

What Can Comparative Authoritarianism Tell Us About China Under Xi Jinping (and Vice Versa)?

HANS H. TUNG AND WEN-CHIN WU

This paper evaluates the progress and impact of the literature on comparative authoritarianism, showing not only how its development over the previous two decades can help us understand China's authoritarian politics better, but also how the latter can move the former forward. We focus on two important topic areas in the literature: authoritarian power-sharing and autocratic politics of information (e.g., partial media freedom and government censorship). For the first topic, we shall review the literature on the authoritarian power-sharing between dictators and their allies and explicate how this conceptual innovation helps us understand the institutional foundation of China's regime stability and phenomenal economic performance before Xi Jinping. The analysis then provides us a baseline for assessing China's economic and political future under Xi Jinping given his clear departure from the pre-existing power-sharing framework. Finally, this paper also assesses the relevance of the literature on authoritarian politics of information to the Chinese context. In sum, we not only emphasize the conceptual contributions of the literature of comparative authoritarianism to the field of Chinese politics, but also identify lacunae in the current literature and avenues for future research that post-Xi political developments have made visible to us.

KEYWORDS: Commitment problem; media freedom; authoritarian institutions; institutional change; Chinese politics.

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HANS H. TUNG (童涵浦) is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Faculty Associate of Center for Research in Econometric Theory and Applications at National Taiwan University, Taiwan. His research interests include international political economy and comparative politics. He can be reached at <hanstung@ntu.edu.tw>.

WEN-CHIN WU (吳文欽) is an Associate Research Fellow in the Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica. His research interests include comparative authoritarianism, political economy and Chinese politics. He can be reached at <wenchinwu@sinica.edu.tw>.



This review paper examines the previous two decades of literature on comparative authoritarianism to show how its conceptual innovations help us to better understand China under Xi Jinping and how this literature can be enriched by the Chinese case. A while after the end of the Cold War, scholars of comparative politics were puzzled by the robustness of some dictatorships and therefore began to investigate the conditions of their resilience in the face of democratizing pressures from either domestic or foreign sources. In particular, the Chinese Communist Party's authoritarian rule seemed to be even more consolidated after it became richer and more integrated into the world economy, a fact which ran contrary to modernization theory. Moreover, despite its façade of popular elections and other democratic components in its formal institutions since the early 1990s, Russian politics under Putin still exhibited strong authoritarianism in various aspects such as the regime's suppression of free speech and freedom of the press. The continuing relevance of dictatorships to world politics has given rise to inter-disciplinary task forces to solve various puzzles ranging from their domestic politics to foreign behavior.

Over the past two decades, political scientists have developed two research agendas to cope with this issue of authoritarian resilience. The first one focuses on authoritarian power-sharing. According to this body of literature, authoritarian stability hinges on how dictators share power with other political elites in their regimes. More critically, it shows both theoretically and empirically how authoritarian institutions like legislatures and political parties can make power-sharing arrangements credible.¹

The second strand focuses on the informational problem facing dictators. Given their monopoly over power, dictators tend to have a strong incentive to censor information that might undermine their political control. On the one hand, they stifle any subversive news or messages from spreading and hurting the legitimacy of their autocratic rule. On the other, they also use propaganda to manipulate people's beliefs about the strength of the regime (Edmond, 2013). While both behavioral patterns are present in almost all dictatorships, there is still variation in the extent to which dictators enforce censorship on the freedom of expression. As a matter of fact, political scientists have found that the degree of media freedom among nondemocratic regimes

¹The authors would like to clarify that the main focus of this review paper is the role of domestic politics and institutions, so we decided not to engage with the literature on how external factors affect authoritarian regime changes. Meanwhile, there are also few studies in the field of Chinese politics that address this issue. Under the CCP's tight control of the Chinese state and society and its media censorship in particular, it is hard to imagine that external pressures would have brought about regime/institutional changes in China. Thus, we do not engage with the literature on how foreign factors affect political changes.

can vary widely. Depending on how desperately dictators need to improve the quality of their governance, some of them strategically grant a higher degree of media freedom to obtain local information inaccessible to their own private sources. In other words, to compensate for the loss of bottom-up information channels due to the lack of democratic elections, dictators strategically allow for partial media freedom (Egorov, Guriev, & Sonin, 2009; Gehlbach & Sonin, 2014; Lorentzen, 2014; Qin, Strömberg, & Wu, 2017). Yet, since dictators may not be able to credibly commit to media freedom given their ability to punish media outlets *ex post*, we also discuss in this review various related issues of self-censorship that have been largely ignored in the existing literature.

Based on the two approaches summarized above, we then continue to show how their conceptual innovations can be applied to the case of China, especially for the Xi Jinping era during which the structure of power-sharing among the dictator and elites has been broken and control over the media has been strengthened. China under Xi's rule in fact offers a good opportunity for scholars to advance the literature of comparative authoritarianism.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 offers a critical review of the authoritarian power-sharing literature in which we highlight its major conceptual, theoretical, and empirical insights. Section 3 then switches gear and delves into the literature on authoritarian responsiveness to discuss the autocratic politics of information. In Sec. 4, we turn to China as a case to show how we can understand the country's authoritarian politics through the lens of power-sharing and authoritarian responsiveness reviewed in the previous two sections. This is accomplished through investigating political developments during Xi's first term to further develop both bodies of literature. We conclude the paper in Sec. 5 by providing a conceptual pathway towards a dynamic theory of comparative authoritarianism.

Authoritarian Power-Sharing

Students of dictatorships have long noticed the importance of power-sharing arrangements or the distribution of patronage in authoritarian politics. As Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, and Morrow (2003, pp. 28–29) summarize succinctly: “Make no mistake about it, no leader rules alone. Even the most oppressive dictators cannot survive the loss of support among their core constituents.” In other words, just like their democratic counterparts, the leaders of authoritarian countries are not exempt from making compromises and cutting deals with their core constituents to form a

ruling coalition. This is why roughly two decades ago, an earlier study on dictatorships by Wintrobe (1998, p. 336) made such an analogy: “. . . if democracy may be likened to a pork barrel, the typical dictatorship is a warehouse or temple of pork!”

Political scientists have developed different analytic frameworks for explaining how dictators distribute power and resources to themselves and their allies. For example, Bueno de Mesquita et al.'s (2003) selectorate theory defines two groups of people whose support is essential to the survival of political leaders: a winning coalition and the selectorate. According to them, dictators need to offer more public goods as their winning coalition grows in size. Ideally, a dictator should keep this winning coalition as small as possible.

Alternatively, Svolic (2012) takes a more theory-driven approach to the analysis of authoritarian politics. He contends that there are two problems of authoritarian rule: authoritarian control and authoritarian power-sharing. Specifically, the first problem centers on the political and economic conflicts between the authoritarian regime and the mass public. For instance, many studies have argued that distributive conflicts between the rich (regime insiders) and poor (regime outsiders) will trigger social unrest and revolutions. Dictators need to properly manage distributive issues to prevent democratic transitions from happening (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2005; Boix, 2003).

Meanwhile, historical data suggest that dictators are often overthrown by regime insiders and not the masses. Therefore, another problem facing dictators is how they manage their relationships with other elites to sustain their political survival. According to Svolic (2012), one-strategy dictators can adopt to share their power and resources through institutionalization. Institutionalized power-sharing within authoritarian regimes not only makes the rules of game clear to all political actors, but also constrains the political power of autocrats and keeps them from infringing on the rights and interests of others. As a result, elites are more willing to support the dictator as well as the regime.

Svolic's emphasis on the importance of power-sharing under dictatorships echoes previous studies on authoritarian institutions (Brownlee, 2007; Gandhi, 2008; Gehlbach & Keefer, 2011; Magaloni, 2008; Wright, 2008). According to the literature, authoritarian or seemingly democratic institutions can make an authoritarian regime very stable. For instance, Boix and Svolic (2013) point out that without any institutional arrangements to make other elites know how resources are divided, they might mistake a decrease in total benefits (e.g., a natural disaster) for the dictator's intentional violation of the political pact between them. Apparently, this misunderstanding can create a source of conflict among the incumbent's supporters and allow a challenger to switch their loyalty.

Hollyer, Rosendorff, and Vreeland (2015, 2019) further illustrate the role of transparency in (de)stabilizing authoritarian regimes. Using the proportion of economic data that is absent in reports from countries to international organizations as a proxy of transparency, Hollyer et al. (2015) find that a higher level of economic transparency in autocracies leads to more protests. The puzzle is then why dictators are still willing to disclose such information that risks destabilize their regimes. The answer provided by Hollyer et al. (2019) is that since the public is more likely to act in concert to protest the regime once they have better information about its performance, economic transparency can actually be used by dictators to create a rally-around-the-flag effect and discourage their potential rivals from challenging them. Accordingly, other elites will stay in line instead of challenging their leadership. As the risk of initiating coups is much greater than that of mass mobilization for most dictatorships, power-sharing and regime transparency become the survival strategies of authoritarian leaders. With this theoretical perspective on authoritarian power-sharing, we will discuss China's political developments over time in Sec. 4.

More recently, the literature in this field has also endeavored to extend this insight to understanding the politics of compensation in authoritarian countries. When dictators implement reforms that alter the initial power-sharing relationship between them and their supporters, this causes a disruption in authoritarian stability. As a matter of fact, even if such reforms are beneficial to the ruling coalition or the regime as a whole in the long run, they might nonetheless create immediate or prospective losers who no longer have any stakes in it ex post. For instance, Casper (2017) demonstrates that International Monetary Fund (IMF) programs facilitate coups in developing countries. Although lending from the IMF may be beneficial for economic recovery, the conditionality of IMF programs requires market reforms that makes political leaders less able to distribute patronage. Thus, previously privileged elites may act against their leader to terminate these programs.

Similar cases have occurred in China and Russia. While Deng Xiaoping's reform of party institutionalization in 1980s allowed China to attract "investment without democracy," it however "eliminated lifetime tenure and instituted mandatory retirement for almost 20 million cadres" (Gehlbach & Keefer, 2011, p. 136) who lost certain perks enjoyed by predecessors. We can observe a similar, more recent case in Russia in which Putin tried to expand his party base (the United Russia) by changing the electoral rules between 2003 and 2007. This change made reelection more uncertain for several incumbent legislators of the party (Gandhi, Heller, & Reuter, 2017). In the case primarily discussed in this paper, China's 2001 bureaucratic restructuring also created losers within the Chinese bureaucracy (i.e., the dissolved ministries) to

facilitate the trade liberalization needed for its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), an achievement which eventually would make the country one of the major trading powers in the world. Each of these different kinds of losers can pose a threat to the political survival of a dictator.

To sum up our discussions in this section, dictators cannot rule alone but share power with other political elites who can challenge their authoritarian rule. These political elites face problems of collective action as well as the power of the dictator to break the promise of power-sharing. As a result, authoritarian leaders need to establish institutions that not only constrain the power of the dictator but coordinate interests among the dictator and other political elites, including those who are included in the dictator's ruling coalition and those who are not. As a result, power-sharing under dictatorships helps authoritarian leaders to consolidate their regimes. Nevertheless, as this analytic view holds that the consolidation of authoritarian rule results from institutionalized power-sharing, it cannot explain why there are institutional changes among autocracies. In particular, why do some autocracies collapse but others do not? After experiencing a regime breakdown, why do some autocracies transition to democracies while others either remain unchanged or transition to other types of autocracies? In other words, this approach is too static to explain the changes and evolution of authoritarian regimes. In Sec. 4, we introduce another perspective on authoritarian institutional change.

Autocratic Politics of Information

While dictatorships have long been viewed as an antithesis of freedom of expression, the burgeoning literature on comparative authoritarianism, however, has found a wide variation in freedom of speech and the press among nondemocratic regimes where some dictators strategically allow these in a higher degree in hopes of collecting local information (Egorov et al., 2009; Gehlbach & Sonin, 2014; Lorentzen, 2014; Qin et al., 2017). As the "authoritarian resilience" thesis has it, the understanding of social problems is the first-order task for an authoritarian government's survival (Nathan, 2003, p. 14). When Mikhail Gorbachev tried to bring a new lease of life to the regime in the late 1980s, one of his major reforms was to lift media censorship. According to his former chief spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov,

Hoping to use the media to help identify his nation's problems in order to solve them, Gorbachev gradually lifted Communist Party control of the mass media starting in 1985. In a matter of months, he introduced a degree of freedom unheard of before in the Russian press, or, to use his term, *glasnost*. He viewed this opening not only as a window on what was

happening in the country, but also as a chance to ensure feedback as he tackled economic and political problems facing the nation. (Gerasimov, 1998, pp. 2–3)

In other words, while freedom of speech can sometimes be threatening to the survival of dictators due to its potential to expose politically sensitive information, it can also be instrumental for them to acquire information that is elusive to their private sources (e.g., secret police). As a result, as long as the information asymmetry between the ruler and the ruled is severe enough, dictators will have an incentive to relax their control over the media “to learn from bottom-up information and to address social problems before they become threatening” (Qin et al., 2017, p. 137). By preempting potential regime threats through addressing social problems in advance, dictatorships can also be responsive to the public and become more resilient to vicissitudes.

A number of comparative studies have investigated how dictators allow (partial) media freedom to overcome the information problem and become responsive to citizens. For example, Egorov et al. (2009) demonstrate that resource-scarce dictators allow free media to improve their quality of governance. They show formally that media freedom is a mechanism for dictators (the principal) to ensure that bureaucrats (agents) have an incentive to implement good policies that are beneficial to their political survival. The incentive for dictators to use media freedom to induce good governance is stronger when dictators have tighter budget constraints, especially in countries that have a scarcity of natural resources. Lorentzen (2013) and Repnikova (2017) adopt a similar perspective to analyze China’s censorship, arguing that the Chinese government strategically allows investigative reporting on local issues that include scandals and corruption to improve the quality of governance without facing the risk of being overthrown by the mass public.

In addition to the level of responsiveness and the quality of governance, other studies focus on the conditions rather than the goals for allowing freedom of the press. For instance, Chen and Xu (2017) demonstrate that dictators are more likely to allow freedom of speech if the policy preferences of citizens are more heterogeneous. In other words, media freedom helps dictators to “divide and rule” citizens by suppressing the potential of collective action. Sheen, Tung, and Wu (2021) also argue that when a dictator’s power is less concentrated (i.e., less personalist), they will allow more media freedom as a commitment to sharing their power with other elites.

While these studies have demonstrated that allowing partial freedom of expression and the media can be politically beneficial to dictators, one remaining question is how they at the same time tackle the potential risks of being overthrown by citizens who then have more opportunities to communicate with each other and organize rebellious collective action against the regime. In a series of papers, King and

his coauthors find that while the Chinese government allows citizens and netizens to engage in online criticism against the government, it nonetheless censors online posts that have the potential to result in collective action (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013, 2014).

China as a Critical Case

After reviewing the two critical aspects of the literature on comparative authoritarianism over the previous two decades, we proceed to observe how the literature aids in our understanding of China's political economy and to reflect on China's evolving political landscape since Xi's ascendancy to the top in late 2012. This enables us to enrich the literature with further theoretical insights into authoritarian politics. The following subsections will be structured in the same way as our expositions above. We begin with an analysis of the concept of power-sharing authoritarian institutions and its applications in the Chinese context. In sum, this section exhibits a virtuous cycle in creating analytic narratives where a back-and-forth process between theory and data is employed to make theoretical models more realistic (Bates, Greif, Levi, Rosenthal, & Weingast, 1998; Rodrik, 2003).

Institutionalized Authoritarian Power-Sharing and China's Collective Leadership During the Reform Era

While most people today remember Deng Xiaoping as China's "chief architect of economic reforms," Deng's contributions to the formation of modern China certainly go beyond economics, at least before Xi Jinping's rise. After the Cultural Revolution ended, Deng created a political framework of collective leadership in an attempt to prevent Mao's cult of personality from returning to China's political landscape. One critical feature of this design was that for all top leaders after Deng, their power would be institutionalized in the form of a "trinity": the General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, the President, and the Chairman of the Central Military Commission. Moreover, a two-term limit (10 years in total) was implicitly and explicitly imposed on all the three positions² so that power would not be monopolized by a few individuals within the party. In addition, an age threshold was also implicitly imposed on membership in the Politburo standing committee. Those above 68 years of age would have

²Before Xi lifted it, the only formal constraint was imposed on the position of the president; there were only implicit limitations on the other two.

to bow out of the leadership. Lastly, while someone would hold the “trinity” of the three key posts, this person was simply “the first among equals” and had to share political power with other Politburo standing members. By means of these designs, Deng’s formal and informal political engineering of collective leadership brought two decades of stability to China’s elite politics, which was precisely what China’s economic miracle was predicated on.

Analytically, Deng’s institutional legacy was not fully appreciated until the recent rise of scholarly interests in authoritarian institutions. The early scholarship on Chinese politics was centered around the idea of “fragmented authoritarianism” where China’s policymaking process was basically understood as one driven by inter-ministerial bargaining among bureaucrats in different ministries (Lieberthal & Lampton, 1992; Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1988; Shirk, 1993). In other words, while Deng’s institutional designs are viewed as growth-enhancing by the more recent literature on authoritarian institutions, they were nonetheless regarded as the source of political conflict and policy contradictions in China by the earlier literature of fragmented authoritarianism.

This contrast between two generations of scholarship clearly shows how the literature on comparative authoritarianism has shed a new light into the field of China studies. While Deng’s power-sharing institutional design did create additional coordination costs to China’s political system, it also helped it steer clear of potential internal conflicts among elites. Before comparative authoritarianism scholars embarked on various empirical tests across different dictatorships, there was no way to know whether coordination costs or conflict absorption would be the dominant effect. As it turns out, the literature shows both theoretically and empirically that these institutions help make the regimes in these countries live longer, obtain higher economic growth rates, and attract more investments (Boix & Svolik, 2013; Brownlee, 2007; Gandhi, 2008; Gehlbach & Keefer, 2011; Svolik, 2012). While we might not be exhaustive in all the outcomes that have been studied in the literature so far, these findings imply that the presence of authoritarian institutions such as the People’s Congress and the Communist Party in China’s political system had contributed (causally) to its phenomenal political and economic performance.³

If the period between Deng’s reforms and Xi’s political ascendancy in 2012 is a good case for confirming almost all the positive predictions made by comparative authoritarianism literature, the literature certainly also provides with us some guidance

³However, since the bulk of the literature is static by nature, it does not quite tell us much about the endogenous effects of some of the outcomes mentioned above. We will elaborate on this point in the next section.

for where Xi's China is heading. While we will still have to wait for enough data to draw reasonable conclusions on the effects of Xi's political maneuverings, what personalizing an authoritarian regime will bring to its survival and economic performance has been well-documented in the literature (Geddes, Wright, & Frantz, 2018). First of all, the decrease in the level of power-sharing among elites enfeebles the regime internally by reducing the stake that excluded elites have in it. This fragility also arises from a more severe informational problem. Sheen et al. (2019) have shown empirically that personalization in a dictatorship leads to a lower degree of media freedom and therefore less information for the regime to know what is happening on the ground. Externally, personalist authoritarian regimes are also more likely to engage in international conflicts and lose credibility with their foreign partners (Weeks, 2014). The outbreak of the recent China-U.S. trade war can also be understood in this context where Xi's concentration of power, especially the removal of the two-term limit previously imposed on the Chinese presidency, has made China's trading partners suspicious of its expansionist foreign policies (e.g., the Belt and Road initiatives). Moreover, the dialogue between the bodies of literature on comparative authoritarianism and China studies is certainly not unidirectional. As a matter of fact, the recent discussion about succession politics in dictatorships has provided such an opportunity for the Chinese case to enrich the former. Several recent studies in the literature (Brownlee, 2007; Frantz & Stein, 2017) contend that higher institutionalization in authoritarian succession rules will make a dictatorship more stable. This argument, however, contradicts what we have observed in China's elite politics. For example, right after Hu Jintao succeeded Jiang Zemin, Jiang initially held on to his chairmanship of the CPC Military Commission for two additional years, and his informal influence lingered nearly throughout the entire Hu era. Jiang's lingering influence apparently hurt Hu's credibility and made it painfully difficult for him to discipline other factional followers. While this tension did not eventually result in any observable political crises that fundamentally undermined the CPC regime during Hu's tenure as the supreme leader, it however implied a shifting power-sharing relationship between Hu as the dictator and other elites.

More theoretically, Jiang's continuing influence during the Hu era means that if we focus instead on power-sharing between the incumbent and his successor, it becomes clear that paradoxically, tensions between the two can take place more easily when succession is more institutionalized. In a non-monarchic context where the incumbent and his/her successor share nothing but interests in common, the effect of institutionalized succession turns out to be the opposite of that predicted in the current literature. When the incumbent has less control over succession and needs to

transfer power to someone who might hold different preferences — e.g., when the transition in leadership is institutionalized — there will be certainly less trust between the incumbent and the successor. More critically, this distrust is definitely not unidirectional. The successor might also be haunted by his or her predecessor's remaining influence. In other words, the successor might have to share power not only with other members in the winning coalition, but also with the predecessor. This constitutes a principal source of tension between them. What has to be noted here is that while the literature on comparative authoritarianism does help us understand more about Chinese politics through providing new conceptual tools and empirical evidence, its static nature nevertheless makes it ill-positioned to explain the changes in China's authoritarian institutions we have witnessed since Xi became its supreme leader in 2012 (Minzner, 2018; Tung, 2019). For example, several prominent top leaders (including retired ones) were imprisoned and tried openly in court. A huge number of government officials and party cadres across upper and lower echelons of the Chinese bureaucracy were jailed and expelled from the Party under the name of the anti-graft campaign. Furthermore, the government has also tightened up social control, both on- and off-line. These recent political developments therefore call for a new theoretical framework that is able to address the dynamics of authoritarian institutions.

Revisiting Censorship, Partial Media Freedom and Authoritarian Responsiveness in China

As we have pointed out above, a number of recent empirical studies in the literature on comparative authoritarianism have shown that China's censorship strategy reflects responsive authoritarianism, a critical principle of governance. According to this idea, the Chinese government responds to social demands expressed through channels which are both institutional (e.g., the People's Congress at the central (Truex, 2016) and local (Manion, 2016) levels) and non-institutional (media reports, online requests (Chen, Pan, & Xu, 2016; Distelhorst & Hou, 2017), and protests (Lorentzen, 2013)). This instrumentalist perspective on the freedom of media or speech under dictatorships has nonetheless assumed that information providers such as media outlets and microbloggers are non-strategic actors. As a result, as long as the government allows a high degree of freedom of speech, the information will be available immediately. It is therefore blind to cases in which an authoritarian government explicitly allows for the freedom of speech *ex ante*, but the fear of being punished *ex post* still causes them to self-censor.

As Wintrobe (1998, p. 20) mentioned early on, there is a difference as to “whether the population genuinely worships them or worships them because they command such worship.” While the commands of dictators’ commands are met with obedience on the surface, the truth on the ground — e.g., the true level of people’s support for the regime or real problems of their governance — might still elude them if self-censorship prevails. In other words, unless dictators are able to make a *credible commitment* to not censoring any news reports, the non-sustainable freedom of speech policy is unable to quench their thirst for information. As a result, it should be noted here that such an informational theory of authoritarian resilience is actually predicated on the fact that dictators are able to both avoid and induce self-censorship among their citizens.

To address these theoretical questions on self-censorship, Sheen, Tung, and Wu (2018) derive the conditions under which the dictator can (or cannot) induce truth-telling. Specifically, they show that even if the dictator requires truthful reporting *ex ante*, the media may not “tell the truth.” Dictators suffer from more severe information insufficiency when society is rather stable or when they are more capable of manipulating information. Neglecting self-censorship in analysis leads to an underestimation of the amount of missing information in autocracies and an overestimation of an autocrat’s level of tolerance against criticism and authoritarian responsiveness. In other words, scholars of authoritarian media politics should consider the role of self-censorship when they investigate how dictators strengthen or loosen their control on media outlets. Sheen et al. (2018) also provide empirical predictions as a way for this literature to calibrate the magnitude of China’s responsiveness while empirically investigating the self-censorship of citizens against their benchmarks.

Concluding Remarks: Towards a Dynamic Comparative Authoritarianism

In this paper, we critically review the two decades of literature on comparative authoritarianism and how its insights can be applied to China. First of all, our review of the literature on authoritarian power-sharing helps make it clear how this literature explains post-Deng Chinese politics before Xi Jinping came to power. The paired case study on China in Sec. 4 illustrates how political institutionalization during Deng’s era made power-sharing and succession among China’s elite more stable. In addition, we also point out in this paper that this theoretical heuristic will have to be extended into a more dynamic theory so all the institutional and political changes brought by

Xi Jinping to China's political landscape can be properly accounted for. Second, the paper also reviews the politics of information under dictatorships and authoritarian responsiveness. As the literature nicely illustrates, the informational perspective helps explain China's partial media freedom for both traditional and social media, a situation in which reports and discussions about local corruption are allowed if reporters and netizens shy away from corruption involving the top leadership. What should be noted here is that this largely applies to pre-Xi Chinese politics alone.

More importantly, the key takeaway from our critical review is that the resilience of China's authoritarian regime definitely does not imply any stasis in its institutional foundations. Xi's various political maneuverings for personalizing Chinese politics has ushered in a new chapter of China's political history and it certainly behooves both political scientists and China scholars to figure out the political logic behind all these changes. It calls for a more dynamic understanding of how this stability was maintained and why certain (institutional) changes arose. The literature on comparative authoritarianism has so far been mainly focusing on identifying static effects of authoritarian institutions without paying too much attention to their evolution. This review therefore would like to raise the attention of our colleagues to this important issue through investigating China's changing political landscape. This lacunae in the current literature not only provides new avenues for future research on China's post-Xi political developments, but also allows the Chinese case to enrich the general literature on comparative authoritarianism.

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