How might America's response to the 9/11 attack on New York City provide us with an additional perspective for understanding the evolution of the emperor's executive power in Chinese history. Many Americans have easily assumed that Chinese have an inherent disposition for “despotic” rulers, in sharp contrast to our dedication to individualism and human rights. Yet, one US response to the crisis of 9/11 has been to greatly enhance the executive power of the presidency and even weaken our tradition of individual rights and freedoms. If we are mindful of our own recent history dealing with the national crisis of terrorism, we might have a new opportunity to explore anew how and why Chinese over the centuries often increased the emperor's executive power -- even though that “default” option in times of crisis had unintended consequences. What might we learn from China's development of executive power in times of national crises that might be of use in our own era in America?

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