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Bjørnar Sverdrup-Thygeson & Stig Stenslie

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BJØRNAR SVERDRUP-THYGESON AND
STIG STENSLIE

Beijingology 2.0: Bridging the "Art" and "Science" of China Watching in Xi Jinping's New Era

Abstract: In Xi Jinping's China, the top leadership is getting even more closed, whereas their decisions carry ever more global weight. Ahead of the Chinese Communist Party's highly important 20th National Congress to be held in the late autumn of 2022, the eyes of the global Intelligence Community are turning to Beijing. How to divine what exactly is going on in the black box of Chinese elite politics at this sensitive moment? This is the million-dollar-question facing analysts of Chinese politics. We argue that

Bjørnar Sverdrup-Thygeson is Senior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, specializing in Chinese foreign policy, Europe–China relations, and international relations theory. He holds a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics, after studies at Oxford and universities in Norway and China. The author can be contacted at bst@nupi.no.

Stig Stenslie is Research Director at the Norwegian Intelligence School (NORIS) and Head of the Centre for Intelligence Studies. He is also Affiliated Senior Researcher at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment and Visiting Professor at King's College London. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Oslo and has written and lectured extensively on politics in the Middle East, China's return as a great power, and intelligence. The author can be contacted at stig.stenslie@gmail.com.

there is a gap asking to be bridged between the "art" and "science" of reading Chinese elite politics, or between on the one hand, the traditional Beijingology, and on the other hand, purely academically relevant research. There is a pressing need for a "Beijingology 2.0," combining the traditional art of the China hands with the most innovative methods and tools derived from social science research into elite studies and text analysis, respectively.

INTRODUCTION

Tea leaf reading, or "tasseography," is an ancient art of fortune-telling. It is a tradition that likely began soon after the discovery of tea by legendary Chinese emperor Shen Nun in 2737 BC. Reading Chinese politics, or "Beijingology," is also about interpreting subtle signs, and, like tasseography, has traditionally been more of an art than a science. This reflects the opaque nature of the political system of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The term "Beijingology" is an adaptation of "Kremlinology," defined as '[t]he art of observing, deducing, and guessing what is really happening within a secretive organization."[1] Indeed, quoting Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "It could well be said that the CCP (China's Communist Party) is the world's largest secret society."[2]

Political elites in a closed regime such as Xi Jinping's China are typically "hard intelligence targets." For an intelligence service, there are few accesses, and there are plenty of counterintelligence measures shielding the elite from external penetration. Elite dynamics in China have always posed a severe analytical challenge for the Intelligence Community (IC), but have arguably become an ever harder intelligence target in what Beijing has dubbed "Xi's New Era." In his first decade in power, Xi has arguably unleashed a notion of fear and paranoia at all levels of the Chinese party-state through his harsh discipline campaigns, intensified surveillance, and crippling of foreign spy activities. According to media leaks, key decisionmakers in the Biden administration in the United States are frustrated by the lack of intelligence on Xi Jinping's inner circle, and, as a result, they have been repeatedly surprised by Beijing's political moves. For example, it was not foreseen how hard the Chinese authorities would crack down on the democracy movement in Hong Kong, China's willingness and ability to project military force into the South China Sea, or Chinese aggressive hacking campaigns against the United States. The access to information on China's top leadership, and hence the ability to understand its intensions, is hardly better in other Western countries' intelligence services.[3]

As China is rising as a global superpower, the global IC are turning their eyes to Beijing ahead of the CCP's highly important 20th National Congress, to be held in the late autumn of 2022. It is more important than ever to

understand the political elite dynamics and thinking in China, as these carry more and more global weight. How do we divine what exactly is going on in the black box of Chinese elite politics at this sensitive moment?

It is striking how little is written in the intelligence literature in terms of how analysts should proceed methodologically for the purpose of answering key questions about Chinese political processes.[4] The fundamental question of reliably determining what we can know that we know, and how to go about finding that knowledge, has often been a guessing game when faced with murky corridors of power. Rising to that challenge has not been made easier by the fact that the analytical community and the academic circles of social science has often discussed these methodological challenges in insulation from each other. This has contributed to an observed split between what is termed the "art" and the "science" of studying closed regimes.

Currently, the spectrum of art and science in analyzing China's political elite remains too disjointed. On the far "art" end of the spectrum one finds the rumor mill among Beijing diplomats, and until recently, the speculations in the Hong Kong press.[5] Among methodological pitfalls are the risks of reading too much into minute changes in newspaper vocabularies, or to become too carried away with reading tea leaves and rumors about intraparty strife that the larger picture of relative stability in the Chinese political elite passes one by.[6] Along the outer reaches of the "science" end of the spectrum, quantitative elite studies are systematic and analytically stringent, but often share the weaknesses common to quantitative studies in being either based on general theories of social science too disconnected from the specific political realities of China, or by providing answers to questions of a too long-term, or too theoretical nature, to be of immediate relevance for those seeking to divine the political decisionaking in Zhongnanhai, Beijing's equivalent of the Kremlin. While China-hands tend to focus too narrowly on China as an idiosyncratic case, quantitative-oriented social scientists tend to focus too broadly to fully account for the specificities of the Chinese political system. In short, we argue that both approaches, taken to the extreme, are of little value to an intelligence analyst.

We are arguably experiencing a gap asking to be bridged between the art and science of Beijingology, a "Beijingology 2.0"—which is fitted to the challenges and opportunities of Xi's New Era—combining the traditional art of the China hands with the most innovative methods and tools derived from social science research into elite studies and text analysis, respectively.

THE QUESTIONS

We start off by clarifying the most basic premise: Why is studying political elites an important task for a China analyst? The questions with which an intelligence analyst at any point engages reflect both the knowledge demands

of the consumer, and the considerations of supporting one's colleagues in the service that works with collecting information. An analyst of Chinese elite politics faces a distinct set of demands that often diverges from those of other epistemic societies, such as journalists or social science researchers. Whereas a journalist focuses mainly on fulfilling a demand for short-term factual updates, a researcher's focus remains on the mapping of broader trends over a relatively long timeframe. As such, the journalistic profession tends to heave closely to the art end of the spectrum, whereas the academic society is naturally aligned with the science. The challenges of an intelligence analyst are due to the demands of being in between these two professions, producing knowledge that is more narrowly temporally and politically focused than that of an academic, but of a broader scope than that of a journalist. This line of argument naturally ties into the broader debate about the nature of intelligence analysis as an art performed by craftsmen, or a science undertaken through structured analysis.[7] This broader discussion on what was early termed the "academic–practitioner divide" within the intelligence literature.[8]

First, a question that consumers are invariably asking is: "What does China want?" Given that China has no agency, however, the correct phrasing of the question is: What does the political elite in Beijing want? In other words, what are the intentions of the Chinese political leadership? Following from this premise, the next question an intelligence analyst should ask is: Who has power and influence in China? Following from this: What is the nature of the political elite? Is there one, or multiple, power centers? Is it meaningful to talk about "political factions"—a much referred to term in China studies? Who has the most influence, in other words; who belong to the core elite around Xi Jinping? Answering these questions engenders a number of deeper queries: What are the sources of power within the distinct Chinese political system? How are leaders recruited—based on meritocracy, or trust based on family and friendship ties? Attaining knowledge on all these at times seemingly esoteric dimensions feeds directly into our knowledge of those shaping political intentions in Beijing.

Second, knowledge about the political elite is also of paramount importance in terms of another of the key tasks an analyst is facing, namely assessing China's political stability. In blunt terms, any briefing about China tends to be followed by a question about the stability of the current Chinese regime. Again, insights from general social science studies prove vital. The stability of a regime may, in short, be challenged in one of three ways: from outside, from below, or from above. According to research, for two-thirds of the world's deposed authoritarian rulers during the postwar era, their demise came as a result of elite machinations, not external interventions or popular revolts.[9] As Susan L. Shirk points out, this general trend among

authoritarian, personalist regimes is worthy of particular attention in the midst of Xi Jinping's accelerating concentration of power in his own person.[10] Following from this, it is central for an analyst to ask: How integrated is the elite? An integrated elite is a precondition both for effective decision-making processes and, usually consequentially, for the viability of the regime. This further engenders a set of subquestions: Which mechanisms contribute to unity within the elite? What is the solidarity within the elite? Are there signs of elite splits, for example related to leadership changes? Which norms and rules contribute to regulating the behavior of the elite? In the Chinese case this entails that great care should be allotted to the current practice on, for example, the rules on age limits, period limitations, and collective leadership mechanisms.

   Third, it is also crucial for an intelligence analyst to map out key actors in the machinery of power of Beijing and potential future leaders, in order to help national decisionmakers to establish the right political contact points in China. These contact points may be trusted advisors of the decisionmakers, whose advice is considered in the policymaking processes. Identifying such channels naturally depends on an in-depth understanding of the political system, its degree of personalization, and the institutionalization of advisory roles. This is also an important task to support those working with "targeting," in other words those spies seeking informants with access to the political elite in China. This is a long-term and studious endeavor, where identifying sources of power and future influence is important in order to identify potential successful venues. In the context of contemporary China, this task is highly challenging, but also particularly important, given the present constraints on publicly available sources.

THE SOURCES

In striking parallel with how the impact of their decisions has increased, the Chinese political elite has become noticeably more closed since Xi Jinping's ascension to power in 2012. The importance of accessing sources on Chinese political conduct has thus become increasingly acute, at the same time as finding such sources that are valid and reliable has become increasingly difficult. In particular, political insights gathered from human sources have become increasingly sparse, thus increasing the relative importance of gathering information from "Beijingological" studies of textual material and official pronouncements. This situation stands in some contrast to that of the 1990s and early 2000s, where China showcased an increasing openness,[11] exemplified in, for example, statistical yearbooks, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) reports, and Chinese academics more actively participating in international research debates. In latter years, however, government officials are refusing to talk to foreigners about politically relevant matters, as

the degree of surveillance has been upped, and the personal risks are higher. The party was shaken by the internal feuds in the party elite in the years 2011 and 2012, and within the elite there is currently likely to be a considerable fear of falling out with Xi.[12] Few, if any, belonging to the elite thus dare to speak due to increasing internal surveillance. Additionally, more is now at risk, given that Xi has brought China out of the closet as a great power, and it is more important than ever that the party cadres present a united front to the outside world.

Because of the increased closing up of the political elite, there are even more rumors spreading in the mill of the diplomatic community, the Hong Kong press—until Beijing clamped down on free speech in the city-state, and in social media. The aforementioned received wisdom from ancient Chinese philosopher Laozi, that "those who know don't talk, and those who talk don't know" (知者不言，言者不知) is truer of the Chinese political sphere today than at any point over the last decades.[13] Additionally, elite-level conflicts often entail leaks from within the elite. We saw this in the aftermath of 1989, with the leak of the Tiananmen papers. We could see something of the same in the aftermath of the Bo Xilai scandal. However, an intelligence analyst needs to be careful with this information, as, to the extent they possess privileged information, it usually is spread by elite actors to serve a particular agenda. A typical modus operandi for an authoritarian regime is the use of media channels to achieve political goals. First, it can be used to spread *kompromat* in order to undermine actors within the elite that have fallen out of favor. This could, for example, be seen in the case of Bo Xilai. Second, disparate elite factions may employ "strategic leaks" as a means of internal power struggles. Third, a regime may consciously spread "fake news" in order to confuse foreign analysts.[14] As such, diplomats, journalists, and researchers that quote "well-informed sources" are often stretching their credulity. In sum, these factors make it extremely challenging to access primary sources on the Chinese political leadership and decisionmaking processes today.

This situation entails that methodically drawing on official textual material to analyze Chinese policy changes, in other words proceeding from the methods of classical Beijingology, has increased in relative importance as the main source for understanding Zhongnanhai policymaking. Even in an authoritarian and heavily censored society such as China, the "information revolution" entails that finding data about Chinese capabilities is considerably easier than before. The elite still produces a large amount of formalized political information in the form of public documents, speeches, and statements. Systematic reading of the *People's Daily* for top-level CCP pronouncements, and the *People's Liberation Army Daily* for the People's Liberation Army, thus offers one of very few windows into Chinese elite-level political dynamics.[15] In addition, the new information landscape provided by

the Internet and the rise of social media, including the dynamics of the Chinese censorship systems, may not revolutionize the access to Chinese elite-level politics, but nevertheless offers the possibility to employ a novel set of tools for analysis.

Not the least, it offers new venues for applying resource-intensive, large-scale quantitative analysis in seeking to discern dominant themes and policy orientation in the Chinese media and propaganda sphere.[16] In addition to providing practical easy-to-do particular kinds of qualitative research, and content analysis of newspaper articles,[17] it also offers the option to utilize programs such as Touch Graph, Yoshikoder, CNKI Analysis, and Technorati to quantitatively map out and identify key discursive trends.[18] Whereas the information haystack thus has increased exponentially, the needles hidden within have not necessarily become more prevalent or easier to find. As such, employing solid methodological frameworks to sift through the available information has become even more important under the current circumstances.

THE METHODS

In spite of the limitations of the classic Beijingology approach, the nature of the Chinese political system entails that the approach is unavoidable for anyone seeking to analyze and predict Chinese policies. However, one should take care to combine the Beijingological approach with more systematically and theoretically grounded methods. The challenge is to find the most salient way to create a synergy between the general social science literature and the in-depth knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of the Chinese political system that are inherent to Beijingology. The following section outlines these different methodological approaches. All of them possesses analytical tools we contend should be part of a solid framework for analyzing elite politics in China.

The Old Way

First of all, an intelligence analyst cannot escape the methods derived from the old analytical tradition of Beijingology. These methods came into being during World War II, as Western analysts sought to understand the political machinations in Berlin.[19] The methods were refined during the Cold War, as analysts sought to read the closed leaderships of Moscow and Beijing.[20] The essence of the methodology is to search for subtle signs in the public practices and communications of the political elites. As Alexander L. George summarized the premises on which the approach is based, it is the realization that the use of media as a tool of government for a regime entails that what is said, although not providing a true depiction of events, provides instead a depiction for the policy goals of the regime. As such, as Alice Miller, one of

the veteran China-hands, has summarized it: "Close examination of how information is presented and what lines of editorial commentary are offered in regime-controlled media makes possible valid interferences about the regime's policy purposes and strategies."[21] However, this is a method with certain limitations, and it is unclear how precise the conclusions drawn for such analysis have been.

How does one do classic Beijingology? The practical methods were traditionally regarded as more of an art than a science. Two key approaches were based on finding methods for divining the intentions of the regime based on what public appearances could say about intraparty intrigues and personnel changes, and, second, what close readings of public pronouncements in newspapers and communications could say about policy changes.[22] The first of these methods that carries on from the heyday of Soviet Kremlinology thus sought to eke out both the policy-relevant agendas, and the vagaries of internal politics, through tracing when and where key personnel are present, and when and where they are absent.[23] A famous example is how one was able to trace the political fortunes of then First Secretary Khrushchev, based on whether his title was capitalized in official Soviet media.[24] This is, however, a challenging task even under the best of cases. It is often profoundly difficult to ascertain when a vacation is only a vacation. As modern-day Kremlinologists have also been forced to ask the question, not the least during Putin's ten day "disappearance" in 2014 in the midst of ongoing domestic political drama in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis and foreign sanctions, where Putin on return simply offered the explanation that "life would be boring without gossip."[25] In the Chinese case, the presence or absence of key political figures in the headlines on the *Renmin Ribao* is also a key meter to utilize. For example, when regional bigwigs simultaneously disappear from public view, it tends to mean there's a top-level meeting going on.[26]

In the heyday of Kremlinology, a substantive amount of time was focused on reading through two key media outlets—*Pravda*, as the mouthpiece of the Communist Party, and the *Red Star* used by the Soviet military. In terms of cross-pollination between the related fields of Kremlinology and Beijingology, it is worth noticing that as a result of the increased power concentration under Putin's regime, one has lately seen a resurgence of such methods among the Kremlin-watching community.[27] However, in parts based on the flaws of classical Kremlinology, there is also a vital ongoing debate on how to strengthen the analytical frameworks, by drawing on more "scientific" methods.[28]

As the inner workings of the state apparatus remains opaque, the amount of peripheral information, from official press briefings to social media presence, has skyrocketed, creating a distinctly new problematique to overlay the still present, old challenges of Kremlinology.[29] As formulated by Mark

Galeotti, "Without some core, objective principles and reliable evidence on which to anchor our findings, our work risks becoming some kind of Rorschach inkblot test, in which we perceive from scattered and ambiguous data only what we want or expect to see."[30] To this is added, then, new and academically salient approaches to systematizing the informal networks that sustain the power elite of Putin's Russia. This novel set of approaches to the analysis of Putin's Russia is summed up well in a book by Baturo and Elkink:

> The title of the book, The New Kremlinology, is chosen to emphasise not only the subject matter, the what, but also the how—the battery of innovative methods we employ for a better understanding of the politics of a non-democratic regime. In the past, the old Kremlinology inferred information about Soviet leadership from indirect sources, whether revelations about the direction of future policies from Soviet official historiography, physical arrangements of the political elite during official ceremonies and parades. […] This book addresses the problem of the opacity of authoritarian politics by relying on innovative methods, such as text analytics, typically used in the study of advanced democracies.[31]

This debate holds valuable lessons also for analysts of Chinese elite politics and speaks directly to the necessity of more saliently bridging the old Beijingological methods with the more methodologically rigorous frameworks found in social sciences.

Tracing People and Networks

A China analyst thus should also be able to draw on more theoretically grounded, scientific methods. Most notably, one can hardly study political elites without relating to the field within social sciences known as elite studies. Whereas this field of social science tends to be predominantly based on Western, democratic systems, it can arguably still generate perspectives that can be transferred to studies on non-Western authoritarian societies. On that note, however, one should address the debate on whether the historical and political traits of China do not differ significantly from the general traits of states, and that as such any general social science theory is equally applicable to China as to any other country.[32] At the other end of the spectrum, a school of thought argues the case of China is too unique to be an applicable area for Western-derived generalized theories.[33] In essence, this article defines itself along the middle ground of this debate, by arguing that while universalized theories may be saliently applied to the Chinese case, Chinese cases may also be generalizable to non-Chinese contexts. The rationale for directing a particular focus on elite-level politics in countries

such as China, is the acknowledgment that in authoritarian systems elite-level decisionmaking matters more. International surveys underpin the observation that leaders effect larger changes in authoritarian regimes, whereas the leaders themselves draw their position from a far narrower "selectocracy" of insiders, on which their political fortunes depend.[34]

Bringing in key concepts from elite studies strengthens the conceptual basis on which to structure an analysis, and not the least it helps foster the type of theoretical deep knowledge that may help an analyst ask the right questions. Reformulated in the intelligence vocabulary, this will secure a more theoretically founded Information Requirements Management process. As Cheng Li argues, questions derived from elite theory have been underprioritized by the China-watching community.[35] Elite studies help provide salient answers to this key conundrum through two main conduits: the first is through tracing the general dynamics of power brokers, formal and informal, in a closed political regime. Who has power and influence in Beijing, to which extent is their position institutionalized and formalized, or to which extent does one have the presence of one or more *eminence gris* in the decisionmaking system? The second is to provide insights into the broader functioning and stability of the political system through looking at the mechanisms for elite circulation and integration, the compromises and norms structuring relations between elites, and those between the elites and people. How are future leaders recruited, on which basis, and through which channels may they be identified? Analyzing these problematiques gives a structural understanding of the Chinese political elites that makes it possible to predict and provide notification on key developments. This is due to the fact that political elites are, so to speak, one of the key independent variables in understanding the changes in some of the most fundamental dependent variables, from economic policies and foreign policies, to regime stability.

In practical terms, elite studies provide an established analytical framework for assessing the informal coterie, rather than the formal structures, surrounding the central decisionmaking figure of Xi Jinping. Who are his gatekeepers, and what sort of information are they likely to provide? In addition, as is already widely recognized, the increased decisionmaking power of one individual should be reflected in an equally increased focus on the comings and goings of this one individual within the system. Of the number of approaches to this issue, we would like to allot particular attention to, first, in-depth biographical knowledge of the key personnel, and, second, the mapping of intraparty factions.

Elite studies scholarship within academia and, in particular, in the think tank community, has already produced a number of rather innovative tools of particular value to an intelligence analyst. This includes, for example, the mapping out of the CCP Central Committee throughout the history of the

PRC, including their professional and personal backgrounds, for the purpose of better identifying the networks sustaining political power within the CCP.[36] "Although looking at photographs in the *People's Daily* continues to be a useful tool, network indicators first developed for other purposes seem to offer another way for China scholars to identify important leaders in China."[37] Utilizing such formalized analyses, as demonstrated by Franziska Barbara Keller,[38] that combine elements of deep biographical understanding with an efficient computer-driven approach to utilize the large datasets that are available for a China analyst, should be one of the key ways to move forward in analyzing Beijingology in Xi China. It is such systematic, theoretically informed methods we argue should be implemented in the China analyst community along a wider range of areas.

When it comes to innovative ways to find and systematize biographical information about China's current and future political leaders, we will draw particular attention to the work of MacroPolo, which is the Chicago-based Paulson Institute's think tank. By using digital design tools, the think tank has compiled a comprehensive and easily accessible database, "The Committee," of key individuals, which is of great benefit to any China analyst.[39] MacroPolo has further used the extensive biographical database as a starting point for experimenting with network analyses and visualizing the development of the top leader's networks. The highly creative premise behind the experiment was that Xi Jinping had a LinkedIn profile. Who would have been his first and second connections?[40] The method on which the overview is based draws on automated analyses of the U.S. presidential elections using Big Data and network analysis. Networks are unveiled through the automated parsing of thousands of news articles, an approach crossing the boundaries of social and computational sciences.[41] This example shows that novel tools and methods developed to map and study political elite networks in Western democracies are also transferable to analyses of leaders in authoritarian societies such as China. Underpinning this argument, the same approach is successfully used by the Elite Network Shifts project at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, mapping political elite networks in Indonesia.[42]

In terms of utilizing elite studies as a framework for analyzing the stability of the Chinese regime, the predominance of Xi Jinping in the current Chinese political structure does not preclude the importance of also improving the analytical tradition of seeking to divine the key factional movements within the CCP.[43] "The collection of systematic data on elite networks, as mentioned, will permit a much more nuanced understanding of elite factions than previous generations of scholarship on elite politics, which depended on elite interviews, close readings of memoirs, and analysis of selected official publications."[44] This remains of key importance, not only in terms of

assessing the broader political context of Xi's increasingly personalized regime, but also in order to assess the long-term stability of the current power configuration, as well as for systematically developing scenarios for potential "long tail" events of low probability, but high potential impact. If some perfect storm of events should undermine Xi's position, who would be likely to see personal gain? Who are Xi's friends and enemies in the system? This is also another of the areas in which a new generation of China scholars has most actively sought to implement novel methods in mapping the changes in the ranks of the CCP membership and leadership. There is already an important ongoing debate as to the extent to which the leadership struggles in the CCP have been institutionalized.[45] The new approaches, leaning heavily on quantitative methods, are promising to transcend this scholarly divide through introducing methods based on "mostly derived from publicly available sources, [that] promise to improve vastly the replicability of results in the study of Chinese politics."[46]

Tracing Ideas

Although the political elite in Beijing is closed, it is important not to overlook what it communicates to the outside world and it is important not to write off everything as propaganda. What the elite say are important primary sources about thinking within the elite, which thus require thorough analysis.

Therefore, a particular useful scientific method is the systematized analysis of public documents and speeches, through the methodological frameworks of discourse analysis and content analysis. This type of systematic research may help the analyst work more systematically to uncover the broader political messaging of the political elites in Zhongnanhai. In spite of censorship, lack of transparency, and the "Great Firewall," the PRC is still a constituent part of the age of information. The realm of available data emanating from China on a whole range of political issues has skyrocketed over the last decades, but has, ironically, coexisted with an accelerating throttling of the information flow from Chinese decisionmakers. In such a data-rich but information-poor environment, it is increasingly important that the analyses of speeches, government declaration, and other texts are undertaken within a methodologically rigorous framework. Drawing on the academic tradition of discourse analysis may contribute to exactly this.[47]

A key feature of discourse analysis is the applied realization of the contingency of language; in other words, that meaning is fleeting and malleable.[48] As such, one should treat historical content analysis, as famously exemplified in Google n-grams that map the prevalence of keywords in literature over long timespans, with caution. As the Central Intelligence Agency pointed out, "One of the pitfalls of propaganda analysis is that certain catch phrases used repeatedly over the years can mean different things

at different times."[49] It nevertheless remains of core importance to study the precise wording of public political speeches and documents.[50] The concepts and words used in these sources are never accidental.[51] Study the key formulations, establishing what is routine, and what are deviations from the norm. This, of course, demands a solid linguistic competence in Mandarin, as well as a deep immersion into the lexical complexities of Chinese "officialese," the particular linguistic tropes that set official PRC political documents apart from everyday Chinese.

Chinese government language in particular has developed from ancient court Chinese to a stylized iteration of Communist Party power, the key feature of which is the repetitions of, often purposely vague, slogans known as 提法 (*tifa*), that serve as signposts for political direction and demarcate official positions on key questions, and as such take on extra importance in a discourse analysis.[52] In terms of defining what counts as sources indicative of official positions, one of the best and only overviews are found among a set of American China analysts Swaine and Miller.[53] As a discourse analyst would be the first to underscore, it is important to realize the particular modalities of Chinese political discourses. This entails that one cannot simply transfer a wholesale blueprint for analyzing political language from a Western setting to the PRC. Words mean things, but in the Chinese political context, they mean things in particular ways.

This all underscores the fact that novel quantitative analytical procedures, salient as they may be, can only get us so far if not combined with in-depth knowledge of the political context of a phrase. However, we will also argue that employing methods from quantitative, computer-driven content analysis of key phrases may also be a time-saving way of seeking to identify political trends. The analytical community should thus seek to aim for a model that allows for the time-efficient method of content analysis to be triangulated with the in-depth, although time-intensive, analytical tools of discourse analysis. Not the least, such a method may prove useful in this digital age. As Joseph Fewsmith pointed out already a decade and a half ago, a key feature of a Beijingologist is now also to be able to design a precise Internet search.[54] This does depend crucially on whether such a method is employed based on a systematic discourse analysis that triangulates the socially constructed meaning of the key phrases utilized.

Arguably, the Chinese political language is particularly suited for this content-analysis method, given the extent to which the party system signals policy changes and political priorities through the employment of a number of rhetorical signifiers (*tifa*) on all levels of the official rhetoric.[55] In practical terms, this method of quantitative triangulation entails identifying through the discourse analysis of the speeches and texts, a number of key signifiers, words, *tifas*, or similar, that have become key representations of certain

political ideas. These key signifiers may then be run through a database of collected key documents, speeches, and diplomatic dispatches, using the resulting data to triangulate and illustrate longitudinal changes in Chinese political positions on key issues.[56]

Beside mapping political networks, as mentioned above, new technology for so-called text mining offers new venues for identifying and analyzing key discursive trends. While traditional methods of discourse analysis are very resource and time consuming, which means that an analyst can only analyze a small quantity of text, text mining makes it possible to look for patterns in large amounts of unstructured textual data. Examples of such data are newspaper articles, speeches, and public documents—typical sources for those who practice Beijingology.[57] Text-mining technology is evolving very rapidly and has evolved from simple word frequency calculation to word-word network and document-document network identification. A notable example of an analytical approach that would have been virtually unobtainable only a few years ago is Chan and Zhong's work on utilizing machine learning to create a program able to make short-term predictions of Chinese policy changes, by automatically analyzing the content of the *People's Daily*.[58] There are still both opportunities and limitations in this technology.[59] If one is well aware of these, text mining has been used with great success to analyze political currents and discourses in Western democracies. There are also a number of rather innovative research studies that have produced interesting findings related to various aspects of Chinese society based on text mining.[60] But our impression is that such tools have so far to a lesser extent been used systematically by those who study elite politics in China. Consequently, we would argue that there is a large, and unrealized, potential in text mining, and that such tools should be a key ingredient in "Beijingology 2.0."

As we have shown in this article, analyzing political elites in China requires that the analyst put to the test is a subject matter expert. They must have a good understanding of China's unique political system, master the Chinese language, and be familiar with relevant approaches from the social sciences and new technological tools.

CONCLUSION

Studying political elites in a closed political system, such as Xi's China, is challenging. One must be able to critically combine art and science approaches, something that demands in-depth knowledge of these methods, their uses, and their limitations. And at the least one must possess detailed knowledge of the distinct traits of the Chinese political elite and the system in which they are embedded. Over these preceding paragraphs, we have sketched out a theoretical framework for how the budding field of

"Beijingology 2.0" could be enriched by social and machine science methodology and thus better equipped to address the changed circumstances of Xi's China. The main lesson from prediction science is that salient predictions demand a solid understanding of the general baseline that is then enriched and adjusted by context-specific knowledge.[61] In other words, achieving greater rigor and better predictive tools means combining the strengths of nomothetic and ideographic approaches to analysis, combining macro and micro in China analysis. It is helpful to think of solid baseline knowledge as derived from "science" approaches, whereas context-specific knowledge draws a lot on "art." In order to bridge these two in a systematic fashion, through an analytical framework that is suitable for the specific needs of an analyst, these two need to be bridged through a solid, systematic analytical framework.

In short, there is a lot to gain by bridging the art and science gap through integrating and engaging with methodologies and theoretical debates gathered from social and machine sciences. In particular, two strands of social science methodology will prove particularly useful to the framework of a "Beijingology 2.0": First, in Xi's China where the political leadership has rapidly transitioned into a more personalized regime, the insights from the field of elite politics, and particular new methods and tools for mapping networks, becomes increasingly prescient. Second, in an age where written data emanating from China are increasingly myriad, while access to firsthand sources is simultaneously more constricted, methods derived from the field of discourse analysis and text mining become more important for systematically tracing ideas and discourses. These methods are, so to speak, missing links whose integration into the conceptual apparatus of Beijingology can help bridge the gap between "art" and "science," and by so doing, strengthening our analytical apparatus for understanding the policymaking processes of the Chinese elite ahead of the CCP's 20th National Congress to be held in late autumn 2022.

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