

1 Introduction: China's Party Congress as the theater of power

Politics is often compared to a drama; this book will examine a theater in which dramas of political power are performed for the purpose of fabricating, ritualizing, and displaying the legitimacy of undemocratic leaderships. The chapters that follow provide an institutional analysis of how this theater stages, operates, and crystalizes the drama while, simultaneously and even more significantly, various behind-the-scenes manipulations drive, craft, and define the performance in every aspect, including, to continue the use of theatrical metaphor, personas, plots, tones, gestures, and even audiences. Together these create a hypocrisy called legitimacy, in which political power is readily accepted by all who are involved and, to a lesser degree, by those who are engaged to watch. This is the story of the National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party; an investigation of its politics and institutions shall be the focus of this book.

The subject under this investigation may cause some confusion for nonspecialist readers at first glance, but it is easy to explain: the political system in China, often correctly termed the party-state, has a parallel structure between the Communist Party and the state, both having its National Congress. For the state, the People's Republic of China (PRC), there is a parliament-like organization called the National People's Congress (NPC), which has recently received profound attention in China studies; by the same token, the ruling party, known as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), also has its own national congress, usually referred to as the Party Congress, which is what this book examines. The NPC has been increasingly important in national legislation, but it is still far from altering the supremacy of the Party over the state in authority and power under such a political system.¹ Despite all the reforms and changes that

¹ For the ruling party's supremacy over the state as a feature of such politics, see Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956; for its complicated expression in the People's Republic of China, see, for example, Shiping Zheng, *Party vs. State in Post-1949 China: The Institutional Dilemma*, Cambridge University Press, 1997; Jan Prybyla, "The Chinese Communist Economic State in Comparative Perspective," in David Shambaugh, ed., *The Modern Chinese State*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 188–215. For the increase of the NPC's power and its limits, see Kevin J. O'Brien, *Reform without Liberalization: China's National People's Congress and the*

China has experienced, a sentence published decades ago to describe the Soviet Communist Party Congress still applies perfectly to its Chinese counterpart: “According to party rules, the [party] congress is the ultimate authority within the party, and given the relationship between the party and governmental institutions, it is, therefore, the ultimate authority in the entire political system.”²

The Party Congress, according to the CCP’s Party Charter (or the Party Constitution, as it is commonly called in the CCP³) in various editions over its long history, is the “highest decision-making body” of the entire CCP; meetings of the Party Congress, as a leading American scholar on Chinese politics has observed, are always “major events.”⁴ In this alleged constitutional position, the Party Congress decides the Party’s political platform, which is always in principle incorporated into the PRC’s state Constitution; it makes, remakes, and amends the Party Charter, which the state Constitution also follows wherever the clauses are applicable in state affairs; and it appoints the Party leadership, which is concurrently the highest leadership of China as a nation and a state. Nobody would doubt the significance in Chinese politics of the CCP,⁵ a political party founded in 1921 as a Leninist revolutionary organization which has continuously been China’s single ruling party since 1949 and boasts a membership of 86.686 million as of the end of 2013;⁶ the importance of the Party Congress thus seems a logical extension beyond dispute. In November 2012 the CCP had its 18th Party Congress, the most recent to date, which received wide attention and coverage from national and international media.⁷

Politics of Institutional Change, Cambridge University Press, 1990; Murray Scot Tanner, *The Politics of Lawmaking in Post-Mao China: Institutions, Processes and Democratic Prospects*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999; Michael William Dowdle, “Constructing Citizenship: The NPC as Catalyst for Political Participation,” in Merle Goldman and Elizabeth J. Perry, eds., *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 330–49; Ming Xia, *The People’s Congresses and Governance in China: Toward a Network Mode of Governance*, London: Routledge, 2011.

² Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 449.

³ It is “constitutional” in the context of the CCP, as the CCP interchangeably uses the terms of the Party Charter and Party constitution to describe the document as its “fundamental law”; also, it functions as “constitutional” in the context of the PRC, because, in perception, the Party Charter is placed parallel, but often prior, to the PRC constitution and, in practice, the latter follows the former in both spirit and, when applicable, its clauses.

⁴ Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution through Reform*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1995, p. 159.

⁵ Even though its omnipresence has been shrinking with the marketization reform of the recent thirty-plus years, as analyzed in Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar, eds., *The Paradox of China’s Post-Mao Reforms*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, especially the Introduction.

⁶ Xinhua News Agency, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-06/30/c_1111379852.htm, posted and accessed June 30, 2014.

⁷ According to a delegate to the CCP’s 16th Party Congress in 2002, 201 television stations from all over the world broadcast live the opening ceremony of that Congress, and on the first two days

Such attention usually looks upon the Party Congress as an event while focusing on its policy and personnel outcomes; this book, by contrast, takes the Party Congress as an institution by investigating how it operates. A challenge immediately emerges, however, in doing so: all of the pivotal missions stated above are run at the Party Congress *nominally*, as everyone with even superficial knowledge of Chinese politics knows well. The Party Congress has never had an opportunity to fulfill its constitutional authority as stipulated by the Party's own Charter; in reality it often does not make its own decisions over those significant matters of platform-making, Charter amendment, and leadership appointments, but rather it endorses the incumbent Party leadership's pertinent resolutions. It is this very challenge that presents the central myth that the book attempts to explore: how can the Party Congress that constitutionally enjoys the status of "the highest decision-making body" be managed and, so to speak, tamed to work only in a nominal, ostensible, and titular way? And how, by the same token, can the Party Congress as such still be able to consistently maintain its institutional prominence and formal significance? In other words, why is the Party Congress so important even though it cannot become authoritative in the way defined by the Party Charter? What is the source of its political magnificence and institutional significance despite its not being able to fulfill its constitutional role? How is it operated to perform its functions in such a way that reduces its authority to a nominal state that, however, simultaneously allows it to shine with notability?

For this project, the fascinating secret of the Party Congress lies in its strange combination of political hollowness and institutional holiness; it is such institutional duality, incongruity, and self-contradiction that all rest at the center of both the empirical and the theoretical inquiries of this monograph. It shall highlight the institutional inconsistency of politics between norms and games, between principles and practices, and between constitutional stipulations and power operations. By investigating the institutional details within the running of the Party Congress, the book argues that institutional manipulations are manifested in a variety of ways, specifically by arising within this institutional inconsistency; by harnessing and maneuvering various norms, rules, and procedures; by actualizing power dominance of "puppet" participations; and by demanding the pompous display of so-called "confirmative legitimacy" in which elite consensus and the political loyalty of those who are involved overwhelm the

after the opening the Congress received 2,956 congratulatory telegrams from within China and overseas. Leng Rong, "Xin shiji juyou zhongda er shenyuan yiyi de shenghui: canjia Zhonggong shiliuda de ganshou" (A Magnificent Meeting in the New Century with Significant and Far-Reaching Implications: Impressions from Participating in the CCP's 16th Party Congress), *Dang de wenxian* (Party Literature), 6 (2002), 6. As the world has been watching the rise of China, there is no reason to assume that such concern about and attention to the CCP's Party Congress has since declined, if it has not increased.

participants' autonomous articulation of various interests and substantial representation of constituencies. Conceptually, it suggests a theory of authoritarian legitimization that focuses on power domination, institutional manipulation, and symbolic performance in a political and institutional context that differs greatly from a democratic one but "steals the beauty," so to speak, from democracy in order to legitimize contemporary authoritarianism.⁸ The book, therefore, shall decode and explain the myth of China's Party Congress by revealing its institutional hypocrisy in the form of its blending of political rehearsals and public display together for the purpose of legitimizing the leaders who have already come to power as well as those who are designated to come into power to the degree that their well-tailored political platforms and personnel plans are well accepted, adopted, and applauded.

Focusing on institutional inconsistency: the political and epistemological puzzle

This book will discuss China's Party Congress in a context that highlights a gap between norms and practices. Social-science observers have for a long time noticed incongruities between principles, norms, and organizational procedures on one hand and, under these very institutional rules,⁹ the real-life exercise of political power on the other, as the latter often deviates from manifested rules to various degrees. This happens across regime types, although democracy in general has clearer rules for its political game than authoritarianism, and its leaders are much more rule-bound than the rulers in nondemocratic politics. About a century ago, Robert Michels had already found that democracy as a legal principle does not fully correspond to actual existing facts in a democratic polity, a phenomenon he labeled the "iron law of oligarchy."¹⁰ For the modern presidency of the United States, which works under a mature democracy, Stephen Skowronek draws our attention to the distinction between presidential

⁸ In this context, the term "performance" is used in the thespian sense, not in the sense that currently prevails in political studies as indicated by the use of terms like "economic performance" or "performance of governance."

⁹ Here the concept of "institutions" suggested respectively by Douglass North and Stephen Krasner is adopted. According to North, "Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction." Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 3. In a similar vein but with interchangeable use of "institutions" and "regimes" in studies of international politics, Krasner defines the concept as "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations." Stephen D. Krasner, "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regime as Intervening Variable," in Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983, p. 2.

¹⁰ Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958 (first published 1915), especially pp. 393–409.

“authority” and “power” and, in general, between “structure” and “action,” by concluding that not every president is equally at liberty to be “as big a man as he can” due to the interactions between structural authority and the actions of leaders with various characters and skills.¹¹ In Latin America of the 1980s, Alain Rouquie noted that political life there “is played on two levels” in the following way:

The juridical inspiration and the manifest ideology are representative and formally egalitarian. The concentration of social power and the modes of domination that flow from them are largely incompatible, or more incompatible than in the older democracies, with the official sources of legitimacy. The appropriation of economic and political resources by a minority on the one hand, and the despoiling of the masses in a cumulative situation of inferiority on the other, demonstrates the essential dichotomy between words and actions.¹²

“Behind the ‘public stage’ of popular sovereignty,” Rouquie continues, “there is a ‘private stage’ based on relations of domination.”¹³

“Informal politics” are what scholars often refer to when discussing the political conduct “behind the public stage” and the deviations of the exercise of power from institutional rules. Also in Latin America, decades after Rouquie’s report, during which time regime changes of redemocratization swept the region bringing participatory institutions to virtually every country, students of comparative politics find, still, that “informal rules coexist with formal institutions throughout Latin America” and that it is “informal rules” that “shape how democratic institutions work.”¹⁴ In a similar vein, but with a different geographical focus, experts have noted that “informal politics remains a prominent, pervasive feature of political life throughout contemporary East Asia” under a variety of regime types, from industrialized democracies to Asian authoritarianism, in which behind-the-scenes politics confront political rhetoric, public performance of power, and mass politics.¹⁵ China is, of course, a prominent case in studies of informal politics, as a recent focus of inquiries has been shifting to the connections and interactions between the informal conduct of politics and formal institutional rules, with the informal aspect gaining emphasis over

¹¹ Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997, p. xvi.

¹² Alain Rouquie, *The Military and the State in Latin America*, translated by Paul E. Sigmund, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, pp. 33–4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 34. Rouquie thinks, nevertheless, “These asymmetrical relations may not otherwise be obvious in the most modernized societies.”

¹⁴ Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, “Introduction,” in Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, eds., *Informal Institutions and Democracy: Lessons from Latin America*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, pp. 1–2.

¹⁵ Lowell Dittmer, “Conclusion: East Asian Informal Politics in Comparative Perspective,” in Lowell Dittmer, Haruhiro Fukui, and Peter N.S. Lee, eds., *Informal Politics in East Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 290.

the formal.¹⁶ A trend has emerged in political studies to look to informal politics for a better comprehension of institutional arrangements, their political and policy outcomes, and institutional changes.¹⁷

This dichotomy of informal politics versus formal institutions is quite often understood in three fashions which can be termed, respectively, approaches which are “linear,” “parallel and antagonistic,” and “one way of the informal dominating the formal,” all concerned with the relations and connections between the two sides, dimensions, or, in Rouquie’s word, “stages” of politics. The “linear” approach sees an evolving, developmental, or progressive trend from informal politics to institutional politics. At the center of this trend stands the concept of “institutionalization,” which can be used to measure such political development when political stability and effective governance are achieved, with, or in spite of, more and more citizens being involved in public affairs.¹⁸ Democracy is superior to authoritarianism because rules of the political game are clearer and more transparent for both politicians and for ordinary citizens, and the rule of law is often associated with a democracy rather than with a dictatorship. This concept is virtually correct for describing history in the long run because, as many classic political thinkers highlight, human societies have, over centuries, developed from “jungle politics” with few declared rules to “civil society” where the art of association gains prominence. It underestimates, however, the possible detours, distractions, and even dead ends in this evolution and their institutional implications. It also ignores the conceptual and structural synchronism of the informal and institutional dimensions of the same polity and the importance of such synchrony to politics, an aspect that this research will emphasize.

By contrast, the “parallel and antagonistic” perspective moves to the other side of the same token by emphasizing the distinction and difference between informal politics and formal institutions against the same historical and institutional background, often confronting them as separate spheres of political conduct in which one mode prevails against another. This conception is so popular as a fundamental presumption for the discussion of the informal aspects of politics that many who have focused their research primarily on informal politics are more or less tainted by it. The undeclared principle of this presumption seems to be that informal politics and formal institutions are running at each other’s expense, not only diachronically, as assumed by the “linear” approach,

¹⁶ In Dittmer, Fukui, and Lee, *Informal Politics in East Asia*, five empirical chapters of the total eleven are devoted to contemporary China. Also see Jonathan Unger, ed., *The Nature of Chinese Politics: From Mao to Jiang*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002.

¹⁷ Dittmer, Fukui, and Lee, *Informal Politics in East Asia*; Unger, *The Nature of Chinese Politics*; Helmke and Levitsky, *Informal Institutions and Democracy*.

¹⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968, pp. 32–9.

but in every sense, including their conceptual natures, structural characteristics, and political utilities, all falling into distinctions between the two, which are regarded as having little overlapping or mutual reinforcement.

When interactions between the two sides of informal and formal politics are brought into the foreground and their complimentary natures are recognized, recent studies often find that informal politics carries more weight than formal institutions in understanding the political phenomena under a variety of regimes across the spectrum from democracy to authoritarianism.¹⁹ This “informal-politics-dominates” approach correctly highlights the significance of informal conduct in all political orchestration, and particularly in working towards a better, more realistic comprehension of democracy, while, more often than not, it attributes the essence of authoritarian politics to the impotence of formal institutions. In the sense of interpreting the politics of authoritarianism, this perspective shares the “linear” approach’s moral attitude, which paints a “backward” portrait of a nondemocracy, but it is much more skeptical than the “linear” concept in seeing little progress in the democratic conduct of politics, where informal politics is deemed just as decisive as it is under authoritarianism. In comparison with the “parallel” conception, it emphasizes the overlap between informal politics and formal institutions, but it often adopts the same “antagonistic” approach in outlining their interactions. Informal–formal, or political–institutional, interconnectedness is often viewed through a one-way lens, which, even for scholars who admit the “complementary” relationship between the two sides, usually neglects, or at least lacks research on, the aspect of how formal institutions work to influence informal politics. It is especially so for politics with a low degree of institutionalization, authoritarian politics included.²⁰

Chinese politics is obviously such a field where politics takes command over institutions. After the early wave of research interested in the leadership, party-state structures, and political organizations,²¹ scholarly attention to institutions has been much weaker than attention to other dimensions of Chinese political

¹⁹ Dittmer, Fukui, and Lee, *Informal Politics in East Asia*; Unger, *The Nature of Chinese Politics*; Helmke and Levitsky, *Informal Institutions and Democracy*.

²⁰ Some exceptions exist, of course, as exemplified by Jennifer Gandhi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorship*, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

²¹ For example, see John Wilson Lewis, *Leadership in Communist China*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963; A. Doak Barnett, *Cadres, Bureaucracy, and Political Power in Communist China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1967; Harry Harding, *Organizing China: The Problems of Bureaucracy, 1949–1976*, Stanford University Press, 1981; Alan P. L. Liu, *How China Is Ruled*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986. Also Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *China under Mao: Politics Takes Command*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966; John Wilson Lewis, ed., *Party Leadership and Revolutionary Power in China*, Cambridge University Press, 1970; Robert A. Scalapino, ed., *Elites in the People’s Republic of China*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972.

life, especially to informal politics. As a certain renewed curiosity in institutions and institutionalizations has recently increased, scholars still often take one of the three conceptual approaches discussed above. This makes the picture of Chinese politics quite distorted, to the degree that it cannot be fairly compared with what Skowronek and Rouquie have observed in the US or Latin America: it is a picture lacking the Janus duality of institutions and politics, due to the politics and institutions often being investigated separately. Of course, there are significant differences between Chinese politics and, say, democratic politics in the United States in terms of political–institutional interconnections and interactions, but these relationships exist in polities everywhere and often determine how a polity runs, as there might not be an authoritarian politics with little or no institutional forms or such a democratic system with little politics.

A gap can be observed, as observers cited above point out, between institutional constraints and political conduct in polities everywhere, to varying degrees, and it is this gap that roused the research interest leading to the present book. For a better grasp of the issue, this study suggests the term “institutional inconsistency” to conceptualize the gap between the political operations of institutions and the institutional regulations of politics, or, in other words, the complicated relationship between the two facets which are variously termed “public” and “private” stages, formal and informal politics, authority and power, or structure and action. It presents an effort to bridge informal politics and formal institutions into one intellectual landscape that is simultaneously political and institutional, where both informal politics and formal institutions have to be understood in their interconnected, interactive, and even integrated ways. The two elements of informal and formal can either be combative or reinforcing of one another, or both at the same time; they can be historically progressive toward a greater degree of institutionalization, or they can be structurally crystalized into a specific combination, and such a combination can be viewed as one in which an informal politics dominates the polity while formal institutions also frame the polity in their specific ways of inter-configuration. In other words, the gap between formal institutions and informal politics can be conceptually well defined to allow for mutual confrontation, but both formal institutions and informal politics are simply two interconnected and interactive dimensions of real political life in any given circumstance from which they emerge. It is in the gap that there can be found the secrecy of politics which operates concurrently with both informal conduct and formal rules.

This research, therefore, emphasizes synchronism between politics and institutions, their mutual reinforcement, and the possible utility of formal institutions for politics when, particularly in authoritarian politics, informal conduct prevails. Its inquiry is particularly inspired by the question of why formal institutions are still created and operated where an informal politics prevails, and it emphasizes how formal institutions are innovated and manipulated in real

political operations. It pays equal attention to the other side of the equation, however, which concerns the utility of formal institutions for informal politics. In other words, this book continues scholarly explorations on the interactions between political institutions and the conduct of power, but does so from an angle that looks at why and how the conduct of power needs formal rules while it simultaneously often has the strong inclination whenever possible to neglect, overstep, and even break the rules. The issue of the incongruity between formal institutions and informal politics, therefore, is presented and examined in this monograph mainly as the issue of their institutional interweaving, their political interaction, and their conceptual interdependence.

The politics and institutions of China's Party Congress: the empirical ground

Nobel Prize-winning economist R. H. Coase once complained that in his field people keep talking about how important institutions are, but ignore concrete institutions that work, such as the firm.²² It does not seem to be difficult to find similar ignorance in the field of China studies, though efforts to overcome it have begun to emerge recently.²³ This book joins these efforts by devoting its entire investigation to the exploration of how a concrete institution works. This institution is the Party Congress, which presents institutional inconsistency in a dialectical way: it enjoys constitutional prestige while suffering from practical impotence, but its institutional shallowness has never reduced its political significance. In the institutional sense, the CCP Charter, through frequent revisions and amendments, never fails to confirm the Party Congress's role as the "highest organ of authority"; it constantly assigns to the Party Congress decision-making roles which can be summarized as the trinity of deciding the Party's platform, making and amending the Party's Constitution, and appointing the Party's national leadership. Yet any such statement could immediately prompt a protest clarifying that it never exercises such authority in practice, and that its power to rule the Party, and through the Party to rule China, is simply nominal rather than substantial. This clarification is true and significant, but,

²² R. H. Coase, *The Firm, the Market, and the Law*, The University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 5.

²³ The research interest in China's People's Congress on both national and local levels has been strong since the 1990s, as noted earlier. The recent emerging publications on various concrete institutions of China can be found in, for instance, Xuezhong Guo, *China's Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2012; Stephen Bell and Hui Feng, *The Rise of the People's Bank of China: The Politics of Institutional Change*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013; Michael Schoenhals, *Spying for the People: Mao's Secret Agents, 1949–1967*, Cambridge University Press, 2013; Ronald C. Keith, Zhiquan Lin, and Shumei Hou, *China's Supreme Court*, London: Routledge, 2013; Wang Zhengxu, "Chinese Presidency: Institutionalisation, Constitutional Ambiguities and the Trajectories towards Democratisation," *China: An International Journal*, 11, 2 (August 2013), 140–54.

for the research presented in this book, it simply raises further questions about the gap between constitutional norms and political reality, rather than rendering any possible conclusion that the Party Congress is meaningless in understanding Chinese politics.

The most striking fact concerning China's Party Congress is that, in practice, it has never attained the significance assigned to it by the Party Charter in any of the three decision-making roles. In terms of platform-making and Charter amendments, either the Party Congress does not make the most important decisions, or congressional decisions are overthrown without a follow-up Congress meeting. In selecting the Party's leadership, the Party Congress has been in an even more embarrassing position, as it is difficult to make the claim that the Party Congress is a functioning electorate to decide the Central Committee, in accordance with the Party Charter.²⁴ Though it has never failed to perform the task of appointing a new, or renewed, leadership, such a leadership can be reshuffled without any congressional authorization; such reorganizations of the leadership were actually frequent and "normal" (in the sense of being never questioned by the Party Congress) throughout CCP history until the 1980s. Until very recently it was not even qualified to serve as the institutional occasion upon which the new leadership, particularly Party chief, was inaugurated, nor did it bless a Party chief's graceful stepping down.²⁵ Moreover, a person can

²⁴ Constitutionally the Party Congress elects the Central Committee, as well as other central leadership committees such as the Central Discipline Inspection Committee, and subsequently the Central Committee elects the top leadership of the Party that usually consists of the Politburo and its Standing Committee. In practice the Central Committee newly elected at the Party Congress always organizes the top leadership bodies immediately following the Party Congress. Besides, being elected a full member of the Central Committee is, with few exceptions, a constitutional qualification for being later elected to the leadership bodies.

²⁵ The CCP's Party chief took different titles in history, as "Party chief" in this monograph refers to the formal number-one position of the central leadership body – usually the Central Committee but in the early years it was once the Central Executive Committee. In the years before 1925, this position was called "chairman" (*weiyuanzhang*) or "secretary" (*shuji*); it then evolved to "general secretary" (*zong shuji*). It once changed to "chairman" (*zhuxi*), but this title didn't become formalized or prevail before Mao Zedong came to dominate the leadership. The 12th Party Congress in 1982 changed it back to "general secretary," which is still carried now. For historical investigations of the issue, see, for example, Tony Saich, ed., *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Party: Documents and Analysis*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996; Zhang Heng and Jian Fei, *Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhi renshi jianming tupu* (Concise Tables of the CCP Central Organizations and Personnel), Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2003; Wang Jianying, *Zhonggong zhongyang jiguan lishi yanbian kaoshi, 1921–1949* (Investigation of the Historical Changes of the CCP's Central Organs, 1921–1949), Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2005; Chen Lifeng, *Zhongguo gongchandang lingdao tizhi de lishi kaocha, 1921–2006* (The Historical Examination of the Chinese Communist Party's Leadership Institutions, 1921–2006), Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2008. Roughly there have been thirteen Party chiefs over history, who are Chen Duxiu, Qu Qiubai, Xiang Zhongfa, Wang Ming (who was briefly in de facto charge of the Party's central leadership in 1931 after General Secretary Xiang Zhongfa was put into Kuomintang jail; this situation is different from that of Li Lisan, who at one time in the early 1930s was in real charge of the central leadership although General Secretary

dominate the Party leadership despite having a constitutionally less important position, or even no position, in the Central Committee, a phenomenon which greatly violates the CCP Charter and humiliates the Party Congress.²⁶ Moreover, the Party Congress has not even been able to meet regularly in accordance with the given Party Charter's stipulations, as its eighteen meetings since the 1st Party Congress was held in 1921 have been unevenly scattered over different periods of history.²⁷

The real intriguing and central enigma around China's Party Congress, however, is twofold. First, despite the above facts, the constitutional authority of the Party Congress has never been reduced on paper, as various versions of the Party Charter admit its supreme authority; and in political operations, by convention of the Party Congress is always organized as foremost and most significant, almost a festival celebration of the Party's political life and an epochal milestone in the Party's (as well as China's) course. The preparation for and the operation of a Party Congress session, as found in the research presented in the chapters to follow, are magnificent and meticulous; the Party media will focus on a Party Congress session for months and even years in advance whenever such a session is scheduled. In any case, the Party Congress constantly maintains its heavy constitutional and operational weight; despite how the Party

Xiang Zhongfa was in post), Bo Gu, Zhang Wentian, Mao Zedong, Hua Guofeng, Hu Yaobang, Zhao Ziyang, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping; only four of them – namely Chen, Xiang, Hu Jintao, and Xi – started to take office with a new Central Committee elected by the Party Congress, while the other nine took power on other occasions; two completed their congressional terms and handed over power to the new leader on the occasion of the Party Congress, both of them very recent cases, namely Jiang, who became the Party's first chief leader to step down with a congressional celebration in 2002, and his successor, Hu Jintao, who left office in 2012 at the 18th Party Congress.

²⁶ This phenomenon once prevailed, from when the first Party chief, Chen Duxiu, stepped down until Mao Zedong took the position; it was then revived under very different historical and political circumstances in the so-called Deng Xiaoping era, when Deng played his "paramount" leadership to an extreme, in which the most important decisions of the Party could be made by an aged Party member who, in the period from 1989 to 1997, took no official post, let alone any leadership position allegedly elected by the Party Congress. For Deng's political career, see Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011. This tradition lingered after Deng, as Jiang Zemin, after stepping down from the position of Party chief, still attempted to intervene decisively in the most important matters from outside the Central Committee. For the leadership politics of China during this period, see, for example, Willy Wo-lap Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Hu Jintao Era: New Leaders, New Challenges*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006; Joseph Fewsmith, "Elite Politics: The Struggle for Normality," in Joseph Fewsmith, ed., *China Today, China Tomorrow: Domestic Politics, Economy, and Society*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010, pp. 149–64.

²⁷ It met every year in the Party's early history; during Mao Zedong's leadership, the intervals between Party Congress meetings were often prolonged irregularly, at its maximum to seventeen years, against the stipulations of a three- or five-year term in different historical periods. Only in the decades since 1982 has the Party Congress begun to hold regular meetings every five years. Chapters 3 and 6 will discuss this issue further.

leadership may ignore congressional decisions, it never ignores the Congress per se as an institution, nor the congressional process that makes those decisions. Second, the Party Congress has never sought to exercise its power to meet constitutional stipulations; it never even questions, let alone attempts to challenge, the unconstitutional moves of the Party leadership that ignore and violate the authority of the Congress. Instead, it behaves as a docile, compliant, and obedient organization in whose best interest it is to be co-operative with the incumbent leadership's decisions, whatever they may be. Although the politics of the CCP have experienced great, sometimes dramatic, changes over history, the congressional process of delegate discussions, deliberations, and decision-making against such changing circumstances never fails to virtually meet the leadership's expectations. As the significance of the Party Congress has been growing in recent years, as exemplified in its now regular meetings every five years, and in its honor to serve as the institutional occasion for Party leaders to inaugurate themselves with authority and to retire from their positions of power with grace, and as a trend of decreasing uncongressional changes of leadership takes place,²⁸ the institutional inconsistency embedded in the above intrigues around the Party Congress is still far from having been changed, to the degree that the Party Congress is still able to play its constitutional role. Therefore it is still more than correct to say that the Party Congress at best remains the de jure superior authority with little de facto power.

This raises questions, however, rather than providing answers: as a nominal decision-making body that seems to carry little political utility, what is the source of the constitutional significance of the Party Congress? Why is the CCP bothered to keep it and, furthermore, continue to pay such serious attention to it? How does the CCP operate the Party Congress to maintain simultaneously its constitutional supremacy and its practical impotency? Considering the changes over the long history of the CCP in terms of increasing or decreasing this inconsistency between constitutional stipulation and political practice, why and how did these changes take place? Do the changes affect the institutional inconsistency around the Party Congress? To put it simply: why is there such a gap between norms and politics, and what does this gap imply for the comprehension of Chinese politics and, in general, for the role of institutions in politics?

Yes, all the statements regarding China's Party Congress sound self-contradictory. To this research, it is this self-contradiction that highlights the Party Congress as an institutional enigma, and it is this self-contradiction that reflects the intrinsic institutional inconsistency of CCP politics, which begs for an explanation that this monograph attempts to contribute. Empirically,

²⁸ See a relevant discussion in Joseph Fewsmith, "Institutions, Informal Politics, and Political Transition in China," *Asian Survey*, 36, 3 (March 1996), 230–45.

the Party Congress has been one of the most under-researched institutions of Chinese politics; it is a “black box” in terms of how it works since almost all of China’s national leadership organizations operate behind closed doors. It is also a black box in terms of recording the hidden information and secret operations of the CCP leadership, an investigation into which could greatly expose a series of empirical and conceptual myths about Chinese politics. Conceptually, its contradictory nature does present a challenge to the very concept of institutions: if institutions are not significant enough to lay down rules for political behavior and power interactions, why do they exist and how do they work?

Authoritarian legitimization with institutional manipulation and ceremonial magnificence: research findings and conceptual arguments

A major finding presented in this book is that institutional inconsistency itself provides the possibilities and facilities for those in power to maneuver norms, rules, and procedures and to engineer the Party Congress to endorse their preferences in every aspect of its functions. Details will be presented in the empirical chapters to show how Party Congress meetings are well planned, prepared, and processed by the incumbent leadership, with a cautious political strategy and meticulous institutional management of the congressional operations in all facets, including the scheduling of sessions; the duration of meetings; the selection of delegates; the terms, rights, and responsibilities of delegates; the structural organization and procedural flow of discussions; the nomination of leadership candidates; voting in elections; and so on. It is found that CCP leaderships have successfully developed a series of codes, measures, tactics, and skills to convene and control the Party Congress, and furthermore such measures and tactics have over time been crystalized into something that can be termed the “institutions behind institutions”; meanwhile, macro-political moves, such as political campaigning, ideological programing, and pre-Congress consensus-building around but beyond the sessions of the Party Congress, are also invented, mobilized, and harnessed to shape the context in which the Party Congress operates, in order to bend it to something that can also be termed the “institutions above institutions.” To make such awkward terms clearer: the Party Congress and the norms that it follows in order to operate, such as delegates’ deliberations and leadership elections, are of course institutions, but in the case of China’s Party Congress this book has found that this series of institutions are manipulated at both micro and macro levels to the degree that delegate deliberations and elections, for example, are distorted and the Party Congress per se is hollowed out. Such distortions and hollowing out are referred to as “institutional manipulations,” because, to follow North’s now classic definition that institutions are rules of the game, the Party Congress and

its operation are thus turned into a game following the leadership's rules rather than the leadership having to play a game following congressional rules. It is institutional manipulation, in other words, because it is imbedded in the management and maneuvering of norms, rules, and procedures; it is such institutional manipulation that makes the Party Congress perform magnificently but function only nominally. The story of China's Party Congress, therefore, is the story of how institutional manipulations are created, executed, and instituted.

Such manipulations are also political; in fact they go well beyond the conceptual dichotomy between informal politics and formal institutions. In concept, political manipulations of institutions arise in the vast space where institutional inconsistency exists, and therefore they fill the vague gap of institutional inconsistency. Institutional manipulations are by nature interactions between politics and institutions, or, more exactly, interactions between political maneuvering for the acquisition of power, on the one hand, and, on the other, political institutions as norms, rules, and procedures for the conduct of power. They are much broader than political manipulation in William Riker's concept;²⁹ they can be as wide-ranging as canons and clichés are to plot and scenery. Alexander George's notion of "operational code" is sufficient to describe such conduct of institutional manipulation,³⁰ but his emphasis, as stated somewhere else, on "collegial (as opposed to formalistic) relationships within a policymaking group" is not concise enough for, nor consistent with, this book's reading of institutional manipulations.³¹ Instead, taking an approach that blends different relationships, including collegial and formalistic ones, into one picture, this book has found rich evidence, and therefore makes the argument, that China's Party Congress is neither an effective institution performing its claimed, formal tasks nor merely an empty box within which informal politics alone creates substance; and that, rather, it is a political and institutional arena where political power has to make various efforts in the operation and the manipulation of institutions.

So why is the CCP leadership bothered to have the Party Congress under the influence of such troublesome manipulations? The second major finding of this monograph answers this question: political power gains legitimization for its various manifestations through the institutional manipulations of the Party Congress. As rules of the game, institutions are what the players follow, not only to win but also to justify their gains and victories. In the game of politics, the first and foremost issue is who gains the political power to make policies that affect public life. That is why, as exemplified by Machiavelli and many others,

²⁹ William H. Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

³⁰ Alexander L. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly*, 12 (June 1969), 190–222.

³¹ Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980.

the question of how to obtain and to retain power is always central in reflections on politics.³² Political institutions are complicated in this context, for they are both the tools of power and the constraints of it. Existing understandings of institutions often emphasize the constraining side of them, specifically regarding the behaviors of politicians who target power acquisition and status maintenance. This is correct, but, as this research has found, it is only one side of the story. This book argues, rather, that institutions not only constrain human behaviors, but also facilitate them. For politicians, the most significant utility of institutions is to enable them to gain legitimacy through institution-bound conduct. It is right to state that institutions “are the art of the state. They give it shape, articulate its relationships, and express its legitimacy”;³³ but it is more accurate to say that political institutions legitimize the shape and relationships of public power.

This line of reasoning can shed some light on regime differences, primarily between democracy and authoritarianism, regarding power acquisition and institutional operation. When considering such differences, the above statement that institutional conduct empowers players and legitimizes victors of political games must be modified, because, as will be argued in Chapter 2 of this book, the authoritarian system does not provide the institutions via which leaders can win power and legitimize their win in one shot, as politicians under a democracy do. In other words, under authoritarianism leaders gain power and legitimize power in separate ways. How to win is perhaps the most serious consideration for them, but that does not mean that the way to legitimize the power they have won is less of a challenge. Contemporary authoritarianism thus often borrows democratic institutions to cope with the challenge of legitimization, but, by definition, it does not adopt the democratic way to gain power. Those authoritarian leaders who are hungry for legitimization, therefore, can be perplexed by the dilemma of needing to follow rules, which legitimizes, and wanting to maintain their own unchallengeable power as rulers, which is the essence of authoritarianism. For legitimization, as in the case of China’s Party Congress, they operate some institutions such as representative delegates, Charter as a fundamental law, and elections as the way to organize the leadership; for maintaining their authoritarian essence, they manipulate such institutions to guarantee their own power triumphs without coming up against challenges in such institutional

³² Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated by Gorge Bull, London: Penguin Books, 1981. Also Herbert Butterfield, *The Statecraft of Machiavelli*, New York: Collier Books, 1962; Timothy Earle, *How Chiefs Come to Power: The Political Economy in Prehistory*, Stanford University Press, 1997.

³³ Daniel Galvin, Ian Shapiro, and Stephen Skowronek, “Introduction” to Ian Shapiro, Stephen Skowronek, and Daniel Galvin, eds., *Rethinking Political Institutions: The Art of the State*, New York University Press, 2006, p. 1.

operations. In an extreme context, rules are often manufactured at the whim of the rulers, so that these rulers are able to utilize the rules to legitimize the game of power and politics in which they are guaranteed to be the winners.

Conceptually, such manipulations of institutions are a series of efforts to overcome, or at least reduce, the role of institutions as constraints and instead to facilitate and fortify the functions of institutions as utilities. In practice, this book finds, the institutional manipulations of China's Party Congress do not expunge delegates' participation in discussions of the political platform, amendments of the Party Charter, and elections of the Party leadership; rather, the manipulations attempt to involve and impress the delegates in such a way that they are honored to participate in these significant decision-making processes. They hollow out the delegates' participation in terms of being autonomous, deliberative, and substantial, thus making it the nominal but necessary step paving the way for delegates to simply accept and endorse the leadership and its well-tailored proposals on any issues. The Party Congress, therefore, stands at a crossroad of meeting two seemingly contradictory demands, both raised simultaneously by the CCP leadership, which are to provide legitimacy through delegates' involvement but to make sure that the legitimization is for those who are already in power. To this end, the process of legitimization has to appear "democratic," but its conclusion has to be the overall attachment of those involved to the leadership that sponsors and executes this process – an attachment through which all participants have demonstrated their loyalty, a type of legitimacy that this research has discovered within authoritarian legitimization and has termed "confirmative legitimacy." For the delegates, this means "I came, I spoke and voted, and I showed my support to the leadership." Such support is, of course, the most important, but "came" (involvement) and "spoke and voted" (participation in discussions and elections) are also indispensable, for it is through these steps that political support is transferred to the displayed loyalty that legitimizes the leadership.

The importance of "show" and "display" in this process is the final finding of this book. Conceptually it forms a further layer of the book's entire argument, which refers to the unusual weight of ceremony in authoritarian legitimization, or the decisive function of theatrical performance in political persuasion to justify power as it is held by the leaders. This is an indispensable and imperative dimension in comprehending authoritarian institutions such as China's Party Congress, through which ceremonial involvement and ritual magnificence are displayed for public endorsement of the manipulations and the confirmative legitimacy that these manipulations have fabricated. In his classic *Negara*, Geertz examines "the interplay of status, pomp, and governance" in ancient Bali, showing how the rituals carved out "great collective gestures, mass enactments of elite truths," and argues for the conceptual coinage of the

“theater state.”³⁴ China’s Party Congress does not run parallel to such a theater state in a straightforward way, but Geertz’s observation of the importance of ceremonial display to the rulers’ persuasion of society does apply to explaining why the Party Congress constantly maintains its political significance and institutional magnificence despite its practical impotence. The Party Congress limits its political conduct within a chosen circle of the elite, and these elite people, in being chosen, feel honored and privileged; the more magnificently the ceremony they are attending is performed, the more such a feeling is strengthened to compensate for their oblivious loss of rights and to glorify their docile acceptance of authoritarian legitimacy. It is through the threefold argument, namely of institutional inconsistency, institutional manipulation, and institutions as the stage of ceremonial enactment of elite consensus, that this book presents a theory of authoritarian legitimization based on empirical findings about China’s Party Congress.

“Mutual contextualization” in multiple contexts: methodological considerations

It is perhaps not fair to complain about the shortage of studies on China’s Party Congress; though there has been not a single book-length treatment of the institution, numerous publications do exist on its individual sessions, especially in regard to recent years when a meeting of the Party Congress often stirs up a dozen conferences and hundreds of reports, analyses, and journal articles, not to mention journalistic stories and political commentaries, full of pre-congressional speculations of forthcoming personnel arrangements and post-congressional analyses of the policy implications of the meeting in almost every aspect of China’s domestic and foreign-relations matters.³⁵ They have

³⁴ Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 121, 166.

³⁵ The full list of references is too lengthy, but some representative publications of the kind by leading scholars on the post-Mao sessions of China’s Party Congress can be found in Lowell Dittmer, “The 12th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party,” *China Quarterly*, 93 (March 1983), 108–24; Cheng Li and Lynn White, “The Thirteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: From Mobilizers to Managers,” *Asian Survey*, 28, 4 (April 1988), 371–99; John P. Burns, “Chinese Civil Service Reform: The 13th Party Congress Proposals,” *China Quarterly*, 120 (December 1989), 739–70; Tony Saich, “The Fourteenth Party Congress: A Programme for Authoritarian Rule,” *China Quarterly*, 132 (1992), 1136–60; Zheng Yongnian, “Power and Agenda: Jiang Zemin’s New Political Initiatives at the CCP’s Fifteenth Congress,” *Issues & Studies*, 33, 11 (November 1997), 35–57; Richard Baum, “The Fifteenth National Party Congress: Jiang Takes Command?,” *China Quarterly*, 153 (1998), 141–56; David Shambaugh, “The CCP’s Fifteenth Congress: Technocrats in Command,” *Issues & Studies*, 34, 1 (January 1998), 1–37; Cheng Li and Lynn White, “The Fifteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: Fully Fledged Technocratic Leadership with Partial Control by Jiang Zemin,”

contributed to the understandings of Chinese politics, but there is room for improvement: existing literatures focus on *what* the Party Congress has done, and on *who* has been doing it; but very little on *how* it is done, or on *how* they do it. They view the meeting of the Party Congress as a political event, and scrutinize the Party Congress's policy and personnel outcomes, but the Party Congress per se as the institutional mechanism that frames the event and yields the outcomes is overlooked. Methodologically, this situation may reflect the lingering but still powerful influences of the behavioral functionalist "input/output" approach tainted with "Kremlin studies" in the field of Chinese politics. With the recent resurgence of academic interest in political institutions and in the Chinese Communist Party,³⁶ it is now the time to view the Party Congress as an institution.

This book takes its task as applying the institutional perspective to the Party Congress, though not overwhelmingly to the degree that it excludes noninstitutional elements. It pursues an approach integrating an examination of institutional norms with an inquiry into political power by employing a fundamental methodology that can be termed "mutual contextualization," which believes that the institutional logic of politics and the political logic of institutions mutually provide the context for one another. Informal politics and formal

Asian Survey, 38, 3 (March 1998), 245–74; Lin Gang and Susan Shirk, eds., *The Sixteenth CCP Congress and Leadership Transition in China*, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2012 (Asia Program Special Report, No. 105); Joseph Fewsmith, "The Sixteenth National Party Congress: The Succession That Didn't Happen," *China Quarterly*, 173 (March 2003), 1–16; Cheng Li and Lynn White, "The Sixteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: Hu Gets What?", *Asian Survey*, 43, 4 (July–August 2003), 553–97; David Shambaugh, ed., "Special Issue on the 18th Party Congress and Future of the Communist Party of China," *China: An International Journal*, 10, 2 (August 2012), 1–101.

³⁶ For such a resurgence of research interest, see, for example, Bruce J. Dickson, *Red Capitalists in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for Political Change*, Cambridge University Press, 2003; Wang Gungwu and Zheng Yongnian, eds., *Damage Control: The Chinese Communist Party in the Jiang Zemin Era*, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003; Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard and Zheng Yongnian, eds., *Bringing the Party Back in: How China Is Governed*, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004; Gerry Groot, *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Party, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony*, New York: Routledge, 2004; Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard and Zheng Yongnian, eds., *The Chinese Communist Party in Reform*, London: Routledge, 2006; Bruce J. Dickson, *Wealth into Power: The Communist Party's Embrace of China's Private Sector*, Cambridge University Press, 2008; David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*, Washington, DC and Berkeley: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and University of California Press, 2008; Lance L. P. Gore, *The Chinese Communist Party and China's Capitalist Revolution: The Political Impact of the Market*, London: Routledge, 2010; Richard McGregor, *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers*, New York: HarperCollins, 2010; Peter Sandby-Thomas, *Legitimizing the Chinese Communist Party since Tiananmen: A Critical Analysis of the Stability Discourse*, London: Routledge, 2010; Zheng Yongnian, *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor: Culture, Reproduction and Transformation*, London: Routledge, 2010; Pierre F. Landry, *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China: The Communist Party's Control of Local Elites in the Post-Mao Era*, Cambridge University Press, 2012; Rowan Callick, *The Party Forever: Inside China's Modern Communist Elite*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

institutions are not investigated in isolation from each other, nor simply in contrast to one another; rather, this book emphasizes that their distinctions are subtle, the tensions are entangled, and the duality is dialectic, thus their interactions should be examined in subtle, entangled, and dialectic ways. They are taken as the contexts for each other to unfold and operate; political conduct and institutional manipulation are the contexts for each other to work together in creating the legitimate operation of power and authority; furthermore, institutional manipulation and ritual performance are the contexts for each other to construct political legitimacy through the very theater of power which is embedded, on such occasions, in the Party Congress.

This monograph, therefore, differentiates itself from previous studies by emphasizing how the Party Congress runs *as an institution* of political power rather than what are the “outcomes” of its sessions; how the institution is politically manipulated to legitimize the leadership and its political programs rather than how power struggles among the leaders unfold around a Party Congress meeting; and how the Party Congress institutionally evolves through the politically and historically sensitive and dynamic process of mutual dependence between rules and rulers, rather than the Party Congress as a constant, empty shell passively and almost unchangeably fulfilled by the intermittent and sporadic rises of political waves. In doing so, it also intentionally avoids going to the other extreme at which institutions become formalistic and are viewed statically. Even the elements of power struggle in the manner of Kremlin studies will not be discarded, but rather will be analyzed in terms of their connections with the Party Congress as an institution and with respect to institutional change.

This approach can cause some confusion if one simply applies the lines of reasoning developed under democratic circumstances to comprehension of China’s Party Congress. As a political institution, China’s Party Congress is unique to the extent that any unconditional paralleling of it with a Western, democratic institution may end up being misleading. Comparative studies of it and its democratic counterparts, however, are definitely valuable and desirable for a better grasp of the essence of, perhaps, both. To avoid possible misconceptions while still pursuing the values of such a study, this research also emphasizes “mutual contextualization” as a basic methodology to explore how China’s Party Congress runs in the vein of authoritarian logic against a background in which democracy prevails in order to provide political legitimacy. The author, therefore, would like to constantly remind himself and his readers to beware, in the subject under investigation, of the further entanglement of authoritarian logic and democratic appearance, which can be caused by penetrating the superficial similarities that China’s Party Congress shares with a possible democratic counterpart in order to reach the deeper layers where institutions and politics interact. China’s Party Congress does run in order to fulfill one important institutional function that democracy addresses, which is

legitimization; the mechanism of legitimization in this circumstance, however, is fundamentally different from, while also ironically benefiting from, that of democracy in terms of the method of involvement, the process of convincing, and the meaning of representation and acceptance. Neither untainted democratic logic, nor self-sustaining authoritarian logic, can explain China's Party Congress; only "mutual contextualization" helps.

A major hindrance, which may help to explain academic indifference to the Party Congress as an institution and generally to "concrete institutions" in China, is the difficulty of obtaining access to relevant research data, given the low degree of transparency of Chinese politics in general and, in particular, the closed-door operations of the national leadership organizations such as the Party Congress.³⁷ The research around this book has been a constant attempt to overcome such obstacles. In recent decades there has been a flourishing of publications of memoirs and autobiographies by retired Chinese leaders and of biographies of them (many are officially approved), including those published overseas, primarily in Hong Kong where freedom of the press allows materials otherwise banned in mainland China, some authored by disgraced CCP cadres, to be available to the public.³⁸ Investigations and publications on CCP history, including CCP-sponsored ones, are also relevant to this research, especially the official documents compiled by CCP-affiliated Party-history research organizations and the outcomes of these organizations' increasing attention to the Party Congress.³⁹ The author also conducted some in-depth personal interviews with Party cadres. Many of these materials, however, are often mixed with ideological propaganda, censored and self-censored with a keenness to be correct politically in following the Party standard, but as historical sources of information

³⁷ Efforts have been made, of course, in this regard, as reflected in works like A. Doak Barnett, *The Making of Foreign Policy in China: Structure and Process*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1985; Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes*, Princeton University Press, 1988; Kenneth Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, eds., *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992; Carol Lee Hamrin and Suisheng Zhao, eds., *Decision-Making in Deng's China: Perspectives from Insiders*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995; Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997; David M. Lampton, ed., *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978–2000*, Stanford University Press, 2001; Bill K. P. Chou, *Government and Policy-Making Reform in China: The Implications of Governing Capacity*, London: Routledge, 2009.

³⁸ This was even a topic for a Xinhua news report: "Woguo xieren gaoguan pinfan chushu" (Chinese Retired Leaders Have Frequently Published Books), at http://news.xinhuanet.com/book/2005-06/21/content_3112539.htm, posted June 21, 2005, accessed July 1, 2005.

³⁹ For the increasing attention of CCP-sponsored scholarship on the Party Congress, see, for example, Li Zhongjie (deputy director of the CCP Central Committee's Research Institute of the Party's History), "Jiaqiang dui dangdaihui lishi de yanjiu" (Strengthening the Studies of the History of the Party Congress), in Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi diyi yanjiubu (ZZDY-First Department), *Zhongguo gongchandang diqi quanguo daibiao dahui yanjiu* (A Study of the CCP's 7th National Congress), Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2006, pp. 1–6.

they are still useful when used with caution and scrutiny.⁴⁰ The methodology of “mutual contextualization,” in addition to its analytical and theoretical dimensions as discussed earlier, is also applied in the technical sense in order to make use of such materials.

In analyzing Chinese politics, which often goes on behind the scenes, the scholars, as the late Gordon White said, must “borrow the skills of the detective and investigative journalist, drawing together a wide variety of sources and reading as often between as along the lines. It is an exercise in analytical demystification.”⁴¹ For this research, it is much like assembling a jigsaw puzzle, but even more challenging, because one does not have all the pieces at hand, nor the projected picture as a blueprint in this process of assembling. A caveat must follow, therefore, to admit that some parts of the picture under investigation are still absent, and that some remain obscure, but these parts can be critical for both the sketching out of empirical landscapes and the shaping of conceptual understandings.

Plan of the book

To follow this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 attempts to establish a theoretical framework focusing on institutional manipulation for political legitimacy, which is argued to be the key to understanding the inconsistency between institutional norms and political games. It starts by tracing the conceptual traditions of legitimacy, then turns to highlighting legitimacy deficits of modern authoritarianism and the dilemma it encounters between gaining legitimacy and monopolizing power. Sophisticated institutional manipulations are invented to cope with this dilemma; magnificent ritual displays of so-called “confirmative legitimacy” are employed to enforce and enact the manipulated legitimization.

Chapter 3 aims to provide an overview of the institutional operation of China’s Party Congress. It is organized around answering questions such as: how the Party Congress schedules a meeting, who attends the meeting, how the delegates are selected, how they are trained and organized for participation in the Party Congress, how the Party Congress is managed with a hierarchical

⁴⁰ For some methodological discussions of the use of such sources, see, for example, Nancy Hearst and Tony Saich, “Newly Available Sources on CCP History from the People’s Republic of China,” in Timothy Cheek and Tony Saich eds., *New Perspectives on State Socialism in China*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997, pp. 323–37; and Joshua A. Fogel, “Mendacity and Veracity in the Recent Chinese Communist Memoir Literature,” in *ibid.*, 354–8; Victor Shih, Wei Shan, and Mingxing Liu, “The Central Committee, Past and Present: A Method of Quantifying Elite Biographies,” in Allen Carlson, Mary E. Gallagher, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Melanie Manion, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Politics: New Sources, Methods, and Field Strategies*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 51–68.

⁴¹ Gordon White, *Riding the Tiger: The Politics of Economic Reform in Post-Mao China*, Stanford University Press, 1993, p. 13.

structure as its organizational backbone, and how the meeting runs according to what may be termed the “CCP code of conference.” The institutional details and their historical changes with political maneuvering provide a manual of manipulation, thus laying down the empirical foundations for unfolding the chapters that follow.

The next three chapters parallel the three constitutional functions of the Party Congress, each being devoted to the examination of one of them, namely debating and deciding the political platform; making, remaking, and amending the Party Charter; and elections of the Party leadership bodies. Chapter 4 explores the questions of how the Party Congress works around making the political platform in general; why the pertinent process is serious and significant; and, notwithstanding the latter, why the platform often quickly becomes obsolete in post-congressional politics. Accordingly, three cases are examined in particular: the 8th Party Congress, in which a congressional political consensus based on exemplary “investigations” was subverted by the Great Leader’s political actions in subsequent months; the 13th Party Congress, which adopted a platform of political reform but was followed by the post-Tiananmen backlash of reforms; and the 16th Party Congress, in which the congressional emphasis on the inclusion of capitalists into the Communist Party was shelved in post-Congress implementation.

Chapter 5 continues this exploration of institutional inconsistency by investigating the congressional amendment of the Party Charter. It first explores the process of how the Party Congress rewrites and amends this apparently fundamental Party document, then devotes most of its pages to an analysis of three organizations or organizational elements, namely the Central Secretariat, as a leadership body; the Central Disciplinary Inspection Committee, as a supervision organization; and Party members’ political rights, all often taking significant positions in the Party Charter although their relevant practices can be very different from what the Party Congress has announced.

How the leadership bodies are elected at the Party Congress is among the most mysterious processes in Chinese politics due to highly limited access to the relevant information. Chapter 6 makes an effort to demystify this congressional electoral process, including its preparation, nomination mechanisms, preview elections, voting, and so-called post-voting measures. It also reviews the historical changes regarding the rules and norms that govern congressional elections, and reveals why and how, despite post-Mao institutional reforms, elections are still harnessed at China’s Party Congress as instruments of autocracy.

Drawing conclusions for the entire book, Chapter 7 positions the above examinations in the context of comparative political analyses for some further theoretical reflections, especially on the issues of ritual and its institutional

meanings, institutional transplantation and its challenges to studies of democratic transition, the politics of institutional change, and conceptual transcendence beyond the dichotomy between institutional and informal politics. It also analyzes the possibility of intra-Party democracy in China from the perspective of congressional operations and leadership elections, an allegedly important issue for China's political transformation from communist authoritarianism.