

Changes in the CPC's Top Decision-making Mechanism in the Reform Years¹

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Abstract

Based on the Theory of New Institutionalism, this article intends to analyze the functions of, and interactions among, the three top decision-making bodies — the Politburo, its Standing Committee, and the Secretariat — within the Communist Party of China (CPC). This article also tries to gauge the degree of systemization of these decision-making bodies based on the CPC's organizational principle, democratic centralism, and further to assess the role and power of the general secretary in steering the CPC's top leadership in Chinese politics.

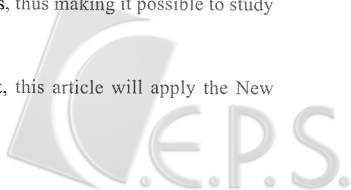
Key words: leadership, decision-making mechanism, Political Bureau (Politburo), Politburo Standing Committee, Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee

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I. Introduction

Since the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in December 1978, Mainland China began to implement the reform and opening-up policy under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, initiating thorough economic transformations. Up to today, the national power of China has been greatly improved, which has become focus of the entire world. The changes in the leadership and decision-making mechanism in this big power have had a huge impact on the international community. However, people outside China still have a limited understanding of China's leadership and the operation of the decision-making mechanism. For instance, after the 16th National Congress in November 2002, Hu Jintao succeeded Jiang Zemin as the party's general secretary, but Jiang still held the position of chairman of the Central Military Commission. To this, international public opinions showed reservation about whether Hu had really assumed the CPC's highest leadership. In the Fourth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee in September 2004, Jiang resigned chairman of the Central Military Commission, and Hu succeeded him. Thus, the international public opinions cast aside their doubts. But, there is still speculation that Jiang, though retreating, remained influential behind the scene. CPC official documents available publicly are limited, and the possibility of interviews with high-level political leaders is slim. The party's classification period of documents is quite long, which means that authoritative research is lacking. Fortunately, in late 1980s, the CPC published the Working Rules of the three top decision-making bodies -- the Politburo Standing Committee, the Politburo, and the Secretariat -- and later the revised Working Rules, thus making it possible to study these bodies.

To avoid subjective judgment, this article will apply the New



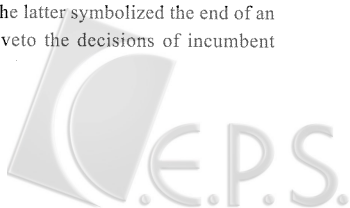
Institutionalism Approach to analyze the CPC's leadership, focusing on these three bodies — Politburo, Politburo Standing Committee, and the Secretariat — their functions and interactions. One of the key elements of the New Institutionalism Approach is to emphasize that all systems function on two dimensions — formal and informal. Apart from written rules and regulations, informal operational procedures, such as routine practices or precedents, are influential to a great extent. Therefore, this article will be based on this approach to deal with these two dimensions — formal and informal systems — of these policy-making bodies.

In addition, democratic centralism, the CPC's organizational principle, is also closely related to its top leadership and decision-making mechanism, making it a factor necessary to be included in evaluating their systemization processes. According to the definition of Wang Guixiu, a Mainland Chinese scholar, democratic centralism operates in a process with the following five elements: holding formal meetings, having sufficient discussions, taking votes, formulating action plans and measures, as well as specifying job division, supervision and a credit and penalty system. In view of the difficulty of collecting relevant documents and adopting parameters to compare the latter four elements — sufficient discussion, taking votes, formulating action plans, and giving credits or penalties — before and after they are in place, the authors thus use holding internal formal meetings on a regular basis or not (collective leadership) and whether there is clear job divisions (individual job division) as two indicators to judge whether these decision-making bodies enforce democratic centralism.

The research of this article must deal with the limitations of the time frame and coverage. In terms of time frame, this research examines the documents dated back to the Third Plenary Session of

the 11th Central Committee up to today and selects those directly related to the decision-making process and personnel reshuffle in key political departments. With regard to coverage, this article will focus on the general secretary of the Central Committee (hereafter referred to as the general secretary), chairman of the Central Committee (hereafter referred to as the chairman) and their decision-making units, review the wane and wax of the power of general secretaries and chairmen in different historical periods, and study their positions in relations to other senior party officials and their interpersonal interactions. The formal dimension of institutional operation refers to the Politburo Standing Committee, the Politburo, and the Secretariat; and the informal dimension of institutional operations mainly focus on the interaction between leaders, or so-called “factions” and the role of the Central Military Commission (hereinafter CMC). The circle-and-review system will be mentioned when necessary.

In terms of this article's structure, Section II to IV will review the changes in the of CPC's top leadership bodies since the reform and opening up policy, cross-analyze their formal and informal dimensions, and evaluate the future of General Secretary Hu Jintao's power and authority in the post-Jiang period (i.e., after Jiang resigned from CMC chairman). This article takes the 13th National Congress in November 1987 and the death of Deng Xiaoping in February 1997 as two cutoff times for comparison, because the two time spots became the demarcations of transformation in the party's highest leadership and decision-making mechanism. To be more specific, the former marked the beginning of the process of systemization of the decision-making mechanism; and the latter symbolized the end of an era in which retired seniors may veto the decisions of incumbent leaders.

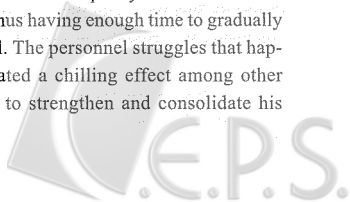


II. The Three-tier Decision-making Mechanism under an Oligarch Leadership (December 1978 -- November 1987)

After the 11th National Congress in August 1977, the five members of the Politburo Standing Committee were in the following order: Hua Guofeng, Ye Jianying, Deng Xiaoping, Li Xiannian, and Wang Dongxing. Hua Guofeng, who ranked first, became the chairman. In terms of interactions among the members, Hua Guofeng's power as the chairman was obviously weaker than Mao Zedong's when Mao had been the chairman since 1958. The four others only showed respect to Hua rather than reverence and awe like to Mao.

Starting from 1958, Mao often missed the Politburo meetings, but decisions made by the Politburo could not take effect without Mao's approvals. The following cases specifically describe the unequal relationship between Mao and other political leaders. In February 1962, the Politburo Standing Committee members held an enlarged meeting in Beijing (the Xilou Meeting) and discussed measures to correct left-leaning mistakes. After the meeting, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping came all the way from Beijing to Nanchang to report the results to Mao. What is more, when Mao was seriously ill in his late years and few could see him directly, those who had the opportunity to see him and passed on his words would get the decision-making power. The most famous example is Mao Yuanxin, the chosen contact person, who had even greater power than some Politburo members.

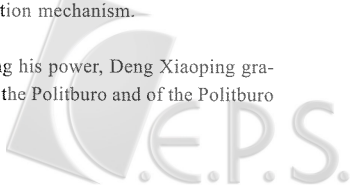
The major reason leading to this discrepancy is that Mao held the post of chairman for 33 years, thus having enough time to gradually develop his control over personnel. The personnel struggles that happened at times in this period created a chilling effect among other political leaders and helped Mao to strengthen and consolidate his



power. However, Hua Guofeng, firstly, had to have Mao's support in order to maintain his position as Mao's successor. After Mao died, Hua consolidated his power as party chairman and the highest leader by getting the support of Ye Jianying, Li Xiannian, and Wang Dongxing to arrest the "Gang of Four" (Jiang Qing, Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan). In the first place, Hua opposed restoring Deng Xiaoping, but finally had to compromise under insistence from Ye Jianying and Li Xiannian. Compared with Mao as the chairman, Hua did not have any power at his discretion to make decisions without consultation with others. He had to strike a balance in political struggles, which created somewhat favorable conditions for the gradual emergence of a high-level consultation mechanism. The evidence indicates that a consultation mechanism had already been operating among the five members of the 11th Politburo Standing Committee (Hua Guofeng, Ye Jianying, Deng Xiaoping, Li Xiannian, and Wang Dongxing).

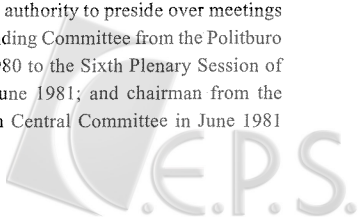
Undeniably, as Hua Guofeng's power was not secured, the members in the consultation mechanism changed frequently. After the CPC Work Meeting in December 1978, Hua Guofeng and Wang Dongxing suffered a major setback in holding their policy-making powers, making the consultation mechanism tilting in favor of Ye Jianying, Deng Xiaoping and Li Xiannian. Ye and Li shifted their support to Deng, which struck a heavy blow against Hua's decision-making influence. A series of personnel changes and the setting-up or restoration of institutions after the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee further weakened Hua's power. Naming Chen Yun's a Politburo Standing Committee member further paved the way for an expansion of a high-level consultation mechanism.

When Hua Guofeng was losing his power, Deng Xiaoping gradually won the majority support of the Politburo and of the Politburo



Standing Committee. From November 10 to December 5, 1980, the Politburo held nine meetings in a row and decided to accept Hua Guofeng's resignation as chairman in the upcoming Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee, and to elect Hu Yaobang as the new chairman in that plenary session. The Politburo also decided to appoint Hu Yaobang to be in charge of the works of the Politburo and its Standing Committee temporarily before these decisions were officiated in the plenary session. All these suggestions were formalized in the Sixth Plenary Session held six months later. When the Politburo was still considering removing Hua Guofeng from chairmanship, many members planned to elect Deng Xiaoping as the chairman. But Deng did not accept the suggestion, so Hu Yaobang assumed the position instead. Ye Jianying, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian, played a dominant role in the entire process.

The Politburo enlarged meeting in December 1980 had a far-reaching impact on the CPC's high-level power structure. Since then, Deng Xiaoping's position as the party's highest leader was secured; and the four-person consultation mechanism consisting Ye Jianying, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian was established. Though Ye Jianying gradually retreated from power, reducing the consultation mechanism members to three, such a consultation mechanism remained unchanged until the 13th National Congress in November 1987. Thus it can be seen that Deng Xiaoping was the real chairman, or "chairman without chairmanship." By contrast, Hu Yaobang held important posts (general secretary from the Fifth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in February 1980 to the Central Committee Democratic Life Meeting in January 1987; the authority to preside over meetings of the Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee from the Politburo enlarged meeting in December 1980 to the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in June 1981; and chairman from the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in June 1981



to the 12th National Congress in September 1982), but he was a policy executor rather than the highest decision maker. In the same situations were Hua Guofeng, who was the chairman from the Work Meeting in December 1978 to the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in June 1981, and Zhao Ziyang, who served as acting general secretary from the Central Committee Democratic Life Meeting in January 1987 to the 13th National Congress in November 1987. Notably, Deng Xiaoping, as the party's highest leader, enjoyed much less power than Mao Zedong, who adopted an individual decision-making pattern after 1958. Deng faced constraints from other political leaders in the consultation mechanism. This can be characterized as an oligarchic decision-making pattern, which emerged in the party's high-level power structure.

In the period from the 11th National Congress in August 1977 to the Fifth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee on February 28, 1980, the party's top leadership bodies were of two tiers -- the Politburo Standing Committee and Politburo. As a rule, the Politburo Standing Committee members are *ex officio* members of the Politburo. In the Fifth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee, the Secretariat was re-established. According to the meeting gazette, the reestablishment was "to facilitate the Politburo and its Standing Committee members to concentrate on key issues of domestic and foreign affairs, and to streamline the party's large day-to-day works for timely and efficient process." The paragraph that "the Secretariat is under the leadership of the Politburo and its Standing Committee to process day-to-day work of the Central Committee" indicates that the two-tier leadership has been expanded into three tiers, i.e. the Politburo Standing Committee, the Politburo, and the Secretariat. There are many reasons behind this organizational change, and one key reason was that the four-person (Ye Jianying, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, Li Xiannian) consultation mechanism tried to go through the Secretariat

and General Secretary Hu Yaobang to undermine Chairman Hua Guofeng's power in the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee. This reason is not necessarily covered in the public explanation of the expansion to a three-tier mechanism.

According to the meeting gazette, the Secretariat implements "collective leadership and, responsibility by job division." A list of members of the Secretariat when it was established in the Fifth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee is self-explanatory regarding the job division: Hu Yaobang, as the general secretary, was the person-in-charge; Wan Li was responsible for agriculture; Wang Renzhong, culture and propaganda; Fang Yi, science; Gu Mu, foreign trade; Song Renqiong, organization; Yu Qiuli, industry; Yang Dezhi, the military; Hu Qiaomu, education; Yao Yilin, the economy; and Peng Chong, politics and law. This evidenced a restoration of the internal job division system in 1958. Namely, the democratic centralism was operating in the Secretariat.

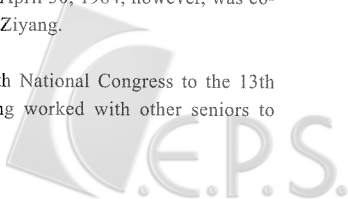
From the 12th to the 13th National Congresses, the functions and positioning of the Politburo Standing Committee, the Politburo and the Secretariat were indistinct and overlapped, but all were generally referred to as decision-making bodies.

For a period of time after the 12th National Congress, the Politburo Standing Committee met much less frequently than it did before, and even ceased to operate, for two reasons. First, it was inconvenient for many senior members, who constituted the majority of the committee, to attend meetings; second, the committee was entangled in lasting internal disputes. The Politburo did not have meetings frequently as well, and sources indicated there were only three to five meetings a year, when major issues compelled discussions and decisions. By contrast, the Secretariat was the only top decision-

making body to have had regular meetings. Ruan Ming and other scholars pointed out that from the Fifth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee to the 13th National Congress, the Secretariat instituted a working system to have two regular meetings a week -- one meeting on major policy issues, and another on day-to-day operations. In terms of internal operations, the Secretariat followed the principle of democratic centralism, i.e. "collective leadership, responsibility by job division." Such operations remained unchanged through two major personnel reshuffles in the 12th National Congress and the Fifth Plenary Session of the 12th Central Committee.

As the Politburo and its Standing Committee met rarely, their decision-making functions gradually shifted to the Secretariat. The participation, or sitting-in, by some Politburo members, other than Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, and Li Xiannian, in the Secretariat meetings strengthened its operation. But, this did not mean that the Secretariat had the sole and full decision-making functions. Although the Politburo and its Standing Committee had few meetings, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, and Li Xiannian, seniors in the Politburo Standing Committee, could sway the Secretariat's decisions by way of making comments on documents or giving telephone instructions. The Party Charter of the 12th National Congress stipulated that the general secretary oversees the Secretariat's operations. But, in practice, a few Secretariat meetings were co-chaired by Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. Similar situations also took place in the Politburo meetings. The Party Charter of the 12th National Congress stipulated that the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee meetings shall be convened by the general secretary. The meeting on April 30, 1984, however, was co-chaired by Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang.

In short, during from the 12th National Congress to the 13th National Congress, Deng Xiaoping worked with other seniors to



adjust the highest leadership, leaving great influence in the stability and systemization of the decision-making mechanism. In this period of time, democratic centralism was in place in the Secretariat only, but not among seniors nor in the Politburo Standing Committee. This could be termed the first systemization period of the CPC highest leadership — the formalization of democratic centralism in the Secretariat.

III. The Establishment of Systemized Decision-making Mechanism (November 1987 to February 1997)

The 13th National Congress in November 1987 marked a milestone in the systemization of the party's top-level leadership; by revising the Party Charter and adopting the internal rules, the functions of the Politburo Standing Committee, the Politburo, and the Secretariat were defined and clarified.

In this meeting, revisions were made to Article 21 of the Party Charter, which referred to operations at the party's top level. The first paragraph, which used to read "[members of] the Politburo, the Politburo Standing Committee, the Secretariat, and the general secretary of the Central Committee shall be elected at the plenary session of the Central Committee," was changed to read "[members of the Politburo, the Politburo Standing Committee, and the general secretary of the Central Committee shall be elected at the plenary session of the Central Committee." The third paragraph, which used to read "the Secretariat handles day-to-day works under the leadership of the Politburo and its Standing Committee," to "the Secretariat is the operation agency of the Politburo and its Standing Committee; Members are nominated by the Politburo Standing Committee and approved at the plenary session of the Central Committee." Both revisions weakened the Secretariat's role in decision-making.

Later, the Politburo of the 13th National Congress met and passed three Internal Rules, making this period the one with the most moves toward systemization in the CPC's highest decision-making mechanism since it came to power. The three are "Working Rules (Trial) of the 13th Politburo", "Working Rules (Trial) of 13th Politburo Standing Committee", and "Working Rules (Trial) of the 13th Secretariat."

The minutes of the meetings discussing the drafts of these three Internal Rules before the 13th National Congress revealed changes in the CPC top decision-making mechanism. After the 13th National Congress, the Politburo and its Standing Committee, both having decision-making functions, showed one difference — that the Politburo Standing Committee shall decide on day-to-day major policies, emergency matters (e.g. foreign affairs) and other affairs empowered by the Politburo. The Politburo shall decide on non-day-to-day and non-emergency major policies. Judging from the frequency of meetings, the Politburo Standing Committee has a stronger and more important decision-making power than the Politburo. The Politburo Standing Committee must meet every week, while the Politburo may meet one or two times a month.

The Working Rules (Trial) of 13th Politburo touches upon its responsibilities, meetings, document reviews, democratic centralism, the daily operations and other issues. On meetings, the Working Rules stipulate that "When the Politburo decides on an issue, a vote shall be taken and the majority prevails. A vote can be taken by anonymous ballot, by a show of hands or in other ways." "Votes on the naming or deposing of important cadres must be taken one at a time." "The results of voting must be declared by the chairperson on the ground." After the 13th National Congress, meetings in the Politburo and its Standing Committee were generally chaired by the general secretary.

The Politburo Standing Committee indeed used votes to decide on major issues.

Notably, the party's highest power structure showed little differences before and after the 13th National Congress. The three seniors — Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian — were no longer members in the Politburo and its Standing Committee. However, Deng's power and position as the paramount party leader remained solid, and the three-person consultation mechanism continued to function. Zhao Ziyang, general secretary at the time, had to take orders from the three-person consultation mechanism just like when he had been the acting general secretary before being officiated. Zhao only played the role of policy executor, and his influence on decision-making was regarded as being extremely limited.

At the same time, the three seniors' retreat from the Politburo Standing Committee left room for the introduction of democratic centralism — collective leadership and responsibility by job division, which used to function only in the Secretariat. The job division of the Politburo Standing Committee members after the 13th National Congress was as follows: General Secretary Zhao Ziyang was the person-in-charge; Li Peng was responsible for the State Council; Qiao Shi, politics and law; Hu Qili, ideology (culture, propaganda), and Yao Yilin, economy. After the Fourth Plenary Session of 13th Central Committee in June 1989, the job division was adjusted in accordance with major personnel reshuffles in the wake of the Tiananmen Incident as follows: General Secretary Jiang Zemin was the person-in-charge; Li Peng headed the State Council; Qiao Shi, politics and law; Yao Yilin, economy; Song Ping, party organizations (later also civil groups); and Li Ruihuan, ideology (culture and propaganda).

After the 13th National Congress, democratic centralism was

no longer operative in the Secretariat, and “collective leadership, responsibility by job division” was adjusted to “responsibility by the chief, and operation by job division.” The chief refers to the general secretary. The job division was as follows: General Secretary Zhao Ziyang was the person-in-charge; Hu Qili, as the executive secretary, was in charge of ideology (culture and propaganda); Qiao Shi was in charge of politics and law; Rui Xingwen, civil groups; Yan Mingfu, the united front. After the Fourth Plenary Session of 13th Central Committee, the job division in the Secretariat was adjusted along with major personnel reshuffles in the wake of the Tiananmen Incident: General Secretary Jiang Zemin was the person-in-charge; Qiao Shi was in charge of politics and law as the executive secretary; Li Ruihuan, ideology (culture and propaganda); and Ding Guanggen, the united front.

The Tiananmen Incident not only prompted Deng Xiaoping to replace Zhao Ziyang with Jiang Zemin as the general secretary, but also had a negative impact on the operation of the party’s top decision-making systems. One example is that the practice of issuing news releases after every Politburo meeting, established since the 13th National Congress, was cancelled. Subsequently, for a long period of time, nothing was available publicly regarding the time, frequency and the subjects of the Politburo meetings, let alone the meetings of the Politburo Standing Committee, which information is more difficult to obtain. Still, information pieced together showed that the Politburo Standing Committee met more frequently than the Politburo. In the seven months drafting the reports of the 14th National Congress, the Politburo met two times and its Standing Committee met four times. The Internal Rules, published later, cast a light on the Politburo’s internal operations and its Standing Committee.

The Politburo Standing Committee has two responsibilities: first,

making decisions on policies, second, making decisions on personnel, i.e., the policy-making power and appointment power. Its policy-making power can be further divided into four categories. First, "follow the lines, guidelines, and policies set by the National Congress and the Central Committee to study the guidelines and policy issues related to the Bureau and to make proposals." In this category, it has no discretion on decisions, and can only make recommendations to the Politburo for discussion. Second, "be responsible for the organizational implementation of guidelines and policies adopted by the Politburo." In terms of the chain of policy-making and execution, the Standing Committee is in the second step, and must execute under the authorization of the Politburo. By nature, this function is close to functional implementation. However, the Standing Committee still has some policy-making functions, rather than only implementation of policies. Therefore, this function is not separated into a different category. Third, "be responsible for making decisions on the policy issues put forward by the Central Discipline Inspection Commission, the Central Military Commission, the Leading Party Group of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and the State Council." These are equivalent to "deciding major day-to-day policies" as set down in the Internal Rules. The Politburo Standing Committee's relationship with the Central Discipline Inspection Commission and the Central Military Commission has become clear. Fourth, "in major emergencies or incidents, the Politburo Standing Committee has the power of making timely decisions for reaction and of issuing documents in the name of the CPC Central Committee." That means, "deciding on emergency issues", which was set down in the Internal Rules adopted in the 13th National Congress.

The Politburo Standing Committee's appointment power has two categories. First, "reviewing and recommending the central departments' heads, the party secretaries of provinces, autonomous re-



gions and municipalities, ministers (directors) in ministries (commissions) in the government, the governors of provinces, chairmen of autonomous regions, and mayors of municipalities.” However, these recommendations must be reviewed by the Politburo, and the Standing Committee has no power of appointment. The second is to review and decide on the appointment or deposing of deputy heads in the party’s departments, deputy party secretaries and committee members in provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, and reviewing and deciding on the naming of vice-ministers (vice directors) in ministries (commissions) in the government, vice governors of provinces, vice chairmen of autonomous regions and deputy mayors of municipalities.” One provision touches upon the relationship between the Standing Committee and the Politburo: “The Politburo Standing Committee reports to the Politburo, and accepts its supervision.” Namely, the Standing Committee is under the Politburo.

Compared to its Standing Committee, which has six job categories in two responsibilities, the Politburo also has two responsibilities — deciding on policies and appointing personnel. But the Politburo’s specific job categories are not as complicated as the Standing Committee’s. The Politburo’s power on policies can be divided into two categories. The first one is to “follow the lines, guidelines and policies set by the National Congress and the Central Committee to discuss, decide on and publish guidelines and policy documents related to the Bureau’s overall work in the name of the Central Committee.” This provision is in fact similar of the first decision-making functions of the Politburo Standing Committee, but emphasizes on quality rather than timeliness. Its language in effect refers to what was previously prescribed as “to decide non-day-to-day or non-emergency matters,” laid down in the Internal Rules adopted at the 13th National Congress. The second job category is “to be responsible for reviewing key issues proposed by the Central Discipline Inspection Com-

mission, the Central Military Commission, the Leading Party Group of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and the State Council." This provision, compared with the third decision-making functions of the Politburo Standing Committee, differs in that "major events" are of greater weight than "policy issues." This falls in the previous category "deciding on non-day-to-day, and non-emergency major policies." In addition, this language clearly states that in terms of organizational hierarchy, the Central Discipline Inspection Commission and the Central Military Commission are lower in hierarchy than the Politburo and its Standing Committee, rather than being equal.

The Politburo's personnel power has only one category, being "responsible for reviewing and deciding on the Politburo Standing Committee's nominations for central departments' heads, party secretaries for provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, ministers (directors) of ministries (commissions) under the government, and governors of provinces, chairmen in autonomous regions and mayors of municipalities." This provision is to correspond to the first paragraph of the Politburo Standing Committee's power of personnel recommendation. Deputies in these positions are named by the Politburo Standing Committee. But the appointments of chiefs to these party and governmental positions must follow a more rigid procedure, and are reviewed and approved by the Politburo and its Standing Committee in a two-stage process. In addition, there are some rough provisions without detailing the specifics, for instance, "the Politburo reviews the work reports of the Standing Committee," "the Politburo shall convene plenary meetings of the Central Committee once or twice a year," and "the Politburo reports to the Central Committee, and accepts the supervision of the Central Committee."

From the Internal Rules, we can see that the Politburo and its

Standing Committee have a relationship in two dimensions: division of work and checking each other's power. The Politburo and its Standing Committee both have decision-making powers, but such powers differ in two aspects. First, the Standing Committee decides on day-to-day major policies and emergency matters, while the Politburo decides on non-day-to-day and non-emergency major policies. Second, the Politburo Standing Committee meets every week, while the Politburo meets once a month. The Politburo and its Standing Committee exercise their decision-making power in the form of meetings. However, there is a parallel process, called "circle-and-review" system. The Party Charter stipulates that the general secretary must be selected from the Politburo Standing Committee members, who must be Politburo members. Therefore, the general secretary possesses the powers of a Politburo member and a Politburo Standing Committee member. Documents show that the general secretary has four more powers: confirm the agenda of Politburo Standing Committee meetings, convene and chair these meetings, approve the minutes of these meetings, and review, sign and issue documents adopted in these meetings or circulated around members with their approval signatures. These four responsibilities can be delegated by the general secretary to other Politburo Standing Committee members.

Since the 13th National Congress defined the Secretariat as the operation body of the Politburo and its Standing Committee, the Secretariat's decision-making powers were revoked and replaced with jobs of "operation," as stated in the Party Charter. The Secretariat retained other functions of managing day-to-day party affairs, ideology and thought education. Clearly, the Secretariat has been defined as a staff agency for the Politburo and its Standing Committee. Although the function of "operation" can be flexible with the authorization of the Politburo and its Standing Committee, the Secretariat would no longer be what it had been before the 13th National Congress, as

long as the Politburo and its Standing Committee maintain their decision-making operations.

The Secretariat has four jobs. First, it is “responsible for making preparations for the discussions and decisions by the Politburo and its Standing Committee.” This directly ties in with the general secretary’s first of the four powers, i.e. “confirming the agenda for meetings of the Politburo Standing Committee.” Since the topics to be discussed at the Politburo Standing Committee are set by the general secretary, therefore, the general secretary can exercise his agenda-setting power when the Secretariat makes preparations for the Politburo Standing Committee meetings. This also echoes what the Party Charter says about the general secretary, that he is “in charge of the work of the Secretariat.” The second and third functions of the Secretariat are respectively “handing the Central Committee’s day-to-day affairs,” and “drafting documents related to general party affairs to be made public in the name of the Central Committee.” These two functions reflect what have been referred to in the previous paragraphs as managing the day-to-day party affairs and ideological work. The Secretariat’s fourth function is to “handle other matters assigned by the Politburo and its Standing Committee.” On the one hand, this is a general provision after three specific functions have been stipulated in preceding paragraphs. On the other hand, this serves to reconfirm the Secretariat’s relationship with the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee.

As the Internal Rules say, the Politburo and its Standing Committee shall operate under the principle of democratic centralism and collective leadership. Evidence shows that after the 14th National Congress in October 1992, the Politburo Standing Committee and the Secretariat generally honored the two principles — “collective leadership, responsibility by job division,” and “responsibility by the chief, and

operation by job division.” Clearly, the Internal Rules have been in place the Politburo Standing Committee.

At that time, General Secretary Jiang Zemin possessed powers in the three top bodies--the Politburo, its Standing Committee and the Secretariat — as stipulated by the Party Charter and the Internal Rules, while the Politburo Standing Committee has operated under the principles of democratic centralism and collective leadership. Still, when Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian were alive, Deng retained the paramount leadership with unshakable influence, and the three-person consultation mechanism would not disappear entirely. Understandably, Jiang Zemin would find it difficult to stand up against the pressures from Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian. After Li died in 1992 and Chen passed away in 1995, the three-person consultative mechanism fell apart. Deng Xiaoping assumed the one-person decision-making pattern. Jiang’s status as a policy executor remained unchanged. Democratic centralism has been only implemented in the Politburo Standing Committee, but not for the seniors. This period is thus characterized as the second stage of the systemization of the highest leadership — the formalization of democratic centralism in the Politburo Standing Committee.

IV. The Decision-making Mechanism under Collective Consultation (after February 1997)

After the death of Deng Xiaoping in February 1997, the party’s high-level power structure began to function in a normal and systemized fashion. The Politburo Standing Committee and the Secretariat have continued to follow democratic centralism -- “collective leadership and responsibility by job division” and “responsibility by the chief, and operation by job division.”



Former members of the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee, such as Yao Yilin, Song Ping, Wan Li, and Yang Shangkun, who retreated after the 14th National Congress, and Qiao Shi, Liu Huaqing, Yang Baibing, Zhou Jiahua, who retired after the 15th National Congress, had no continuing influence to veto the decisions by incumbent leaders in ways like Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, and Li Xiannian could. The influence of those retired members declined tremendously to barely affecting either the normal operations of the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee nor the general secretary's power and responsibilities. Hence, Jiang Zemin became the decision maker in a real sense.

It must be noted that Jiang Zemin, with less influence than Deng's, had to depend greatly on the consultation mechanism. Jiang's power in the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee was in no way comparable to Deng's in the three-person (Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian) consultation mechanism, which once maintained a stronger influence in party affairs than the Politburo and its Standing Committee. Furthermore, with democratic centralism operating in the Politburo Standing Committee, any one member would find it of greater difficulty to act outside the consultation, and General Secretary Jiang was no exception. Factors that could disrupt the smooth operations of the Politburo and its Standing Committee in line with the Party Charter and the Internal Rules have largely gone away.

After the 16th National Congress in November 2002, Hu Jintao succeeded Jiang Zemin as general secretary. But Jiang still held the post of CMC chairman. International media thus believed that although Jiang did not enjoy the same prestige as Deng, the relationship between Hu and Jiang was similar to that between Jiang and Deng before February 1997. One evidence was that in a secret meeting, Hu made a commitment that he "would seek Jiang's guidance on

major affairs and listen to his opinions.”

Four months later, there was speculation that Jiang might decide on certain affairs, such as the military and defense, appointment of Politburo members and party secretaries in Beijing and Shanghai, major foreign affairs issues and the Taiwan issue, among others. Some media, however, reported completely the opposite, saying that Politburo members gave no hints in writing or verbally that there was any affair that would require Jiang's decision or approval. Which is closer to the truth? Or, do these reports only reflect parts of the situation? The transformation path of the party's highest leadership, described in this article, may help establish the reality and indicate future direction.

Normally, of the nine Politburo Standing Committee members elected at the 16th National Congress, five would constitute a majority. Undeniably, the “Shanghai faction,” groomed by Jiang Zemin, constitutes the majority of the Politburo Standing Committee. But the actual number of those faithfully supported Jiang was different, ranging from five to seven. Another report said that Jiang could not obtain the majority support. In view of the fact that not all cadres appointed by Jiang Zemin would remain loyal to him, this article will not make a subjective prediction about Hu's or Jiang's supports but will expound on the development from historical tracks.

After the 16th National Congress, the Politburo, the Politburo Standing Committee, and the Secretariat underwent significant personnel changes. The most striking one is that the Politburo Standing Committee members were expanded from seven to nine. Among the original seven members, only Hu Jintao, who succeeded Jiang as secretary general, remained. This recalled similar situation when Jiang Zemin just assumed the post of general secretary with little in-

fluence compared to Deng, and had to make decisions by relying on the consultation mechanism, and similar period from the 13th to the 16th National Congresses when the number of the Politburo Standing Committee members was gradually increasing. A few developments, such as Jiang Zemin's resignation as general secretary while continuing to serve as the CMC chairman, Jiang and five other Politburo Standing Committee members (except Hu) retreating at the same time, the 16th Politburo and its Standing Committee members were confirmed, indicate high-level personnel reshuffles in a process in which Jiang tried to rely on the consultation mechanism, a mechanism closely related to the seven members of the 15th Politburo Standing Committee. In other words, "collective leadership and responsibility by job division" of democratic centralism, which was in force during the period of the 15th Politburo Standing Committee, remained in force until the 16th National Congress. Democratic centralism remained also operational in the 16th Politburo Standing Committee.

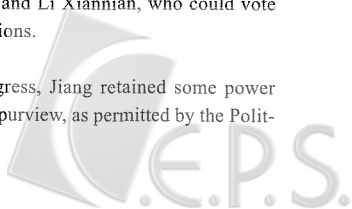
The 16th Politburo meets every month in line with the Internal Rules. The meeting frequency of the Politburo Standing Committee is higher than the Politburo. The responsibility in the 16th Politburo was divided as follows: General Secretary Hu Jintao is the person-in-charge; Wu Bangguo is responsible for the National People's Congress; Wen Jiabao for the economy; Jia Qinglin for the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC); Zeng Qinghong for personnel affairs; Huang Ju for industry; Wu Guanzheng for discipline inspection; Li Changchun for publicity, culture and education; and Luo Gang for politics and law. Compared with the job division of the 15th Politburo, Hu Jintao, Wu Bangguo, Wen Jiabao, Jia Qinglin, Zeng Qinghong, and Li Changchun succeeded the work field originally under the responsibility of Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Zhu Rongji, Li Ruihuan, Hu Jintao, and Li Lanqing respectively. It should be noted that the industry field now under the charge of Huang Ju



is separated from the economy under Zhu Rongji's responsibility. Therefore, the work scope under Wen Jiabao is comparatively narrower than that of Zhu Rongji. Similarly, the discipline inspection under the charge of Wu Guanzheng used to be part of the politics and law under Wei Jianxing. Therefore, Luo Gang's charge in politics and law is narrower than that of Wei Jianxing.

In the Politburo Standing Committee, operations generally followed democratic centralism-- "collective leadership, and responsibility by job division." When responsibility division becomes more and more specific and detailed, the general secretary's power, no matter who takes it, has been largely weakened compared with the Deng Xiaoping period. At the time when Hu succeeded Jiang, and Jiang was still CMC chairman, following the precedent established by Deng Xiaoping, military policies were made in accordance with the decision-making procedure stipulated in the Internal Rules, as with any other policies. Hu could not make one-person decisions on military affairs, and Jiang could not separate military decision-making from the overall policy-making mechanism. Hu and Jiang may have developed certain privities on job divisions, which also must be based on the consent of the majority of the Politburo Standing Committee members. If the Politburo Standing Committee made decisions against Jiang's wishes, Jiang had to accept that. This situation applies to Hu as well. It is true that the retired leaders who had served in the Politburo and its Standing Committee could exert their influence on party decisions via their relations with current members of the 16th Politburo Standing Committee. This influence, however, is by no means on a par with that of Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian, who could vote down the incumbent leaders' decisions.

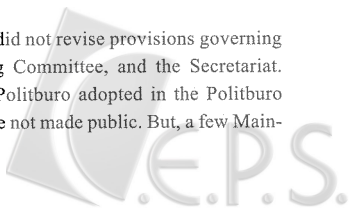
After the 16th National Congress, Jiang retained some power to decide on party affairs under his purview, as permitted by the Polit-



buro Standing Committee. When the majority of them changed their mind, Jiang had to hand over his power and resign from the CMC chairman in the Fourth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee in September 2004 and become a retired leader. In other words, since those seniors who had had the veto power were no longer there, democratic centralism could be fully implemented in the Politburo Standing Committee. The door open to seniors to have a say or veto has been closed eventually. Consequently, this marked the third stage of systemization of the party's highest leadership — the embodiment of democratic centralism in the Politburo Standing Committee.

Is it possible that Hu Jintao, in the post-Jiang Zemin period, expands his powers arbitrarily and consolidates all the powers to himself in disregard of the Party Charter and Internal Rules? Although it is not entirely impossible, the chance is quite slim. As long as the Politburo Standing Committee remains operational under democratic centralism — collective leadership, responsibility by job division -- Hu would have increasing difficulty bypassing the consultation mechanism to exercise his power as the general secretary and make policy decisions. Moreover, the addition of two more members to the 16th Politburo Standing Committee increased the difficulty of reaching a consensus. As to the position of the CMC chairman, which equaled to the party's supreme power during the Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping years, Jiang had to leave the post eventually, despite there being no limitation on term. This proves that even the CMC chairman must act within the collective consultation mechanism that has operated since February 1997.

The 16th National Congress did not revise provisions governing the Politburo, Politburo Standing Committee, and the Secretariat. The Working Rules of the 16th Politburo adopted in the Politburo meeting on December 2, 2002 were not made public. But, a few Main-



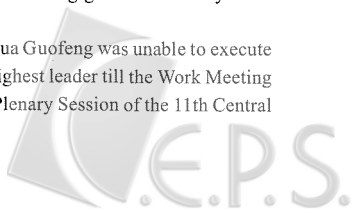
land Chinese publications quoted the contents in excerpt, which indicated the similarities of the two. Documents made public after the 16th National Congress show the relevance of the aforementioned Internal Rules with the actual operation in force today. It can be concluded that the defined functions and responsibilities of the Politburo Standing Committee, the Politburo, and the Secretariat, and power and responsibilities of the general secretary before and after the death of Deng Xiaoping have few differences.

V. Conclusion

In a holistic view of the years after the reform and opening up, the 13th National Congress marked a watershed of changes of the power of general secretary versus that of the chairman. Since then, the general secretary's power has been explicitly defined, unlike before when powers of the two were vague.

In the nine years from the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee to the 13th National Congress, the chairman had been served by Hua Guofeng (from Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in December 1978 to the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in June 1981) and Hu Yaobang (Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in June 1981 to the 12th National Congress in September 1982). In addition, Hu Yaobang was the general secretary from the Fifth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in February 1980 to the CPC Democratic Life Meeting in January 1987. From then to the 13th National Congress in November 1987, Zhao Ziyang was acting general secretary.

Though serving as chairman, Hua Guofeng was unable to execute real decision-making power as the highest leader till the Work Meeting in December 1978. After the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central



Committee, Hua's decision-making power was gradually weakened due to the severe setbacks he and Wang Dongxing had suffered at the last Work Meeting. The consultation mechanism as the highest decision-making body tilted to Ye Jianying, Deng Xiaoping, Li Xiannian and Chen Yun. Since the enlarged meeting of the Politburo in December 1980, Deng Xiaoping's position as the paramount leader was secured, and the four-person consultation mechanism — Ye Jianying, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian — was solidified. Under this consultation mechanism, General Secretary Hu Yaobang received from Hua the power to run the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee and execute decisions, leaving Hua a figurehead as the party chairman.

Hu Yaobang formally became the party chairman in the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in June 1981, and continued serving as general secretary at the 12th National Congress in September 1982. He was in charge of the Secretariat and calling meetings of the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee. During this period, Ye Jianying gradually retreated for health reasons, leaving the consultation mechanism with three members: Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian. Hu Yaobang's role as a policy executioner remained the same. At times, Politburo and Secretariat meetings were co-chaired by Hu and Zhao Ziyang. The period from Zhao becoming acting general secretary of the CPC Democratic Life Meeting in January 1987, until the 13th National Congress in November 1987, Deng's position as the paramount leader remained secured, and the three-person consultation mechanism with Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian remained operational and influential.

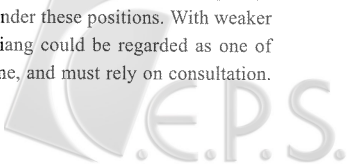
After the 13th National Congress, the Party Charter was amended and Internal Rules were established to explicitly define the functions and differentiation of the Politburo Standing Committee, the Politburo

and the Secretariat as well as stipulate the general secretary's power and responsibilities.

According to the Party Charter and Internal Rules, the Politburo and its Standing Committee both have decision powers (on policy matters and personnel appointment), but the Standing Committee's is wider and more important. In working relations with the two bodies, the general secretary has four responsibilities: confirming the agenda of the Politburo Standing Committee meetings, convening and chairing these meetings, signing and issuing the minutes of these meetings, and signing to approve the documents adopted at these meetings or circulated among members with their approval signatures. The Secretariat's function is operation (four categories). The general secretary has the power to oversee the Secretariat's operation.

Despite the fact that the general secretary's responsibilities were clearly defined, the party's highest power structure still remain the same as before the 13th National Congress, even though Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian were no longer members of the Politburo and its Standing Committee. Zhao Ziyang, and his successor, Jiang Zemin, could not but act as a policy executor rather than a decision-maker until the three retired leaders passed away.

After the three died, senior leaders who retired from the Politburo and its Standing Committee at the 14th or 15th National Congresses no longer had the influence to veto decisions by the 15th Politburo Standing Committee. Therefore, the Politburo, the Politburo Standing Committee, and the Secretariat began to operate pursuant to the Party Charter and Internal Rules. Jiang Zemin thus became the highest policy-maker with full authority afforded under these positions. With weaker influence than Deng in the party, Jiang could be regarded as one of the decision-makers, not the only one, and must rely on consultation.



Through internal negotiation and compromise in the 15th Politburo Standing Committee, Hu Jintao succeeded Jiang Zemin as the general secretary, while Jiang, following Deng's precedent, remained the CMC chairman. Those who retired from the Politburo and its Standing Committee at the 16th National Congress carried no influence over the 16th Politburo Standing Committee decisions, and the addition of extra members to the Politburo Standing Committee made it more difficult to achieve a consensus. These two developments leave little room for the Politburo and its Standing Committee to operate beyond the Party Charter and the Internal Rules. General Secretary Hu Jintao could not act against the Party Charter or Internal Rules to expand his power, let alone Jiang Zemin in his position as the CMC chairman. As Jiang left the commission to be a retired leader, Hu Jintao is expected to act within the Party Charter and Internal Rules as one of several decision makers. It is very unlikely for Hu to step around the consultation mechanism and expand his power on his own.

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