Ref.: Ms. No. SON-D-20-00297
Who Are in Charge, Who Do I Work With, and Who Are My Friends: A Latent Space Approach to Understanding Elite Coappearances in China
Social Networks

Dear Professor Minhas,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to Social Networks. I have received comments from reviewers on your manuscript. Your paper should become acceptable for publication pending suitable minor revision and modification of the article in light of the appended reviewer comments.

When resubmitting your manuscript, please carefully consider all issues mentioned in the reviewers' comments, outline every change made point by point, and provide suitable rebuttals for any comments not addressed.

To submit your revised manuscript go to
https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://www.editorialmanager.com/son/__;!!HXCxUKc!kl7AQRv5Udkgyvb6gy5jBTdAqm4UImg0AtDF_cCMvJOeQMi4_kD9A0iL3mDxw6E$ and log in as an Author where you will see a menu item called 'Submission Needing Revision'.

Please resubmit your manuscript by Feb 20, 2021.

I look forward to receiving your revised manuscript.

Yours sincerely

Martin Everett
Co-Editor
Social Networks

Comments from the Editors and Reviewers:

Reviewer #1: This article is very well done.
The question is important.
The data collection clever and unique.
The analysis technique is appropriate and well done.
The writing is clear.

The work is important and I expect it to make a splash.

I also think that it will help guide future scholars not just those studying related questions about

autocratic governments but network scholars. For example, the authors talk about not equating "who do I work with" and "who are my friends" and how to sort this problem out. They also talk about roles on page 9, which may help network scholars be more precise in other work.

Reviewer #2: The authors apply a latent vector model to analyze the network of official appearances by China's elite. They find that centrality and a latent similarity measure help predict appointments to the leading small groups, while a simple count of co-appearances does not. The estimated model has a great fit using out-of-sample prediction metrics.

The paper is extremely well-done. It uses state-of-the-art methods to tackle a timely and important research question. The findings have wide-ranging implications for the studies of authoritarian elites, winning coalitions, and selectorate theory. The model offers a rare insight into the inner workings of a closed-off regime, and even provides some explanations for why individual actors may move in and out of favor with an authoritarian leader. I think the paper is publishable with very minor revisions. In what follows, I offer some thoughts on framing, some clarification questions, and ideas for future directions.

I would like to encourage the authors to discuss their data in more theoretical terms. Why do elites make public appearances? How do they choose what events to appear at?

Presumably, appearances at some events are expected. Are there protocols that call for attendance by government representatives? Are specific people expected to attend? Even in the absence of information on the official protocols, the authors could show, for example, whether the same actors or actors in the same official positions attend the same events year after year?

Appearances may also be a part of a broader strategy for career advancement, as they presumably provide visibility and networking opportunities. In this respect, it would be useful to know whether all events are open to all the elites or whether some are "by-invitation-only." Again, in the absence of data, the authors could try to look at repeating events to see if there is variation in who attends.

Are appearances necessary for promotion? Is attendance at some events indicative of a coming promotion? Is attendance at some events more important than others? Is there a way to account for some of this information in the statistical model or even in descriptive analysis? You could look for patterns in appearances preceding major promotions, even for a handful of select cases.

Clarification questions:
The latent factor model places actors in a k-dimensional space, yet the visualization in Figure 5 is two-dimensional. D does this mean that k=2 in this application? Or did you only choose to show two dimensions?

What is the range of the latent angle distance measure? In Figure 8, it looks like the range is between -1 and 1. Do higher values indicate greater dissimilarity of appearance patterns, yet not necessarily a tendency to appear at the same events? It may be more intuitive to rescale so that higher values represent closeness.

Future research:

Do you have data on known ties between actors, such as whether they went to the same school or any other variables that you could regress the latent angle distance on? It would be fascinating it you could unpack some of the drivers of latent distance.