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Has Xi Jinping Reached His Peak? Power Concentration versus Governance Capability

Guoguang Wu

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Through analyzing the strengths and limitations of Xi Jinping's power in its interactions with the CCP regime's governance performance, this article summarizes Xi's accomplishments of concentrating power in contrast to his ineffectiveness in promoting his governance programs, presents evidence of regime elite resistance to Xi's power and policy, and contends that Xi is now trapped in the same power-policy deadlock that during his first ten years in office facilitated his rapid concentration of power. The article thus argues that Xi's power has now peaked due to the existence of such a deadlock, and any possible moves on his part to further concentrate power will inevitably and increasingly harm regime governance in general as well as Xi's own authority within elite politics in particular.

This article attempts to analyze and assess the strengths and limitations of Xi Jinping's power, primarily in terms of domestic politics, in the wake of his triumph at the October 2022 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It asks the following questions to explore the myth of the dictator's power: With the ultra-concentration of power in his hands, are there any major challenges now confronting Xi, and, if so, what are they? Do these challenges undermine his power either today and for the foreseeable future? Will Xi be able to further increase his concentration of power to tackle these challenges?

To answer these questions, the article goes beyond the narrow field of leadership politics to connect CCP elite politics with the regime's governance performance as way to understand how such interactions may affect the dictator's power. Under China's authoritarian political system, the supreme leader's power rests on his control of the elites who, in turn, enable him to extend his control over society. It is apparent that Xi's success in this regard has been remarkable. The exercise of his power, however, also involves wider dimensions, particularly his ability to govern. In turn, Xi's governance performance is inevitably a major factor affecting his power, both in terms of its scope and its effectiveness.

Taking an approach that highlights interactions between power and governance, this article first examines Xi's accomplishments in terms of concentrating power and, in contrast, his ineffectiveness in using his power to promote his governance programs. It then analyzes why Xi's formidable power does not enhance his governance performance; in fact, in terms of the responses of regime elites to Xi's policy programs and power concentration, his power seems to profoundly undermine his ability to govern. The article further considers why Xi is not able to overcome the passive resistance of his

regime elites, arguing that he is now trapped in the same power-policy deadlock that during his first ten years in office facilitated his rapid concentration of power. In sum, the article contends that Xi's power has now peaked due to the existence of such a deadlock, and any possible moves on his part to further concentrate power will inevitably and increasingly harm regime governance in general as well as Xi's own authority within elite politics in particular.

Formidable Power, Frustrated Governance Performance: The Quandary of Xi's Rule

Xi Jinping has achieved huge successes in terms of concentrating power since coming to office in 2012, and these achievements reached an overwhelming triumph at the 20th Party Congress. There are at least two explicit indicators of this triumph: First, Xi overcame political and institutional obstacles to win a third term to rule over the party, the state, and the military. This not only dismantled the leadership norms practiced during the previous three decades—from former party chiefs Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao—but also paved the way for his future additional terms and even perhaps life-tenure in power. It seems only a matter of time before Xi will become a great leader on par with Mao Zedong, the CCP's God-like figure from the mid-1930s to his death in 1976, a status unmatched by any other CCP leader.

The second benchmark of Xi's accomplishments in terms of concentrating power is his reorganization of the top leadership of the Chinese party-state at the 20th Party Congress, whereby he no longer has any political insubordinates, let alone any policy adversaries and/or potential foes. He managed to remove Li Keqiang (former premier) and Wang Yang (former No. 4 leader) from the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), even though both were younger than Xi and in 2022 had not yet reached retirement age. Furthermore, all four replacement PBSC members (in official ranking: Li Qiang, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, and Li Xi) are his long-time supporters.¹ This accomplishment even surpasses Mao's record, who was never able to form a Politburo and a PBSC made up exclusively of his long-time followers.

Prior to gaining overwhelming leadership dominance, there are some milestones on the road that Xi had astonishingly and rapidly traveled to achieve such a concentration of power. In 2017, after five years in power, he reorganized the CCP Politburo at the 19th Party Congress, with at least two extraordinary achievements: He removed three incumbent members who were relatively young,² and he promoted at least ten of his

¹ For their connections with Xi, see, for example, Guoguang Wu, "The King's Men and Others: Emerging Political Elites under Xi Jinping," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 60 (June 2019), https://www.prclleader.org/_files/ugd/10535f_da7effdfa8ad40979f17d561cb845a98.pdf.

² They were Li Yuanchao (b. 1950), Liu Qibao (b. 1953), and Zhang Chunxian (b. 1953), who in 2017 were all below the retirement age of 68 for Politburo members. See their biographical information at https://www.gov.cn/guoqing/2016-12/19/content_5211789.htm#1.

protégés to fill the fifteen vacancies on the powerful leadership body.³ With the successful sidelining of those leaders who potentially could compete with Xi's dominance, by the 20th Party Congress in 2022 Xi was able to assemble a PBSC that was completely aligned with his personal preferences.

Meanwhile, the 19th Party Congress amended the party charter to include, as a CCP guiding principle, "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," alongside Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, and the Scientific Outlook on Development. The latter two refer to the ideas of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, respectively, CCP party chiefs prior to Xi. Neither Jiang nor Hu, however, was able to have his "theory" included in these guiding principles until they were about to retire from office, and, when it was written into the party charter, have his name mentioned.⁴ In this sense, Xi's achievement is remarkable.

The next milestone is the 2018 state constitutional amendment that abolished term limits for president of the People's Republic of China (PRC), a position Xi had held since 2013. This paved the way for Xi to remain in power in 2022–23 for a third term as well as likely beyond the 2027–28 leadership reshuffling.

The above summary of Xi's major achievements in power suggests that his power has reached a peak in terms of securing formal positions and organizational domination, surpassing that of all previous CCP leaders including Mao Zedong. In contrast, however, Xi's record of exercising governance power, especially since the 20th Party Congress, has been unimpressive, or remarkably negative, by objective standards, that is, in a general sense, and by subjective expectations, that is, in terms of fulfilling his own promises.

For some general parameters to assess his governance performance, Xi's government has done a poor job in promoting economic development, managing foreign relations, and delivering social benefits to the populace, tasks that an effective authoritarian regime typically focuses on and that Xi's predecessors were able to manage particularly well. In terms of the GDP growth rate, something the regime has been quite proud of as a major achievement since 1979, Xi's regime has performed poorly, as indicated by the statistics in Table 1.

³ These included: Cai Qi, Chen Min-er, Chen Xi, Ding Xuexiang, Huang Kunming, Li Qiang, Li Xi, Liu He, Wang Chen, Zhang Youxia. See their biographical information at <https://www.gov.cn/guoqing/dhgjjg/940713685.htm>. For their connections with Xi, see Wu, "The King's Men and Others."

⁴ The Theory of Three Represents, proposed by Jiang Zemin, was written into the party charter at the 16th Party Congress, held in 2002, when Jiang handed over the position of party general secretary to Hu Jintao. Similarly, Hu had his Scientific Outlook on Development written into the party charter as he was retiring from office at the 18th Party Congress in 2012.

Table 1. Latest Economic Performance of Xi Jinping’s Regime, 2019–2023

Year	Annual growth rate (%)	Change from the previous year (%)
2019	5.95	0.80 decline
2020	2.24	3.71 decline
2021	8.45	6.25 increase
2022	2.99	5.46 decline
2023	5.20	2.21 increase
2024 (Jan.–June)	4.70	1.50 decline

Sources: The author’s calculations based on various sources, including Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/CHN/china/gdp-growth-rate>), China Briefing (<https://www.china-briefing.com/news/chinas-gdp-in-2023/>), and Trading Economics (<https://tradingeconomics.com/china/gdp-growth-annual>).

In fact, China’s economic growth rate has continued to decline since Xi came to power in 2012, except in the two cases of 2021 and 2023 when economic growth increased as well as in 2017 (with a mere 0.10 increase).⁵ There are many reasons for such a macrotrend change, but the constant low annual growth rates during Xi’s tenure do suggest some correlations between poor economic performance and Xi’s governance performance.

With respect to the announced goals of the Xi leadership, such as reducing official corruption in the party-state system and “bringing China back to the center of the world stage,” any accomplishments during his current term are dubious. The continuous purge of party-state cadres and military generals may be evidence of Xi’s firm commitment to these goals, but, ironically, they also strongly suggest that, first, Xi’s powerful anti-corruption campaign during his first two terms was not as effective as was claimed, and, second, as a result, his regime today is not as clean as he would like. Moreover, corruption has become more serious, as indicated by reports that in the first half of 2024, the national disciplinary inspection and supervision system handled more than 12,400 clues about corruption within its own ranks, and it punished 2,003 supervisory cadres.⁶ The latter number is much higher than the number of those punished during the same period of 2019 (1,600) and 2022 (1,100) but close to the total amount (2,300) of such cadres who were punished in the entire year in 2022.⁷

⁵ <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/CHN/china/gdp-growth-rate>.

⁶ “今年上半年 2003 名纪检监察干部被处分,” 新华社, July 29, 2024, <http://www.news.cn/politics/20240729/92ce1fdb79a1411288b973b627aad6b1/c.html>.

⁷ “今年上半年各级纪检监察机关立案 1800 余件、处分 1600 余人,” 《中国纪检监察报》, September 8, 2019, <https://www.chinacourt.org/article/detail/2019/09/id/4447268.shtml>;

“上半年一千一百余名纪检监察干部被处分,” September 8, 2022, <https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202209/08/WS631996a0a310817f312ed38e.html>;

It is difficult to measure Xi's achievement to "bring China to the world's central stage," but the following is at least a superficial indicator: From the 20th Party Congress (October 2022) to July 2024, as this article is being written, Xi paid visits to 11 countries; during the corresponding period following the 19th Party Congress, he visited 23 countries; and in the same period following the 18th Party Congress, he visited 27 countries.⁸ Many possible factors can explain this obvious decrease in the number of foreign trips, which might include his declining health or technical inconveniences in scheduling such diplomatic visits, but it is difficult to conclude that Xi's less active role in diplomacy means China has more actively participated in world affairs, let alone that it occupies a position on the so-called "central stage of the world." China's absence from the world leaders' peace summit on the Russia-Ukraine War, held in June 2024 in Switzerland,⁹ further points to this conclusion.

Everyday Resistance by CCP Elites: What Do the "Three Distinguishes" Tell Us?

The contrast between Xi's formidable power and his frustrated governance performance raises questions about the exercise, operation, and effectiveness of Xi's power: Why is Xi not able to transfer his power successes to the field of governance? Why has Xi's concentration of power not been helpful for him to carry out his policy programs? How can we explain the contrast between his power concentration and his governance ineffectiveness?

This article suggests that there is a paradox between strong power, especially Xi's ultra-concentration of power, and weak governance being simultaneously embedded in Chinese communist politics. When the supreme leader's power concentration is such that the elite are strictly disciplined in a political sense and the ruling system accordingly is frozen in terms of carrying out its functions, political control is inevitably actualized at the cost of effective governance. In an earlier piece, based on such logic, I presented a case of Xi's self-defeating governance regarding the military industry.¹⁰ In general, the four "i"s help explain this paradox, i.e., political control harms the *information* flow from the bottom up to the decision-makers, hinders policy *implementation*, damages the *incentives* of the governing elites, and reduces the system's *initiatives* to perform its functions. No highly centralized system with tight

"2022年2300余名纪检监察干部被处分," 新华社, February 7, 2023, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0207/c1001-32619278.html>.

⁸ The author's database.

⁹ Laurie Chen and Liz Lee, "China Says It Will Not Join Swiss Peace Conference on Ukraine," Reuters, May 31, 2024, [https://www.reuters.com/world/china-will-not-join-swiss-peace-conference-ukraine-sources-say-2024-05-31/#:~:text=BEIJING%2C%20May%2031%20\(Reuters\),confirming%20an%20exclusiv e%20Reuters%20report](https://www.reuters.com/world/china-will-not-join-swiss-peace-conference-ukraine-sources-say-2024-05-31/#:~:text=BEIJING%2C%20May%2031%20(Reuters),confirming%20an%20exclusiv e%20Reuters%20report).

¹⁰ Guoguang Wu, "Xi Jinping's Self-Defeating Governance: Policy Implications and Power Politics with the Rise of Military-Industrial Leaders," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 79 (March 2024), <https://www.prcleader.org/post/xi-jinping-s-self-defeating-governance-policy-implications-and-power-politics-with-the-rise-of-mili>.

political control is immune from problems of the four “i”s, and the Xi regime is in no way an exception. Although space here does not allow for evidence and analysis of each “i” problem, the following discussion will take the regime’s so-called “three distinguishes” as an example to examine how, given the tight political control, the Xi regime deals with these problems, especially in terms of implementation, incentives, and initiatives.

The “three distinguishes,” as based on the revised “Regulations on the Protection of the Rights of Members of the Communist Party of China” 《中国共产党党员权利保障条例》, a document issued by the Central Committee in December 2000, include: “to distinguish the errors and mistakes made by party members due to a lack of experience and trial-and-error in the promotion of the reforms from disciplinary and illegal acts that are knowingly committed, to distinguish the errors and mistakes in exploratory experiments without clear restrictions from violations of discipline and the law that persist despite explicit prohibitions; to distinguish unintentional mistakes to promote development from violations of discipline and the law for personal gain.”¹¹ These “distinguishes” were initially proposed by Xi himself in January 2016 to overcome the phenomenon known as “*weiguan buwei*” (为官不为), namely, “officials not performing their duties.”¹² By 2023, a CCP official website was admitting that this phenomenon had “become a prominent problem,” and it urged that “without delay, party committees at all levels must not wait to strive to reverse this situation as soon as possible.”¹³

Why does the prevailing phenomenon of cadre inactivity exist? The above-cited website finds the major causes to include cadres’ “increased ideological confusion and low enthusiasm.”¹⁴ For our analysis, “ideological confusion” (the original wording is “*sixiang hunluan*” [思想混乱]) refers to cadre discontent with Xi’s policy programs (to be discussed below), and the diagnosis of “low enthusiasm” provides straightforward evidence that the incentives for China’s vast troops of party-state governing elites are low. In fact, an official analysis identifies three types of cadre inactivity, including “the lack of motivation, therefore not want to do anything,” “insufficient responsibilities, therefore not daring to act,” and “the lack of ability, therefore not being able to act.”¹⁵ The former two are indicative of an incentive problem in the functioning of governance, while the latter is indicative of a lack of incentives to improve their governance capabilities.

Furthermore, Xi’s strict political control over the elites is a significant factor contributing to the low incentives among cadres. This led Xi himself to address the issue

¹¹ The full text of the document can be found in 共产党员网, <https://www.12371.cn/2021/01/04/ARTI1609758349105433.shtml>.

¹² “总书记强调的‘三个区分开来’内涵是什么？” 共产党员网, <https://www.12371.cn/2023/01/11/ARTI1673418116165895.shtml>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

at the beginning of his third term. In his speech to the First Plenum of the 20th Central Committee on October 23, 2022, Xi told his cadres:

Comprehensively and strictly administering the party (全面从严治党) and encouraging responsibility-taking and effort-making (鼓励担当作为) are intrinsically unified and not in opposition to each other. Being strict does not mean controlling everyone deadily (管死), nor does it mean making people timid, fearful, dull, and as inactive as a pool of stagnant water. Rather, by clarifying the direction, establishing rules, correcting the atmosphere, and strengthening immunity to form a clean and upright political ecology within the party, we should create an environment that encourages action and fosters initiative, thereby further mobilizing the positivity, enthusiasm, and creativity of the entire party.¹⁶

In January 2023, in his speech to the Second Plenary Session of the 20th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, Xi again emphasized the need to combine strict administration with kindness (严管和厚爱结合), to pay equal attention to incentives and constraints (激励和约束并重), and to adhere to the “three distinguishes,” calling for “better stimulating the positivity, initiative, and creativity of party members and cadres.”¹⁷

In discussing the phenomenon of cadre inactivity, three points deserve special attention, especially with respect to the implication of serious limitations to Xi’s power. First, with Xi since 2016 constantly talking about the “three distinguishes”¹⁸ and, since the start of his third term emphatically stressing “positivity, initiative, and creativity,” the implication is that cadre inactivity has been an enduring challenge to the regime and it has not at all been reduced after he initially noted the problem about eight years ago. Second, both in 2016, when Xi first raised the problem to a special seminar class for leading cadres at the provincial and ministerial levels (省部级主要领导干部专题研讨班), and in 2022/23, when Xi addressed the Central Committee and the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, his audience on both occasions was high-ranking cadres. This implies that such inactivity had already reached the highest levels of the CCP system, with the problem even existing among those leaders immediately subordinate to Xi himself. Third, as implicitly indicated by Xi’s above 2022 paragraph, CCP cadres widely regard Xi’s “comprehensively and strictly administering the party” to be in opposition to their own responsibility-taking and effort-making as party-state officials, thereby making it necessary for Xi to “clarify” the “intrinsic unity” between the two.

The CCP governing elites’ “lying down” seems evident in the above discussion. Furthermore, I would argue that such “lying down,” or inactivity among cadres, can be

¹⁶ 习近平, “为实现党的二十大确定的目标任务而团结奋斗,” 新华网, December 31, 2022, http://www.news.cn/2022-12/31/c_1129247515.htm.

¹⁷ “习近平在二十届中央纪委二次全会上发表重要讲话,” 中国共产党新闻网, January 9, 2023, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0109/c64094-32602947.html>.

¹⁸ 蔡志强, “使‘三个区分开来’实起来,” 中国共产党新闻网, September 22, 2023, <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0922/c117092-40083101.html>.

viewed as, to borrow from James Scott's famous concept, an example of "everyday resistance" by CCP elites to Xi's power and policy.¹⁹ As the title of Scott's book indicates, such everyday resistance is a "weapon of the weak." Is it the CCP governing elite who are weak? The answer obviously is "yes" when they are compared to the party chief or to the political system in which they live, and this is especially the case as the party chief's power has been growing, expanding, and becoming unprecedentedly concentrated. Considering that Xi has achieved such power through his weapons of anti-corruption and coercive control that target the governing elites, these elites unquestionably can be regarded as weak vis-à-vis the party discipline and the party-state coercive apparatuses that are both tightly controlled by Xi.

"The governing elites as the weak," however, is a self-contradictory phrase, as the cadres are of course powerful in terms of governing, despite politically how weak they are in the system under Xi. When they choose not to do their jobs, governance inevitably becomes paralyzed, and policy is not implemented in the manner expected by the policy makers. Furthermore, for a system as large as the CCP ruling machine and as large as the country of China, national policies require implementation initiatives by the governing elite to meet the various local conditions. When local governing elites lack incentives to take initiatives, policy implementation inevitably becomes bogged down. In brief, Xi must rely on these elites to carry out the tasks of governance. But when these elites become involved in everyday resistance in terms of performing their governance responsibilities, Xi's formidable power meets a fundamental limitation in terms of being capable of effectively governing the country.

The Mutually Enforcing Dynamic Ends in Deadlock: Xi Becomes Victim of His Own Trap

Xi's governance program, of course, has its own intrinsic problems, especially because of its fundamental anti-market position and its anti-West nationalism that are counterproductive in promoting China's economic development and global cooperation. Such problems, however, facilitated the rise of Xi's power concentration, becoming what I call "a policy-power mutually enforcing dynamic." With the increasing elite resistance, the situation seems to be changing in a direction whereby the dynamic becomes a trap.

In China's domestic political economy prior to Xi's ascent to power, CCP governing elites increased their public power and, in both legal and illegal ways, reaped huge private benefits through rent-seeking, or, power-money exchanges, under the authoritarian state-market nexus.²⁰ China's official corruption, therefore, is not simply a problem of individual behavior but rather an institutional phenomenon embedded in the power arrangements that nurture communist-capitalist collaboration. In other words, the so-called China model which, following the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989, combines the CCP's monopoly of public power with capitalist market mechanisms,

¹⁹ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

²⁰ For the state-market nexus, see Guoguang Wu, *Globalization Against Democracy: A Political Economy of Capitalism after its Global Triumph* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), esp. Ch. 2.

promoted China's economic prosperity and, simultaneously, facilitated rampant official corruption. Economic prosperity has strengthened both the legitimacy and the material strength of the CCP, while corruption and, behind it, the elite networks of power-money exchanges, have bankrupted the communist ideology and, potentially, present a major challenge to the CCP's unified control over resources and power.

When he came to power, Xi deliberately highlighted the challenges, as he clearly indicated in his report to the 20th Party Congress when referring to the "situation of a decade ago." According to his own description, "Back then, many people, both inside and outside our party, were worried about the future of the party and the country" because there were "acute problems and challenges, which undermined the party's long-term ruling, the security and stability of the country, and the well-being of the people."²¹ Accordingly, Xi sought to concentrate his power to tackle these challenges, especially the negative consequences, that is, primarily the cadre corruption, that plagued the China model. As we understand, through the powerful anti-corruption campaigns Xi actualized his concentration of power and, at the same time, promoted anti-market and anti-West policies. I argue that Xi intentionally tied his concentration of power to his policy program to enhance their mutual reinforcement while advancing his status as the great leader of China. With this policy-power link, Xi, in the name of tackling the negative consequences of the market reforms that threaten the CCP's monopoly of power, utilizes an anti-market policy to promote and justify his concentration of power, and, in turn, uses the latter to initiate and implement the former. This strategy mobilized both the ideological and organizational resources of the CCP system, the two most important resources that the system possesses,²² to empower Xi as party leader. Xi can thus easily justify and even glorify his policy program based on CCP ideology; the party's organizational principle allows only Xi as the party chief to propose ideas to "guide" the party's course. Utilizing both party ideology and party organization, and based on his determination and ruling tactics, Xi speedily turned himself into a visionary leader and, accordingly, a formidable and powerful leader.

Xi's power and policy have both greatly hurt the interests of the CCP governing elites, however. Xi's power is rooted in CCP institutions and his policy is rooted in CCP ideology, and all the elites are dependent on the institutions and are bound by CCP ideology, therefore, they are fundamentally constrained from taking any effective steps of resistance that will block Xi's triumph in the battle over power. But for governance, Xi depends on the system, and the system's functioning depends on the party-state cadres. When elite resistance takes everyday forms, primarily inactivity in terms of performing their governance functions, Xi loses the battle to govern, or, at least, he is placed in a disadvantageous position in any attempt to confront the elites such that they will improve governance. As the CCP governing elites are also an integral part of the CCP institutions upon which Xi relies, it seems that, despite his formidable power, Xi has not been able to win them over.

²¹ See Xi's report at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/448633/index.html>.

²² Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

Because of this mutually enforcing dynamic, elite resistance, even in the simple form of elite discontent with the current anti-market policies, not only negatively affects the governance performance of the regime but also leads to serious worries on Xi's part about his own power. Thus Xi's hunger for power during his first ten years in office has now developed into a power paranoia, whereby any negative responses to his leadership, however slight, can be regarded as threats, thus significantly reducing any space for policy adjustments. In this sense, Xi is locked in by his own strategy that formerly had been successful in empowering him as China's great new leader. This also means, regardless of the extent of Xi's power, it is still a serious handicap in terms of any policy initiatives to improve his governance. The recent Third Plenum of the CCP's 20th Central Committee is one such example, further highlighting Xi's dilemma.

Conclusion

The question, "Has Xi Jinping peaked in power," can be answered from multiple perspectives, but this article approaches to answer it by exploring three sub-questions: Will Xi's concentration of power further increase? How does Xi exercise his power in terms of achieving his political and governance programs? Will his power be sufficiently powerful to overcome any obstacles, if there are any such obstacles, to make any achievements?

To all of these three sub-questions, the answer in this article is negative. With his already vast and historically unparalleled concentration of power, there seems to be little space for his power to increase further, at least in a formal or organizational sense, while it is also difficult for his authority and non-organizational influence to grow. His record of governance has not been positive, and it is widely thought to be responsible for China's economic slowdown and various governance crises. In analyzing why such a gap exists between Xi's successful power concentration and his regime's poor performance in terms of governance, the above sections, paying special attention to the responses by CCP elites, argue that Chinese elites today, through inactivity to perform their governance duties, are taking everyday forms of resistance. The reach of Xi's power, despite how vast and formidable it may be politically, is thus limited in terms of governance administration and policy implementation.

Xi's rule, therefore, is paradoxical: the more power he has concentrated, the fewer incentives his ruling elites have to perform their governing duties. In a deeper sense, this is a dilemma between political control and governance capabilities. The CCP power system is generally effective in terms of political control, but for many reasons it has not been effective in governance. Xi has pushed this dilemma to new heights not only because of his concern for political control of Chinese society but also for his control of the regime and its elites. Starting from a weak powerbase when he first came to power in 2012, he quickly achieved overwhelming control through a strategy that combined a policy program that blamed the previous China model for the pitfalls of crony capitalism, on the one hand, and that utilized the same power-policy advantages of the China model to strengthen a communist dictatorship, on the other. This policy-power mutually reinforcing strategy, however, created yet another dilemma: the communist dictatorship has been reinforced by the introduction of anti-market policies, and thereby it has encountered new challenges in terms of being able to promote economic development and global cooperation. Along with Xi's huge accomplishments in

amassing power, the negative impacts of his governance strategy have been growing. The discontent of the governing elite and their everyday resistance are a personification of the above dilemma, presenting a major obstacle for Xi's future exercise of power.

However, it will be impossible for Xi to overcome this obstacle. Both Xi and the CCP elite must continue to live with the same system. Xi is very unlikely to restructure the system to overcome elite resistance. If Xi were to change his policy in the direction of his predecessors to highlight once again market mechanisms, the private sector, and global engagement, his concentration of power would be questioned, undermined, and challenged—and Xi would most definitely resist; in this sense, he has become deadlocked in his own policy-power mutually reinforcing strategy and is unable to escape. His only realistic choice is to tighten political control to deal with the elite resistance, which inevitably will lead to a further decline in his ability to govern and thus to a further resurgence and reinforcement of this vicious circle.

About the Contributor

Guoguang Wu holds a Ph.D. in politics from Princeton University and is Senior Research Scholar at the Center on China's Economy and Institutions, Stanford University, as well as Senior Fellow on Chinese Politics at the Asia Society Policy Institute's Center for China Analysis. His research focuses on Chinese politics and comparative political economy, with current interests in China's elite politics, the politics of development, transition from communism, and the emergence of capitalism in comparative perspective. He is author of four books, including *China's Party Congress: Power, Legitimacy, and Institutional Manipulation* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) and *Globalization against Democracy: A Political Economy of Capitalism After its Global Triumph* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), and editor or co-editor of six English-language volumes and author or editor of more than a dozen of Chinese-language books. During the late 1980s, he worked in Beijing as a policy adviser and speechwriter for China's national leadership.

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