

Country-Specific "Political Selection Institution" Analysis: China

China, which is the current largest authoritarian state that is still robust today, has long been fascinated because of its mysterious and complicated political operation process. According to the definition of selectorate in the book that they are able to express preferences over the selection of leaders and have access to enter the winning coalition, since China does hold election of all government positions, all citizens can be considered as selectorate. The authors of book also contend that, the communist countries, like former Soviet Union and China, rely on communist party to retain power and thus half of the party population, which consists the winning coalition, may have influence and be essential to the leader selection and power consolidation.

However, the political institution and operational process in China is far more sophisticated than it apparently presents. For instance, although the regime of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) endures from 1949 to now, the size and composition of selectorate and winning coalition, as well as the approaches of how leaders achieve and maintain their positions changes overtime. To disentangle the myth of Chinese politics, this article will analyze the political reality of China in the scope of the selectorate theory, analysis the political composition within the Chinese system and its implications.

The rest of the article consists of three parts. The first part will introduce the fact of Chinese politics. The second part will analyze the composition and size of selectorate and the winning coalition as well as how does they change over time. The third part will address the implications mainly in two aspects: the relationship between the changing size of winning coalition and

certain reform policy in each period; the relationship between public and private goods provision and economic growth.

Basic Elements of Chinese Politics

The official position of actual leader of China varies in different period. From the establishment of communist regime in 1949, China has experienced six leaders: Mao Zedong (1949-1976), the interim Hua Guofeng (1976-1978), Deng Xiaoping (1979-1989), Jiang Zemin (1989-2002), Hu Jintao (2002-2012) and Xi Jinping (2012-). In Mao and Hua era, the actual leader is the head of the CCP, called the Chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP. But in the beginning of Deng era, this position was replaced as the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CCP and became less important than Deng's position, the Chairman of the Central Military Committee of the CCP, which is also in actual charge of China. But after the Tiananmen Square Protest, realizing that it is better to centralize the power in case of preventing losing the leading position of the party, Deng resigned from the leader of the military at the end of 1989 and handed it to Jiang Zemin who had just been selected as the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CCP in June. After Jiang's commencement as the President of China in 1992, the centralized leadership was finally established with three "heads", the head of the party, the head of military and the head of the state, in one person. It has been unofficially institutionalize in the following reign of Hu and Xi.

Chinese political regime is a one-party system (although it is called multi-party cooperation, other small parties actually do not have access to compete for local or national leadership; they must comply with the absolute leadership of CCP). The constitution of the People's Republic of China clearly articulates that the Chinese Communist Party is the only ruling party and in the

position of leadership. Other Parties only have the right to “participate” in politics, namely, making suggestions in the policy-level but no chance to compete for political leadership. The CCP has a hierarchical election system, including six levels (village, township, county, city, provincial and central). Every five years, a direct election held by a party congress from the lowest level entails all party member of each village to elect a new village committee. Committees beyond this level are formed by representatives that elected by their lower level party congress. Through the hierarchical election level by level, the Central Committee of the CCP is formed by 371 members. The Central Committee then elect the Politburo of 25 members, the Politburo Standing committee of 7 members and the General Secretary who is the actually leader of China.

Although under one-party dictatorship, like many authoritarian regimes, the party has his "window dressing" of democracy-like institutions. The major "window dressing" is that beside the party system, there is a party-controlled government system. Like the party election system, the government system is also arranged in a hierarchical way. Every adult above 18 years old has the right to elect deputies of the People's Congress of each level and to be elected as a deputy. The hierarchical election level by level eventually generates the National People's Congress, which has the power to decide the members of government in national level, including the president who is the head of the state.

The government election is only nominal and rigged no matter party or government election, which means that everyone knows about the results before the election. In each level, most of deputies and delegates are nominated by the upper level party committee. Also, the chief position, from township head to premier, has only one candidate who is designated by the party. Thus, the congress only has the right to say Yes or No. Since it is reasonable that little will say

no if deputies and delegates want to ensure their political future, the congress is actually a rubber-stamp institution.

However, compared to the government election, the party election is few more democratic because of its competitive approval voting system. Specifically, for the election of the Central Committee members that contains 205 people, this system allows 220 candidates and let the voters select 205 people from these 220 people. The outcome is decided by the vote rank of each candidate. It did produce some unexpected outcomes that are not favorable to some powerful leaders. For example, in the 15th Party Congress, the former governor of Fujian province Xi Jinping (now President) ranks the last in the Central Committee Alternative member election. Also in this year, the now sentenced Bo Xilai (former governor of Liaoning Province) also want to be elected as the Central Committee Alternative member. However, he even failed in the Province Party Representative election, which means he lost the chance to participate in the National Party Congress. It is very rare for a governor who fails to be elected as party representative of National Party Congress and Bo was the exception.

Selectorate and Winning Coalition

According to the definition, selectorate is the set of people whose endowments include the qualities or characteristics institutionally required to choose the government's leadership and necessary for gaining access to private benefits doled out by the government's leadership. Specifically it means that members of selectorate are significant in the leader selection and have access to enter the winning coalition. Nominally, the leader of China is the president, which means the people who are able to cast vote in election can be defined as selectorate. Thus, according to such standard as well as the Election Law of People's Republic of China, since the

election system is hierarchical, Chinese people whose age is above 18 are eligible to vote. But although the president and the General Secretary is the same person, this person is not elected by government election. Therefore, these people are only considered as nominal selectorate, whose number¹ is approximate to the number of Resident (N). Relatively, the real selectorate, who are able to exert influence on the selection of the real leader of the country, the General Secretary of the Party, is the CCP member, whose number is currently 85,127,000². The proportion of the selectorate to the total population, 1,339,724,852³, is approximately 6.4%. The

The formation and relationship of blocs within the selectorate are complicated. Like other communist countries, the CCP is an organization based on patron-client relations. Since lower level official candidates are nominated by upper level party committees, like I mentioned before, except the lowest and the highest level, officials in between are both patrons and clients. The most powerful patrons in the CCP were members of the Central Committee, which currently has 376 members including alternates.

Because of the power of personnel designation and officials tend to select people who support them, blocs are formed. There are three major blocs that are led by the coming into power of certain leaders. The most influential bloc is the *Tuanpai* (the League faction) that includes officials who have work experience in the Communist Youth League of China (CYLC). It came into power with the rise of former General Secretary Hu Jintao who was the First Secretary of CYLC in the 1980s. After the commencement of Hu in 2002, large numbers of officials who once worked with or subordinate to Hu in CYLC were promoted and they reached

¹ In the white paper of Chinese government, *The Human Right Condition in China* (2000), the government claims that the proportion of eligible electorate to the total population is 99.97%. See <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/rqbps/1995/Document/308419/308419.htm>.

² Resource from the website of The Central People's Government of People's Republic of China, http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-06/30/content_2437360.htm. June 30th, 2013

³ The number is valid till 2011. <http://news.163.com/11/0428/10/72NHR77000014JB6.html>

the power center in the 18th National Congress of the CCP. Current powerful cadres⁴ of Tuanpai are Premier Li Keqiang, Vice Premier Liu Yandong and the Secretary of CCP committee of Guangdong province Hu Chunhua, who is considered as the leader of next generation after Xi Jinping. The other bloc is the Shanghai Gang⁵ led by former General Secretary Jiang Zemin. Many members of this bloc are in chief positions in Chinese political system, although they are gradually being ousted under the reign of Hu and Xi. There is another bloc that is not fully based on patron-client relationship but more tied with sharing similar historical background political perception inherited from their revolutionary fathers of Mao era, called Princelings. President Xi, whose father was the Vice Premier in Mao era, is one of them⁶. The Princeling is determined to be a short-lived bloc because of the revolutionary generation is almost dead out, but princelings' sons may inherit their father's political connections and evolve into a new patron-client bloc.

Like the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU), since the CCP system is a hierarchical one and the General Secretary is not selected by direct election, it is sure that the winning coalition is not the half of the electorate. But unlike the CPSU whose leader's selection depends

⁴ Other powerful members of Tuanpai are Li Yuanchao (Vice President), Wang Yang (Vice Premier), Li Zhanshu (Secretary of the CCP general office), Zhou Qiang (the Chief Judge of the Supreme People's Court of China), Han Zheng (Mayor of Shanghai). They are all in the Politburo of the CCP.

⁵ The bloc is named as Shanghai Gang because Jiang Zemin was the Secretary of the CCP committee of Shanghai before he became the General Secretary. Under his reign after 1989, many his former colleagues in Shanghai got promoted, such as Wu Bangguo (former mayor of Shanghai and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress), Huang Ju (former mayor of Shanghai and later Vice Premier), Zhu Rongji (former mayor of Shanghai and later Premier), Zeng Qinghong (former Vice President), Li Changchun (former Politburo Standing Committee member). Current leaders include Zhang Dejiang (Recent Politburo Standing Committee member and the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress) and Zhang Gaoli (Recent Politburo Standing Committee member and the First Vice Premier).

⁶ Other Princelings include Yu Zhengsheng (The Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and recent Politburo Standing Committee member) whose father was the mayor of Shanghai Yu Qiwei (also Jiang Qing's ex-husband), Wang Qishan (Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and recent Politburo Standing committee member) whose father-in-law Yao Yilin was former vice premier and Politburo Standing committee member, sentence Bo Xilai (former Party secretary of Chongqing and politburo member) whose father was vice premier Bo Yibo, General Liu Yuan (Political commissar of People's Liberation Army General Logistics Department) whose father was former President Liu Shaoqi. Previous Princelings also include former Premier Li Peng whose adoptive father is Zhou Enlai.

on the support of nomenklatura in patron-client relationship, the top leaders of the CCP in recent twenty years was nominated or selected by top and some retired powerful cadres covertly which is prior to the formation of patron-client relationship, which means the patron-client relationship has little influence on leader selection. Besides, after the nomination, the list of nominees will be sent to be discussed within a certain level of party officials. The process of leader selection and discussion is called *Yunniang* (prearrangement). Thus, party members who involve in the process of *Yunniang* are winning coalition members.

According to the information from an insider, the current process of *Yunniang* consists several steps below:

1. A secret ballot within Chief-ministerial level officials (unofficial process), which contains about 400⁷ voters. Between two candidates, Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, the former beat the latter by more than 200 votes, which reflected the preference of those officials. This process is not decisive and is just an explorative attempt that not has been institutionalized.

2. The Politburo meeting officially decides the number and nomination proposal of next Politburo member.

3. Recommendation (official process). This process is also circumscribed within Central committee member and alternate members and officials who are not in the Central Committee but are above the Chief-Ministerial level. The specific method is that every attender will receive a list that contains members of previous Central Committee who are eligible in age⁸ to be elected as Politburo members. Finally, a recommendation list that contains about 30-40 nominees (10-15 Politburo Standing Committee nominees) will be formed.

⁷ The Cadre system of China contains 27 levels. This number of 400 involves in officials who are above level 8, the Chief-Ministerial level, which refers officials who are the secretary of the party committee of certain province, ministers of state council and military chiefs of each military region.

⁸ People whose ages are above 67 are not eligible to be the next Politburo member.

4. The discussion of the list (unofficial). The Politburo and some retired powerful cadres (mainly includes former Politburo Standing committee members) will do the first round elimination of the list. The Politburo Standing Committee members will do the second round elimination. Finally, the refined list will be sent to other retired cadres (mainly includes former Deputy-National level officials, such as former vice premier) and officials above the Chief-Ministerial level, asking for their opinions.

5. The final decision will be made by the Politburo Standing Committee and ratified by the Politburo meeting. If still there are some different opinions about the list, an enlarged-Politburo meeting (adding previous Politburo Standing Committee members) will be convened to decide the ultimate list. For instance, for the list of the 18th Politburo Standing Committee, the incumbent Politburo Standing committee meeting cannot decide the last member (choosing from Zhang Gaoli, Wang Yang and Li Yuanchao) of next Politburo Standing Committee. The subsequent enlarged-Politburo meeting finally decided Zhao Gaoli as the last member of the new committee.

I should note that the process of Yunnian is mainly aimed at selecting the Politburo Standing Committee members and there is only one step that involves in the selection of the one top leader. Actually from Deng's reign, the Chinese leadership system is becoming a more collective one, rather than Mao's personal dictatorship. Thus, I still count people who are able to participate in the process of Yunnian as winning coalition members. By examining the process, there are 537 people in the current winning coalition: 205 Central Committee members, 171 Central Committee Alternate members⁹, 54 officials who are above the Chief-Ministerial level

⁹ All the members and alternate members of the Central Committee are above the Chief-Ministerial level.

but not members of the Central Committee¹⁰, 19 retired cadres who are former Politburo Standing committee member and 88 retired cadres who are former Deputy-National level officials¹¹. The portion of winning coalition to the selectorate is about 0.0006%. Within this winning coalition, besides the former powerful cadres, the main body of 430 officials who are above the Chief-Ministerial level composites members from different backgrounds: military (about 40 members), Party system (about 40 members), State council (about 100 members), regional leaders (about 150 members), State owned enterprise (50 members), NPC (20 members) and other social groups (30 members).

However, the winning coalition analysis about only fits the selection of the incumbent Xi Jinping and the 18th Politburo, whose selection procedures are about to be institutionalized. Before Xi, the selection of top leaders was not this sophisticated. In fact, the size of winning coalition varies in different periods. For Mao, his came into power derived from his military feats. But to maintain his position, he still had to rely on certain group of people. However, his risks of remaining in office also came from his coalition members. Thus, using what BDM (2011) suggests, Mao used to keep his essentials off-balance and replaced them when he felt threat to his position. From his came into power in 1935, his key coalition members were: Zhang Wentian (1935-1941), Liu Shaoqi (1941-1962), Lin Biao (1962-1969) and the Gang of Four (1969-1976). The only coalition member who supported Mao all the time was Zhou Enlai, but his support was not decisive but fundamental. Although the coalition members varied, the size of winning coalition did not change a lot, with about five people each time.

¹⁰ See http://www.360doc.com/content/09/1101/02/112068_8191249.shtml. (Chinese)

¹¹ See

<http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%85%9A%E5%92%8C%E5%9B%BD%E5%AE%B6%E9%A2%86%E5%AF%BC%E4%BA%BA> (Chinese)

For his successor, Hua Guofeng, Mao himself was his key coalition member. Therefore, although he exterminated the Gang of Four, Mao's death let him lose his most powerful support, and was ousted by Deng two years later. Deng's came into power, unlike his before and after, was more like a Soviet way of relying on patron-client relationship. He was not designated by any elder revolutionaries, but relied on his former subordinates and millions of victim officials of Mao era, to gain and retain his power. Victims of Mao era had the incentive to support Deng because they were sure that Deng would redress them once come into power because Deng himself was a victim. According to official statistics, more than 3 million former officials were later redressed because of Deng's policy, which indicates that the size of Deng's winning coalition was about 3 million. Under huge pressure, Hua abdicated his power at the end of 1978. Under Deng's reign, millions of former victims (his winning coalition) helped Deng booster his reform.

However, the large-size winning coalition failed to be inherited by the next generation of leaders because of the Tiananmen Square Protest. Unsatisfied to the General Secretary Zhao Ziyang's attitude toward the protest, which is too warm, Deng and other eight former powerful cadres (Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, Yang Shangkun, Bo Yibo, Peng Zhen, Song Renqiong and Yao Yilin) met unofficially and decided to dismiss Zhao and made Jiang Zemin as the next General Secretary. There were only seven people knew Jiang was about to come into power. Even Jiang himself was shocked when he was informed. For the selection of Hu Jintao, the winning coalition was even smaller: he was selected by Deng himself in 1992 as the successor of Jiang without an official meeting, just waiting for the ratification of the Politburo meeting.

To conclude, the winning coalition size of China is bimodal-like. Mao and Hua each had winning coalition size not exceeding 5, but Deng had 3 million. Jiang and Hu were decided to be

leaders by no more than ten people. Xi's coming into power relies on a larger winning coalition compared to his two predecessors. But since the current leader selection procedure tends to be institutionalized, the size of winning coalition has no chance to be dwindled again as long as there will not be any extraordinary events like the Tiananmen Square Protest.

Implications: Reform Policy, Economic Growth and Public and Private Goods

Allocation

This part consists implications of selectorate theory on two kinds of relationships. The first one is the relationship between the changing sizes of winning coalition and the reform policy shift of China. The second one is the relationship between the economic growth and goods distribution.

First, by examining the how the size of winning coalition changes over different periods, a close relationship between the size of winning coalition and the reform policy change is obvious. It can be noticed that when the coalition number was large to 3 million, Deng commenced the most revolutionary reform since the establishment of the communist regime. Many policies, such as supporting the household contract responsibility system with remuneration linked to output, could be sentenced to death in Mao era. However, the step of reform was stopped by the crackdown of Tiananmen Square Protest. Selected by a small-number winning coalition, Jiang terminated the process of reform and began to address the class struggle in the early 1990s. Eventually, it was the large-winning coalition leader, Deng, who exerted pressure to Jiang and again boosted the process of reform. In the year 1992, the Party made the establishment of the Socialist Market System as their goal, which is considered as a significant reform milestone. However, after the death of Deng in 1997, Jiang was not able to make any more progress on the

reform by making his own contribution. Hu, as Jiang's successor and another small winning coalition leader, focused mainly on improving the living standard of people but also failed to make any significant progressive policy on economic or political reform. Xi, who is different from Jiang and Hu by being selected by a larger winning coalition, made his historical contribution to the reform of China. The Third meeting of Central Committee of the 18th National Party Congress of the CCP in November 2013 ratified *The Decision of the CCP Central Committee on Several Important Issues of Comprehensively Deepening Reform*. The significance of this document rivals the one in 1978 when Deng for the first time announce the reform policy. Therefore, there seems to be a positive relationship between the size of winning coalition and the progressiveness of reform policies.

The major reason of such relationship can be attributed to the risks that different leaders face when they have different winning coalition size and the composition of the winning coalition. In other words, the leaders' survival depends on whether the interests of the winning coalition members being satisfied, which means that leaders must be responsible to the favor of winning coalition members. Otherwise, the leaders are probably to be resigned by the winning coalition, which is considered as the major risk of remaining in office of communist Chinese politics. For Deng, as discussed before, his winning coalition had great incentives to be redressed from their former guilty identities, so Deng had no choice to make the revolutionary change of Mao's policy. If Deng still did what Hua did after the death of Mao, which still stack to Mao's class struggle theory, he would be ousted and replaced by another reformer like what he did toward Hua. But for Jiang, since he was decided to be the leader by only eight cadres whose are almost conservatives to the reform (except Deng), in the first two years of his reign, his policy major focused on the criticism of the reform, aiming at satisfy those conservatives' political intention.

The ultimate authority, Deng, could not bear the negation toward the reform and sent an "ultimatum" to Jiang during his "Journey to South" in spring 1992, by saying that "whoever does not want reform should resign". Realizing that Deng was his most critical winning coalition member, Jiang quickly adjusted his policy by setting the Socialist Market economic system as the goal of the Party to favor Deng's interest. The death of Deng freed Jiang from his obligation to comply. Since then, no influential reform policies were proposed, neither in Hu era whose leader was picked by Deng himself and had a smaller winning coalition. Xi, who has a relatively larger winning coalition, also makes policies favorable to his winning coalition. Compared to his two predecessors who were selected by conservatives, Xi's winning coalition is far more complicated, which contains not only conservatives like Shanghai Gang (Jiang's faction) and more reformatories Tuanpai (Hu's faction). Analysis considered that Xi's policies in his first two years were conservative, such as the unprecedented suppression on the ideology area since the reform era, which seems to respond the interests of those conservatives in his winning coalition. But this year, the ratification of *The Decision of the CCP Central Committee on Several Important Issues of Comprehensively Deepening Reform* that makes significant progress of the reform favors those reformatories within his winning coalition. In summary, the composition and interests of the winning coalition, which are decisive to the leaders' survival, shape the intensiveness of reform policy.

In addition, China's address on economic performance makes it an untypical authoritarian country that has small winning coalition. According to selectorate theory, economic growth, which can make all citizens better off, is considered as public good. But authoritarian country leaders, with small winning coalitions, do not need to have good economic performance because

it is more effective for them to retain in power by allocating enough private goods to their winning coalition members. There are two reasons for the abnormality of China.

First, unlike many other authoritarian regimes whose legitimacy derives from military victory or royal lineage, the CCP, although gained the control of China through military victory in 1949, its contemporary regime legitimacy largely result from the astonishing economic performance since the Deng era. Admittedly, Mao's military victory gave the birth of communist regime, but his disastrous governance had put his reign to the edge of collapse, confiscating all his previously earned legitimacy. It was Deng who save the communist regime by leading the country from poverty to wealth, from endless political struggle to stability. Economic growth has become a label of the CCP's rule that is given by Deng. Once this label is invalid, which indicates the CCP can no longer bring prosperity to Chinese people, the grievance toward the communist regime will accumulate, which undermines the political stability and the ruling position of the CCP. Therefore, there is no reason for the CCP to neglect its economic performance.

Second, it is not appropriate to define a policy that can provide pure public good or private good. Although economic growth is generally considered as public good, it can provide large amount of private good especially in Chinese economic and political environment. In China, the winning coalition members, as well as some high-level selectorates, can exploit private good major in two ways. The first one is elementary, which refers to the privileges of cadres. For example, according to inside information, the privilege of a Chief-Ministerial level official (winning coalition member) contains the following: a) 220 square meters of house allowance; b) eligible to have private driver, body guard and medical team; c) enjoy four private three-week recreation times every year; d) free first class seat, three cars or two bus when traveling; e) free

eating and accommodation when traveling; f) free medical care for entire life. These privileges are unimaginable to be obtained by an ordinary person. The second way derives from the political monopoly of the CCP, which entitles the CCP officials to intervene in economic realm. The importance of economic performance, which has been discussed above, urges regional officials to focus on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) output, in order to gain more opportunities to be promoted. To achieve this, officials strive to introduce construction project or foreign capital into their regions. Since the officials hold the examination and approval power, project owners need to bribe the officials in order to get the chance to commence their constructions to earn revenue. Therefore, such rent-seeking power enables officials to earn considerable "grey revenue", which is considered as private good exploitation.

Conclusion

This article mainly discusses Chinese politics in the scope of selectorate theory. China, as a one party dictatorship authoritarian country, has a body of selectorate that refers to all the CCP members. The winning coalition is not simply half of its selectorate, but varies in different periods. The current winning coalition contains about 500 members who are decisive to the selection and the retaining office of current General Secretary of the Party Xi Jinping. The overall trends of the size of winning coalition of Chinese leader is like a bimodal curve and the size will be stabilized and may continue to increase in the future. The article finds that when the size of winning coalition becomes larger, the Chinese leaders tend to conduct intensive reform policy; relatively, when the winning coalition is small, the leaders prefer to reserve the status quo. In addition, by acknowledging the importance of economic growth, officials use their political power to exploit private goods.

The defects of this article are obvious. First, since the political system of China is basically covert, many information recourses I refer to are not from official document but from insiders who have more information about the system. I believe when more documents are declassified, the study of Chinese political institution will be clearer. Second, given the complexity of Chinese politics, it is not possible to present a thorough and systematic examination of it in a 15-pages paper. More details need to be developed. Third, if a statistical analysis is employed to prove that there is a causal relationship between the size of winning coalition and the intensiveness of reform policy, the argument would be more compelling. However, due to the lack of cases, such statistical effort cannot be achieved currently. I believe that when the leader selection procedure of the CCP is finally institutionalized after several generations, the statistical study will ready to be conducted.

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