Current Issues

China After Deng: Ten Scenarios in Search of Reality*

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With Deng Xiaoping preparing to "meet Marx," speculation over the future shape and stability of the Chinese polity has mounted steadily. In the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen crisis some observers predicted the early demise of China's Communist regime, triggered by a dramatic breakthrough on the part of resurgent democratic forces.[1] When the regime failed to collapse as expected, attention was drawn to the apparent absence of such putative prerequisites of "civil society" as semi-autonomous social forces, civic associations and a well-defined "public sphere." China, it seemed, wasn't quite ready for democracy after all.[2]

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, analysts were quick to point out that a vital difference between Gorbachev's Russia and Deng's China was that the latter underwent a full decade of economic reform prior to the onset of the Beijing Spring. By marketizing and opening up China's economy, Deng's reforms enabled the Chinese people to raise both their living standards and their hopes, thereby providing the government with a vital cushion of legitimacy and partial immunity against "SRDS" (sudden regime death syndrome). In this view – personally endorsed by Deng – Gorbachev's fatal mistake lay in neglecting *perestroika* while one-sidedly promoting *glasnost*. It was a mistake China's chaos-averse leaders were determined not to repeat.[3]

With Chinese hard-liners loudly trumpeting the need for heightened political and ideological vigilance to prevent a Soviet-style meltdown, meaningful political reform seemed farther off than ever. But if the democratic option was thus foreclosed, other, less benign possibilities

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1. See, for example, Roderick MacFarquhar, "The anatomy of collapse," *New York Review of Books*, 26 September 1991; and Ramon H. Myers, "The next power struggle," in George Hicks (ed.), *The Broken Mirror* (Essex: Longman, 1990), pp. 456–465.

2. For a debate over the presence/absence of "civil society" in China and its implications for democratization, see "Symposium on civil society and the public sphere," *Modern China*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (April 1993).

3. Deng's emphasis on the priority of economic over political reform can be traced to the Polish political crisis of 1980–81. In Deng's view, the Polish government's initial willingness to accede to Solidarity's demands for union autonomy and political reform served to exacerbate a potentially inflammatory political situation, bringing the country to the edge of chaos. On the origins and impact of Deng's "Polish nightmare," see Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 110–12. On the differences between Soviet and Chinese reform strategies in the 1980s, see Pei Minxin, *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

now presented themselves. To some observers, the growth of extreme disparities in income and productivity between (rich) coastal and (poor) interior regions, coupled with a diminution in Beijing's extractive capacity vis-à-vis the provinces and the rising incidence of local governmental resistance to Beijing's fiscal exactions and exhortations, bespoke a potentially critical contraction of central authority. In such a situation, it was argued, the death of Deng Xiaoping – China's "Last Emperor" – could well trigger a dramatic rise in provincial recalcitrance, possibly even portending a break-up of the country along regional lines.[4] A variant of the dissolution scenario stressed the potential for Malthusian catastrophe inherent in China's rapidly growing population, massive rural emigration, shrinking cultivated cropland and woefully inefficient state enterprises.[5]

When moderate reformers regained the political initiative in 1992 following Deng Xiaoping's dramatic "southern tour," a new mood of buoyant optimism, reminiscent of the pre-Tiananmen period, soon emerged. Accelerated marketization of the Chinese economy would, it was now suggested, generate renewed pressure for political liberalization. In this scenario, a gradual process of "peaceful evolution" would propel the country towards a quasi-pluralistic, "neo-authoritarian" (*xin quanweizhuyi*) political future – like the "little dragons" of East Asia – and ultimately perhaps beyond, to emergent democratization.[6]

In the absence of a broad consensus over where China was headed, still other possibilities were debated. One particularly intriguing scenario was put forward in 1990–91 by a group of Chinese Communist "princelings," including Chen Yuan, son of CCP patriarch Chen Yun, and Pan Yue, son-in-law of Politburo Standing Committee member Liu Huaqing. Conceding that traditional Marxist–Leninist doctrines had lost much of their power to explain contemporary events and inspire the Chinese masses, these princelings argued that in order to avoid a Soviet-style calamity China needed to adopt a "neo-conservative" (*xin baoshouzhuyi*) political programme, emphasizing not violent class struggle but harmonious Confucian social order and discipline; not Communist egalitarianism but bureaucratic capitalism; not proletarian internationalism but ardent Chinese patriotism. Initially discounted by many as intellectually vapid and philosophically confused, the neo-conservative programme began to at-

4. See, for example, Maria Hsia Chang, "China's future: regionalism, federation, or disintegration?" *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (September 1992), pp. 211–227; and Wang Shaoguang, "The rise of the regions: fiscal reform and the decline of central state capacity in China," in Andrew G. Walder (ed.), *The Waning of the Communist State: Economic Origins of Political Decline in China and Hungary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 87–113.

5. See Jack A. Goldstone, "The coming Chinese collapse," *Foreign Policy*, No. 99 (Summer 1995), pp. 35–52.

6. See e.g. Gordon White, "Democratization and economic reform in China," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 31 (January 1994), pp. 73–92; and William Overholt, *The Rise of China: How Economic Reform is Creating a New Superpower* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), ch. 2. The chequered history of Chinese neo-authoritarianism is examined in Ma Shu Yun, "The rise and fall of neo-authoritarianism in China," *China Information*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 1–19.

tract additional attention in 1994, when a lurid doomsday tract, *Viewing China through a Third Eye*, was published in Shanxi province by a close confidant of princeling Chen Yuan. After reading the book, which warned of a coming Chinese apocalypse triggered by uncontrolled rural emigration and rampant lawlessness, one veteran China watcher characterized the law-and-order agenda of the neo-conservatives as "high-tech feudalism with Chinese characteristics."[7] Another labelled it "neo-fascism."[8]

Partially offsetting the radical alarmism of *Third Eye*, some Western social scientists proposed a more modest, less flamboyant variation on the neo-conservative model: "state corporatism," which took as its defining features concentrated executive decision making, top-down control, elite co-optation of functional interest groups, and a search for social harmony and consensus. In the view of these analysts, China's post-Deng future lay somewhere between the harsh oligarchic chauvinism of the neo-conservatives and the kinder, gentler tutelary elitism of the neo-authoritarians.[9]

This article represents a preliminary attempt to sort out some of these conflicting claims and predictions. In the discussion that follows, I briefly outline some of the more commonly encountered post-Deng political scenarios (and their principal variant forms), classifying them according to whether they are in the main *evolutionary, devolutionary, or revolutionary* in nature. I then examine a number of salient constraints – socio-economic forces, political conditions and environmental factors – that are likely to affect the future plausibility of each scenario. Based on the putative strength and directionality of these constraints, I assess the contingent probabilities of each scenario. Assuming the role of political oddsmaker, I conclude by estimating the hypothetical odds, or "morning line," on each scenario (leaving myself, I hope, sufficient "wiggle room" to avoid serious embarrassment later on). While nothing remotely resembling scientific certainty or precision is claimed for this essentially deductive/intuitive mode of analysis, I believe it is possible, using rudimentary political logic, readily available information and a modicum of common sense, to arrive at a reasonably thoughtful and coherent assessment of China's future political prospects and probabilities. At the very least, it is hoped that the present article will help bring into somewhat clearer focus the forces affecting China's post-Deng political development and the choices confronting China's next generation of leaders.

7. Willy Wo-Lap Lam, cited in *The Economist*, 22 October 1995, p. 37.

8. Ruan Ming, "Taizidang de disandiguo meimeng" ("The Third Reich fantasy of the princelings"), *Zhongguo zhiqun*, No. 10 (October 1992), pp. 39–41. On the rise of Chinese neo-conservatism, see Joseph Fewsmith, "Neoconservatism and the end of the Dengist Era," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 35, No. 7 (July 1995), pp. 635–651. The text of *Viewing China through a Third Eye*, by Wang Shan ("Dr Leninger"), appears in translation in FBIS Daily Report: *China* (Supplement), 19 April 1995.

9. See e.g. Jonathan Unger and Anita Chan, "China, corporatism, and the East Asian model," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 33 (January 1995), pp. 29–53.

For the purposes of this exercise, the projected time frame is approximately three to five years in the future. While the latest political manoeuvres and day-to-day factional intrigues in Beijing are obviously of interest insofar as they may significantly affect China's future political trajectory, I make no attempt here to predict the immediate outcome of the post-Deng succession process.

The Shape of Things to Come

The major scenarios (and variant forms) considered in this exercise are:

Muddling through. The current system persists much as Deng Xiaoping left it; in the absence of a charismatic "paramount leader," collective technocratic leadership prevails, with Jiang Zemin and Li Peng as "core" leaders. Backed by the PLA, the new leadership cautiously persists in the policies of the Dengist era, moving ahead slowly and fitfully with marketization while eschewing significant political reform.

Neo-conservatism. A corporatist regime comes to power, dominated by post-Leninist princelings and bureaucrat-capitalists. The regime jettisons the rhetoric of class struggle and the "four cardinal principles," reverses the process of economic and fiscal decentralization, and bolsters its legitimacy by appealing to patriotic sentiments, Confucian virtues and widespread popular fear of social chaos and disorder.

Neo-authoritarianism. An increasingly privatized and marketized economy is presided over by a strong tutelary executive, with rudimentary "rule by law" but only minimal political pluralism – as in Singapore. This scenario is rooted in developmental principles and priorities outlined by Zhao Ziyang in his 1987 report to the 13th Party Congress.

Political fission. In the absence of strong leadership at the Centre, the regime, weakened by the cumulative effects of reform-induced fiscal decentralization, regional economic polarization, rampant official corruption, and the erosion of traditional ideological and political controls, breaks down. There are three main variations of this scenario: *Immobilism* – strong enough (with the backing of the PLA) to prevent chaos or regional secession but too weak to govern effectively, the regime's collective leadership suffers from creeping political paralysis, resulting in administrative gridlock and a further hollowing out of the central government's power and authority; *Regional fragmentation* – beset by weak central leadership and rising provincial and regional assertiveness, the country divides into a plurality of independent geopolitical entities, as in Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union; *Chaos* – lacking effective central authority and plagued by rising crime, corruption and uncontrolled rural emigration, the regime melts down politically, dissolving into virtual anarchy (as in the worst-case prediction of *Third Eye*).

Praetorian military intervention. The army actively enters the political arena to prevent a meltdown or to stabilize an endangered (or politically immobilized) regime. Possible modes of military intervention range from

massive and autonomous (as in Indonesia in 1965) to localized and supportive (as in the October 1976 coup against the Gang of Four).

Democratization. Fundamental institutional reforms, repeatedly stalled since the early 1980s, are implemented. This scenario has two principal variants: *Breakthrough from above* – the CCP voluntarily embraces the principles of political pluralism, including tolerance of dissent and electoral competition, as in post-1987 Taiwan and South Korea; *Revolution from below* – stubbornly rejecting the option of self-initiated political reform, the regime is swept from power in a massive display of popular resistance, as in Romania in 1989. A replay of the 1989 Tiananmen movement, but with a dramatically different outcome, ending in nominal victory for China's long-suffering democrats.

Neo-Maoist revival. The post-Deng leadership, with backstage guidance from a handful of surviving hard-line Communist Party and PLA elders, halts market reform and rural emigration, recollectivizes the countryside, cracks down on dissent and enforces the Four Cardinal Principles with renewed vigour. Deng's "open policy" is partially reversed and the preferential economic advantages enjoyed by China's coastal provinces and "special economic zones" are annulled.

Three of these scenarios (muddling through, neo-conservatism and neo-authoritarianism) are essentially *evolutionary* in nature, in that they assume a general absence of sudden, sharp or violent discontinuities in political institutions, values and leaders. Four others (immobilism, regional fragmentation, chaos and military intervention) are basically *devolutionary*, since they imply varying degrees of attenuation (or deconstruction) of political authority at the Centre. The remaining three (democratic breakthrough from above, mass movement from below and neo-Maoist revival) are essentially *revolutionary*, insofar as they involve a radical reconstitution of political authority. Below, each of these scenarios is examined individually, adducing a series of "positive" and "negative" constraints affecting the contingent probability of each outcome. For the sake of simplification and convenience (mine, not the reader's), certain proximate scenarios are considered conjointly.

Muddling Through

Positive constraints.

- "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Inertia and continuity are the default values of all viable systems. Despite manifold internal problems and contradictions, the Chinese system has performed reasonably well. Confronted with a potentially life-threatening political crisis in 1989, the regime managed to restore public order, resume economic reform, and effect an orderly intergenerational transfer of power. Meanwhile, aggregate economic growth has been impressive, trade and investment are booming, and per capita income continues to rise. Why tinker with success?

- Fear of chaos. Tinkering in non-trivial ways with existing institutions, policies or leaders could upset Beijing's delicate political equilibrium, giving rise to heightened popular demands for systemic change. Though it bespeaks a relatively high degree of elite insecurity and brittleness, fear of chaos constitutes a strong argument for maintaining the status quo.
- "Deng says so." Last but not least are Deng Xiaoping's repeated admonitions not to change things after his death. Deng's chosen successor, Jiang Zemin, appears to be succeeding in his effort to consolidate the power of his "core" faction, reputedly consisting of Jiang, Li Peng and others. While the Tiananmen incident may one day be redefined from a "counter-revolutionary rebellion" to something less malignant, this need not be accompanied by a major overhaul of political institutions, values, or even leaders.

Negative constraints.

- Death of Yan'an elders. Since 1992 several important Party elders have died. Because most of these were identified with the conservative wing of Deng's reform coalition (including Wang Zhen, Hu Qiaomu, Li Xiannian, Deng Yingchao, Yao Yilin and Chen Yun), their passing has visibly diminished the system's inertial resistance to change. While fundamental institutional reform is not likely to occur as long as Deng still draws breath, his death is likely to trigger new demands and pressures for systemic repair and revitalization.
- Anachronism of Marxism-Leninism. With the passing of leading comrades of the Long March generation, the Four Cardinal Principles have become virtual museum pieces, openly ignored and rarely invoked, except ritualistically. The gap between Communist Party ideology and Chinese reality is arguably wider today than ever before (with the possible exception of 1989). Sooner or later – arguably sooner – something will have to give.
- Systemic malaise. Although demands for fundamental political and institutional change have been sharply muted since 1989, malaise runs deep at many points in society. The gap in economic growth between coast and interior has risen sharply since the mid-1980s, along with the urban–rural income gap.[10] The plight (and potential for social unrest) of China's 60–90 million uprooted rural "floaters" has also become a cause of serious concern,[11] while a steep rise in crime, corruption and

10. From 1985 to 1994 the average urban–rural income differential rose by almost 40% – from 1.9:1 to 2.65:1. See *Beijing Review*, Vol. 38, Nos. 14–15 (3–16 April 1995), p. ii; and K. Griffin and Zhao Renwei (eds), *The Distribution of Income in China* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 34, 82. In 1993, two Chinese social scientists noted that regional income disparities – estimated to be as high as 8:1 – were equal to or greater than those existing in Yugoslavia on the eve of its disintegration. See Wang Shaoguang and Hu An'gang, *Jiaqiang zhongyang zhengfu zai shichang jingji zhuanxingzhong de zhudao zuoyong* (*Strengthen the Central Government's Leading Role in the Transition to a Market Economy*) (Liaoning: Renmin chubanshe, 1993).

11. In *Viewing China through a Third Eye*, China's floaters are described as a "seething volcano" whose "interacting emotions ... produce a powerful destructive force that can explode at any time" (p. 29). For a somewhat less apocalyptic view of the floating population,

youthful cynicism have all been correlated with a decline in Communist morality and the concomitant rise of "money worship."[12] When Deng Xiaoping dies, voices of political-institutional change – both liberal and conservative – can be expected to be raised once again.

Net assessment. No one in the third echelon of technocratic leadership can hope to match Deng Xiaoping's power or prestige. Without Deng around to bolster them, Jiang Zemin and Li Peng, among others, could begin to lose their grip, rendering maintenance of the status quo problematical. Worsening socio-economic stresses would further increase the likelihood of change.

Neo-conservatism

Positive constraints.

- Rise of bureaucratic capitalism. The partial marketization and opening up of the Chinese economy have given rise to a new class of successful, quasi-private Chinese entrepreneurs. These "cadre capitalists" operate on two distinct levels. Locally, tens of thousands of cadres and would-be entrepreneurs "take the plunge" (*xiahai*) each year, forming small and medium-sized "briefcase companies" (*pibao gongsi*) and "in-law companies" (*yanei gongsi*) – quasi-private firms set up for the purpose of providing access to state-managed resources and brokering the resultant commercial transactions. At the national level, the growth of *pibao gongsi* and *yanei gongsi* is mirrored in the rise of giant parastatal trading conglomerates such as China International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC), Kanghua Development Corporation (now defunct), Polytechnologies, Inc., and Norinco. These huge, semi-private trading firms have amassed vast resources and carved out huge commercial empires. Generally dominated by princelings and other high-level cadre children (the so-called *gaogan zidi*), they are profoundly altering the country's economic landscape.[13]
- Recipe for social order. With the stylized moral precepts of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism demonstrably unsuited to the normative and institutional requirements of emergent bureaucratic capitalism, neo-

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see Dorothy Solinger, *China's Transients and the State: A Form of Civil Society?* (Hong Kong: Chinese University, Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, 1991).

12. See, for example, former Vice-President Wang Zhen's discomfiting diagnosis of deteriorating conditions in China's rural areas, reported in *South China Morning Post*, 12 March 1991.

13. The phenomenon of large-scale cadre capitalism is analysed by Maurice Meisner, "Bureaucratic capitalism: some reflections on the social results of the Chinese Communist revolution," unpublished paper, November 1994. On the rise of the princelings, see He Pin and Gao Xin, *Zhonggong "Taizidang" (China's Communist Princelings)* (Taipei: Shibao chuban gongsi, 1992); and Jae Ho Chung, "The politics of prerogatives in socialism: the case of the *Taizidang* in China," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (March 1991), pp. 58–76.

conservatives have put forward a rather crude, self-serving doctrine to justify the concentration of political and fiscal power in the hands of a new corporatist elite. Appeals to Confucian values, nationalist sentiments and fear of chaos are likely to strike a resonant chord among stability-minded technocrats, *gaogan zidi* and foreign investors alike.

- The new nationalism. China's rising status as a global trading state and regional military power, coupled with the fortuitous collapse of the Soviet Union, has visibly served to rekindle China's long-dormant sense of national pride and self-assertiveness. The new patriotism is evident in such things as China's increasingly blunt rejection of Western criticism over human rights abuses, the hardening of Beijing's stance against Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten, the PLA's beefed-up presence (and bravado) in the Spratly Islands, and, most recently, renewed Chinese military threats and missile tests in the Taiwan Straits. With patriotism on the rise, neo-conservatives are well positioned to play the "Motherland card."[14]

Negative constraints.

- Public resentment of princeling profligacy. The well-publicized financial manipulations and misdeeds of certain princelings have created a negative backlash among both educated Chinese and ordinary citizens. The resentment that fuelled public outcries against *guandao* (bureaucratic racketeering) in the spring of 1989 is still alive, much of it focused on the family, friends and followers of China's top leaders – including Deng Xiaoping himself. Such anger arguably constitutes a significant check on the political ambitions of the princelings.[15]
- Lack of a coherent programme. The inchoate alarmism evident in *Viewing China through a Third Eye* suggests a movement without a clear, well-defined policy agenda. Neo-conservatives are generally *against* chaos, uncontrolled rural emigration, and the inherent "noisiness" of free institutions, markets and minds. But what are they *for*, apart from Motherland, discipline and the oligarchic concentration of economic and political power?
- Death of Chen Yun. According to Chinese sources, the death of Chen Yun took some of the wind out of the princelings' sails. Chen (along with other conservative Party elders) had reportedly given backstage support to the neo-conservative programme, and his son, Chen Yuan, has been one of its most ardent boosters. According to some reports, the elder Chen's death left princelings feeling rudderless and adrift.

14. See Allen S. Whiting, "Chinese nationalism and foreign policy after Deng," *The China Quarterly*, No. 142 (June 1995), pp. 295–316.

15. In 1992 it was widely reported that popular resentment over *guandao* had led Deng Xiaoping to withdraw the names of several princelings who were under consideration for possible promotion to the CCP Central Committee. See Baum, *Burying Mao*, pp. 364–65.

Net assessment. In general, rising economic and social stress, patriotic fervour and fear of instability tend to reinforce neo-conservative appeals for recentralized power. Robust civic institutions, autonomous local enterprises and flourishing markets tend to weaken their appeal. Given China's nagging developmental difficulties and a rising tide of assertive nationalism, neo-conservatism's near-term prospects appear bright.

Neo-authoritarianism

Positive constraints.

- Success of the "dragon" economies. One of the most powerful attractors to this scenario has been the dynamic growth of East Asia's "little dragons." Informed by the developmental theories of Samuel Huntington and inspired by the phenomenal economic success of Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s, Chinese neo-authoritarians succeeded in incorporating their quasi-pluralistic free-market vision of China's future into Zhao Ziyang's political report to the 13th National Party Congress in 1987.[16] Although their early gains were substantially cancelled out in the repressive aftermath of the Tiananmen crisis, the same factors that made the neo-authoritarian programme appealing in the first instance – its combination of strong (but relatively "soft") central political control, a vigorous, decentralized market economy, and enhanced political "consultation and supervision" by non-Party organizations and individuals, including people's congresses – continue to prove highly attractive to intellectuals and other pro-reform groups and strata in China, including a new "rule by law" faction said to be forming around such leaders as Qiao Shi, Li Ruihuan and Tian Jiyun, with backstage backing from retired CCP elders Wan Li and Yang Shangkun.[17]
- "Reversal of verdicts." With neo-authoritarian ideas and values continuing to attract strong political support from the putative rivals of "core" leaders Jiang Zemin and Li Peng, a post-Deng decision to remove the "counter-revolutionary" label from the Tiananmen incident (or to reverse the verdict on Zhao Ziyang) might well augur a significant deflation in the power of the "Jiang–Li axis" and boost the fortunes of remnant Zhaoists.
- Dynamics of Chinese development. With or without a reversal of verdicts, neo-authoritarianism could prove attractive as a more benign alternative to the outmoded ideological imperatives of the Four Cardinal Principles and the self-serving oligarchic nostrums of neo-conservatism. With Zhao no longer in disrepute, his report to the 13th Party

16. See Tony Saich, "The Thirteenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party: an agenda for reform?" *Journal of Communist Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (June 1988), pp. 203–208. The neo-authoritarian programme is assayed in Stanley Rosen (ed.), "The debate on the new authoritarianism," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1990–91).

17. See, for example, *South China Morning Post*, 18 and 19 March 1995; *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 30 March 1995, pp. 14–15; FBIS, 15 March 1995, pp. 9–10, 20 March 1995, pp. 9–10 and 27 June 1995, p. 38; and *Zhengming*, No. 210 (1 April 1995).

Congress, revised and updated, *mutatis mutandis*, to take account of changing circumstances, could serve as a programmatic guide to future development.

Negative constraints.

- Fear of chaos. The central leadership's acute fear of instability and disorder precluded a sustained neo-authoritarian breakthrough in the late 1980s, and may well continue to do so in the future. The logic of Deng Xiaoping's recurrent "Polish nightmare" – the fear that political concessions made in response to popular demands would be perceived as a sign of weakness, leading to a further escalation of demands and ending in chaos, as in Poland in 1980–81 – has been invoked by Chinese leaders many times in the past. With elite anxiety continuing to run high in Beijing on the eve of Deng's death, neo-authoritarianism, with its implicit promise of reversing past verdicts and putting a kinder, gentler political face on China's market transition, appears fraught with peril.
- Strength of centrifugal forces. With the Chinese fiscal and administrative systems already substantially decentralized (and arguably lurching out of control), the very integrity and coherence of the system are at risk. With centrifugal forces running alarmingly high, what is needed, critics argue, is more, not less centralization of economic planning and resource allocation; more, not less politically-imposed "stability and unity." In this sense, neo-authoritarianism may well be an idea whose time has passed.

Net assessment. Any significant weakening of the "core" Jiang–Li leadership in the post-Deng transition period could set the stage for a neo-authoritarian revival. In general, the softer the post-Deng economic landing, the brighter the outlook for neo-authoritarianism. Politically, a decision partially or wholly to rescind the Tiananmen verdicts would send an important signal. This is not unlikely, but worsening socio-economic conditions could diminish the political appeal of a Zhaoist approach.

Political Fission

The three variations on this scenario – immobilism, regional fragmentation and chaos – differ among themselves in a number of significant respects. In the following discussion, generic constraints affecting the overall devolution of power are considered first, before analysis of the contingent probabilities of each particular variant form.

Positive constraints.

- Weakening of societal bonds. The same symptoms of deepening societal malaise that make muddling through improbable render some sort of devolution of power more likely. Whether measured in terms

of soaring rates of crime and corruption, the plight of the "floating population," the rising frequency and magnitude of industrial labour disputes,[18] or the simmering frustration of Chinese farmers – tens of thousands of whom have rioted in recent years over declining rural incomes and predatory cadre behaviour – precursive signs of incipient social disintegration are growing.[19] Under normal circumstances, localized disorders are unlikely spontaneously to metastasize into generalized chaos. But given the manifest weakening of normative and organizational "ties that bind," the sudden appearance of a fresh catalyst – a debilitating post-Deng political struggle, or a massive upsurge in urban unemployment – could push ambient social pressure and temperature to the point of combustion.[20]

Fiscal and administrative decentralization. While deepening societal stress arguably increases the likelihood of chaos, endemic centrifugal forces may also be working to accelerate a regionally-based devolution of political power. Since the early 1980s, the decentralization of control over material resources and fiscal revenues has significantly weakened Beijing's ability to command, reward and punish provincial governments.[21] While the central government, under the ministrations of Vice-Premier Zhu Rongji, has attempted in recent years to recentralize certain fiscal and financial powers and functions (such as by adopting new uniform tax and central banking laws), it is far from clear that the effort has resulted in a significant strengthening of Beijing's economic leverage.[22]

Inter-regional and intersectoral competition. Vertical relations of command and control are not the only ones to have been attenuated by the economic and administrative reforms of the 1980s. Horizontal relations among provinces and regions have also become severely strained – by uneven rates of development and by resentment stemming from the preferential tax treatment and favourable terms of trade enjoyed by coastal economic zones and "open cities" under Deng's reform programme. Since the mid-1980s, periodic resource wars, blockades and a variety of local tariffs, surcharges and other fiscal exactions, many of them illegal, have marked the deterioration of interprovincial economic

18. In 1993, the Chinese government recorded the occurrence of more than 12,000 "large-scale" labour disputes. See "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation," *The China Quarterly*, No. 139 (September 1994), p. 863.

19. For extensive examples and documentation, see Baum, *Burying Mao* (paperback edition, forthcoming), ch. 16.

20. This possibility is explored in depth in James Miles, *The Legacy of Tiananmen: China in Disarray* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, forthcoming), ch. 10 and passim.

21. See, for example, Wang Shaoguang, "Central–local fiscal politics in China," in Jia Hao and Lin Zhimin (eds), *Changing Central–Local Relations in China: Reform and State Capacity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 91–112; also Wang Shaoguang, "The rise of the regions"; and Christine Wong, Central–local relations in an era of fiscal decline," *The China Quarterly*, No. 128 (December 1991), pp. 691–715. A contrary argument is advanced by Huang Yasheng, "Why China will not collapse," *Foreign Policy*, No. 99 (Summer 1995), pp. 54–63.

22. See e.g. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 May 1995, pp. 18–20.

relations.[23] Any further degradation of Beijing's fiscal and administrative authority after Deng's death could conceivably result in renewed regional economic warfare – with potentially serious consequences for the integrity of the system.

- Ethnic unrest. In the late 1980s, the revival of long-smouldering ethnic and religious tensions in Tibet, Xinjiang and to a lesser extent Inner Mongolia emphasized the ostensible fragility of China's geopolitical unity. More recently, in the early 1990s the disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in escalating demands for local autonomy and even for outright independence in China's far western and north-western frontier areas. In the wake of the Soviet collapse, Chinese authorities accused the West of fomenting separatism in Tibet and ordered security forces to "put down fiercely" any new pro-independence agitation.[24] Though hard-line tactics evidently succeeded in putting an end to organized acts of defiance (much as the 4 June crackdown put an end to anti-government demonstrations in Beijing), underlying ethnic and religious tensions remain unresolved.[25]
- Post-Deng uncertainty. Notwithstanding the central government's periodic attempts to bring inter-regional conflicts and centrifugal forces under control, Deng Xiaoping's death could impair the Centre's ability to dictate (or apply effective pressure) to recalcitrant provincial and local leaders. Deng alluded to this possibility in the summer of 1994, instructing his comrades that if they wished to avoid a Soviet-style collapse they would have to "handle well the relations between the party centre and the localities."[26] A similar exhortation, along with a strong plea to resolve rising contradictions between coast and interior, received major stress in Jiang Zemin's "12 great relationships" speech of 28 September 1995.[27]

Negative constraints.

- Unified military command. One major factor militating against China's near-term political dissolution is the unitary command structure of the PLA, which enables Beijing to bring overwhelming military force to bear against any threat to its sovereign prerogatives. The 1989 Tiananmen crisis demonstrated the Party's ability, in a crunch, to secure regional military compliance. Although there were serious morale problems within the ranks of the martial law forces in Beijing, the PLA

23. See Andrew Hall Wedeman, "Bamboo walls and brick ramparts: rent seeking, interregional economic conflict, and local protectionism in China, 1984–1991," Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1995, ch. 1 and passim.

24. In Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, Chinese security forces were instructed, following the Soviet collapse, to "exercise firm dictatorship over those ethnic separatists who link up with hostile foreign powers to split the motherland or who use religion to complicate relations between ethnic groups" (*Xinjiang ribao*, cited in Reuters (Beijing), 24 March 1992).

25. See e.g. Richard Yang (ed.), *Chinese Regionalism: The Security Dimension* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

26. Cited in Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *China after Deng Xiaoping* (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), p. 386.

27. See *Washington Post*, 9 October 1995, p. A32.

displayed remarkable discipline in a highly stressful situation. It should also be noted that the appointment, dismissal, promotion and transfer of ranking PLA personnel at the regimental level and above is tightly controlled by central authorities. Finally, the PLA's two main political control mechanisms – the commissariat and the Party committee system – permit the CCP to dictate the political agenda within the army and monitor compliance with its directives.[28]

The nomenklatura. Centrifugal forces favouring increased provincial/local autonomy are also partially offset by Beijing's continued control over the appointment and removal of key provincial personnel. The nomenklatura system ensures that the Centre can impose its will on ambitious, independence-minded provincial powerholders: witness the 1991 removal (disguised as a face-saving promotion) of the outspoken governor of Guangdong province, Ye Xuanping. In this vein, a recent study of provincial personnel changes since the mid-1970s suggests that the Centre's power of appointment and removal constitutes a powerful check on the ambitions of would-be provincial satraps.[29]

High cost of "going it alone." Another negative constraint is the strong presumption that China's provinces – even the most commercially successful ones – would suffer greatly from a combination of diminished prestige, heightened military insecurity and reduced market power in the event of a post-Deng political break-up. With the possible exception of Guangdong, which could conceivably form a dynamic "Greater Chinese" common market with nearby Hong Kong, Taiwan and/or Fujian, no single province or contiguous group of provinces has the clear potential to become a major player in the political economy of East Asia. With the example of the former Soviet Union available as a potent reminder of the comparative advantage enjoyed by large, unified states over their small, divided remnants, there is little incentive for provincial leaders to attempt to go it alone.

Limited salience of minority nationality/ethnic issues. Unlike the former Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, whose ethnic minorities collectively comprised a majority of their total populations, China's internal ethnic problems are relatively limited in scope and scale, involving no more than seven or eight per cent of the country's population concentrated in a few outlying provinces. Although ethnic and religious minorities have periodically renewed their struggle to free themselves from China's grip, the relatively small number of people involved in these separatist movements and the localization of conflict in a few sparsely populated border areas have enabled Chinese military and public security forces to impose order quickly – and ruthlessly – in times of trouble.[30]

28. On the preponderance of central control over regional military forces, see Michael Swaine, *The Military and Political Succession in China: Leadership, Institutions, Beliefs* (Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation, 1992), pp. 150–51, 134–38 and passim.

29. See Huang Yasheng, "Central–local relations in China during the reform era: the economic and institutional dimensions," unpublished paper, Harvard University, 1995.

30. See, for example, June T. Dreyer, "The PLA and regionalism: Xinjiang," in Yang, *Chinese Regionalism*, pp. 249–276.

- Gradualism in breaking the "iron rice bowl." Aware of the potential volatility of a large mass of unemployed urban workers, the government has proceeded with extreme caution in implementing its bankruptcy laws. In October 1995 the Ministry of Labour announced that all workers and staff members adversely affected by the planned closure (or merger) of more than 400 state enterprises had been successfully relocated in new jobs. Based on the evident success of this first batch of enterprise closures, plans were announced for a second round of 114 bankruptcies and mergers.[31] With the trauma of large-scale industrial lay-offs at least partially mitigated, the potential for disorder is arguably diminished.

Net assessment. Disintegration is a relatively new concern in Communist systems; but for obvious reasons it has become a major preoccupation. In August 1994, a survey of China specialists conducted by the Pentagon Office of Net Assessment revealed that more than half of those queried expected some form of political devolution to occur following Deng Xiaoping's death. However, because of the wide variety of disintegrative scenarios included in the survey – ranging from accelerated administrative decentralization and federalism to total systemic collapse – it was of limited utility as an exercise in single-outcome prediction. Its results, moreover, were misrepresented in the media.[32]

A few preliminary generalizations may be hazarded concerning the likelihood of political fission in post-Deng China. First, it seems clear that the most extreme form of disintegration, the chaos scenario, is the hardest to forecast, since it is contingent upon a variety of complex, intangible factors, including the presence or absence of contagion effects (or metastatic potentials), catalytic events, and so forth. By its very nature, chaos is non-linear and sharply discontinuous. Given the presence of deep regional and sectoral divisions, rampant corruption and profiteering, uncontrolled rural emigration, and a general weakening of societal bonds, *inter alia*, chaos cannot be ruled out. Still, systemic collapse is rare, and mitigating factors remain both plentiful and powerful.[33]

It can also be argued that a regionally-based political break-up of China – the fragmentation scenario – is unlikely for two main reasons: first, the high costs of "going it alone" relative to the anticipated gains in local autonomy; and secondly, Beijing's continued, clear preponderance of raw military power over the provinces. Having said that, however, it is evident that forces favouring a *de facto* deconcentration of political power are already relatively strong in China – and could grow stronger

31. See Reuters (Beijing), 8 October 1995; and *China News Digest* (Global Edition), 19 July 1995.

32. See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 February 1995, p. 15.

33. The generic properties of systems at the "edge of chaos" are examined in Roger Lewin, *Complexity: Life at the Edge of Chaos* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993). Note in particular the following: "In nonlinear systems small inputs can lead to dramatically large consequences.... That's the basis of their unpredictability" (p. 11).

still after Deng Xiaoping's demise. It is not too difficult, for example, to envisage a situation in which, after Deng's death, a stand-off between "rule by core" and "rule by law" factions results in creeping governmental paralysis. Of the three fission scenarios considered here, immobilism is certainly the most plausible, at least in the short term. In the longer term, any ongoing stalemate at the Centre would provide enhanced opportunity for more radical devolutionary changes to take place – including regional fragmentation.

Praetorian Military Intervention

This scenario assumes that the army will play an important role in shaping China's post-Deng transition. PLA intervention need not take the form of a full-blown military takeover or coup (such as in response to mounting political chaos or immobilism). At a much lower level of socio-political disorder, it could take the form of a tactical alliance between one or more Communist Party factions and a group of central military leaders, intended not to seize power but to pre-empt a coup or merely to ensure an orderly political transition (the October 1976 arrest of the Gang of Four is a relevant precedent).

Positive constraints.

- Antidote to political disorder. Instability and immobilism are classic breeding grounds for military intervention. As Samuel P. Huntington has noted, "the causes which produce military interventions in politics... lie in the structure of society. In particular they lie in the absence or weakness of effective political institutions."[34] Given the sheer number and magnitude of socio-economic stresses and centrifugal forces present in contemporary China, and given the evident fragility of China's political institutions, the military can be expected to play a stabilizing role in the post-Deng political equation.
- Past precedent. In the event of a provincial revolt or protracted governmental paralysis following Deng's death, military intervention would become a strong possibility. It was in a situation of heightened factional conflict and political confusion that Mao Zedong called on the army, under Lin Biao, to enter the political arena during the Cultural Revolution. Within three years, the army had become such a potent political force that Mao was ultimately obliged to remove Lin and muzzle the PLA. In this connection it should also be remembered that the PLA's role in the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown was personally arranged and orchestrated by Deng Xiaoping. It could conceivably happen again, although whether Jiang Zemin (or anyone else) among Deng's putative successors could command similar military loyalty and obedience in time of crisis is problematic.

34. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 195–96.

Negative constraints.

- Professionalization of the PLA. The army today is far less politicized than it was in Lin Biao's heyday. Barring sudden crises of civilian political paralysis or instability, the high level of professionalism and depoliticization displayed by the PLA and its officer corps argue strongly against any wholesale, uninvited military intrusion into the political arena (see pp. 164–65, above).
- Low intensity of factional conflict. Although the possibility of a pre-emptive politico-military coup, along the lines of the PLA's 1976 arrest of the Gang of Four, cannot be ruled out entirely, the intensity of intra-Party conflict today appears substantially lower than at the time of Mao's death. With elite adherence to the "rules of the game" (including the principle of collective leadership) seemingly much stronger today, partisan military intervention appears unlikely.
- Jiang Zemin's courtship of the PLA. Although Jiang Zemin had no military experience or background prior to being named to succeed Deng Xiaoping as chairman of the CMAC, in recent years he has consistently sought to improve his relations with the army high command – by supporting sharply increased defence budgets and high-tech military weapons procurement programmes; by personally promoting substantial numbers of senior army officers; and by permitting PLA business enterprises to engage in large-scale extrabudgetary profit-making activities. While it is too soon to tell whether (and to what extent) Jiang's efforts have succeeded, few informed analysts expect the PLA to bite the hand that feeds it so generously.[35] The high stakes involved in Jiang's courtship of the PLA are revealed in a warning Deng Xiaoping issued to Jiang in 1993: "When we old people are not present, if the armed forces are out of control, the overall situation will be out of control. This has been our experience over many years."[36]

Net assessment. Short of a severe breakdown in social and political order, direct military intervention in Chinese politics is unlikely. However, since no individual leader or faction can hope to govern China without military support, the PLA will inevitably exercise a certain amount of influence – possibly even *de facto* veto power – over the initial selection (and ultimate viability) of Deng's successor.

One wild card in the military deck is former PRC President (and retired CMAC Vice-Chairman) Yang Shangkun. Notwithstanding his 1992 falling out with Deng Xiaoping (reportedly precipitated by Yang's boast that he possessed evidence proving that Deng was personally responsible for the bloodshed on 4 June), Yang's status as a first-generation CCP

35. With Jiang's backing, China's official defence budget rose from 25 billion *yuan* in 1992 to more than 63 billion *yuan* in 1995. On Jiang's attempts to bolster his military support, see David Shambaugh, "China's Commander-in-Chief: Jiang Zemin and the PLA," in Mark Weisenbaum (ed.), *China's Military Modernization* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1996); and Lam, *China after Deng*, ch. 4.

36. Cited in Shambaugh, "China's Commander-in-Chief," p. 46.

"immortal" and his close personal ties to a number of senior Chinese military and political leaders make him a force to be reckoned with – as a potential kingmaker, though presumably not, at 88 years old, a likely king. Of particular interest in this connection are reports that Yang has recently gone out of his way to speak favourably of Zhao Ziyang. It has also been widely reported that Yang was extremely reluctant to endorse Jiang Zemin's promotion to "core" leadership status in 1989 and again in 1992, and it is thus believed that the ex-President would be likely to side with the Qiao Shi–Li Ruihuan "rule by law" faction against the Jiang Zemin–Li Peng "rule by core" faction in the event of a post-Deng showdown. Whether Yang could generate sufficient support among his old military comrades to neutralize Jiang's advantage as PLA commander-in-chief, however, is questionable.[37]

Democratization

This scenario encompasses two distinct variants: an elitist breakthrough from above and a mass-based revolution from below. (A third possible democratic variant, organic evolution from below, lies at the conjunction of neo-authoritarianism and breakthrough from above, and is not considered separately.[38]) Below, the two main democratic scenarios are considered conjointly before their individual contingent probabilities are assessed.

Positive constraints.

- Rising legislative activism. Since the early 1990s there has been a notable increase in legislative activism in China, at both the local and national levels. At the 1992 NPC meeting, for example, fully one-third of the deputies withheld their approval from a government proposal to go ahead with construction of the controversial Three Gorges Dam. Less than a year later, in the winter of 1992–93, people's congresses in several provinces and municipalities voted to oust a number of incumbent officials backed by the local Party establishment.[39]

  More recently, at the March 1995 NPC session in Beijing, 36 per cent of the deputies refused to endorse the Party's nominee for Vice-Premier, Jiang Chunyun, while 33 per cent withheld their support from a government proposal to restructure the country's central banking system. These developments have been interpreted as an attempt by

37. On Yang's dispute with Deng and Jiang, see Baum, *Burying Mao*, pp. 369–371. On his recent political activities, see FBIS, 31 January 1995, p. 5; *New York Times*, 15 May 1995, p. 6; FBIS, 31 July 1995, p. 18, and 9 August 1995, p. 8.

38. The relationship between micro- and macro-processes of democratization is explored in Edward Friedman, *National Identity and Democratic Prospects in Socialist China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995). See also Stephen Manning, "Social and cultural prerequisites of democratization: generalizing from China," in Edward Friedman (ed.), *The Politics of Democratization: Generalizing East Asian Experiences* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 232–248.

39. See *South China Morning Post Weekly*, 20–21 February 1993.

NPC Chairman Qiao Shi and Vice-Chairman Tian Jiyun to strengthen people's congresses as a check upon the power of the "rule by core" faction.[40]

- Seeds of "civil society." Although the newborn forces of civil society were too few and too fragile to withstand the government's unexpectedly brutal assault of June 1989, under the cumulative impact of continued economic reform and opening up many of the Party's traditional social control mechanisms, including household registration and the *danwei* system, have been gradually eroded. At the grass-roots level, in villages and townships across China, a "public sphere" of expanded political debate and electoral participation also appears to be taking shape, a development actively encouraged by leaders of the "rule by law" faction.[41]
- Success of the Taiwan model. The democratization of the Kuomintang under Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui shows that a hard-line, monopolistic Leninist party can, under favourable economic conditions and with enlightened leadership, transform itself into a pluralistic, competitive party without self-destructing. Perforce, the Taiwan experience is being closely watched in China.
- Suppressed demand for democracy. As Deng's death approaches, there has been renewed intellectual agitation for political reform, causing the Chinese government to grow visibly nervous. In the spring of 1995, on the eve of the annual meeting of the NPC, a spate of legislative petitions and "open letters" addressed to China's top leaders were circulated in Beijing. These petitions, signed by more than 200 prominent intellectuals and political activists, demanded, among other things, a reversal of the Tiananmen verdict and an end to the persecution of political dissidents. It was, by all accounts, the most highly concentrated outburst of democratic activism seen in China since the winter of 1989; and it could presage even larger, more sustained eruptions after Deng dies.[42]

Negative constraints.

- Governmental anxiety. The regime's deep fear of democratic excess, instability and chaos has created a virtual siege mentality, effectively

40. On the move to strengthen the NPC, see *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 30 March 1995, pp. 14–15; also *Zhengming*, No. 210 (1 April 1995), in *Inside China Mainland*, Vol. 17, No. 6 (June 1995), pp. 21–23; and *South China Morning Post*, 19 April 1995, p. 17, in FBIS, 19 April 1995, pp. 14–15. On the composition of the "core" leadership group, see FBIS, 6 June 1995, p. 23.

41. See Kevin J. O'Brien, "Implementing political reform in China's villages," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 32 (July 1994), pp. 33–60; and Tyrene White, "Rural politics in the 1990s: rebuilding grassroots institutions," *Current History*, Vol. 91, No. 566 (September 1992).

42. On the 1995 petition drive, see *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 15 June 1995, p. 15; and *China Rights Forum*, June 1995, pp. 10–14. A "convulsion" theory of democratic transition is argued by Barrett McCormick, "Democracy or dictatorship?" *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 31 (January 1994), pp. 95–110.

precluding significant political relaxation. Thus, in a clear setback for China's renascent democrats, a number of the human rights petitioners alluded to in the previous paragraph – including Wang Dan, Chen Ziming, Wang Xizhe, Liu Xiaobo and Bao Zunxin – were placed under police detention in May and June of 1995. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

- Deng draws the line. With respect to the possible future introduction of political pluralism and party competition in China, Deng Xiaoping stated his position unequivocally in 1994: "We must properly draw the lesson from the former Soviet Union.... The CCP's status as the ruling party must never be challenged. China cannot adopt a multi-party system."[43]
- Intellectuals "divorced from the masses"? While China's critical intellectuals tend to be politically active and progressive, it is far from clear that most ordinary citizens harbour strong democratic aspirations or priorities. Urban workers, after all, were generally slow to join the 1989 protest demonstrations,[44] while rural participation was virtually nonexistent. Although grass-roots political participation has undoubtedly increased in villages and townships in recent years, the focus of such activity is primarily situational and local, rather than systemic or national. In this connection it should also be noted that in the wake of the Soviet collapse of 1991 there was a noticeable rise in the frequency with which ordinary Chinese, including erstwhile supporters of the 1989 student protests, expressed great anxiety over the possibility of emergent chaos in China. In part, such anxiety was the product of a well-orchestrated government campaign of fear-mongering; but it also – arguably – reflected the putative hollowness and contingent nature of popular demand for democratic reform.
- Deng's economic gamble. A second putative source of reduced social demand for democratization is the country's rapid economic growth. Deng Xiaoping's high-stakes gamble – that the fruits of economic reform would, if widely shared, dampen popular enthusiasm for radical political change – was at least partially vindicated by the events of spring 1989. In those areas of China where economic reform and the open policy had progressed the farthest, where incomes were highest and opportunities for upward mobility most widely available (such as in Hainan, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen and Fuzhou), non-student support for anti-government demonstrations was relatively slow to develop and limited in scale. In many cases, urban residents in these areas reported that they were "too busy making money" to

43. Quoted in Lam, *China after Deng*, pp. 385–86.
44. See Andrew G. Walder and Gong Xiaoxia, "Workers in the Tiananmen protests," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 29 (January 1993), pp. 1–30.

demonstrate in support of the Beijing students.[45] Thus, economic opportunity – to the extent that it is widely shared – appears conducive, at least in the short run, to authoritarian "stability and unity." As Deng himself put it shortly after the Tiananmen débâcle: "Without a decade of economic reform and opening up, we would not have survived 4 June."

Net assessment. Democratization from above entails a substantial elite willingness to take political risks, a willingness rarely encountered before 1989, and never since. Conceivably, a coalition of party moderates and liberals, marching under the banner of "rule by law," could opt to reverse verdicts and open up China's political system. However, they would first have to dislodge the "rule by core" group – no mean feat. And even if they succeeded, they would be more likely to promote a middle-of-the-road neo-authoritarian agenda than a radical democratic one.

The more radical form of democratic transition, mass movement from below, must also be considered unlikely in the near future. Economic opportunity has visibly blunted popular demand for political reform; and any massive new display of "people power" would almost certainly risk forcible suppression and/or generalized chaos – two good reasons why another Tiananmen-style upheaval is problematical.

Neo-Maoist Revival

Positive constraints.

- Backlash from reform. Although the market reforms of the past 15 years have putatively benefited many (if not most) Chinese much (or at least some) of the time, there remain pockets of regional, occupational and ideological resistance. Subsistence farmers in remote interior regions, unemployed (or insecure) older workers in state enterprises, and veteran Party/army cadres of the Yan'an and civil war generations have never been comfortable with either the speed or the direction of Deng's reforms. Not surprisingly, these are the same groups that were generally most active in the anti-"spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalization" drives of the 1980s. With inflation, unemployment, crime, corruption and other signs of socio-economic malaise rising sharply in many areas, nostalgia for the "good old days," real or imagined, has mounted in some quarters. Consciously promoted by such unreconstructed CCP conservatives as Deng Liqun and Song

45. See e.g. Mary S. Erbaugh and Richard Curt Kraus, "The 1989 democracy movement in Fujian and its aftermath," in Jonathan Unger (ed.), *Pro-Democracy Protests in China: Report from the Provinces* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), pp. 150–165. Data on the dates, magnitudes, and frequencies of public demonstrations in various Chinese cities in 1989 appear in *Huo yu xie zhi zhenxiang* (*The Truth of Fire and Blood*) (Taipei: Zhonggong yanjiu zazhishe, 1989), sec. 3, pp. 1–108; *Jingxin dongpode 56 tian* (*The Startling 56 Days*) (Beijing: Zhongguo dadi chubanshe, 1989); and Wu Mouren *et al.*, *Bajiu Zhongguo minyun jishi* (*Daily Record of the 1989 Chinese People's Movement*) (New York: private publication, 1989).

Ping, and visibly mirrored in the so-called "Mao craze" of the early 1990s, support for a neo-Maoist revival continues to exist, albeit at a relatively low level of political intensity and saliency.[46]

- Agricultural recentralization. Since the early 1990s, declining grain harvests and inflationary increases in food prices have spawned conservative efforts to roll back market-oriented, family-based contract responsibility systems in agriculture and to recentralize farm policy. Last year, mandatory provincial grain quotas were reintroduced, along with compulsory grain sales and (in some cities) grain rationing. Price controls were also reinstated on more than two dozen farm commodities, as the government sought to stabilize basic food supplies. Meanwhile, a neo-Maoist "model" village, Nanjie in Henan province, has been trumpeted by conservatives as a successful alternative to Deng's free-market policies – complete with collective ownership, Dazhai-style performance evaluations, and free housing, health care, education, television sets and fuel.[47]

Negative constraints.

- Actuarial laws. Despite recent efforts by aging CCP conservatives to polish up the tarnished patina of the Maoist mystique, the death or disability of most remaining members of the Long March generation since the early 1990s has dramatically reduced high-level support for a revival of Maoism. With the passing of veteran conservatives like Wang Zhen, Hu Qiaomu and Chen Yun, nostalgia for the "good old days" has visibly diminished in political relevancy.
- Irreversibility of reforms. While there is some debate over the extent to which Deng's reforms have effected a permanent alteration of China's institutional and normative landscape, there appears to be widespread agreement that once released, the genie of market reform and opening up is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to stuff back into its pre-reform bottle. To put it somewhat differently, "How ya gonna keep 'em down in Dazhai after they've seen Hong Kong?"

Net assessment. The recent "Mao craze" was more faddish than fervent. Of all the conceivable outcomes examined in this article, a neo-Maoist revival is perforce the least plausible. Despite widespread socio-economic frustration and malaise, nostalgia for the past is not nearly so strong as a dwindling handful of Mao's erstwhile guerrilla comrades would like to believe.

The Bottom Line

Taking into consideration all the various constraints and contingencies

46. On Deng Liqun's efforts to promote a Maoist revival, see Richard Baum, "Deng Liqun and the struggle against 'bourgeois liberalization,' 1979–1993," *China Information*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring 1995), pp. 1–35.
47. On the Nanjie model, see Miles, *The Legacy of Tiananmen*, ch. 9.

discussed above, a tentative estimate of the probability of occurrence of each scenario may now be hazarded. I have divided the scenarios into three groups, in descending order of probability[48]:

More likely.

- Neo-conservatism. Favourite picked to win if socio-economic stress deepens, patriotic fervour rises, and Tiananmen skeletons remain hidden in closet. Post-Deng victory by "Jiang–Li axis" brightens outlook for princelings and friends. Early betting odds: 3-1.
- Neo-authoritarianism. Pre-Tiananmen favourite regains lost ground if "rule by law" faction wins succession sweepstakes. Soft economic landing and reversal of Tiananmen verdict augur improved prospects. Odds: 4-1.
- Muddling through. Newtonian law of inertia favours continuity and business as usual, but current institutions, leaders (esp. Li Peng) lack long-term credibility, resiliency. System is demonstrably "broke, needs fixin'." Odds: 6-1.

Less likely.

- Immobilism. Post-Deng factional strife spells possible gridlock – more likely sooner than later. Prolonged political paralysis could give rise to more serious problems. Odds: 8-1.
- Praetorian military intervention. Conceivable response to immobilism or imminent chaos. In a pinch, would Jiang Zemin or Yang Shangkun sound the sweeter notes on a bugle call? Odds: 10-1.
- Democratic revolution from above. CCP liberals lack clout, constituents. Very chancy in short run. More likely in longer term, but don't hold breath. Odds: 12-1.
- Regional fragmentation. Military/institutional barriers, high cost of "going it alone" render break-up improbable. Too much to lose. Odds: 15-1.

Least likely.

- Democratic mass movement from below. Mass demonstrations carry substantial risk of suppression, chaos or both. Soviet, Yugoslav experience dictates sobriety, caution. Odds: 20-1.
- Chaos. Inherently unpredictable. Severe socio-economic stress, elite immobilism set stage for possible catastrophic implosion. A clear longshot. Odds: 25-1.
- Neo-Maoist revival. A null hypothesis. Geriatric fantasy is a non-starter. Odds: 50-1.

48. Because of partial overlap and possible sequential coupling between certain scenarios (e.g. "immobilism" and "military intervention"; "mass movement from below" and "chaos") the probable odds listed below add up to more than 100%.

Caveat Emptor

Unlike a horse race, in which a limited number of entrants compete under well-defined rules on a fixed track to produce a clear winner, post-Leninist political systems are fluid, potentially polymorphous things. Not only is there no well-demarcated finish line to mark the completion of the post-Deng transition process, but the track itself is in a state of near-constant flux. The experience of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union since 1989 cautions us not to expect any simple, static solutions. The "gentle revolution" was not the much-heralded End of History, as some claimed, but merely a turning point. China's post-Deng political transition is likely to be a long-term "work in progress," a complex kaleidoscope of forces whose forms and patterns may change over time. We should thus be prepared for a range of emergent combinations, phases and dynamic permutations.

To repeat a point made at the outset, what has been attempted here is essentially an exercise in deductive logic, with a large dollop of intuition added. Ten alternative political scenarios have been run through the refractory prism of a single set of current socio-economic, political and environmental conditions with the aim of highlighting likely areas of systemic constraint and contingent probability. The results are highly tentative, and should be construed as merely suggestive, rather than predictive.