

Xi Jinping and His New Zhijiang Army: A Perspective from Social Network Analysis

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Abstract: Authoritarian regimes' internal and external behavior are characterized by their leaders' traits and behaviours. Building upon the achievements of elite studies in recent years, this paper analyzes the relationships among cadres who hold high posts within the Chinese Communist Party in the Xi Jinping era. The term "New Zhijiang Army" refers to the people who Xi trusts and are closely associated with. The paper first chooses four cadre-selected congresses from 2007 to 2018, through which Xi rose to power from a member of the standing committee of the Political Bureau to his investiture as president without term limits. The paper analyses the figures of the party, government, and military in these four congresses and indicates the characteristics of officials who emerged alongside Xi Jinping. Finally, the paper sheds light on the relationships between Xi and his "army", and offers a new perspective on future developments in China.

Keywords: China, Xi Jinping, Chinese Communist Party, elite studies, network analysis.

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Introduction

The decline of leaders' powers since the 1990s has led to a process of institutionalization in China's leadership. Institutionalization refers to a set of mechanisms that are created to regulate leaders' policy-making and power transition.¹ Retirement age and term limits are main examples of institutionalization.² In an authoritarian state, dictators cannot govern effectively alone. Thus, institutionalization helps to facilitate the power-sharing between a dictator and his allies to extend the regime's duration.³ Nevertheless, institutionalization is not permanent and static because power-sharing depends on a dictator's desire and opportunity.⁴ Kou and Zang⁵ argue that top leaders with high personal authority can prevent institutionalization. Similarly, Boix and Svobik⁶ argue

- 1 Chien-wen Kou and Xiaowei Zang, "Informal Politics Embedded in Institutional Contexts: Elite Politics in Contemporary China," in *Choosing China's Leaders*, ed. Chien-wen Kou and Xiaowei Zang (London: Routledge, 2013), 4.
- 2 Milan W. Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 92.
- 3 Carles Boix and Milan W. Svobik, "The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions, Commitment, and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships," *The Journal of Politics*, 75, no.2 (2013): 300–316.
- 4 Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, 54.
- 5 Chien-wen Kou and Xiaowei Zang, "Informal Politics Embedded in Institutional Contexts: Elite Politics," in *Contemporary China*.
- 6 Carles Boix and Milan W. Svobik, "The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government"

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that imbalance of power within the ruling coalition breaks institutionalization.

Therefore, a question is raised as to whether formal institutions can counteract informal factions since Xi Jinping took the reins of power in 2012.⁷ In other words, the question is whether institutionalization is challenged under Xi Jinping. Xi Jinping, “the chairman of everything,”⁸ was regarded as the most powerful leader since Mao Zedong. He has collected power rapidly and has broken many formal and informal rules and norms within the Communist Party. For instance, he has launched a purge of former Politburo Standing Committee member Zhou Yongkang, an unprecedented anti-corruption campaign, and he has enshrined his thought in the party’s constitution and canceled term limits for presidency in 2018. Moreover, he has taken several titles in small groups and Security Council in addition to his existing institutional roles, namely General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and the President of the PRC. All these institutional roles surpass even those of Mao Zedong’s.⁹

At this point, the role of Xi Jinping’s personality and experience in governance are highlighted. Xi Jinping and his followers in the process of decision-making are this paper’s research objectives. Li summarizes four types of people, Shaanxi Gang, friends, political protégés, and personal assistants in Xi Jinping’s inner circle.¹⁰ These people compose a loose group who has connections with Xi Jinping in the ruling coalition, although the number is dynamic and implicit. The prominent component of the group is the ‘New Zhijiang Army.’ The term ‘Zhijiang’ was sourced from a column written by Xi Jinping on Zhejiang Daily when he worked in Zhejiang province from 2002 to 2007.¹¹ New Zhijiang Army refers to the members who share some common attributes and have strong connections with Xi Jinping. They consist of Xi Jinping’s old friends (classmates, roommates), subordinates, and townsmen.¹² Compared with old friends and townsmen, subordinates who have worked with Xi Jinping in the same province make up most of the New Zhijiang Army.

Given the above, it is interesting to explore the pattern and characteristics of senior officials alongside the rise of Xi Jinping. Several questions are asked. Does the New Zhijiang Army exist in the ruling coalition? Do the promoted officials share similar

7 Victor, C. Shih, “Contentious Elites in China: New Evidence and Approaches,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 16 (2016):1.

8 “Chairman of Everything,” *The Economist*, April 2, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/china/2016/04/02/chairman-of-everything>.

9 Ming Xia, “Xi Jinping’s Constitutional Coup,” December 18, 2013, http://2newcenturynet.blogspot.com/2013/12/blog-post_18.html.

10 Cheng Li, “Xi Jinping’s Inner Circle,” *China Leadership Monitor*. 43 <https://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/spring-2014>.

11 Ying J. Chou, “An Estimate of Xi Jinping’s Personnel Allocation in the 19th CPCNC Based on the Rise of ‘New Zhijiang Army,’” *Prospect & Exploration* 14, no.9. (2016):104-116.

12 Guang, Yang, “Xi Jinping’s Way to Select Officials,” *Human Rights in China*, October 14, 2016, <https://www.hrichina.org/en/node/17388>.

characteristics? Do their connections with Xi Jinping play a role in promotions? And what are the implications for China elite studies? This paper neither identifies every member of Xi Jinping's inner circle nor predicts the potential successors. Instead, it hopes to examine senior officials from a new perspective and contribute to the field of elite studies.

The paper first proceeds by reviewing the main tenets of studies on China's elites and the technique of social network analysis. In subsequent sections, it elaborates the rationale of research methods, namely document analysis, social network analysis, and logistic regression and the analytical data. Results with graphs and tables are explained in detail. Finally, the paper highlights implications and conclusions.

Literature Review

Studies on China's Elites

Elite refers to a group of powerful people whose political decisions influence society. Elite studies hence research the characteristics of politicians and leaders in public institutions and private organizations. Their research fields include elites' social backgrounds, careers, activities, and interactions. When elites are identified, published sources and surveys are employed to collect data.¹³ Feminism, network analysis, ethnography, comparative analysis, and interviews are also used in analytical approaches or methods.¹⁴ Besides that, personality profiling, which consists of psychobiography and personality study,¹⁵ and biographical analysis¹⁶ are new analytical methods for leadership studies.

In the case of China, a variety of theories and models have been developed to look at the nature of political leadership from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping era. Four themes are summarized by Kou and Zang,¹⁷ with the first one being factional politics. Before power transfer and leadership succession were institutionalized within the CCP, dichotomies were used to divide groups according to elites' attitudes, interests, class background, and stances on policies. Subsequently, more detailed categories were set up at the national level and the provincial level.¹⁸ Nevertheless, these studies can be generally classified into factional analysis, the most important theory at the early phase. Factionalism as an informal explanation of elites' similarities and connections is very popular in elite studies. Factions were mainly formed in the Jiang Zemin's era from 1989 to 2002.¹⁹ The well-

13 Ursula Hoffmann-Lange, "Methods of Elite Research," in *Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, ed. Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 910-927.

14 Joseph A. Conti and Moira O'Neil, "Studying Power: Qualitative Methods and the Global Elite," *Qualitative Research* 7, no. 1 (2007): 63-82; Matias López, "Elite theory," *Sociopedia.isa* (2013): 1-12.

15 Jerrold, M. Post, "Personality Profiling Analysis," in *Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, ed. R. A. W. Rhodes and Paul 't Hart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 328-344.

16 James Walter, "Biographical Analysis," in *Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership* Edited by R. A. W. Rhodes and Paul 't Hart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 314-327.

17 Kou and Zang, "Informal Politics Embedded in Institutional Contexts"

18 Monte R. Bullard, "People's Republic of China Elite Studies: A Review of the Literature," *Asian Survey*, 19, no.8 (1979): 789-800.

19 Kerry Brown, "The New Emperors: Power and the Princelings in China," (New York: I.B. Tauris,

known factions include the Shanghai faction, Youth League faction, princeling faction, and Qinghua University faction. However, the limitations of factionalism are apparent: the boundaries between factions are not clear and one elite can belong to more than one faction.²⁰

Meanwhile, international relations theories such as the bandwagoning effect and balance-of-power polity were adopted to analyze actors during the Mao era.²¹ The second theory, generational politics, appeared in late 1970s and the mid-1990s. This theory is about the conflicts between the older revolutionary generation and the younger one. Technocracy, the third theory, stands for the significant contrast between the young and well-educated officials and the revolutionary cadres.²² When institutionalization was strengthened in the Post-Mao era, rules within the party had been built up and factional analysis was questioned.²³ Hence, the fourth theory is institutionalization.

However, the concentrated power of Xi Jinping has resulted in a new situation. The disputes between factionalism and institutionalization continue, but a new argument has been put forward by recent works. By comparing Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong in the Five-Factor model (extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness and neuroticism), Lee²⁴ argues that even though both have similarities in charisma, Xi Jinping has higher levels of political tolerance and need for achievement. In other words, Xi Jinping is less likely to repeat creating a personality cult and endure political struggle as Mao did, but would not yield to core issues. Likewise, Gueorguiev²⁵ argues that existing norms and institutions within the party have allowed Xi Jinping to expand power, with ambiguous and malleable rules supporting his intentions in succession and promotion. The ambiguous and malleable rules used by Xi Jinping to secure his position include succession norms, the incumbent's semblance of balance, and the retirement age. Thus, informality and formality coexist in China's leadership.

In practice, the past studies on China's elites rely on archives, intelligence sources, interviews, news reports, and researcher's observations.²⁶ Constrained by a lack of transparent and systematic data, earlier studies mainly employ qualitative methods. Gradually, case studies in individual leaders and political campaigns, group studies in demographic information, and statistical methods are the main approaches to analyze

2014):15.

20 Brown, *The New Emperors*, 18-19.

21 Zhi, Y. Bo, "Political Leadership in China," in *Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, ed. R. A. W. Rhodes and Paul 't Hart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 613

22 Kou and Zang, "Informal Politics Embedded in Institutional Contexts", 4.

23 Zheng, X. Wang and Anasta Vangeli, "The Rules and Norms of Leadership Succession in China: From Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping and Beyond," *The China Journal* 76 (2016): 1324-9347.

24 Tony, C. Lee, "Can Xi Jinping be the Next Mao Zedong? Using the Big Five Model to Study Political Leadership," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23 (2018):473-497.

25 Dimitar, D. Gueorguiev, "Dictator's Shadow: Chinese Elite Politics Under Xi Jinping," *China Perspectives*, 1-2, (2018): 17-26.

26 Chien, W. Kou, "Chinese Elite Politics and Qualitative Analyses: Primary Data Sources and Analytical Methods," *The Taiwanese Political Science Review*, 9, no.2 (2005): 236.

Chinese leadership.²⁷ Moreover, new data and new techniques were introduced in elite studies. Benefiting from the internet, short biographies of higher-level elites with data on careers and their backgrounds are becoming available. Therefore, graphs are becoming increasingly more useful to depict relationships among members of an elite.²⁸ As a consequence, political scientists have started to focus their attention on social network analysis to study the Chinese leadership.²⁹

Social Network Analysis in Elite Studies

Social network theory explores interpersonal relations and the relational structure within a group of people.³⁰ In a network, actors (or nodes) can be individuals, firms, states, and so on.³¹ In political science, the interactions between states or individuals may be the perfect topic for network theory. The usefulness of this theory is especially evident at the micro-level. Information and resources flow through networks, and the position within the overall network, determine the priority to access information and resources. Meanwhile, actors' behaviors in the network are regulated by the structure, so different positions have different controls.³²

As an analytical technique, social network analysis is applied to two special formats of data. One is describing the characteristics of actors, and the other is describing the actors' relationships.³³ The principle of network theory implies that the power and influence of an actor within the network are measurable, so several core indexes need to be introduced. Centrality is one of the most important measurable concepts; the actor who reflects greater centrality is the more "powerful" and occupies the more central position in the network. Centrality can be measured by degree centrality, eigenvector centrality, betweenness centrality, and closeness centrality.³⁴ This paper uses degree centrality and betweenness centrality in its analysis. The former is counted through the number of edges of a node. The higher the degree, the more central the node is. The actor who has the most degrees is the most important in the network. The latter is a measure of the extent to which a node is connected to other nodes that are not connected to each other. It's a measure of the degree

27 Bo, "Political Leadership in China."

28 Franziska, B. Keller, "Moving Beyond Factions: Using Social Network Analysis to Uncover Patronage Networks Among Chinese Elites," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 16, no.1 (2016): 21.

29 Guang, X. Wang, "The Application of Social Network Analysis to Public Administration Research," *Survey Research — Method and Application*, 34, (2014): 67-132; Chan, H. Wang, "Social Network Analysis and China Studies: Measurement and Analysis of Relational Network," *Mainland China Studies*, 58, no.2 (2015): 23-59.

30 Yuh J. Tsai, "Social Networks: A New Approach of Sociological Research," *Thought and Words: Journal of the Humanities and Social Science*, 46, no. 1 (2008): 1-34.

31 John Patty and Maggie Penn, "Network Theory and Political Science," in *Oxford Handbook of Political Networks*, ed. Jennifer Nicoll Victor, Alexander H. Montgomery, and Mark Lubell (Oxford University Press, 2016): 1-32.

32 David Lazer, "Networks in Political Science: Back to the Future," *Political Science & Politics*, 44, no.1 (2011): 61-68.

33 Franziska, B. Keller, "Analyses of Elite Networks," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Political Elites*, ed. Heinrich Best and John Higley (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 136.

34 Patty and Penn, "Network Theory and Political Science."

where a node serves as a bridge.

In the case of social network analysis applied in China studies, social capital and employment are the main fields. Public policy is also another emergent issue. Wang³⁵ proposes three available fields, namely elite studies, enterprise studies, and collective action. For elite studies, the past research experience and theories of qualitative research have paved the way for social network analysis.

Research Design and Methods

To analyze the New Zhijiang Army in a comprehensive way, the paper employs three methods, namely document analysis, social network analysis, and logistics regression to analyze data. Document analysis is a qualitative procedure that reviews printed and electronic documents to gain meaning, knowledge, and understanding.³⁶ Documents in the paper include news reports, officials' digital profiles, and related analytical literature on China's elite studies. This paper will use social network analysis and logistic regression to analyze the relationship between multiple independent variables and a categorical dependent variable, and the probability of occurrence.³⁷ Binary logistic regression where the dependent variable is dichotomous will be used in this paper.

Officials' data in this paper is collected from the online database³⁸ built by the CCP. It records the national and municipal officials' profiles including name, age, gender, place of origin, title, career, ethnicity, and educational background. Moreover, the paper also refers the political elite database³⁹ built and updated by National Cheng Chi University. Data collection and analysis consist of two procedures. The analytical groups and measurable variables are identified in advance. The first procedure is social network analysis for 138 senior officials from March 2013 to March 2018, and the second is logistic regression for 190 senior officials from March 2008 to March 2018.

The first procedure's purpose is to find the characteristics of the new or promoted officials with the rise of Xi Jinping since March 2013. Since subordinates under Xi Jinping are the majority, officials' working provinces are presented with social network analysis.

Table 1 shows the dataset at the national level for social network analysis from March 2013, when Xi Jinping became the head of state, to March 2018. The higher ranking means higher positions, while the same ranking means the same level of position. The ranking of positions is in a fixed order in China's leadership. The highest position is the party's decision-making core, the Politburo Standing Committee, whose members are currently seven. The second position, the Political Bureau, is composed of 25 members

35 Wang, "Social Network Analysis and China Studies."

36 Glenn Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9, no.2 (2009): 27-40.

37 Hyeoun A. Park, "An Introduction to Logistic Regression: From Basic Concepts to Interpretation with Particular Attention to Nursing Domain," *Korean Society of Nursing Science*, 43, no.2. (2013): 154-164.

38 The database can be found at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/394696/index.html>.

39 The database can be found at <https://cped.nccu.edu.tw/>.

from the Party, state, and military. From ranking 6 to rank 4, these positions belong to party and state leaders⁴⁰ even though the power distribution is unbalanced. The lowest position is the functional office of state council.

The analytical unit here is the head of each position despite the fact that one position may have two leaders. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has the minister Wang Yi and the party chief Qi Yu. The analytical unit in the paper hence is Wang Yi and not Qi Yu. In addition, it is possible that one person has more than one identity or title. For example, Wang Yi is not only the minister of Foreign Affairs but also the state councilor. State councilor which ranks 4 in Table 1 is higher than minister, therefore, Wang Yi's principal identity is state councilor.

Table 1. The Dataset of Analytical Groups.

Position	Ranking	Example
The Standing Committee of the Political Bureau	6	Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang
The Political Bureau	5	Fan Changlong, Li Xi
Secretariat of the Central Committee	4	Yang Jing, Huang Kunming
Vice-chairman of National People's Congress	4	Wang Shengjun, Wang Chen
State Councillor	4	Wang Yi
President of Supreme People's Court	4	Zhou Qiang
Procurator-general of Supreme People's Procuratorate	4	Zhang Jun
Vice-chairman of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference	4	Chen Yuan, He Lifeng
Central Military Commission of CCP	3	Zhang Youxia
Ministries and Commissions under the State Council	2	Yuan Guiren, Chen Baosheng
Units under CCP Central Committee	2	Song Tao
Functional Offices of CCP Central Committee	1	Wang Jiarui,
Organizations directly under the State Council	1	Cai Fuchao, Ning Jizhe
Functional Offices of the State Council	1	Wang Guangya, Zhang Xiaoming
Agencies under the Central Military Commission	1	Zhong Shaojun, Li Zuocheng

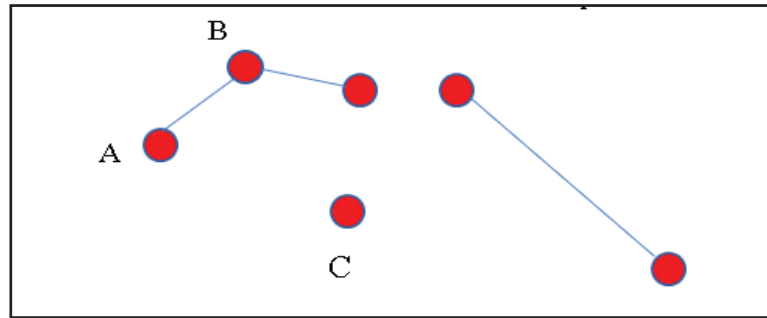
Once the analytical unit is identified and collected, a red point (see from Figure 1 in social network analysis) is a node that refers to an official, and an edge refers to the link between two nodes who have connections.

According to Xi Jinping's official profile,⁴¹ he has worked in Shaanxi, Hebei, Fujian, Zhejiang, and Shanghai. Fujian province and Zhejiang province are places where he spent the most years. Since subordinate is the main relationship, the edge here refers to the same province in officials' careers. If actor A and actor B have worked as administrative officials in the same province, an edge will be tied between them.

40 Zhi Z. Zheng, "How to Rank leaders of Party and State," Accessed on April 10, 2019. https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1270347.

41 Xi Jinping's profile can be found at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1025/c414940-29608803.html>.

Figure 1. Examples of Nodes and Edges.



The second procedure's purpose is to test whether the connections with Xi Jinping influence officials' promotion. Thus, combining with previous empirical works and the focus of the paper, the paper defines different variables. Table 2 shows the independent variables, dependent variables, and controlled variables. Data is collected from March 2008 to March 2018 to measure potential changes in positions in that time frame. Promotion can mean two things here: firstly, literal promotion, and secondly, through a new identity or title for the same position during the term. For example, Liu He, the classmate of Xi Jinping in middle school, is a member of the Political Bureau since October 2017, and the vice-premier of the State Council since March 2018, but he was assigned a new title as the vice director of the National Science and Technology Education Leading Group in August 2018. That means he got promoted.

Table 2. Variables for Logistic Regression.

Name	Independent Variables		Controlled Variables	Dependent Variables
Actor	Relations with Xi	Working Province	age, gender, ethnicity, education	Promoted
	same place of origin; classmate; subordinate	Shaanxi, Hebei, Fujian, Zhejiang, Shanghai		Non-promoted
		none of the above		

Two categories are classified in the independent variables. Relations with Xi Jinping include townsmen whose places of origin is Shaanxi province, classmates who studied in the same class with Xi Jinping, and subordinates who have worked under Xi in the same local government. The information can be found in officials' profiles and news reports. The second category is working province in accordance with Xi Jinping's path to promotion. If an official has worked in one of the five places, he or she will be marked.

The controlled variables include age, gender, ethnicity, and education which are often tested by previous empirical studies.⁴² Therefore, the paper will mark these controlled

42 Lu H. Chen, Te S. Chen, and Yi, L. Chen, "Who Are the Rising Stars in the 18th CCP National Congress? A Study of Political Potential of Central Committee Alternate Members," *Mainland China Studies*, 55, no.1 (2012): 1-21; Ruixue Jia, Masayuki Kudamatsu, and David Seim, "Political Selection in China: The Complementary Roles of Connections and Performance," *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 13, no.4 (2015): 631-668; Z Wu, J Luo, and X Zhang, "Uncovering Political Promotion in China: A Network Analysis of Patronage Relationship in Autocracy," accessed on May 2, 2019, <https://arxiv.org/abs/1902.00625>.

variables out based on previous research.

Results

In the first procedure, 138 officials' data of working provinces are collected and presented in Figure 2. Red points mean cadres, and blue squares mean their working places. When several cadres have worked in the same province, the blue square links these red points together. The isolated red points on the left side mean those cadres have no working experience in provinces. Examples include Liu He, the vice-premier of the State Council, who stayed in the state council after graduating from Renmin University in 1986, and Wan Exiang, who became the deputy president of the Municipal Court and the Supreme Court without administration experience. For military cadres, if military regions are marked in their official profiles, the regions are their working places. For example, the Nanjing Military Region which governs six provinces locates in Nanjing City, Jiangsu province.

Figure 2. Two-mode Graph of Cadres and Provinces From 2013 to 2018.

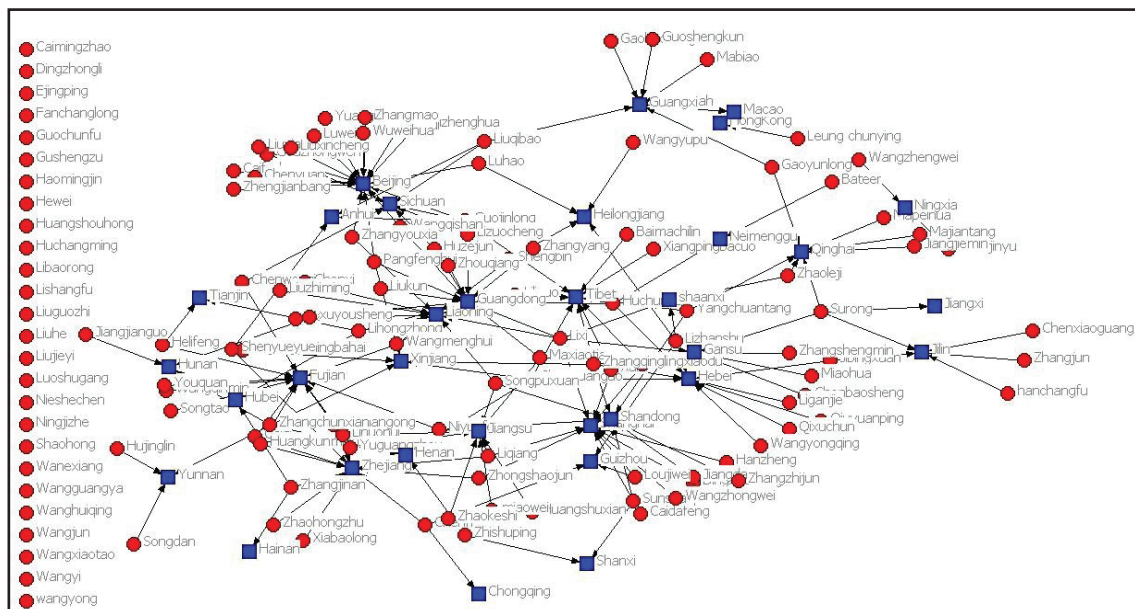


Figure 3 shows the index of degree centrality among 138 officials. Beijing's size is the biggest in the figure. It means the number of cadres who have worked in Beijing is the largest and that working in Beijing is the most important within the network. The sizes of Guangdong, Fujian, Shanghai are also big, illustrating their importance.

Figure 4 shows the index of betweenness centrality among cadres. It turns out that Guangdong's size is the largest (Beijing's is smaller). That means Guangdong is the most suitable province as a bridge for cadres. If one cadre wants to know another cadre, he or she had better ask someone who has Guangdong experience for help.

Figure 3. Two-mode Graph of Cadres and Provinces with Degree Centrality.

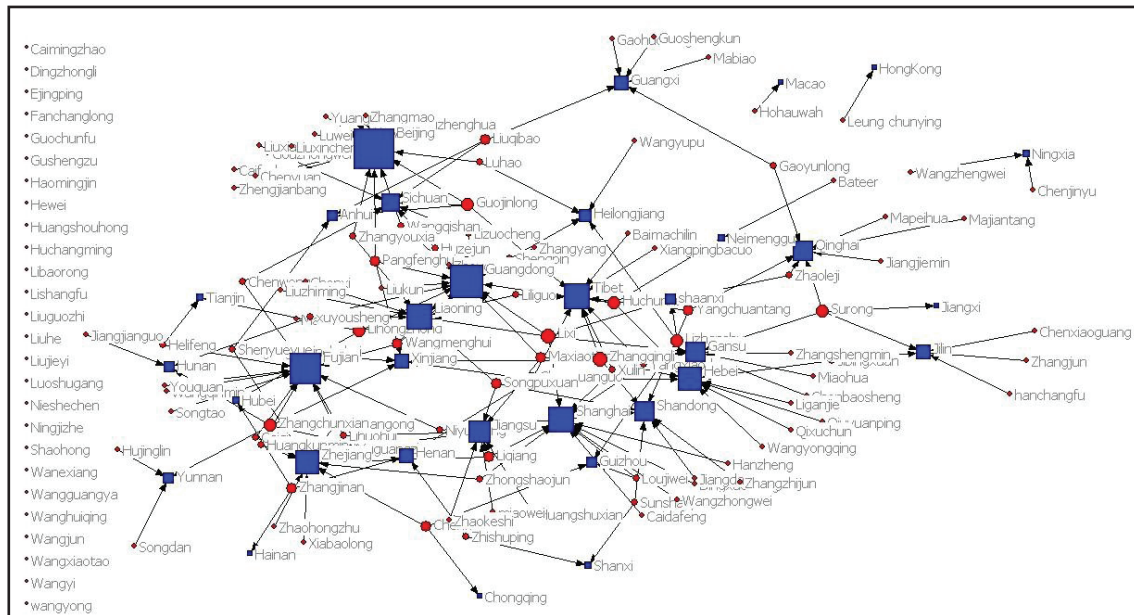


Figure 4. Two-mode Graph of Cadres and Provinces with Betweenness Centrality.

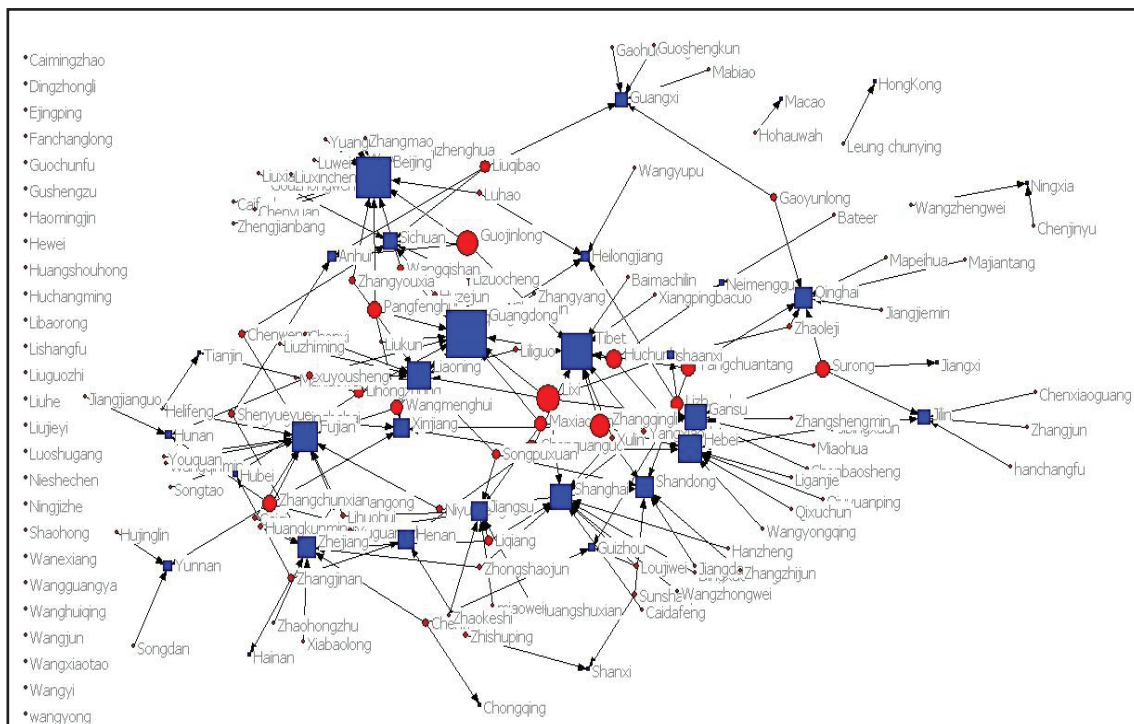


Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4 expose two terms of Xi Jinping. When it came to the second term, situation has changed. Figure 5 shows the network of the cadres who were promoted in March 2018. In the isolated group, no officials have worked in Jilin, Hainan, and Jiangxi. Fujian province where Xi Jinping worked for 17 years becomes the most important in the network. The new and promoted officials who worked in Fujian province make up the majority of cadres. Shanghai, Liaoning, and Zhejiang's positions are also highlighted.

Bureau and the Party Secretary of Guangdong province, is the most important person within the network.

Li Xi not only shares the most working provinces with other cadres but also is the best person to connect with other cadres. The provinces he worked in include Gansu, Shaanxi, Shanghai, Liaoning, and Guangdong.⁴³ Even though he was not the subordinate under Xi Jinping, he was usually regarded as a member of Xi's group. Another outstanding person within the network is Guo Jinlong, who was a member of the Political Bureau and the Party Secretary of Beijing. But his position was replaced by Caiqi, Xi Jinping's subordinate in Fujian province, in 2017 (Xinhua, 2017).

Figure 9. One-mode Graph of Cadres with Degree Centrality from 2013 to 2018.

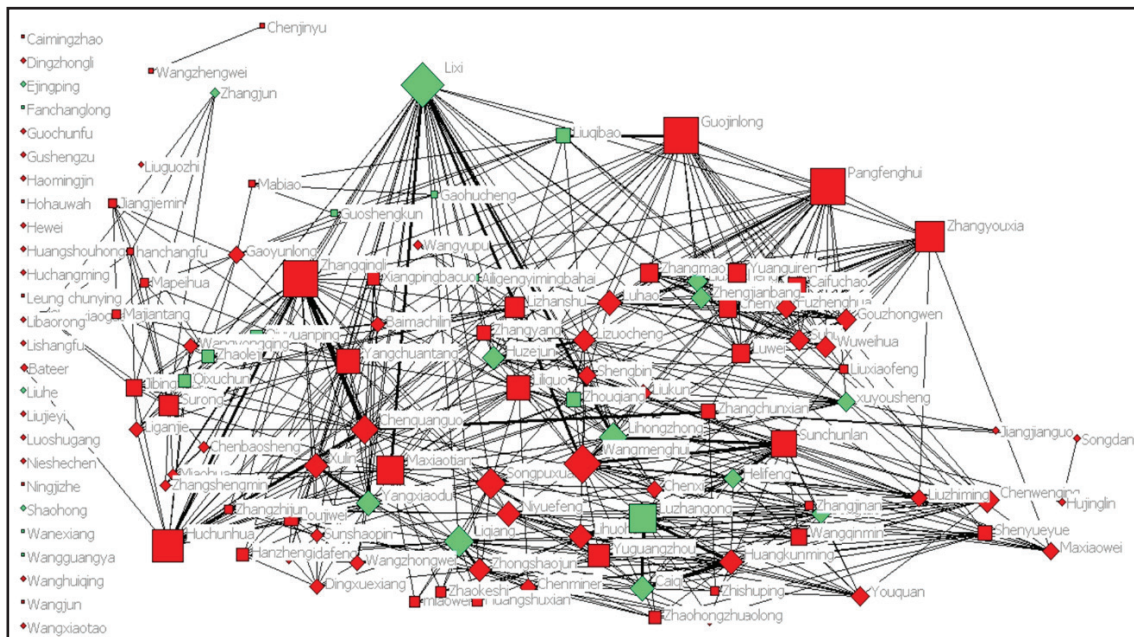
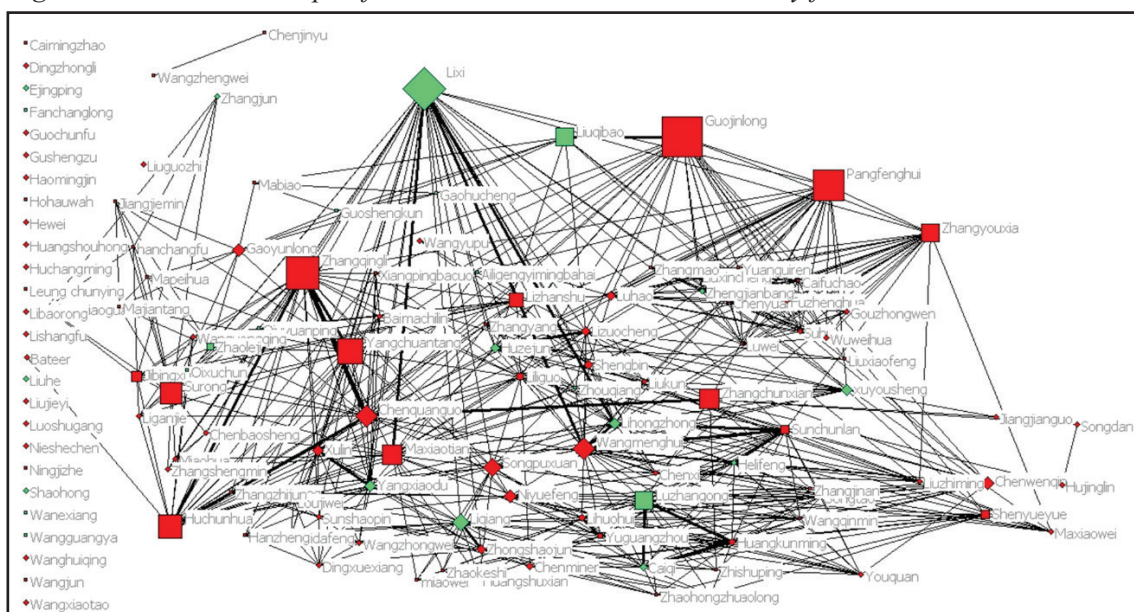


Figure 10. One-mode Graph of Cadres with Betweenness Centrality from 2013 to 2018.



43 Li Xi's profile can be found at www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/25/c_1121856438.htm.

In the second procedure, 190 cadres' data from March 2008 to March 2018 are collected by excluding the ones who have entered the Politburo or retired before Xi Jinping was promoted to a member of the Standing Committee in 2007. Also, two cadres lacking complete data are excluded. Table 3 shows the result of the dependent variable with SPSS.

By controlling four variables, the relations with Xi Jinping, including classmates, subordinates, and townsmen, do have an influence on officials' promotions ($p=0.018$). Working in Shaanxi, Hebei, Fujian, Zhejiang, or Shanghai has no significant impact on officials' promotions. Therefore, the relation with Xi Jinping is more important than the working places. In other words, the New Zhijiang Army is more like a group of people who have connections with Xi Jinping, not based on the places they worked in—Xi Jinping just happened to work in the above five provinces. Furthermore, if officials who don't have relations with Xi Jinping want to get a promotion, the rate of success is the ones who have relations with Xi Jinping's 0.156 times. The officials who have relations with Xi Jinping are likely to be promoted.

Table 3. *The Logistic Regression of 190 Cadres.*

Variables in the Equation									
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 ^a	relation(1)	-1.857	.785	5.595	1	.018	.156	.033	.727
	place(1)	-.870	.526	2.731	1	.098	.419	.149	1.176
	gender	-.688	.918	.562	1	.454	.503	.083	3.039
	education	.164	.260	.396	1	.529	1.178	.708	1.960
	nation	-1.801	1.042	2.989	1	.084	.165	.021	1.272
	age	-3.605	.568	40.280	1	.000	.027	.009	.083
	Constant	5.519	1.780	9.616	1	.002	249.342		
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: gender, education, nation, age.									

Conclusion and Limitations

Elite governance is a special and significant issue in Chinese studies. With the power concentration of Xi Jinping, new leadership developments need to be observed and studied. To explore the pattern and characteristics of senior officials with the rise of Xi Jinping, the paper used document analysis, social network analysis and logistics regression to examine the phenomenon of New Zhijiang Army in the ruling group. Departing from previous research on the members of the central committee of the Party, this paper has analyzed the Party and state leaders and the affiliated organizations of the Party, government, and military. It argued that a group of people who have strong connections with Xi Jinping was formed with the rise of Xi. The majority were Xi Jinping's subordinates in Fujian province until March 2018. Li Xi was the most important person within the officials' network from 2013 to 2018 if we're only considering the working province. The results also find that the relationship with Xi Jinping influences officials' promotions, while the

working places are not important.

The problem of decision-making within a closed circle is apparent. Xi Jinping is surrounded by party members whose political career is tied to his own success. Among political cadres, loyalty to Xi Jinping is valued more than competence. Until this skewed value system remains, no one will provide critical information and oppose Xi Jinping's opinion. Lack of accurate information can be a problem for the Party, as shown by the recent case of COVID-19 in Hubei. After the virus outbreak, Hubei's party secretary has been replaced by the mayor of Shanghai, Ying Yong, who has held a high post in Zhejiang province from 2003 to 2007, when Xi Jinping was the party chief.⁴⁴

Until now, the network of "Zhijiang Army" among main cities of China has been constructed by Xi Jinping. From the north to the south, the party secretaries of Heilongjiang, Beijing, Shanghai, Hubei, Chongqing, Jiangxi, Guangdong, and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council are, respectively, Zhangqingwei, Caiqi, Liqiang, Chenminer, Yingyong, Lixi, and Xiabaolong. All of them are thought to be close to Xi Jinping.

The main limitation of this paper is that the analytical units in the study are principals at the national level. They exclude the deputy positions except for the vice-chairmen of the National People's Congress and the vice-chairmen of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and the lowest levels of the party, state, and army are functional offices of CCP Central Committee, functional offices of the State Council, and agencies under the Central Military Commission. Hence, it is possible that when the scope of research units extends to the provincial level, the result is different. Moreover, the tested variables merely consider the relations with Xi Jinping and officials' working provinces and ignore officials' family backgrounds, for example, princeling or the "fuerdai"—the rich second generation, because their data lacks transparency. Changes may also still occur due to Xi Jinping's now unlimited term. People's relations are dynamic, and nothing is guaranteed. One example is that military cadres' news and information can disappear, or stop being updated without explanations. This represents a major challenge for future research.

Given the above, the paper argues that key persons exist within the ruling clique in the Xi Jinping era. They get in charge of substantial affairs and affect Xi Jinping. Thus, developing innovative and comprehensive techniques to measure and analyze these key persons is necessary in elite studies. Further studies can turn to long term tracking of officials since 2013. Conversely, key persons' influences on Xi Jinping can also be researched.

44 Zheng, William Zhang, "Coronavirus: Beijing Purges Communist Party Heads in Hubei over 'Botched' Outbreak Response in Provincial Capital of Wuhan," Accessed on February 28, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3050372/coronavirus-beijings-purge-over-virus-takes-down-top-communist>

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