deng's ambitious program to reform China's central bureaucracy is in trouble.

Veteran officials who monopolize the top leadership posts are still refusing to appoint younger, better educated, professional cadres to positions of authority. Lines of authority have not been drawn, systems of responsibility and accountability have not been established, and the power to make decisions has

not been decentralized. The problem of irresponsible bureaucratism—defined as much talk, little action, and the dread of shouldering responsibility—remains.

In danger of losing momentum, Beijing announced a "second stage" in its effort to reform the central bureaucracy in the spring of 1983. The list of objectives—rejuvenation of leadership, reduction in personnel, improvement in political attitudes, and greater professionalism—suggested that a number of government departments had paid only lipservice to the reforms in the first stage of the reorganization.

It was then disclosed that a new problem had emerged—overloading the central bureaucracy (now reduced in size) with the same burden of economic tasks as before. Because economic decentralization had not been carried out, bureaucratic reform had gotten ahead of and was out of step with economic reform in China.

In September 1983, a central directive ordered that restructuring of government organs cease until further notice. The decision was necessary, Chinese officials disclosed, because the process of bureaucratic reform was disrupting the day-to-day operations of a number of government departments.

Reform at Provincial and Local Levels

Reorganization and streamlining of the provincial party and government bureaucracies, initiated in the spring of 1983, also appeared to get off to a smooth start. Following the same pattern as the restructuring of the national bureaucracy, the stated goals included reducing the number of offices and size of staffs, decreasing the average age, and raising the educational level of the provincial leadership. Carried out under close central supervision, the results appeared initially to satisfy Beijing that its objectives had been met.

We think, however, that the effort to reform the bureaucracy at provincial and local levels ultimately will be even less successful than in Beijing. Because central control diminishes, the bureaucracy becomes

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more entrenched at each succeeding administrative level in China. In addition to the operation of personal networks (in which the protection and welfare of members comes first), factional alignments forged during the Cultural Revolution will continue, we believe, to undermine Beijing's reform program in a number of provinces. [redacted]

Because Deng is attempting to redistribute power on a massive scale, his political reforms have been resisted in varying degrees by a large proportion of China's party and state cadres. Deng has encountered resistance from time to time from more conservative leaders in the Politburo, especially when the reforms he has promoted produce side effects that appear to threaten party rule or the basic principles of "socialism." Because of strong opposition, the process of reform has been slow, erratic, and subject to frequent compromise. [redacted]

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Press articles indicate how seriously Beijing views the problem of provincial and local factionalism in China. These articles make it clear that:

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- Factional alignments are still critical in personnel matters, with appointments often made on this basis rather than on professional merit.
- Policy issues are of secondary importance; the real differences between local factions are over personalities and old political scores.
- Factions continue to seek and receive the support of higher level officials, up to and including national figures. Patrons and clients work together to squeeze out "strangers" and promote "acquaintances."

Despite major obstacles and setbacks, we think that Deng and his allies have made some progress toward their political reform goals. Compared with Maoist rule, China's leadership has become more collective; factional struggle has diminished; the policy process has become more professional, with decisions based more on merit; and there has been some improvement in the quality of the bureaucracy. [redacted]

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As the reorganization works its way down to the local level (scheduled to be completed in 1984), factional problems are likely, we think, to intensify. [redacted]

Certain aspects of China's political system, however, have not changed. It remains highly centralized and authoritarian, with the Chinese Communist Party retaining a monopoly of power. Power remains vested more in individuals and personal networks than in institutions. The bureaucracy continues to work poorly, especially at provincial and local levels where footdragging, obstructionism, and factionalism undermine the implementation of policy. [redacted]

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Initial guidelines for the three-year party "rectification" campaign just getting under way identify "factionalists" as a main target of the purge. We think there is little doubt, however, that rectification will itself become a weapon in factional infighting and will not significantly advance the political reform effort at provincial and local levels in China. [redacted]

Some Western observers believe that China's centuries-old tradition of rule by individual powerful men and personal networks will preclude development of the institutions and formal rules essential for modernization. Although recognizing the force of this cultural argument, we think that China will conform to the general pattern of industrializing nations and in time develop a more modern political system. The more meaningful questions, in our view, are not so much whether, but in what form and when. [redacted]

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Prospects

After 30 years of Maoist neglect, China under Deng Xiaoping's leadership has begun the formidable task of political and economic modernization. To accomplish this, Deng is seeking to transfer power from those who made the revolution—the old guerrilla fighters and uneducated party faithful—to a younger, better educated generation of technocrats. China under Deng has entered a period of transition from revolutionary to bureaucratic Communism. [redacted]

Alternative Paths

China could develop into a highly centralized and orthodox bureaucratic state along the lines of the Soviet Union. Any Chinese leadership fears the consequences of weakened central authority. Deng himself

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has warned that without proper party leadership China could “retrogress into division and confusion and be unable to accomplish modernization.” Especially after Deng goes, the inherent authoritarian instincts in both Chinese and Communist societies could push Chinese political life into a more orthodox, centrally controlled, and disciplined direction. [redacted]

China could also become a more pluralistic, although still highly controlled, society combining Marxist, Chinese, and even some Western traditions. The underlying spur will continue to be a desire to make headway against bureaucracy, redtape, cadre and official malfeasance, leftism, and economic inefficiency. Reformist leaders clustered about Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang believe that further experimentation with political and economic reform is essential to achieve a more efficient, dynamic “socialist” society. [redacted]

A third possibility, and in our view the most likely, is a muddled outcome in which authoritarian politics coexist uneasily with more liberal, decentralized economic policies. China has a great ability to muddle through, and we believe the reformers can continue in this vein for a long time. Efforts to extend reform, particularly political reform, beyond present levels will be difficult for many of the same reasons that have slowed their development over the past three years. Chinese society remains too divided as well as fearful of change becoming uncontrolled, we believe, to allow much further liberalization. [redacted]

A darker course is possible, especially if Deng were to die soon. A Hu-Zhao leadership could turn out to be too weak to control the political pressures and ideological passions revealed in the spiritual pollution campaign. A conservative military-civilian coalition might take over, establish a repressive regime, and lead a backlash against many of the reforms promoted by Deng. [redacted]

An important key to the future will be the balance between innovators and reformers and more conservative elements in China’s leadership. We regard the recent campaign against “spiritual pollution”—a slogan denoting Western cultural influence—as the latest example of a conservative initiative exploiting the

fear of foreign influence that has long retarded China’s modernization. Although Deng Xiaoping has taken an active part in this campaign, we view his participation as a tactical move perhaps to preempt his critics. Hu Yaobang appeared to be a target of the conservatives early in the campaign, but met the challenge successfully and played a key role in curtail-
ing the campaign after only two months. That was time enough, however, for relations between reformers and conservatives to worsen considerably. [redacted]

Another major factor determining China’s future will be the time remaining in which Deng can play an active role. If he has several more years of effective leadership, his reformist successors—General Secretary Hu Yaobang and Premier Zhao Ziyang—will have gained valuable time to build their own team and keep up the momentum of reform. [redacted]

After Deng goes, we think that Hu and Zhao will be politically weaker than at present and confronted by growing conservative pressures. A crucial question will be whether Hu Yaobang, reportedly regarded as too “liberal” by some party elders and military leaders, will be able to hold together the coalition forged by Deng. We think that in any event China’s political life will probably move in a more centrally controlled, disciplined direction in the immediate post-Deng period. [redacted]

Addressing the 12th Party Congress in September 1982, Deng showed a new awareness of the long time it takes for successful political reform in China. It will now take at least until the end of this century, Deng admitted, to achieve his ambitious reform goals. We agree with Deng. Even under the best of circumstances, the task of modernizing China’s political system will be slow, protracted, arduous, and uncertain. [redacted]

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