

**THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY AT 100:
A FORMIDABLE FORCE IN
TODAY'S WORLD**

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Executive Summary

1. On 1 July 2021, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will celebrate the centennial of its founding. Its first national congress was attended by only 13 delegates who represented 57 party members nationwide. The party has since grown to become one of the world's largest political parties (with 93 million members).
2. "Party building" (*dangjian*) dominated much of General Secretary Xi Jinping's first term. Xi integrated two broader but interconnected objectives, modernising China's governance system and governing capability, and implementing the rule of law, into his party-building efforts.
3. Xi pursued party building with a three-stage strategy: fighting corruption, overhauling party institutions, rules and regulations, and accentuating the party's role in state governance. Xi's aspiration is to build a party capable of "self-cleansing, self-perfecting, self-innovating and self-upgrading".
4. The anti-corruption campaign aims to not only persecute corruption cases and purge corrupt cadres, but also build a system that would achieve successively the effects that cadres "dare not", "could not" and "would not" engage in corruption. Following the initial success of the anti-corruption campaign, a "party-building institutional reform" programme was introduced to overhaul the intra-party system of rules and regulations.
5. This programme in turn is integrated with the national project of implementing the rule of law. The CCP carried out a "five-year plan for intra-party regulation making 2013 - 2017" following the Fourth Plenum of the 18th Party Congress devoted entirely to the rule of law. The integration of intra-party rule making with state legislation is the CCP's innovation to the Leninist party.
6. For the first time in the reform era, the CCP carried out in 2018 an integrated institutional restructuring that included the ruling party and the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the government in one package. The restructuring

consolidated the CCP's grip on all government branches to create a model of governance dubbed as "all-encompassing or omnipresent state".

7. Xi is regarded abroad as another big dictator after Mao. However, unlike Mao, whose dictatorial rule saw the systematic dismantling of the party-state institutions in zealous pursuit of a revolutionary ideal, the power Xi has amassed has instead been deployed in meticulous institution building on a massive scale.
8. Far from "cracking up" or collapsing as anticipated by some observers, today's CCP is in a better shape than before Xi took the rein. Xi has arrested the atrophy of the party, resulting in a CCP that is more capable of handling tasks both at home and abroad as illustrated by China's successful control of COVID-19. It is a formidable force in the world today, and perhaps for decades to come.

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Lance L P GORE*

The Chinese Communist Party on the Eve of Its Centenary

- 1.1 On 1 July 2021, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will celebrate the 100th anniversary of its founding in Shanghai in 1921. From its humble beginning at its first national congress attended by 13 delegates representing 57 party members nationwide, it has grown to become the largest political party ruling the most populous country in the world.
- 1.2 According to the latest *Intraparty Statistics Communiqué* issued by the Central Organisation Department of the CCP on 30 June 2020, CCP membership reached a new height of 91.914 million by the end of 2019, a net increase of 1.32 million over 2018. Of this 50.7% had an education of junior college or above (46.615 million). Those who joined the Party before the founding of the People's Republic on 1 October 1949 accounted for only 0.189% (174,000); those recruited before the reform and opening era (i.e. before 1979) accounted for 16.87% (15,509 million) while 82.94% (76.232 million) were recruited during the reform and opening era, 14.955 million (16.27%) of which have been recruited since Xi Jinping became the general secretary (15 November 2012).¹
- 1.3 Based on the average rate of increase in the past decade, by its 100th anniversary on 1 July 2021, CCP membership should reach a little past 93 million. Were it a nation, the CCP would have ranked the 15th most populous in the world, just ahead of the Democratic Republic of Congo (population 92.081 million in June 2021²).

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¹ <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0630/c1001-31765451.html>, retrieved 8 June 2021.

² <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/democratic-republic-of-the-congo-population/>, retrieved 12 June 2021.

- 1.4 General Secretary Xi Jinping devoted his first term primarily to rectifying and rebuilding the party. Party building (*dangjian*) under him has embraced a new direction and taken on new characteristics. Xi has a more strategic vision for the CCP in China's drive towards national rejuvenation.

The CCP in Xi's Vision

- 2.1 The CCP has always regarded itself as the backbone of the nation and the most potent factor in national rejuvenation. Mao regarded "party building" (*dangde jianshe*) as one of its three "magic wands" in the successful Chinese revolution.³ In the CCP's parlance, "party building" refers to the constant effort devoted to recruiting, training and disciplining party members, improving party institutions, rules and norms, and enhancing the efficacy of the party in carrying whatever tasks that come along. Xi regards a well-built ruling party as the ultimate guarantee for China's rise. Party building was dubbed "the great project" by Mao in the 1930s and "the new great project" by successive CCP leaderships during the reform era.
- 2.2 However, Xi inherited a ruling party described by Hu Jintao, his predecessor, as in a dire situation of undergoing "four tests" and experiencing "four dangers". The four tests are the test of ruling the country, of reform and opening, of market economy and of the international environment. The four dangers are sagging spirit, lacking in ruling capability, losing touch with the masses and corruption. Xi's predecessors devoted considerable energy and resources to party building but with disappointing results.
- 2.3 Xi does not consider himself as just another Chinese top leader in the routine succession established by Deng. He apparently aims to instead stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Mao and Deng with his accomplishments in the final push towards national rejuvenation, particularly in putting China on a robust institutional foundation. In other words, he wants to be remembered in history as the one who has established the definitive form of "socialist with Chinese characteristics" after

³ The other two are united front and armed struggle. The latter is the basis for the CCP's insistence that the armed forces of China—the People's Liberation Army—is a partisan organisation instead of the worldwide norm of a politically neutral defence force of the nation.

four decades of “crossing the river by feeling for stepping stones”. In November 2014, Xi, in his characteristic way, unveiled his massive strategic reform plan as “four comprehensives”—comprehensively deepen reforms, comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society, comprehensively implement the rule of law and comprehensively govern the party strictly.

- 2.4 The last “comprehensive” is what he tackles first on the premise that before the nation could be rejuvenated, he must rejuvenate the party. A robust ruling party is the premise of the other three comprehensives. Party rejuvenation began immediately upon his assumption of office with a massive anti-corruption campaign that has continued to this day. After initial success, the Politburo Standing Committee adopted a party institutional reform programme on 1 September 2014, “The implementation plan for deepening party-building institutional reform”, with the stated objective of putting the CCP on a robust institutional foundation. The plan consists of reforms in four areas: intra-party institutional reforms; cadre and personnel system reforms; reforms of grassroots organisation building; and reforms of the system and mechanisms of cultivating talents.⁴
- 2.5 To accomplish these objectives amid the resistance of status-quo interest, Xi has no qualms about amassing power by establishing several “leading groups” on top of existing political establishments and usurping economic policymaking from the traditional domain of the premiership. He has acquired the “leadership core” status that was denied to his immediate predecessor through clever manoeuvres⁵ and even flirted with the Maoist personality cult. Throughout his tenure in office he tirelessly demands loyalty, discipline and the intraparty norm of shoring up the authority of the top leader.
- 2.6 Xi has since tried to strengthen the party with a three-stage strategy: fighting corruption to restore the faith, morale and discipline to the Leninist party; rebuilding party institutions, rules and norms; and realigning the party with the state to ensure

⁴ Press conference on deepening party building institutional reforms by official from the Central Organization Department, *Guangming Daily*, 2 September 2014, available http://news.gmw.cn/2014-09/02/content_12957089_3.htm, last accessed 28 May 2021.

⁵ C.f., Lance Gore “Elevating Xi Jinping to the ‘Core’ of Chinese leadership” (EAI Background Brief 1127, 7 April 2016).

the centrality of the party in the governance of the nation. The ultimate objective is to build a party with modernised ruling capabilities and capable of “self-cleansing, self-perfecting, self-innovating and self-upgrading”.⁶

Anti-Corruption System Reform

- 3.1 Xi’s tenure started with a massive anti-corruption campaign that has seen the purge of millions of corrupt officials and party members from the top to the bottom of the party-state hierarchy. More importantly, Xi and his close ally Wang Qishan, chairman of the Central Commission on Discipline Inspection, the anticorruption body of the party, aim to establish an anti-corruption system that would achieve successively three objectives: first, officials would no longer dare to engage in corruption, then they would not have the opportunities to do so, and finally they would not want to engage in corruption.⁷
- 3.2 On 30 June 2014, the Politburo passed “The implementation plan for reforming the party’s discipline inspection system”. The plan spells out the details of institutional arrangements that govern the flow of authority between party committees and discipline inspection commissions at various levels as well as within the discipline inspection system, and standardises the rules and procedures of disciplinary actions. It also further institutionalises the practice of stationing inspectors or inspecting teams in all important party-state organs to monitor their daily operations. It also further develops the discipline-inspection tour system and standardises its operation.
- 3.3 Previously, the discipline inspection commissions at various levels and locales were subordinate to party committees which they are supposed to exercise oversight on. That institutional setting created a situation of subordinates who are both supervising and at the mercy of their superiors. For example, whenever a corruption case is uncovered, it must first get the go-ahead from the secretary of the party committee before an investigation could be launched. That considerably undermines

⁶ See Xi’s elaboration on his report to the 19th Party Congress that enshrines the “Xi Thought” on socialism with Chinese characteristics for the new era, at http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2019-11/05/c_1125195941.htm, accessed 10 June 2021. The 6th Plenum of the 19th Party Congress (October 2016) is devoted to “strictly governing the party in a comprehensive way”.

⁷ In Chinese: 不敢腐，不能腐，不想腐.

the efficacy of discipline inspection and is regarded as one of the root causes of rampant corruption.

- 3.4 Under the new system, the discipline commissioner reports primarily to the discipline commission at the next higher level, instead of to the party committee at the same level. When a case of corruption is discovered, it first reports to the higher level discipline commission instead of to the party committee at the same level. The personnel appointment in the discipline commission is also taken away from the party committee and handed over to the next higher level discipline commission, creating a degree of independence for the discipline enforcement organ.
- 3.5 The new system is characterised by “two primaries”: corruption investigation is primarily led by the higher level discipline commission, and the appointment and performance assessment of commissioner and deputy commissioners are primarily in the hands of the higher level discipline commission. In the case of disagreement between two levels of discipline commissions, the decision of the superior commission prevails.⁸
- 3.6 After three years of intensive anti-corruption campaign, Xi has duly launched institution rebuilding. The CCP devoted the entire Sixth Plenum of the 18th Party Congress (October 2016) to party building. The plenum summarised the experiences of fighting corruption, codified intra-party discipline inspection in the revised “Regulations on internal oversight” and adopted the revised “Guideline for intra-party behaviour”. What is unusual about this intra-party behavioural guideline is its explicit inclusion of the behaviour of members of the Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee. The inclusion is widely regarded as yet another of Xi’s attempt to subordinate his colleagues at the apex of power.
- 3.7 On 9 March 2020, the Central General Office of the CCP issued the “Provisions on the primary responsibility of party committee/party group in strictly governing the party in all-round way”, which is a detailed regulation holding party chiefs at various

⁸ Here the interference of the party committee is implicated. *Xinhua News Agency*, “Providing a solid institutional guarantee for the rectification of discipline and work style: recounting the comprehensively deepening the reforms of the party’s discipline inspection system”, at http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-01/11/content_2803035.htm, accessed 11 June 2021.

levels, locales and organisations responsible for any failings in party building within their respective jurisdictions. The CCP finally unveiled its long-awaited “Opinions on strengthening the supervision of the ‘first hands’ (i.e. party chiefs) and party leading teams” on 27 March 2021, signifying that the CCP begins to tackle the root source and mother of all corruptions—the excessive power of party chiefs.⁹ Although the methods and mechanisms proposed still seem inadequate to check the power of party chiefs, it is a more serious start than ever before.

- 3.8 The Sixth Plenum initiated a new phase of party building centred on two areas of institution building: beefing up intraparty rules and institutions, and strengthening the role of the party in the management of state affairs, both under the rubric of “party-building institutional reform” (*dangjian zhidugaige*), which is in essence, reforming party-building institutions so as to achieve the capability “self-cleansing, self-perfection, self-innovation and self-upgrading”.

Party Building Institutional Reform

- 4.1 Party building under Xi Jinping is undertaken with two broader but interconnected objectives—modernising China’s governance system and governing capability, and facilitating the rule of law (*yifazhiguo*).
- 4.2 The Politburo first introduced the concept of “party building institutional reform”, which includes not only intra-party institution building but also rationalising state governance, on 29 August 2014. Party institutions are made the core of the governance structure of China from which government institutions are derivative. They determine the direction of the nation. and methods and effectiveness of state governance.¹⁰
- 4.3 Party building institutional reform is officially described as the process of establishing a comprehensive system of party building based on the Party

⁹ *People’s Daily*, 2 June 2021, at <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0602/c1001-32119748.html>, accessed 7 June 2021.

¹⁰ See for example, “The nine ‘perennial insistence’ in centennial party building”, *Study Times*, 19 May 2021, at http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-05/19/c_1127463790.htm, accessed 12 June 2021.

Constitution, centred on democratic centralism, and covering major areas of party building so that the party's work is "more scientific, more democratic, more law-based and more effective". The central task of party-building institutional reform is to build and perfect the CCP's intra-party system of rules, regulations and institutions.¹¹

- 4.4 Soon after the Fourth Plenum of the 18th Party Congress in October 2014 adopted a resolution on implementing the rule according to law ("CCP Central Committee Decision Regarding Some Major Questions in Comprehensively Promoting Governance According to Law"), the CCP initiated "The outline of five-year plan for intra-party regulation making 2013 - 2017" (together with "The five-year plan for building and perfecting a corruption prevention system 2013 - 2017").¹² The outline marked the nestling of intra-party rule-making inside the push for broader rule of law programme and anti-corruption institution building.¹³ Table 1 lists some of the most consequential "intraparty legislations" under Xi Jinping, categorised under four areas: rules of rulemaking, regulations on the operation of party organs, discipline and anti-corruption regulations, and regulations concerning intra-party behaviour and code of conduct.

TABLE 1 INTRAPARTY RULES AND REGULATIONS UNDER XI JINPING

Rule Making Rules	
CCP regulations on intra-party legislation 中国共产党党内法规制定条例	3-9-2019
CCP measures for the documentation and review of intra-party legislation and normative documents 中国共产党党内法规和规范性文件备案审查规定	3-9-2019
CCP Provisions on Responsibility for Enforcement of Internal Regulations (trial) 中国共产党党内法规执行责任制规定 (试行)	3-9-2019
Operational Rules	
CCP detailed guidelines for party member recruitment 中国共产党发展党员工作细则	10-6-2014

¹¹ C.f., Jiang Mingan (professor at Peking University Law School) "Interpretations of the outline five-year plan of the intra-party legislation", at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/1128/c164113-23679381-2.html>, last accessed 14 June 2021.

¹² "CCDC: 34 regulation making projects concerning party workstyle on the agenda following the 18th Party Congress", at <http://politics.people.com.cn/ywzx/n/2014/0930/c363762-25767013.html>, last accessed 5 June 2021.

¹³ See the CCP Central Committee's "Outline plan for building the rule of law China 2020 - 2025", available at http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-01/10/content_5578659.htm, last accessed 14 June 2021.

Several stipulations on the promotion and demotion of leading cadres (trial) 推进领导干部能上能下若干规定 (试行)	29-7-2015
Regulations on environmental and ecological accountability of leading cadres of the party and government (trial) 党政领导干部生态环境损害责任追究办法 (试行)	17-8-2015
CCP regulations on the work of local party committees 中国共产党地方委员会工作条例	5-1-2016
CCP regulations on the disclosure of party affairs 中国共产党党务公开条例	25-12-2017
CCP regulations on the work of party branches 中国共产党支部工作条例	25-11-2018
Regulations on cadre education and training 干部教育培训工作条例	12-12-2018
Regulations on the selection and appointment of leading cadres of the party and government 党政领导干部选拔任用工作条例	17-3-2019
CCP regulations on party group work 中国共产党党组工作条例	15-4-2019
Regulations on the performance assessment of leading cadres of the party and government 党政领导干部考核工作条例	21-4-2019
CCP regulations on political and legal work 中国共产党政法工作条例	18-6-2019
CCP regulations on propaganda work 中国共产党宣传工作条例	29-6-2019
Regulations on the work of party schools 党校工作条例	25-9-2019
Regulations on the work of CCP Central Committee 中国共产党中央委员会工作条例	30-9-2020
CCP regulations on the election work of local party organisations 中国共产党地方组织选举工作条例	6-1-2021
CCP regulations on the work of party organisations in institutions of higher learning 中国共产党普通高等学校基层组织工作条例	22-4-2021
CCP regulations on united front work 中国共产党统一战线工作条例 (试行)	5-1-2021
Discipline and Anti-corruption Rules	
The management of cadres whose spouses have emigrated to other countries or territories 配偶已移居国(境)外的国家工作人员任职岗位管理办法	First half of 2014
CCP accountability regulations 中国共产党问责条例	28-6-2016
CCP regulations on internal oversight 中国共产党党内监督条例	27-10-2016
CCP regulations on inspection tour work 中国共产党巡视工作条例	1-7-2017
Provisions on personal affairs reporting by leading cadres 领导干部报告个人有关事项规定	8-2-2017
Measures for verified reports of leading cadres' personal affairs 领导干部个人有关事项报告查核结果处理办法	8-2-2017
Provisions on work safety responsibility system for local party and government leading cadres 地方党政领导干部安全生产责任制规定	18-4-2018

Chinese Communist Party Disciplinary Regulations 中国共产党纪律处分条例	1-10-2018
CCP supervision rules for discipline enforcement work of discipline inspection organs 中国共产党纪律检查机关监督执纪工作规则	6-1-2019
Provisions on the primary responsibility of party committee/party group in strictly governing the party in an all-round way 党委(党组)落实全面从严治党主体责任规定	9-3-2020
Opinions on strengthening the supervision of the ‘first hand’ (i.e. party chiefs) and party leading teams 关于加强对一把手和领导班子监督的意见	27-3-2021
Behavioural Rules/Code of Conduct	
Eight regulations on improving work style and connections with the masses 关于改进工作作风密切联系群众的八项规定	4-12-2012
Regulations on frugal spending and anti-wasting in party and government organisations 党政机关厉行节约反对浪费条例	26-10-2013
CCP code of conduct on incorruptibility and self-discipline 中国共产党廉洁自律准则	20-10-2015
Code of Conduct for Intraparty Political Life under New Conditions 关于新形势下党内政治生活的若干准则	2-11-2016
Several stipulations about the democratic life meetings of the leading cadres at the county level or above 县以上党和国家机关党员领导干部民主生活会若干规定	12-1-2017

Sources: The author’s compilation from various online sources.

The Party and the Rule According to Law

5.1 Intra-party legislation (rule, regulation and institution making) is meant to provide concrete rules to “cage power with institutions” (*ba quali guanjin longzili*). It started with a comprehensive clearing up of old rules and regulations that took more than a year (August 2013 – November 2014) to complete. The CCP purged 300 or so of the 767 intra-party regulations issued between 1978 and 2012, many of which are either obsolete or contradicting one another.¹⁴ Most of the rest are to be amended or updated, which resulted in 90 or so new intra-party regulations by the 19th Party Congress in 2017.¹⁵

¹⁴ Party Building Institute of the CCP Central Organisation Department, “On the relationship between deepening party building institution reforms and the modernization of state governance”, *Qiushi*, No. 2, 2015.

¹⁵ <http://cpc.people.com.cn/19th/n1/2017/1019/c414536-29596657.html>, last accessed 20 March 2021.

- 5.2 The CCP followed up with “The outline five-year plan for intra-party legislation” by issuing the “Opinions on strengthening the construction of intra-party regulations and institutions” on 25 June 2017. This is the first document in CCP history devoted to intra-party regulation and institution building. It set the goal of establishing, by the party’s centenary, a comprehensive system of regulations and institutions, an efficient system for their implementation and an effective system of logistic support, substantially raising the capability and level of “governing the party by rules”.¹⁶
- 5.3 Characteristic of Xi Jinping’s personality and work style, the “Opinion” envisioned a 1+4 framework of intra-party regulations and institutions, namely, four subsystems under the over-arching Party Constitution—the system of organisational regulations, a system of regulations governing party leadership, a system of regulations concerning party building itself, and a system of supervision and enforcement. The “opinions” stressed quality control and operationalisability.
- 5.4 The document further stipulated the establishment of specialised organs and personnel in charge of intra-party legislation at the provincial level to offer provincial party committee services, such as legislative planning, drafting regulations, maintaining existing regulations, guiding and supervising implementation, and provide the provincial party leadership with legal counselling and so on. It is also tasked with long-term planning for grooming successor talents, and building up a corps of intra-party legislative staff that is loyal to the party, hardworking, political and ideologically correct, competent, and courageous in taking responsibility.
- 5.5 Such intra-party legislation that parallels that of the usual state legislation is uniquely CCP. It is a further innovation to the Leninist party. In a way this is inevitable for single-party rule when it pursues institutional modernisation, for in such a polity the law will amount to very little if members of the ruling party disregard it. Party regulations, rules and disciplines, while allowing the party some leeway to finesse the constraints of the law if its ruling position is endangered, also gives the party an extra set of tools to shape the behaviour of the members of the ruling party.

¹⁶ https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/yaowen/202101/t20210102_233116.html, accessed 10 June 2021.

The Party and Governance Modernisation

- 6.1 It has become a cliché within the CCP that the key to running the affairs of China well is to run the party affairs well. “Scientific”, “systematic” and “standardised” are regarded by Xi Jinping as the hallmarks of governance modernisation. In Deng Xiaoping’s original vision, such modern governance should be achieved by separating the party from the government so that the latter could enjoy the autonomy and develop the expertise and competence of managing public affairs. The party on the other hand had to be liberated from the daily routines of the state to better attend to party affairs and major policymaking. The CCP’s 13th Party Congress in 1987 codified this vision in the political report delivered by Zhao Ziyang, then CCP general secretary. The Tiananmen protests in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet camp halted this vision in its track. The CCP became wary of the government evolving into a competing power centre as in the Soviet case under Gorbachev.
- 6.2 Despite Zhao Ziyang’s purge during the Tiananmen Protest Movement, the CCP leadership did not repudiate the 13th Party Congress line because of Deng’s stern warning that “not a single word of the 13th Party Congress Resolution should be altered”. Both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao muddled through until Xi Jinping completely reversed the 13th Party Congress plan when he took the rein in late 2012. His conviction is that party power and its ruling position consist of it playing a central role in managing daily state affairs. He resurrected the Maoist slogan, “The east, west, south, north and the center; the workers, peasants, soldiers, students and merchants—the party leads them all” and hammered on “party leadership” wherever there is an opportunity.
- 6.3 At the annual “two sessions” of 2017, Wang Qishan espoused a new theory of state, asserting that the Chinese state has always been a “omnipresent state” (*guangyi zhengfu*) that is distinctive from the modern Western conception of a limited state. He pointed out that the people always regarded party authorities and bureaucracies as part of the state.¹⁷ Wang’s theory of an omnipresent or unlimited state was

¹⁷ <http://lianghui.people.com.cn/2017/n1/2017/0307/c410899-29128832.html>, last accessed 11 June 2021.

invoked to pave the way for the massive overhaul of party-state institutions in March 2018.

- 6.4 Before 2018, China undertook six rounds of institutional reforms, all on streamlining and trimming state bureaucracies. The 2018 round, however, was a comprehensive overhaul of the party-state structure in its totality as a single, integrated reform package covering 60 types of institutions under eight categories: party central organs, institutions of the National People's Congress, State Council bureaucracies, the People's Political Consultative Conference establishment, administrative law enforcement, civilian-military relations, mass organisations¹⁸ and local governance.
- 6.5 The reform plan was floated towards the end of February and formally adopted on 21 March; the less than a month in between was a significant departure from the normal practice of allowing sufficient heads-up time for discussion and consensus building. More importantly perhaps is the tightly spaced three Plenums of the Central Committee leading up to the reform: the First Plenum of the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, the Second Plenum in January 2018 (known for its resolution on a constitutional amendment to remove term limit of the state president) and the Third Plenum in February devoted to party-state institutional reforms.
- 6.6 The intensive manoeuvres that led to the massive institutional overhaul has Xi's style written all over it. It appears to have been engineered to overwhelm and overcome all possible resistance inevitable to such reallocation of power and interests on such a massive scale. As a result of this round of institutional overhaul, an iterated party-dominated governance structure has taken preliminary shape, in which the State Council is subordinated to the CCP's central authority to an unprecedented extent. The official mouthpiece, *People's Daily*, hailed this round of reforms "revolutionary".¹⁹ Table 2 illustrates the major subordinate relations between the party and the government as a result of this round reform.

¹⁸ These are CCP's auxiliary or peripheral organisations, mainly the Women's Association, the communist youth league and the federation of trade unions.

¹⁹ E.g. Xinhua online commentary, "Accurately grasp the striking characteristics of this revolutionary change", at http://www.xinhuanet.com/comments/2018-03/14/c_1122536181.htm and "Why Liu He stated

TABLE 2 FURTHER SUBORDINATION OF THE STATE TO THE PARTY

Party Principals	State Agencies
Central Commission on Comprehensively Implementing the Rule of Law	Support office provided by the Ministry of Justice
Central Audition Committee	Support office provided by the State Administration of Audit
Central Leading Group on Education	Support office provided by the Ministry of Education
Central Party School	Merged with the National College of Public Administration
Central Propaganda Department	Doubled as State Information Office and in charge of the press, publications and films, and Voice of China broadcast
Central Organisation Department	Control over State Council Bureau of Civil Service
Central United Front Department	In charge of State Council Nationalities Commission, Bureau of Religious Affairs and Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs
Central Political and Legal Committee	In charge of the comprehensive management of public security, stability maintenance and prevention of religious cults

Source: Author's compilation based on various online sources.

6.7 The Fourth Plenum of the 19th Party Congress of the CCP in late October 2019 was devoted to what is dubbed “the fifth modernisation”—the modernisation of the state’s governance system and governing capability, in addition to the good old “four modernisations”: industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defence, first proposed in 1964. The plenum passed *CCP Central Committee Resolution on Several Major Issues in Insisting and Perfecting the System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Modernising the State’s Governance System and Governing Capability*, which is all but about the enhancing of the ruling party’s capability to run state affairs. Party-building institutional reforms pursue the same ideals of being “scientific”, “systematic” and “standardised” so as to be seamlessly integrated with the modernisation of state governance.²⁰

that deepening party and government institutional reform is a profound revolution” at <http://npc.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0314/c14576-29867226.html>, both accessed 14 June 2021.

²⁰ Same as note 14.

Preliminary Assessment

- 7.1 Often dubbed “Reform 2.0”, Xi’s massive institutional building is meant to encapsulate the spirit and evolutionary outcome of the CCP in the reform era in an institutional incarnation by the party’s 100th anniversary. In this effort Xi has invested his historical legacy that he hopes will allow him to stand shoulder-by-shoulder with Mao Zedong.
- 7.2 Xi is regarded in the West as another big dictator after Mao. However, unlike Mao, whose dictatorial rule saw the systematic dismantling of the institutional hierarchy of the party-state in the zealous pursuit of a revolutionary ideal, the power Xi has amassed has been meticulously deployed in institution building on a massive scale. The academic research literature broadly agrees that successful institution building, such as the ones that contributed to the rise of the West, usually requires asymmetrical power distribution in favour of the principals.²¹ A dictator bent on creating dense rules, regulations and institutions that may eventually constitute the constraint of his or his successor’s power, is different from whimsical dictators, including Xi’s hero Mao Zedong. Xi therefore may turn out to be a leopard with different spots.
- 7.3 Institutions consist of both formal and informal rules. The formal rules are relatively easy to create as Xi Jinping has been doing on a massive scale. However, informal rules or norms take a long time to evolve. Institutionalisation is attained only when the facilitating informal rules and norms have matured, or, in Samuel Huntington’s words, when institutions have acquired value for participants.²² Xi is keenly aware of the informal culture among CCP cadres of disregarding party rules and discipline. For example, he has criticised incessantly cadres for disregarding or paying lip service to rules and disciplines as if these were “strawmen”, leading often to the “broken window effect”.²³ He also described the tendency in implementing

²¹ See for example, Douglass North, *Structure and Change in Economic History*, W W Norton 1981.

²² See for example his book *Political Order in Changing Society*, Yale University Press 1968.

²³ “Xi Jinping on making up for the missing pieces in intraparty institutions for the first time”, at http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-04/13/c_1118614215.htm, accessed 6 June 2021.

intraparty regulations as “warm at the top, lukewarm in the middle and cold at the bottom”.²⁴

- 7.4 Under Xi the CCP has devoted enormous resources and effort to the anti-corruption campaign to facilitate behavioural correction within the party, and to publicising intra-party rules and regulations so as to put cadres under the watchdog of the wider population. However, Xi is at the wit’s end on how to cultivate a positive informal culture within the ruling party. The methods he has deployed, such as reviving ideological faith, reminding cadres to stay loyal to the party’s original mission (*buwang chuxin*) and the extensive use of role models and so on have not surpassed what Mao did. It is difficult to see how he could do better than Mao given the complexed structure of interests in a marketised society today.
- 7.5 Nevertheless, far from imminent “cracking up” or collapsing as anticipated by many Western observers,²⁵ today’s CCP is in a better shape than when Xi first took the rein. The regime support for the CCP has increased under Xi as a recent Harvard survey study has discovered.²⁶ The Leninist party is, for the time being, rescued from atrophy and is more capable of engaging a broad range of tasks both at home and abroad as illustrated by China’s successful control of COVID-19. China under its stewardship is a formidable force to be reckoned with, perhaps for decades to come.

²⁴ “Important measures in strengthening the system of intra-party regulations for the new era”, press conference by officials from the Central General Office of the CCP on the recently passed three documents on intra-party regulation making, at http://hl.cma.gov.cn/zfxxgk/zwgk/zcwj/zcjd/202012/t20201230_2547936.html, last accessed 6 June 2021.

²⁵ See for examples Shambaugh’s well-known article, “The Coming Chinese Crackup”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 March 2015 and Gordon Chang, *The Coming Collapse of China*, New York: Random House 2001. Chang has since engaged in a perennial postponing of his predicted date of collapse.

²⁶ See *Understand CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time*, the Ash Centre of Kennedy School of Government, June 2020, available at https://ash.harvard.edu/files/ash/files/final_policy_brief_7.6.2020.pdf, last retrieved 6 June 2021.