

**The Golden Age of Oligarchy?  
Institutional Constraints and Leadership Discretion in  
China's Cadre Management System**

by

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For my parents and Manchester United.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When Manchester United won the historic Champions League final in 1999, the ITV commentator famously remarked that the football club “has reached the Promised Land”. By that time, my favorite football club had been denied the European Championship for over three decades due to the competitiveness of the tournament and the seclusion of English clubs from Europe following the Heysel Stadium disaster. For a prize that people are determined to win, against the odds and after a long wait, there is no phrase more appropriate for describing it than “the Promised Land”. After penning the last word of this dissertation and defending it before a group of leading scholars, there is a real sense that I have reached mine.

It is a cliché to say that the interests of graduate students evolve over time, and their dissertations usually bear little resemblance to the research proposals used for graduate school application. For me, quite amazingly, the dissertation is very much along the lines of the personal essay I wrote more than six years ago. I have “returned to the roots”, so to speak. The question originates from a rather naive dichotomy between the West and the rest of the world (and often a more naive dichotomy between the US and China): why have some countries developed well-respected laws and rules that regulate political competition, while others resolve political matters mainly through personal discretion? In the former, citizens may have complaints about many social issues and economic problems, but they generally have strong faith in their political system, and it is difficult to argue that this faith results from coordinated ideological manipulation by the state. Even in Greece where the living conditions have plummeted and the government is apparently incompetent, there is little talk about replacing the multi-party system with, for example, a “Chinese model”.

In the latter, by contrast, socioeconomic problems tend to trigger legitimacy crisis for the political system, and not many tears will be shed if one arbitrary form of government is replaced by another. With this general puzzle comes a number of related questions: under what conditions will institutional rules take root to constrain elite behavior? What happens when extraordinary measures prohibited by formal institutions are required to cope with pressing political problems? Is authoritarian rule compatible with rule of law? The process of writing this dissertation has allowed me to provide some preliminary answers to a few questions, and it has also piqued my interests in further exploring them.

Although academic research is in the end a very solitary endeavor, I have benefited from the guidance of many excellent scholars at the University of Michigan. Combining the training of a sinologist and modern social scientist, my advisor Mary Gallagher is well-versed in both Chinese culture and history, on the one hand, and the cutting-edge findings of comparative politics research, on the other. Her ability to occupy the frontier of multiple disciplines proved critical for my intellectual growth, as I was able to get ideas and suggestions that gave my project a completely different dimension. Mary has also been an inspiration on a personal level, showing me vividly how a top scholar in a large research university mentors her students, interacts with colleagues, and maintains a healthy work-life balance. I can recount many small things Mary did for me to support my graduate study, but one anecdote that I can never forget is when she, amid her hectic schedule, came to my poster session at the APSA meeting in 2014. In a large exhibition hall where presenters tend to feel atomized and belittled, the surprising appearance of your advisor is indeed memorable. In many ways, Mary is not only a teacher that I learned from but also the very person that I want to be.

I am also grateful to other members of my dissertation committee. Ken Kollman has witnessed every step of my progress in graduate school, from the proseminar on American politics to the American prelim and finally the oral defense. Ken's weekly dissertation group has been a great venue to get timely feedback on my work from other graduate students and Ken himself. Brian Min has read and commented on several versions of my papers,

challenging me to think about corruption in China from different perspectives. Brian has also shared many career advice that will be invaluable for my adventure as a junior scholar. As a cognate member on the committee, Nico Howson has pushed me to think more broadly about China's legal development and the complicated relations between the Party's internal rules and state statutes. With his rich experience of interacting with Chinese people from all walks of life, Nico can tell innumerable interesting stories that illustrate China's transition from a poor, closed country to a dynamic, cosmopolitan society.

There are many fellow graduate students in the department who have made my doctoral study a lot more enjoyable and rewarding. Yuhua, who is set to become the first Chinese faculty at Harvard's Department of Government, played an important part in bringing me to Ann Arbor and settling in afterwards. As one of the few graduate students in the department also interested in Chinese politics, Yujeong has been a wonderful companion with whom I can discuss research ideas and collaborate on projects. Nicole and Yilang, youngsters who are following the honorable tradition of Chinese studying at Michigan's prestigious Political Science program, have added much-needed fresh air to the final years of my student life. In Dave and Ben, I have had officemates who can offer interesting conversations during the interval of exhausting work. Molly, Andrew, Geoff and others have all provided useful suggestions for my dissertation.

My long stay in Ann Arbor has seen the come and go of many great friends. Ming was a good gym partner for quite a few years before he graduated in the summer of 2014. Linsen showed me why smart PHD students should quit their programs and make a good fortune by running an online business. Jianrong and Xiaoshu, the most happily married couple I've ever known, hosted some wonderful dinner parties over the years. Congzhen, Shengqian, Wumei, and Xiaolin ripped me apart time and again in playing "tractor", a classic Chinese poker game that has delayed my graduation for at least two years. There are many other friends with whom I have played football, sung karaoke, travelled, and dined together, and they are the best gifts that life has bestowed on me.

This acknowledgement would not be complete without a few words for my parents. Like many Chinese parents, they put enormous emphasis on education and self-discipline. Physical punishment for failing to do well in exams was not uncommon during my childhood. What is special about my Dad and Mum, however, is their open-mindedness. As a school-boy I occasionally expressed views that ran against accepted political norms. Instead of suppressing my unorthodox ideas, they largely allowed me to read and think freely. Neither of my parents has attended college, much less do they have any idea what a PHD program is like. Yet they have always given me full support, even during the darkest hours when there was no end in sight. This hasn't been easy, not when they are constantly invited to weddings and baby showers. When I cried on the morning of the defense, the tears are not for myself but for them.

Much has been made of the fact that PHD students do not have a five-to-nine schedule, that they operate in an extremely competitive environment and always have to work, that the lack of personal life makes them boring and nerdy, that their work requires too much thinking, and that they are making little money. Each profession, however, has its dark side and it is difficult to say that graduate students are definitely less blessed than stock brokers, sellers, or accountants. Pain, like love, cannot be compared. In my case, I consider myself an extremely lucky kid to have received the offer letter from Michigan on that February afternoon in 2009. The past six years has not only given me a doctoral degree but turned me into a better man. Although often regarded as a pessimist, I have always believed that the best is still to come. It is this belief that has brought me this far, and the same belief will also take me home.

Qingjie Zeng

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# ABSTRACT

## **The Golden Age of Oligarchy? Institutional Constraints and Leadership Discretion in China's Cadre Management System**

by

Qingjie Zeng

Chair: Mary Gallagher

Many authoritarian regimes in the modern era vest power in a collective governing body to prevent the emergence of personalist dictatorship. In these regimes, the maintenance of cohesion and unity among the ruling oligarchs is of first-order importance for the long-term resilience of authoritarianism. This dissertation suggests a typology of authoritarian rule based on the distribution of power among the first tier elites and their interaction with second tier followers. The specific institutional formula adopted derives in part from the regime's attempts to cope with three common threats to oligarchic rule: personalization, demagoguery, and stagnation. I apply this analytic framework to contemporary China, arguing that the institutional arrangements in the CCP polity combine personalistic and collective features in first-tier interaction while ruling out reciprocal accountability between the two tiers. On the basis of this characterization, I put forward several observable implications for the operation of China's cadre management system, which regulates the appointment and removal of public officials. These hypotheses are tested against empirical data, generating evidence to support the following propositions: 1>. the wielding of power within the oligarchy is constrained by institutional rules of power-sharing; 2>. the paramount leader is still provided

with enough formal and informal resources to launch initiatives and avoid policy gridlock; 3>. relations between the two tiers of leaders are hierarchical, as the second tier followers are deprived of any meaningful impact on personnel and policy decisions. While it is difficult to predict whether the CCP regime will be blessed with another long spell of economic growth and political stability, the two-and-a-half decades following the Tiananmen crisis provides a vivid example of how elite cohesiveness is sustained by sophisticated power arrangements.

# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

The *China Leadership Monitor*, a quarterly publication on current trends in Chinese politics, posted in 2005 an article entitled “Hu’s in Charge?”. The quip in the title conveyed a general sense among the China watchers that Hu Jintao, the then general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, was far from a political strongman who could impose his will on a complex and institutionalized governing system. Instead, the making of important decisions was based on bargaining and consensus building among the nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee. Indeed, the absence of dictatorial power during Hu’s reign was so obvious that some commentators questioned whether “Hu (is) going to be lame-duck leader”<sup>1</sup> while others described Hu’s era as “nine dragons taming the water”, a Chinese expression meaning each man ruling over his own fief.

Although the notion of collective rule may go against popular conception of non-democratic government, it is in fact a common form of organizing power in modern authoritarian regimes. Politburo, committee, council, and junta are just some of the political bodies that accommodate groups of ruling elites. Regimes based on collegial leadership are often referred to as oligarchies, a term used by Aristotle to describe political systems governed by a small number of people. The institutional structure within which oligarchs interact with one an-

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<sup>1</sup>*The Sunday Times*, 17 November 2002. Quoted in *Zheng* (2010, 80).

other varies greatly both across regimes and over time in the same society, with far-reaching implications for the viability of authoritarianism. Appropriately, recent theoretical works on authoritarian resilience have stressed the importance of political institutions for sustaining elite cooperation and unity.

Meanwhile, there has been little attempt to systematically examine the various challenges facing collective rule and their consequences. Many studies have examined the oligarchy's tendency to degenerate into personalistic dictatorship or drive regime insiders to join the opposition camp, but few have provided a general framework for understanding the forces that threaten oligarchic stability. Another often-neglected dynamic is vertical accountability within the authoritarian apparatus. Studies tend to focus on the interaction among elites with comparable political stature and resources. The nature of elite interactions at the top tier, however, also depends on the leaders' relationship with lower tier elites. First tier leaders may appeal to lower level constituents for support and unsettle the balance of the collective leadership; strong accountability to the second tier may also tie the hands of top leaders in their pursuit of new policy agendas.

This introductory chapter presents a conceptual framework for thinking about the challenges faced by ruling collectivities. The framework assigns central role to the incentives of actors within the collective leadership and the interaction between different tiers of elites. According to the degree of power concentration within the first tier and vertical accountability between tiers, authoritarian regimes can be placed on a two-dimensional space. This classification of authoritarian rule departs from the classical tripartite typology of military, single-party, and personalistic regimes. While it ignores the specific organizations (military, party, or royal family) from which regime supporters are drawn, it has the merit of underscoring the direction of institutional change induced by power shifts within and between tiers.

The ultimate usefulness of classifying authoritarian regimes is to generate predictions about regime performance and longevity. I argue that the joint variation in personalization



and vertical accountability has important consequences for a regime's policy orientations and long-term viability. This chapter illustrates the argument with the case of China. Focusing on the period after the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, I submit that the Chinese polity should be located at the midway point along the personalistic-oligarchic continuum, while on the dimension of vertical accountability it occupies the very low end. By placing China on the two-dimensional space, I synthesize and improve on existing efforts to characterize the Chinese state that tend to capture some of its core features but miss others.

Portraying China as a regime that combines personalistic and oligarchic features while rejecting bottom-up accountability generates several observable implications. This dissertation is an attempt to test these implications with both qualitative and quantitative data. The substantive focus of this study is the regime's cadre management system, broadly defined as the institutional mechanisms of appointing and removing public officials. The institutional rules that govern the selection of officials have always been the principal subject of political analysis. In closed regimes where political elites are selected by superiors rather than competitive elections, the inquiry of appointment and dismissal is the equivalent of electoral studies in democracies. In China, the cadre management system is usually seen as the linchpin of the ruling party's political control and its relative success with economic reform.<sup>2</sup>

The main theme of this dissertation is that Chinese politics during the post-Tiananmen period seems to have arrived at an institutional equilibrium that favors the maintenance of long-term oligarchic rule. First, power-sharing among members of the oligarchy is institutionalized enough that the paramount leader, the CCP's general secretary, cannot amass absolute power to overwhelm his ruling allies. Second, the benefits of remaining within the oligarchy are great enough, and the costs of defection high enough, to prevent the ruling elites from appealing to outside constituencies for support. Third, the paramount leader can still take advantage of his formal prerogatives and informal personal network to consolidate his

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<sup>2</sup>For example, see *Manion* (1985); *Burns* (1994, 1989); *Lam and Chan* (1996); *Chan* (2004); *Landry* (2008).

status as the superior leader. The general secretary's role as the "first among equals" allows for policy innovation and coordination that prevents regime stalemate. While it is presumptuous to predict that the current institutional formula can give the CCP another extended period of elite cohesiveness and unity, the two-and-a-half decades following the Tiananmen crisis, marked by sustained economic growth and political stability, will probably be seen as a golden age of oligarchy in the Party's history.

The next section critically reviews recent theoretical works on authoritarian institutions, focusing on the specific mechanisms by which cooperation and unity among ruling elites are maintained. This body of literature has articulated a broad array of challenges to collective leadership and calls for a synthetic framework to conceptualize the various pathways to the breakdown of oligarchic rule. The third section introduces three major challenges faced by oligarchies. It also presents a typology of authoritarian regimes based on two central factors: the degree of power concentration in a singular dictator and the amount of vertical accountability to second-tier elites. The fourth section connects political development in China to this comparative framework. By examining how China fits into the two-dimensional conceptual map, I put forward a number of observable implications regarding the regime's cadre management patterns. The final section outlines my plan to test these implications with empirical data in the following substantive chapters.

## **1.2 Authoritarian institutions and oligarchic rule**

Collegial leadership is a common way of organizing power in modern authoritarian regimes. Under collective rule, the dictator has to share power with a group of elites who possess similar amounts of political stature and resources (*Perlmutter*, 1981, 1-2). As one observer points out, "(m)odern authoritarian regimes are most typically oligarchic and are dominated by an oligarchic political elite" (*Hammer*, 1986, 7). In the social science literature, however, the term "oligarchy" is often loosely defined and invoked to capture many different phenomena (*Payne*, 1968). All the writings on oligarchy seem to refer to "a form of

government in which political power is in the hands of a small minority” (*Indridason*, 2008, 36), but beyond that there is little consensus on how the oligarchic group can be identified or how the oligarchic activities are organized. *Cassinelli* (1953) argues that an organization becomes oligarchic when people who hold “positions of authority” are free from the control of subordinate members of the organization. “Freedom from control” does not mean that the leaders can completely ignore the desires of lower ranks, but that the subordinates cannot take any positive action to restrict leadership behavior. *Leach* (2005) focuses on the legitimacy of authority exercised by the minority, regarding an organization as an oligarchy unless “the leaders are formally granted by the group the right to make and enforce decisions”, which “generally means that the leaders are formally elected” (326). *Winters* (2011), by contrast, stresses the material basis of minority power and defines oligarchy as regimes set up to perpetuate massive concentration of wealth.

Building on these approaches and conferring conceptual clarity to the term, this study defines oligarchy as a political system in which significant decisions are made collectively by a small, face-to-face body with two properties: 1>. the ruling body is not accountable to the general public through contested elections; 2>. no single member can dominate the policy-making process.<sup>3</sup> The absence of formal accountability to the population separates oligarchy from democracy, although the oligarchs may be held accountable to lower-level elites in some ways. The second property sets oligarchy apart from personal rule, a distinction to be elaborated below. Note that this definition does not require the defense of concentrated wealth to be the defining feature of oligarchic rule, a requirement that was built into Aristotle’s original conception (*Winters*, 2011).

In a sense, all leaderships in modern, complex societies are collective. Even the most autocratic ruler in the least institutionalized regime will have to depend on a group of political actors for formulating and implementing policies. That being the case, how useful is it to treat oligarchy as a distinct type of authoritarian rule? I argue that, although all

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<sup>3</sup>This definition also draws on Baylis’ definition in his study of collegial leadership in industrialized societies. See (*Baylis*, 1989, 7).

political decisions emerge from a group process, oligarchies are qualitatively different from personalistic regimes, where authority is so concentrated in one individual that the dictator can largely make decisions without obtaining the consent of others. Unlike oligarchies that vest power in a more or less permanent collegial body, the loci of influence in personalistic regimes shift constantly between political organs at the pleasure of the dictator. While the formal procedures of policy-making are usually observed in oligarchies, they are either non-existent or habitually ignored in personalistic regimes. The unconstrained power exercised by absolute rulers is conveyed in quotes such as “The State? I am the State (Louis XIV of France)” and “Not a leaf will move without my consent (Pinochet of Chile)”.

The fact that recent literature on authoritarian politics has revolved around the role of institutions reflects the prevalence of oligarchic rule in global politics. Contrary to the popular image of dictatorships, modern authoritarian regimes often employ sophisticated institutions to arrange succession, distribute power, facilitate elite bargaining, and absorb rising social forces. Many of the seminal works on comparative authoritarianism suggest that regime resilience depends not only on historical accident, personal leadership, or macro socioeconomic factors, but also on how institutional rules structure elite interaction and maintain elite cohesion.

In a structured comparison of four authoritarian regimes, *Brownlee* (2007) identifies strong party organizations as a key factor in holding regime insiders together. Since members of a ruling coalition usually hold different policy preferences and compete for power, unbridled intra-elite conflict can potentially shake the foundation of collective rule. In “competitive authoritarian” regimes (*Levitsky and Way*, 2010) that allow limited elections, losers in intra-elite struggles may choose to defect and join the opposition to defeat region-sponsored candidates. The opposition could then capitalize on electoral victories to push the regime for further liberalization through protests and riots. This path towards destabilization can be avoided if party organizations are able to adjudicate among the elites in the race for advancement. The losers will be convinced that the relatively institutionalized rules of com-

petition will offer them opportunities in the future. Because no faction suffers permanent exclusion from power, ruling elites prefer to remain within the oligarchy rather than challenge it from without. “The consequence”, according to Brownlee, “is long-term cohesion among the rulers’ most influential members and the maintenance of political stability” (*Brownlee*, 2007, 13).

Although limited elections may threaten elite cohesion by offering disaffected politicians the option of joining the opposition, when properly managed the electoral institutions can actually enhance elite unity. Using 20th century Mexico as an example, *Magaloni* (2006) argues that elections provided a regularized method to share power among members of the ruling party, the PRI. To induce the cooperation of party politicians, the regime systematically rewarded politicians “most capable in mobilizing citizens to the party’s rallies, getting voters to the polls, and preventing social turmoil in their districts” (8). Moreover, the PRI’s landslide victories in elections conveyed the party’s strength and discouraged potential divisions with the party. The resounding defeat of opposition candidates signaled to PRI politicians that the only way to political success was with the ruling party.

Participatory institutions such as multi-party elections and legislatures are utilized not only to mollify regime insiders but also to co-opt social forces into the regime’s institutional framework. Where opposition forces have developed autonomous political organizations (Muslim Brotherhood in several Middle Eastern countries, Catholic groups under communist Poland, the merchant families in early 20th century Kuwait, to name a few), repression with brute force becomes far more costly than some form of co-optation. Under these conditions, authoritarian rulers may introduce tightly controlled elections and legislatures to grant policy concessions to the opposition groups (*Gandhi and Przeworski*, 2007; *Gandhi*, 2008). Provided a forum to articulate their demands and gain desirable policies, societal elites are transformed from revolutionaries bent on overthrowing the political order into its noisy collaborators.

Both Brownlee and Magaloni have considered elite defection in the context of hybrid

regimes that allow some degree of electoral competition. What form will elite defection assume in closed regimes that prohibit opposition or competitive elections altogether? One common way for disgruntled elites to threaten the basic rules of the oligarchic game is to solicit support from outside groups. Seeking to preserve or expand their power within the oligarchy, elites often dangle new participatory rights in front of a broader group of political actors. In the former Soviet Union, contending sides of the Politburo routinely appeal to the larger Central Committee (CC) for support. Therefore, the severe splits among Politburo members are correlated with rising influence of the CC (*Roeder, 1993*). When Gorbachev's reform plan encountered stiff resistance from the bureaucracy, he went a step further to allow Soviet citizens to participate in competitive legislative elections (*Kotz and Weir, 1997, 96-7*). Sensing the destabilizing consequences of oligarchs reaching out to broader constituencies, communist regimes tend to place utmost importance on maintaining a monolithic, unified politburo leadership (*Hammer, 1986, 7-8*)

Thus, party and electoral institutions prevent elite defection by increasing the rents collected by regime insiders, lengthening the time horizon on which leaders evaluate intra-elite competition, and raising the costs of leaving the ruling coalition. Apart from elite exclusion and defection, another development that could radically change the oligarchy's internal dynamics is the emergence of a personal dictatorship. The story of a single leader breaking out from collective leadership to assume absolute power is a common one in authoritarian politics (*Chehabi and Linz, 1998*). Stalin in the Soviet Union, Mao in China, Mahathir in Malaysia, and Pinochet in Chile all started their tenure sharing power with other leaders, but later managed to consolidate personal dictatorship by filling important positions with loyalists, rigging intra-party rules, and bypassing collective decision-making bodies.<sup>4</sup> Once a single leader has consolidated autocratic rule, collective rule ceases to exist and former members of the oligarchy will either have to accept a permanent state of subordination or conspire against the dictator.

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<sup>4</sup>For Stalin and Mao's rise, see *Svolik (2012)*; for Mahathir, see *Slater (2003)*; for Pinochet, see *Remmer (1989)*.

*Svolik* (2012) provides a detailed analysis of institutional constraints on the concentration of power in one person's hands. In his framework, the principal deterrent against the dictator's breakout from collective leadership is the threat of rebellion by other oligarchic members. Such deterrent, however, is severely compromised by the high risks of a failed rebellion and by the oligarchs' imperfect information about the dictator's actions. The attempts to amass personal power often proceed in secretive and informal ways, undetected by the dictator's ruling allies. The information deficit faced by the ruling allies allows a single leader to accumulate power to a point where the threat of collective rebellion is no longer credible. A primary function of authoritarian institutions, argues *Svolik*, is to alleviate this information asymmetry and increase the oligarchy's ability to detect any tendency towards personal rulership (89-90). Deliberative bodies such as Politburo, councils, and legislatures regularize the interaction among elites and facilitate the monitoring of the dictator's actions. Regular meetings and collective decision-making procedures also reduce the costs of collective actions that can nip the dictator's opportunism in the bud (*Gehlbach and Keefer, 2012*). *Magaloni* (2008) makes a similar point about the utilities of party institutions. To credibly promise self-restraint and fend off the threat of intra-elite struggle, dictators must delegate some decision-making power to the impersonal rules of the party. The sense of empowerment will encourage elites to stick with the regime in the long run (723).

As this brief review of relevant studies shows, oligarchic rule faces a diverse set of challenges that could transform it into either personal dictatorship or a more incorporative regime with broader representation. There has been few attempt, however, to synthesize these findings to produce an overarching framework for understanding the dynamics of oligarchic stability. Most studies have situated their research in specific institutional context (military rule, closed single-party regime, electoral authoritarianism) or adopted a narrow conception of threats to collective rule (dictator breakout, defection to opposition, appeal to broader constituencies). Each study has therefore described a particular kind of danger to elite cohesion, but struggles to provide a full picture of the various pressures faced by

oligarchy.

Existing theories of elite interaction in authoritarian regimes also tend to neglect the hierarchical, multi-tiered nature of authority structure. Many conceptual models posit a dyadic encounter between the “dictator”, on the one hand, and a group of regime insiders, on the other, who are assigned such various labels as “lieutenants (*Geddes*, 2004)”, “loyal friends (*Magaloni*, 2008)”, “allies (*Svolik*, 2012)”, and “regime supporters (*Gehlbach and Keefer*, 2012)”. In oligarchies, however, important intra-elite interactions occur not only among oligarchs holding similar positions and wielding roughly equal power, but also between the oligarchy and lower-level members of the regime. In Roeder’s study of Soviet politics, he refers to the Politburo members as the first-tier leaders and the CC members as the second-tier actors (*Roeder*, 1993). This distinction is important because political outcomes in oligarchies are jointly shaped by interactions within the first tier and between the two tiers. The relationship between the oligarchs and their second-tier followers varies across regimes, and this variation has important consequences. For example, first-tier leaders might seek to solicit support from the second tier to strengthen their bargaining positions within the oligarchy; dependence on lower-level support might in turn constrain the options of first-tier leaders.

In the next section, I offer a synthesis of three major challenges confronting oligarchies that centers on negotiations both within the first-tier and between two tiers. Based on the varying relationship between oligarchic members and between elites at the two tiers, I present a typology of authoritarian regimes that illustrates the possible pathways out of oligarchic rule.

### **1.3 Threats to oligarchy in comparative perspective**

The challenges to oligarchic rule can be discussed with an abstract, schematic approach that applies to a wide variety of polities such as military government, single-party regime, and hegemonic-party regime with limited elections. Focusing on the incentives of oligarchic



members and their relationship to second-tier elites, I argue that oligarchies face three distinct threats.

## **Personalization**

Members of the oligarchy who assume the position of the chief executive, whether it be the president, the general secretary, or the chairman, always have strong incentives to acquire unconstrained power and relegate other oligarchs to the position of subordinates. The personalization of power is usually manifested in the weakening of procedural checks on the chief executive. Preexisting norms and rules that are supposed to constrain the ruler are gradually set aside. *Slater* (2003, 88-91) summarizes three main mechanisms used by aspiring dictators to undermine procedural constraints: the appointment of personal loyalists to key posts and the purging of rivals (packing), the modification of institutional rules and procedures to stifle competition for leadership positions (rigging), and the creation of new policy-making bodies to bypass existing agencies operating under the norm of collective rule (circumventing).

Case studies of the advent of personal rulership provide evidence that supports Slater's summary of dictator's maneuvers. For example, after the 1973 coup in Chile, Pinochet's first move was to promote himself to the position of President of the Junta and set aside previous convention of rotating presidency and parity among the three major armed services. The elevated position soon allowed Pinochet to "(ignore) other junta members in appointing ministers, ambassadors, and other top officials" (*Remmer*, 1989, 128). The junta began to meet less frequently, and a new military intelligence agency was created that reported directly to Pinochet rather than to the junta. Stalin's rise from an "obscure party functionary" to the Soviet Union's indisputable autocrat is another prominent example of transition to personal dictatorship (*Svolik*, 2012, 62). In the Great Purges, Stalin eliminated more than two thirds of CC members elected at the 1934 Party Congress, transforming the Party from an organization of elites and intellectuals into one dominated by Stalin's humble loyalists.

The impulse of authoritarian rulers to acquire unconstrained personal power is widespread, despite the enormous variations in their bases of support and ideological positions. After studying more than 170 authoritarian regimes that emerged in the post-war period and lasted for over three years, *Geddes* (2004) finds that more than half of them had been “partly or fully personalized within three years of the initial seizure of power” (27).

Although tales of “enlightened despotism” abound, empirical analysis has demonstrated that personal dictatorships tend to be less resilient than institutionalized one-party regimes (*Geddes*, 2003; *Brownlee*, 2007, 30). Even absent systematic data, impressionistic evidence also associates personalistic rule with the loss of broad social support, arbitrary use of repression, and stagnated economic development (*Chehabi and Linz*, 1998; *Bratton and Van de Walle*, 1997). For this reason, scholars have often described the transition from oligarchy to personal rulership as a process of “decay” (*Remmer*, 1989, 42) or “degeneration” (*Svolik*, 2012, 63).

## **Demagoguery**

The aspiration for unlimited personal power is not the only opportunistic behavior that might endanger oligarchy. Members of the first-tier coalition sometimes have incentives to solicit support from a broader set of political actors. Because the equilibrium of the oligarchy depends on limiting decision-making power to the oligarchs themselves, any attempt to invite outside participation could potentially unsettle the balance of collective rule. Unless effective measures are implemented to limit the incentives to engage in demagogic appeal, oligarchy is at risk of losing its exclusive grip on power to outside groups.

The logic of cooperation in an oligarchy can find its analogy in the economic organization of cartels (*Ramseyer and Rosenbluth*, 1998). Although cartel members can maximize their collective rents by fixing selling prices, each firm finds it profitable to cheat—underselling the cartel by a small margin. Ramseyer and Rosenbluth observed the same pattern of interplay among the oligarchs that ruled Imperial Japan after the Meiji restoration. In trying to boost

their bargaining position within the ruling coalition, the oligarchs repeatedly threatened to grant political rights to societal groups. One oligarch, Itagaki Taisuke, organized political societies that incorporated disaffected former samurai and later the tax paying landowners, petitioning the Meiji government for an elected national assembly (23-4). Gradually, the cheating from the oligarchy's own ranks informed and empowered the citizen groups to a point where a closed political system is no longer sustainable. Attempts of demagoguery eventually destroyed the oligarchy and paved the way for elected assemblies.

The impulse to solicit support from broad constituents poses a constant threat to the oligarchy's monopoly on power. In communist countries, intense power struggle within the Politburo tends to expand the theatre of politics to the Central Committee, shifting the balance of power in favor of the second-tier leaders (*Shirk, 1993; Roeder, 1993*). In hegemonic party regimes with limited elections, the defection of ruling elites to the opposition camp can also be understood as a form of demagoguery. In the Philippines, for instance, Marcos' New Society Movement (KBL) was able to ensure electoral domination through massive fraud. However, when disgruntled KBL leaders such as the Laurel brothers decided to join the opposition after feeling marginalized by Marcos, the KBL's control over electoral results collapsed. With the help of previous regime insiders, the opposition party quickly made a series of electoral breakthroughs that culminated in Marcos' downfall in 1986 (*Brownlee, 2007, 183-196*).

### **Policy stagnation**

Finally, even if an oligarchy can avoid the trend of personalization or the brinksmanship of elite defection, authoritarian survival still depends on the ability to adjust institutions and policies to changing circumstances. The capacity to make effective and timely adjustments is particularly important at times of economic crisis, which provides a "stress test" for authoritarian resilience (*Haggard and Kaufman, 1995; Levitsky and Way, 2010*). During economic downturn, authoritarian leaders face strong pressure to exempt their core supporters from

bearing the costs of adjustment. The more diverse the demands from core supporters, the less likely authoritarian regimes can enact coherent adjustment policies (*Pepinsky, 2009*). As Haggard and Kaufman observed, successful adjustment “depends on rulers who have personal control over economic decision-making, the security to recruit and back a cohesive ‘reform team’, and the political authority to override ... opposition to policy change. (1995: 9)”

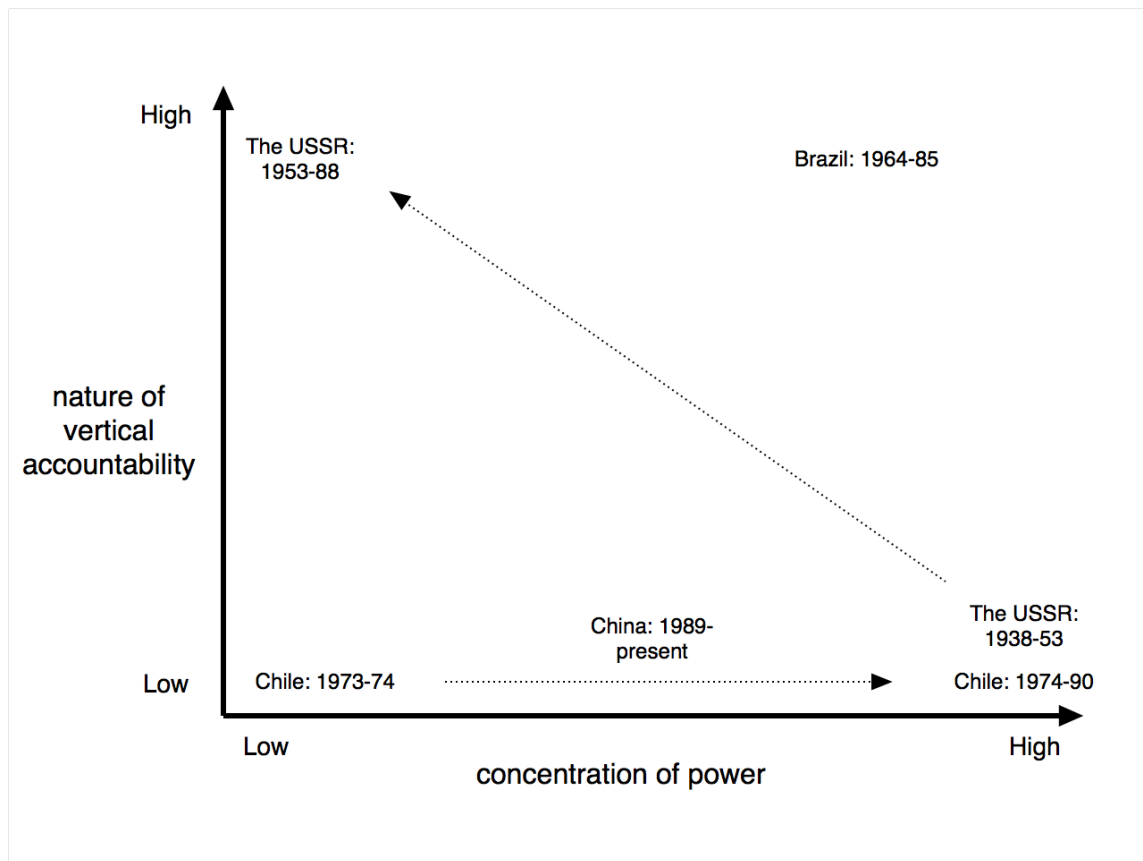
The response of authoritarian regimes to economic crisis is structured by political institutions. A personalistic dictatorship devoid of broad social support and faced with little institutional constraint can formulate policies quite autonomously. The collegial nature of oligarchic rule, by contrast, creates numerous veto players in the policy-making process by requiring considerable bargaining and consensus building. Finding common ground would be even more difficult if the oligarchs are beholden to different support groups with diverging policy preferences.

The lack of reform and policy innovation during the later stages of the Soviet Union provides a vivid example of stagnation under oligarchy. After the removal of Khrushchev, collective leadership in the Politburo was increasingly institutionalized. No single leader, even the general secretary, could impose his personal preference on colleagues. In the mean time, the delicate balance of power in the Politburo means that no leader could afford to lose the support of second-tier actors in the CC. The CC members predominantly came from the iron triangle of Party apparatus, economic ministries and the military, sectors vehemently opposed to economic reforms that increase consumer goods production at the expense of heavy industry. Therefore, balanced leadership in the Politburo enhanced the oligarchy’s accountability to the CC, and the combination of balanced leadership and vertical accountability stalled economic reform (*Roeder, 1993, 119-143*).

The three challenges to oligarchy can be unified in a single analytic framework that considers institutional change along two dimensions. The first dimension, represented by the horizontal axis in figure 1.1, is the degree to which power is concentrated in one man’s hands

within the first tier leadership. At one end of the spectrum are personalistic regimes wherein all institutional constraints on the chief executive have been emasculated. At the other end are regimes with highly institutionalized rules for sharing power among the oligarchs. The second dimension, corresponding to the vertical axis, is the degree to which the first tier leaders are held accountable to their second tier supporters. At the lower extreme of the spectrum, relationship between the two tiers is purely hierarchical: the second tier players are the agents of the first tier leadership and the direction of authority is strictly top-down. At the higher end are regimes characterized by “reciprocal accountability” between the two tiers (*Shirk, 1993; Roeder, 1993*). Under this arrangement, while first tier leaders have the power to appoint second tier members, the second tier members as a collectivity can also influence the selection of first tier leaders. Moreover, major policy decisions made by the first tier must be ratified by the second tier.

**Figure 1.1: Classification of authoritarian regimes**



Based on these criteria, different authoritarian regimes can be placed on a two dimensional space in figure 1.1. The use of continua instead of a fourfold table is due to the fact that most regimes do not fit into pure types but show a combination of the elements found at the extremes. Moreover, regimes often undergo institutional change along the two dimensions, as represented by the dotted arrows.

A few real-world examples are shown in the figure to highlight the application of the framework. Between the Great Purges and the death of Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Union was a clear case of personal rulership with minimum accountability to second tier leaders. After the passing of Stalin, however, the Soviet leaders gradually institutionalized collective leadership in the Politburo and granted the CC the power to veto important personnel and policy decisions, moving the regime to the upper-left corner. Chile after the 1973 coup is a case of institutional change in the opposite direction. In the wake of the coup, Chile experienced a brief period of collegial junta rule. By the end of 1974, however, Pinochet had relegated the junta to a purely legislative body and “the margins of the policy process” (*Remmer*, 1989, 129). Between 1973 and 1976, Pinochet “managed to distance himself from the military institution itself, creating a government that was eminently personal in nature and not immediately responsive to pressures from the officer corps” (134). The Brazilian military rule between 1964 and 1985, on the other hand, seemed to combine highly concentrated power in the first tier and robust accountability to the second tier officers. In the aftermath of the 1964 coup, the military issued an “Institutional Act” that gave extraordinary power to the president, but the high command of the military is directly responsible to the officer corps: “(t)he higher levels retain the final word, but they cannot diverge too far from the views of their junior officers. In each political crisis the officers heatedly debated the proper government policy” (*Skidmore*, 1988, 108).

There is no simple answer to the question why institutional changes occur along the two dimensions. *Geddes* (2004) believes that such changes follow the seizure of state power by an elite group. When struggling for power, the elite corps cannot afford to impose highly cen-

tralized and hierarchical organizations because too stringent structures tend to drive away cadres and mass followers, whose support is essential for seizing power. Leadership structure at this stage thus tends toward collegiality and responsiveness to a broad coalition. After the seizure, members of the elite corps previously unified by a common cause start to compete for supreme power, and the winner will be eager to reduce the size of the ruling group and amass power in his own hands. The consolidation of a new regime is thus accompanied by personalization and the loss of reciprocal accountability. Geddes' theory, however, is silent on what happens after the consolidation stage. As evidenced by the post-revolutionary experience of the Soviet Union, China, Yugoslavia, and Mexico, the maturation of authoritarian regimes is often marked by a return to rule-bound sharing of power among oligarchs. *Slater* (2009) underscores the agency of political entrepreneurs, showing that autocrats can exploit the existence of multiple political institutions to achieve personal dominion. In Indonesia's case, Suharto successfully balanced the influence of the military with an empowered party organization, Golkar. By playing the two structures off against each other, Suharto managed to convert a collegial junta into personal dictatorship. Finally, *Baylis* (1989) traces the origins of collegial leadership to macro social processes such as the functional specialization of government and the proliferation of organized interest groups, each seeking its spokesman in the top decision-making body (11-3).

Thus, institutions emerge out of a complex interaction of historical contingency, socioeconomic context, and elite manipulation. It is beyond the scope of this study to provide an exhaustive account of institutional formation and evolution. Instead, I have a more modest goal of showing that authoritarian institutions have causal effects on important political outcomes. The institutional approach has been subject to the criticism that institutions are possibly epiphenomenal; that is, the same conditions of political, social, and economic conflicts that explain political institutions also determine political outcomes such as regime stability (*Pepinsky*, 2014; *Magaloni and Kricheli*, 2010, 131). Recognizing the endogeneity of the institutional variable, I take the view that rules and norms, once created, can become

“sticky” over time and exert independent effects on elite behavior (*Thelen, 1999*). The next section will examine the institutional features of the Chinese regime in light of the outlined framework. I argue that important state behavior, especially in the realm of cadre appointment, promotion, and discipline, is critically shaped by the institutional arrangements of collective rule and vertical accountability. Understanding the post-Tiananmen CCP regime through the lens of this framework also reconciles diverging interpretation of the Chinese state in the literature.

## 1.4 The making of the Chinese oligarchy

Although the post-Mao era in China is often described as a period of economic reform without political reform, significant changes have occurred to the political system dominated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As can be seen in figure 1.1, the Chinese regime that emerged in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen crisis is located at the midway point on the horizontal axis and the lower end of the vertical dimension. In other words, power is neither concentrated in one single leader to the exclusion of other oligarchs nor equally distributed among the first tier actors. The Chinese chief executive, the CCP’s general secretary, has enough formal and informal resources at his disposal to exert greater influence on key decisions than his colleagues in the Politburo Standing Committee, but his supremacy is robustly constrained by the institutional rules crafted by earlier CCP leaders. In terms of vertical accountability, the Politburo and its Standing Committee effectively dominate the Central Committee (CC) composed mainly of officials from central apparatus and the provinces<sup>5</sup>, making the relationship between the two tiers purely hierarchical.

First, the revolutionary veterans that took over the Party’s leadership after Mao’s death were quick to implement measures that would prevent the repeat of Mao’s arbitrary, autocratic rule. In 1981, the Party leadership issued a document that condemned “the devel-

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<sup>5</sup>The Politburo is composed of about two dozen members. The Politburo Standing Committee has 5-9 members and makes day-to-day decisions for the Politburo. The size of the Central Committee has been fixed at about 200 officials since the 12th Party Congress in 1982.



opment of arbitrary individual rule” and “personality cult” under Mao (*Svolik*, 2012, 92). A series of organizational and procedural reforms were then introduced to ensure collective, balanced leadership at the top of the Party pyramid.

In the post-Mao period, the Standing Committee of the Politburo was confirmed as the Party’s principal day-to-day decision-making body, and regular meetings of the Committee were established. The general secretary is prohibited from circumventing the Standing Committee in making major decisions. Hu Yaobang, the general secretary from 1980 to 1987, was forced to resign allegedly for making decisions in the Secretariat, which was supposed to be primarily a body of implementation (*Miller*, 2008b, 67). In addition, a norm was developed that the Standing Committee should incorporate the heads of the major institutional constituencies in the political system —the Party apparatus, the state council, the national legislature, the united front body, etc. As a result, each Standing Committee member could boast a substantial amount of institutional support, making it difficult for any single leader to assert dominance over the others (*Miller*, 2011a, 4-5). Perhaps most importantly, the succession of the general secretary became increasingly stable and norm-based. The transition of power from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao in 2002 established the precedent that the general secretary should serve no more than two five-year terms and that no incumbent general secretary can unilaterally select his own successor.<sup>6</sup> The tacit agreement that a general secretary should cede power after a fixed tenure constitutes a crucial obstacle to the perpetuation of personal influence.

Second, despite the emphasis on collective rule and procedural checks on the general secretary, the Standing Committee is not an entirely egalitarian body. Much like the American founding founders, who regarded a strong and independent chief executive as critical for the vitality of the Union (*Prakash*, 1993), the revolutionary veterans in the 1980s also recognized

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<sup>6</sup>*Nathan* (2003), also see Alice Miller’s contributions to *the Chinese Leadership Monitor*, various years. The deliberate attempt to reduce the stature of the general secretary is also manifested in the changing ways by which the state media refers to him. Before 2002, the general secretary was routinely referred to as the “core” of the Party center, but this emphatic title was denied to general secretaries that came into office after 2002.

that the stability of CCP rule hinged on the ability of the general secretary to lead and unite the Politburo. The need for a pivotal figure to resolve disputes within the oligarchy was illuminated by the events leading to the 1989 Tiananmen crisis. In early 1988, price reforms and over-investment triggered high inflation in Chinese cities. Amid economic stresses, the Politburo Standing Committee was bitterly divided between conservatives advocating austerity measures and reformers in favor of further liberalization. When students in Beijing took to the streets in April 1989 to mourn the death of the liberal reformer Hu Yaobang, citizens across the country joined in large numbers to express their anger with corruption and urban inflation. Naturally, split within the leadership was carried over to the issue of how to handle the demonstrators (*Miller, 2009*). The contradictory signals coming out of the oligarchy further fueled the protests, which were only put to an end when Deng Xiaoping intervened to unify the top leadership. In an internal speech made immediately after the crisis, Deng reiterated the imperative to have a central figure unifying the oligarchy: “every leadership group must have a core; a leadership without a core is unreliable.” (*Deng, 1993, 310*)

The Party’s codified rules, conventions, and informal practices have afforded the general secretary substantial resources to launch initiatives and avoid gridlock in the Standing Committee. The CCP’s Constitution described the general secretary’s power in only one sentence, allowing him to convene the meetings of the Politburo and its Standing Committee, and to direct the work of the secretariat. On the surface, the authority to convene top-level meetings carries much agenda-setting power, but the room to maneuver is limited by the relatively fixed schedule of such meeting. Meanwhile, the ability to guide the work of secretariat gives the general secretary greater influence over the implementation of major decisions than other oligarchs.

The majority of the general secretary’s prerogatives are based on norms, conventions and informal network building. After the Tiananmen crisis, the Party leadership developed the tacit rule that the general secretary should concurrently serve as the Chairman of the CCP’s

central military commission, effectively making him the Commander in Chief of the PLA. Since the 15th Party Congress in 1997, no other member of the Standing Committee holds military office. Moreover, the general secretary, through his collaboration with the secretariat and the Organization Department, has more control over important personnel decisions than other members of the Standing Committee. The general secretary's advantageous position in the personnel system allows him to assign key posts to people with whom he shares intimate personal connections, formed on the basis of previous work experience, common native place, or educational background. The promotion of loyal supporters personally beholden to the top leader constitutes an essential step towards the consolidation of power (*Miller, 2010; Shih et al., 2012*). For the general secretary, replacing officials from the previous administration with his own clients is further facilitated by the Party's organs of disciplinary punishment. Through the selective enforcement of anticorruption regulations, the general secretary can remove political opponents and vacate key positions for his loyal supporters (*Fu, 2014*).

The discussion above has shown that the current institutional arrangement within the oligarchy resulted in part from the CCP's attempts to deal with both centripetal and centrifugal threats, the former manifested by the tendency towards personal dictatorship and the latter by the danger of division and stagnation. Finally, the Chinese oligarchy is also weary of its members playing the demagogue, namely seeking to expand influence within the oligarchy by appealing to outside constituents. Such attempts to solicit outside support could shake the oligarchy to its foundations by bringing more actors into the decision-making process.

Two institutional safeguards have been developed to neutralize the danger of demagoguery. First, members of the Standing Committee have made a collective commitment to maintaining a public display of unity and punishing anyone who tries to gain outside support by leaking internal disagreement to the public view. Due to differences in outlook and institutional support base, members of the oligarchy inevitably split over important matters, but the CCP's discipline demands that such differences be kept within the Standing Committee

and a public facade of unity be sustained (*Miller, 2011b*). Whoever exposes the internal differences by reaching out to other constituents will be severely punished by the rest of the oligarchy.

The pact against defection was forged during the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, when conflicting state media reports made it plain that the Standing Committee was split over how to handle the student protests. Zhao Ziyang, the then general secretary, commended the students for “supporting the CCP and socialism” in a public speech on May 4th, directly contrasting the stance of the hardliners. On May 19th, Zhao paid a visit to the Tiananmen Square to express his sympathy with the students’ cause. After the June 4th suppression, Zhao was stripped of all his positions by the hardliners and placed under house arrest until his death. Although Zhao’s modest approach towards the students would probably have undermined his political career anyway, his exposure of leadership splits and direct appeal to the protesters certainly accounted for the severity of punishment (*Li, 2010*)

Another safeguard against demagoguery is to establish the institutional dominance of the first tier oligarchy over second tier leaders. As *Roeder (1993)* points out, a relationship of “reciprocal accountability” often exists in authoritarian regimes, enabling the second tier players to have important say over major policies and the selection of first tier leaders. In the case of the CCP, however, there is little institutional mechanism holding the Politburo accountable to the CC, making the relationship between them predominantly hierarchical. On the critical matter of personnel, the Politburo members not only control the selection of the CC members but also deliberate in closed-door meetings to choose their own successors, only giving the CC the nominal power to ratify the Politburo’s recommendation (*Zheng, 2010, 81*). When it comes to policy-making, everyday business is left to the Politburo and its Standing Committee, whereas the CC’s plenary sessions are convened only about once a year to play a symbolic role (*Sheng, 2005, 344*).

The absence of bottom-up control in the Chinese case can be contrasted with the experience of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP). In the VCP’s institutional structure,

the CC's power to elect Politburo members was substantive rather than nominal. In 1997, a special CC session was convened to choose the general secretary due to the incumbent leader Do Muoi's early retirement (*Abrami et al.*, 2013, 251). The elected general secretary, Le Kha Phieu, oversaw a deteriorating economy and lost the support of provincial leaders. As a result, he was unceremoniously voted out of office at the CC's Twelfth Plenum in April 2001 (*Abuza*, 2002, 133). The Vietnamese CC has also convened special sessions to address urgent economic issues, something that has never occurred for the CCP (*Abrami et al.*, 2013, 251).

In China, the much weaker role of the CC is a deliberate arrangement to reduce the menace of demagoguery: when the second tier players are institutionally fragmented and debilitated, it becomes much less feasible for any oligarch to mobilize support from below to strengthen his position. Combined with the credible commitment to punishing the rule breakers, the CCP system is carefully set up to deter potential demagogues.

My characterization of the Chinese regime as one that combines personalistic and oligarchic features while rejecting reciprocal accountability holds promise for reconciling some conflicting themes in the study of Chinese politics (*Gallagher*, forthcoming, Chapter 2). According to one tradition, the Chinese state owes its resilience to the increasingly institutionalized norms and rules that constrain elite behavior. The state's ability to deal with various challenges is enhanced by institutionalization in the realm of leadership transition, merit-based promotion of officials, and political participation in the form of citizen complaints.<sup>7</sup>

The theme of institutionalization is contradicted by two other schools of thought. First, some scholars have emphasized the importance of patron-client networks and factional competition for understanding political outcomes (*Pye*, 1981; *Huang*, 2006; *Fewsmith*, 2001; *Shih*, 2008). In this framework, factional leaders seek to expand their influence and main-

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<sup>7</sup>For a general statement of the institutionalization thesis, see *Nathan* (2003). See *Nathan* (2003); *Miller* (2008a); *Zheng* (2010) for the institutionalization of elite politics and leadership succession; see *Edin* (2003); *Whiting* (2004); *Li and Zhou* (2005); *Choi* (2012) for merit-based promotion; see *Dimitrov* (2013); *Lorentzen* (2013) for the mechanisms of addressing citizen complaints.

tain support base by distributing rewards to their clients, often at the cost of formal rules and regulations. The second, articulated by *Heilmann and Perry* (2011), attributes China's authoritarian resilience to the very opposite of institutionalization —the CCP leaders' discretionary power to improvise and experiment new solutions to a changing environment. Recognizing that the political world is subject to “eternal flux and ceaseless change” (12) that cannot be channeled by institutional rules, the Chinese leaders insist on avoiding binding constraints in order to make discretionary decisions. The policy-makers are “(u)nchecked by institutions of accountability” and “pursue their objectives with little concern for the interests of those who stand in their way” (13).

Seen from the analytic framework of this dissertation, the three accounts of the Chinese state appear more complementary than contradictory. Each tradition captures an important regime feature but all fail to understand the Chinese system as one that has evolved to deal with the challenges to oligarchic rule: personalization, stagnation, and demagoguery. Institutions have been enhanced to prevent the emergence of personal dictatorship and the public display of oligarchic unanimity. Meanwhile, the existence of patron-client network gives the general secretary important resources to consolidate power and launch new policy initiatives. The top leaders' room for policy adjustment is further strengthened by the lack of accountability to the second tier players, whose weakened role also reduces the danger of demagogic tactics.

Based on my arguments about the distribution of power within the Chinese oligarchy and between the two tiers of leadership, several observable implications can be derived. The substantive chapters of this dissertation will analyze whether empirical evidence is consistent with these implications. First, when it comes to making important appointment decisions, the general secretary of the CCP should enjoy what I call “constrained supremacy”. In other words, we should observe that, on the one hand, the general secretary manages to consolidate his position by providing favorable treatment to his key supporters and, on the other hand, that such distribution of patronage faces certain constraints due to the norm of

collective rule. Second, the actual process of promoting officials should also reflect the lack of reciprocal accountability between the first and second tier leaders. Top-down authority in the personnel system will be vigorously defended, whereas officials at lower levels have little leverage to influence the selection of first tier leaders.

Third, in terms of removing officials through the CCP's anticorruption enforcement, the dominance of the Politburo over the second tier leaders, especially the provincial officials, should be readily observable. The most important determinant of the patterns of enforcement will be the central government's emphasis on anticorruption. When the top leaders mobilize the bureaucracy to intensify anticorruption efforts, the response from the provincial officials will be swift. Finally, since the anticorruption campaign is a major instrument for a new ruling oligarchy to consolidate its position, those officials with particularistic ties to the oligarchs should receive preferential treatment during the campaign. At the same time, peaceful, norm-based transition of power means that the new oligarchy will refrain from persecuting the loyal followers of the retired oligarchy, relieving the fear that voluntary abdication of power will endanger the safety of the retirees.

## **1.5 Plan of the dissertation**

The substantive chapters address the four observable implications one at a time. Chapter II analyzes the rotation of key provincial officials —one of the most important mechanisms of patronage distribution —to examine the degree to which collective decision-making rules constrain the personnel power of the general secretary. I show that the general secretary is unable to transfer a much larger number of his loyal supporters to provincial posts during his tenure, or assign them to provinces with greater strategic value. Despite the limited number of patronage appointments, the general secretary does manage to transfer his men to more important positions such as provincial party secretary and governor, and they are rotated more frequently to spread the patron's influence. This is consistent with my “constrained supremacy” hypothesis: the general secretary can promote his personal network to consoli-

date power, but such attempts are constrained in some aspects of personnel arrangement.

In Chapter III, I examine the implementation of intra-party democratic reforms that purport to empower lower tier cadres in the selection of first tier leaders. Because data regarding the role of the CC in choosing the Politburo are difficult to collect, most of the evidence in this chapter is from leadership selection at or below the provincial level. Since the CCP's power structure largely duplicates itself at each of the territorial levels, evidence from subnational politics still provides valuable insights into how the system functions at the center. Drawing on interview data, document research, and descriptive statistics, I find that the efforts to expand bottom-up participation are hindered by loopholes in formal regulations and informal practices. Members of the CCP's standing committee at each administrative level still monopolize appointment decisions at the next lower level, with little evidence of reciprocal accountability. Under the reasonable assumption that political control will grow tighter further up in the administrative hierarchy, the findings imply that reciprocal accountability is even less prevalent at the central level.

Chapter IV changes gear to examine another aspect of the CCP's cadre management system: the anticorruption regime. By analyzing anticorruption enforcement data during the 1998-2008 period, I find that the vigor of provincial-level enforcement responds strongly to the policy signals sent by the center. Meanwhile, the routine rotation of cadres, an institution set up to enhance the center's supervision of the provinces, has no effect on the enforcement outcomes. The results confirm the thesis that top national leaders retains maximum flexibility to adjust the strength of punitive measures, whereas the lower tier cadres are mostly passive followers of central directives.

Chapter V studies how the Politburo Standing Committee that took power in 2012 consolidates its power by launching an anticorruption campaign with unprecedented magnitude. Based on a sample of over 500 provincial officials who were in office when the campaign started, my data analysis shows that those with patron-client ties to the Politburo Standing Committee are less likely to be investigated for corruption during the campaign than those



without such ties. At the same time, factional ties with retired members of the Standing Committee, while offering no additional protection, do not increase the risks of investigation either. The enforcement pattern of the latest campaign again reveals how the Chinese leaders exploit their personal networks to accomplish political goals; it also shows that a “live and let live” agreement has developed among different cohorts of the oligarchy to facilitate peaceful, orderly power transition.

## CHAPTER II

# The general secretary's constrained supremacy in the personnel system

### Abstract

In this chapter, I argue that the degree to which the CCP's paramount leader is constrained in distributing key provincial posts to his key supporters provides a stress test of the regime's power-sharing system. Using a new dataset of provincial leadership rotation from 1992 to 2014, I test several hypotheses derived from a theory of patronage distribution by the CCP's "first among equals". The empirical analysis reveals that the general secretary enjoys what can be described as "constrained supremacy" in the making of personnel decisions: the formal arrangement of collective decision-making seems to constrain rampant reward of patronage that would unsettle the balance among the regime's top elites, but the paramount leader still manages to boost his own position by providing favorable treatment to key supporters. The analysis also shows the complex interaction between formal constraints and leadership discretion in non-democratic regimes, a feature difficult to capture in cross-national quantitative studies.

## 2.1 Introduction

Recent scholarship of comparative authoritarianism has dedicated much attention to the importance of political parties as the institutional foundation of regime resilience. It is argued that institutionalized mechanisms of succession, leadership selection, and distribution of spoils facilitate power-sharing among the party elites. These arrangements allow the party elites to better monitor the actions of the paramount leader, preventing the latter's abuse of power which unsettles the balance of collegial leadership and undermines political stability. In short, party institutions contributes to regime resilience by constraining elite behavior, increasing transparency, and reducing uncertainty in elite interactions.

The internal logic of this argument is coherent and compelling. Yet in cross-national quantitative studies, it is extremely challenging to measure the degree of party institutionalization that constraints elite behavior. Common measures tend to reflect the existence of formal institutions, but can hardly capture the inner workings of leadership selection and decision-making. After all, the universe of authoritarianism is filled with regimes wherein sophisticated party institutions exist but there is little check on the power of the chief executive.

The concept of neopatrimonialism is especially useful for analyzing the gap between prescribed institutional rules and actual operation of the political system. At its core, neopatrimonialism describes hybrid regimes where the formally constructed political institutions are permeated by the informal logic of patrimonialism. Under this mixture, some political and administrative decisions follow fixed procedures, rules, and laws, while others are dictated by various kinds of informal rules. The delicate balance between the legal-rational form of dominance and patrimonial rule has major implications for the dynamics of institutionalized power-sharing in authoritarian regimes. Insofar as leadership discretion, personal dependence, and patronage twist the logic of formal institutions, power-sharing between regime elites becomes precarious and unsustainable.

This chapter uses an in-depth study of China's appointment system to illustrate the

complicated interaction between formal institutions and informal, personal logic of exercising power in authoritarian regimes. Specifically, I offer a close look at the reshuffling of provincial leaders that functions under the formal institution of cadre rotation. In the post-Mao period, the CCP has developed a collective leadership system that would supposedly vest the power of appointing provincial leaders in the Politburo and its Standing Committee. The emphasis on deliberation and collective decision-making is meant to prevent the abuse of power by the paramount leader, the CCP's general secretary, which wrought havoc of the political system during the Mao era. In the mean time, the power-sharing arrangement is constantly threatened by the paramount leader's personal agenda to pack provincial leadership with his loyal supporters.

I argue that the degree to which the CCP's paramount leader is constrained in distributing important provincial posts to his key supporters provides a stress test of the regime's power-sharing system. Using a new dataset of provincial leadership rotation from 1992 to 2014, I test several hypotheses derived from a theory of patronage distribution by the CCP's "first among equals". The empirical results are consistent with the argument, articulated in the introductory chapter, that the general secretary possesses "constrained supremacy" in the personnel system. The formal arrangement of collective decision-making seems to constrain rampant reward of patronage that would unsettle the balance within the oligarchy, but the paramount leader still manages to boost his own position by providing favorable treatment to key supporters.

The close analysis of the CCP's appointment system at once corroborates the fundamental insight of authoritarian power-sharing and lays bare the difficulty of capturing the inner workings of authoritarian politics with broad, cross-national indicators of regime type. On the one hand, the party institutions and procedures developed during the reform period have set the broad parameters of the general secretary's power. These formal institutions have likely enhanced transparency and predictability in an oligarchic decision-making system and contributed to authoritarian stability. On the other hand, the paramount leader's impulse to

bypass or manipulate formal procedures in distributing important positions to his personal followers remains strong. The existing measures of regime type in comparative authoritarianism, however, can barely account for the subtle influences of personal dependence and informal groups that lie beneath the formal institutions. Recognizing that cross-national, quantitative studies inevitably need to use proxy variables that simplify the details of individual countries, my findings nonetheless underscore the importance of coding regimes in a way that best captures the true relevance of formal institutions in political life. This chapter also advocates for the usefulness of single-country studies that carefully examine how informal rules might replace, undermine, or reinforce the operation of authoritarian institutions (*Grzymala-Busse, 2010*).

This chapter proceeds as follows. The second section reviews recent studies of the relationship between authoritarian party institutions and credible power-sharing. It also points out that existing measures of party institutions do not reflect the relative weight of formal versus informal rules in determining political outcomes. The third section discusses China's cadre rotation system as a Janus-faced institution that can be used both to advance the regime's overall interests and to threaten the power-sharing arrangement by promoting the general secretary's personal influence. Based on this observation, several hypotheses are formulated to test whether collective decision-making rules can constrain patronage distribution by the paramount leader. The fourth section introduces the data source and the measurement of key concepts. The fifth section carries out the empirical analysis before the last section concludes this chapter.

## **2.2 Party institutions and credible power-sharing**

The relationship between party institutions, credible power-sharing, and regime resilience has recently drawn considerable attention from students of authoritarian politics. This line of inquiry was in part inspired by the intellectual contribution of Barbara Geddes, who was among the first to investigate how different features of authoritarian regimes lead

them to break down in systematically different ways (*Geddes*, 1999, 2003). Classifying non-democratic polities into personalist, military, single-party, and hybrid regimes, and using data of authoritarian survival during the post-war period, Geddes finds that single-party autocracies tend to survive longer than other regime types. The longevity of single-party regimes, however, was attributed less to any institutional arrangement than to the self-interest of party cadres. In Geddes' model, both the majority and minority factions of the dominant party obtain sufficient benefits through holding office, and therefore leadership struggles are more likely to result in compromise than democratic transitions. Under single-party rule, regime breakdowns are usually caused by "pressures of various kinds external to the ruling party or clique" (*Geddes*, 2003, 64).

The effects of party institutions on elite power-sharing received much more elaboration in later studies. According to Beatriz Magaloni, dictators of all stripes are constantly under the threat of being deposed by other members of the ruling coalition. To minimize such danger, dictators must credibly promise to exercise self-restraint and share substantial power with the potential rivals. Moreover, this promise of power-sharing will only be credible when the dictators delegate some authority of appointment and policy-making to the impersonal rules of the political party. "In doing so", Magaloni argues, "the dictator credibly ties his hands to reward those who invest in the existing autocratic institutions by sharing power with them over the long run (*Magaloni*, 2008, 723)".

An even more sophisticated analysis of credible power-sharing can be found in Milan Svoblik's monograph on authoritarian politics (*Svoblik*, 2012). In it, Svoblik noted that there are structural reasons for power to be increasingly concentrated in the hands of the dictator at the expense of his ruling allies. The threat of collective rebellion by these allies, the only deterrent against the dictator's encroachment, is compromised by the rebellion's potential failure and the allies' imperfect information about the dictator's actions. As the dictator's efforts to expand personal power are usually conducted in secretive and informal ways, it is difficult for other elites to be certain whether their statuses are being eroded by an emerging

personal dictatorship. The information deficit faced by the ruling allies allows the dictator to accumulate power to a point where the threat of collective rebellion becomes unrealistic and incredible. Oligarchic form of rule, therefore, has a natural tendency of moving towards personal dictatorship.

The obstacles to authoritarian power-sharing created by information asymmetry provide a unique angle for viewing the functions of formal institutions. Deliberative and policy-making bodies such as politburos, councils, and committees increase the transparency and predictability of elite interactions, making it easier for the allies to detect the dictator's non-compliance. The enactment of formal procedures and rules ensures that their violations will be readily and widely observed. The greater transparency among the ruling elites eases the monitoring of the dictator's actions; it also guarantees that the allies have the necessary information to stop the dictator's unilateralism before it become unmanageable. *Gehlbach and Keefer* (2012) make a similar argument that formal institutions promote collective actions by "regime supporters" that serve to constrain opportunistic behavior of the dictator.

Taken together, recent theoretical developments in comparative politics make a compelling case that strong institutions can stabilize authoritarian rule by alleviating elite conflicts. What has received less attention, however, is how to measure the strength of authoritarian institutions. In non-democratic or transitional regimes, formal regulations are often poor guide to actual official behavior, which is more likely to be shaped by informal rules and norms (*Böröcz*, 2000; *Helmke and Levitsky*, 2004; *Grzymala-Busse*, 2010). The way most authoritarian regimes operate in practice is best characterized by neopatrimonialism, a concept that describes the coexistence of formally constructed institutions and patrimonial type of authority relationships (*Engel and Erdmann*, 2006). Under neopatrimonial rule, there is no shortage of codified procedures, official chain of command, and legal constraints on political behavior, but the actual functioning of the system tends to revolve around personal patronage or competition between informal groups.

*Bratton and Van de Walle* (1994), for example, show that in many African countries

loyalty is maintained through personal dependence rather than ideology or law. There, the essence of politics is the reward by public officials of personal favors in the form of public sector jobs, projects, and contracts, making a mockery of formally prescribed official duties. *Scott* (1972) paints a similar picture of contemporary Thailand where, despite the existence of a National Assembly and citizen associations, the unit of political competition remained “the personal clique organized according to the patron-client model” (59). The imperatives of clique leaders to distribute “high posts, financial opportunities, and government-controlled privileges” often clashed with formal regulations and bred rampant corruption (61).

Extant literature on authoritarian survival has used innovative methods to measure the presence of formal party institutions, but these broad indicators of regime types often fail to capture the robustness of party institutions vis-à-vis forces such as personalism and informal bargaining. Magaloni’s classification of autocracies, for instance, designates regimes as single-party dictatorships if access to political office is mainly controlled by dominant parties rather than military or royal families (*Magaloni*, 2008, 731). In a similar manner, Svobik distinguishes among “authoritarian regimes that ban political parties, sanction the existence of only a single party, or allow multiple parties to operate”, concluding that single-party regimes survive longer than other autocracies (*Svobik*, 2012, 186). Thus, both Magaloni and Svobik assume rather than test the proposition that organizational procedures of the ruling party can effectively constrain the dictator. *Gehlbach and Keefer* (2012) shift the focus from the existence of parties to variables that indicate the party’s organizational capacity independent of the ruler. These indicators, including the age of the ruling party and the probability of orderly transfer of power, come closer to reflecting the binding effects of party institutions, although they still tell us little about whether key political decisions result from institutionalized processes or the whims of individual leaders.

In short, the field of comparative authoritarianism has made some major breakthroughs in identifying the empirical association between formal party organizations and regime resilience, but it remains unclear whether this association can be explained by successful power-



sharing promoted by institutional constraints. Despite Geddes' exhortation that researchers should classify authoritarian regimes based on their "actual rules for selecting leaders and making allocative decisions rather than formal designations of regime type" (*Geddes*, 2003, 72-3), it is difficult to ascertain the congruence between "actual rules" and formal institutions in cross-national analysis. As Pempsky points out, institutions are attractive to students of comparative politics because they are "relatively easy to identify, making sophisticated cross-national studies feasible" (*Pepinsky*, 2014, 649). However, when assumptions about measurement validity are difficult to defend in large-N analysis, single-country studies that convincingly link institutions to political outcomes can better illustrate the foundations of broader theoretical claims. In this spirit, I delve into the appointment system of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to examine whether key political decisions in authoritarian regimes—in our case, the distribution of valuable provincial positions—are controlled by formal rules to constrain the dominance of individual leaders and further the regime's collective goals.

## **2.3 Cadre rotation and elite power-sharing in China**

### **2.3.1 Cadre rotation as a Janus-faced institution**

In every regime, access to influential government office is synonymous with political power and often invites cut-throat competition between different institutional actors. The importance of political appointments is amplified in authoritarian countries for the simple fact that most valuable positions are subject to top-down assignments rather than electoral competition. In the case of China, it is a consensus among scholars that the ruling Communist Party's monopoly over personal appointment constitutes the linchpin of its political control and success with decentralized authoritarianism (*Manion*, 1985; *Burns*, 1994; *Chan*, 2004; *Landry*, 2008). The CCP's control over leadership selection is nothing less than all-encompassing: nearly every position with any substantive importance in the Party bu-

reaucracy, government, military, public-owned financial and corporate institutions, and mass organizations are included in the Party-managed “Job Title List” (*Burns*, 1994).

In this chapter, I analyze the appointments of key provincial positions to gauge the efficacy of formal rules on successful authoritarian power-sharing. The provincial posts are placed in the center of analysis for two main reasons. First, since China embarked on market-oriented reform in the late 1970s, the central government has entrusted a great deal of policy-making and implementation responsibilities to the provincial leaders (*Oi*, 1992; *Montinola et al.*, 1995). The devolution of authority, which touched upon the control over state-owned enterprises, the ability to attract foreign investment, and the retention of local revenues, was a conscious decision by the center to elicit the support of provincial leaders for reform (*Shirk*, 1993). During the post-Mao period, provincial leaders have taken center stage in China’s political landscape, playing a critical role in the country’s economic and social development (*Cheung et al.*, 1998). Second, provincial-level administrative experience has become an increasingly important stepping-stone for entering the national leadership. Ambitious CCP officials have to first broaden their experience and prove their governing skills before being slated for the most important central posts (*Li*, 2008). The distribution of top provincial positions, therefore, has major implications for the dynamics of regime resilience in China.

A defining feature of the CCP’s personnel system is the routine rotation of key officials both across provinces and between the central and provincial governments. For our purposes, it is important to recognize the cadre rotation system as a Janus-faced institution that can be used to serve both the regime’s overall interests and the agenda of individual CCP leaders. From the regime’s perspective, the constant transfer of provincial officials accomplishes several institutional goals. Firstly, frequent turnover of officials can prevent the emergence of independent power bases that might challenge the center’s authority. When officials are routinely transferred to positions in unfamiliar provinces, they are denied the opportunity of forming close ties with local elites and building their own personal followings. As such,

provincial leaders will be less inclined to side with local interests at the expense of central commands (*Huang, 2002*). Another potential benefit of the rotation system is to train Party cadres by exposing them to diverse local environments and responsibilities. Much like a royal prince whose grooming will require serving in different regions of the kingdom and across multiple functional areas, CCP leaders-in-the-making are also expected to gain rich experiences through rotation. Finally, cadre rotation can be utilized as a method to reduce regional inequalities that has grown to dangerous proportions under the reform era. By transferring officials from the center and economically-advanced provinces to less developed regions, new ideas and successful governing experiences might reach more areas to achieve more equitable development (*Eaton and Kostka, 2014*).

A discussion of the cadre rotation policy that treats the CCP leadership as a unitary actor and considers only the regime's collective interests, however, will be incomplete and even naive. For individuals sitting at the top of the Party hierarchy, the frequent reshuffling of provincial leaders offers a rare opportunity to expand their *personal* influence through the distribution of much-coveted positions. Political clientelism, defined as the distribution of public resources in the form of public jobs and economic rents by the patron to consolidate personal rule, is often considered a central aspect of neopatrimonial rule (*Snyder, 1992; Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997; von Soest, 2010*). Because leadership positions in the provinces come with enormous power and various perquisites, top CCP rulers have strong temptations to reward these posts to individuals with whom they share particularistic ties. In Chinese politics, clientelist ties with patrons are usually formed on the basis of kinship, native place, educational background or common work experience (*Nathan, 1973; Dittmer and Wu, 1995*). By rewarding provincial posts to people whose loyalty is not based on ideologies or laws but on intimate personal connections, the patrons can secure better responsiveness from their local agents; more importantly, they can mobilize more robust support from the provinces in their power struggles with rivaling elites.

The cadre rotation system thus poses significant challenges to authoritarian power-

sharing: instead of being disposed to serve the regime's encompassing interests, the frequent transfer of officials may allow top CCP leaders to pack provincial governments with their loyal supporters. The concern of overly concentrated power centers on the general secretary of the Central Committee, the official paramount leader of the CCP. When the general secretary's ability to control the selection of provincial leaders surpasses other ruling elites by a large margin, the oligarchic form of rule runs the risk of, in the words of Svobik, degenerating into personal dictatorship. Indeed, each of the three CCP general secretaries that took power after the 1989 Tiananmen Incident has been accused of rewarding important positions to their clients. Jiang Zemin, the CCP's top leader from 1989 to 2002, promoted a large number of officials who had advanced their careers in Shanghai, where Jiang served from 1985 to 1989 as mayor and then party secretary (*Li*, 2004; *Miller*, 2010, 1). Jiang's successor, Hu Jintao, is said to have consolidated his power by promoting leaders of the Communist Youth League (CYL), a CCP-sponsored mass organization that Hu led between 1982 and 1985 (*Li*, 2005). Xi Jinping, who took over from Hu in 2012, seems to have implemented personnel policies that favor officials with whom he developed close personal contacts during his long tenures in Fujian and Zhejiang provinces (*Li*, 2014). The question, then, is whether the CCP's formal rules can constrain the distribution of patronage by the Party's paramount leader and maintain a working balance within the ruling coalition.

### **2.3.2 Party institutions and the sharing of appointment power**

During the Mao period, institutional constraints on the power of the Party's paramount leader were all but non-existent. Authority was ascribed not to any institution but to Mao as a charismatic individual, and purges and mass campaigns were arbitrarily employed to remove Mao's real and imagined rivals. After Mao's passing, the CCP leaders undertook numerous reforms to avoid the recurrence of absolutist dictatorship and disastrous policies that led to the Great Famine in the late 1950s and the Cultural Revolution. At the heart of these reforms was the consolidation of the Politburo Standing Committee, composed of five

to nine members, as the Party's highest collective decision-making body. In addition to the general secretary, the Standing Committee would include the heads of the major hierarchies in the political order —the government apparatus, the legislature, umbrella united front body, and so forth (*Miller, 2011a, 4*). The Standing Committee began to meet regularly during the reform period and, according to Party norms, major decisions were to be made based on consultation and deliberation. Formal procedures were established that required the general secretary to report the work of the Standing Committee to the full Politburo, enhancing vertical accountability among the Party elites. Overall, the structure and process of the Standing Committee reflected the goal of “reinforcing consensus-based decision-making under oligarchic collective leadership” and “limiting the ability of the general secretary to acquire dictatorial powers over the rest of the leadership” (*Miller, 2011a, 5*).

With regard to the rotation of provincial leaders, formal rules have also been enacted to ensure that appointment decisions will be conducted according to set criteria and procedures. For one thing, the Party center has promulgated several authoritative documents to regulate the transfer of cadres. According to these regulations, local officials who have served in the leadership group of the same province for ten years should be transferred; the party secretary and governor of the same province should not be transferred at the same time. The regulations also stipulate that rotation should center on functional areas most susceptible to undue local influence, including personnel management, anticorruption and public safety.<sup>1</sup>

More important for limiting the personnel authority of individual leaders is the requirement that provincial-level appointments should be made collectively by the Politburo Standing Committee. In this discussion, I focus on the appointment to the CCP's Provincial Standing Committees (PSC), a decision-making body composed of 10 to 15 most important provincial officials. These PSC members are on the “job title list of cadres managed centrally”, meaning that the authority to appoint and remove them rest with the CCP's

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<sup>1</sup>The General office of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. (1990). *Decision on the Implementation of the System of Transferring Leading Cadres in Party and State Organs*. (1990) *Provisional Regulations on the Transfer Work of Party and State Leading Cadres*. (1999)

Central Committee (*Burns*, 1994). Because the full Central Committee only meets once or twice every year, the Party Constitution delegates its day-to-day responsibilities to the Politburo and its Standing Committee.<sup>2</sup>

According to the CCP's personnel regulations, when the Standing Committee holds a meeting to discuss the appointment of provincial leaders, an official from the Central Organization Department will first introduce the candidate(s)' information gathered in the initial nomination and screening stages. The Standing Committee members would then deliberate before taking a simple majority vote to decide on the appointment. During the deliberation, each member should be given "sufficient time to be briefed of the candidate(s)' information and fully express his or her views"<sup>3</sup>. Then, the members present must clearly state their positions of approving, disapproving, or postponing the appointment decision.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the entire process, the general secretary does not seem to have more formal influence than other Standing Committee members except the privilege of convening and presiding over the meeting.<sup>5</sup>

The robustness of these formal institutions depends on whether the general secretary can manipulate existing procedures to favor his close associates. Because the selection of important CCP leaders still operates behind a thick curtain of secrecy, there are many aspects of the appointment process that remain outside the public's scrutiny. For example, we know very little about how the candidates for provincial posts are generated except that some bargaining usually occurs between the central and provincial authorities (*Burns*, 1994, 471). If the general secretary exerts disproportionate influence on the selection of candidates, he will have significant edge over other Standing Committee members prior to the meeting. We also know next to nothing about the proportion of appointments that actually go through the deliberation and voting process prescribed in formal regulations, or whether votes were

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<sup>2</sup>*The Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party*. Article 13.

<sup>3</sup>The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. *Regulations on the selection and appointment of leading party and government cadres*. Article 34. (2002)

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*The Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party*. Article 22.

cast anonymously to save the members from openly defying the general secretary. All these unknown details of the selection process could allow the paramount leader to circumvent the constraints posed by formal rules and procedures.

Although we cannot directly observe CCP leaders' compliance with decision-making rules, the actual outcomes of personnel appointment can shed important light on the vitality of Party institutions. If the influence of patrimonialism within the CCP is such that the general secretary can radically expand his personal power by sidestepping or manipulating formal institutions, then his clients should be favored systematically in the distribution of PSC positions. Conversely, if the consensus-based, collective decision-making process can effectively check the unilateral power of the paramount leader, the dominance of his loyal supporters should be trivial or non-existent. In that case, the danger of personal dictatorship is minimized and robust power-sharing is maintained.

Specifically, the rotation system provides four mechanisms by which the general secretary can promote the influence of his key supporters in provincial politics. First, the general secretary can transfer a large number of his personal supporters to PSC posts in various provinces. This seems to be the most blunt and yet effective channel of asserting one's dominance: the more provincial leaders that share personal ties with the paramount leader, the greater his power. Second, the general secretary may attempt to assign them to more "important" provinces, either in an economic or political sense. By controlling provinces that are critical for extracting tax revenue or maintaining political stability, the paramount leader can tighten his grip on power without increasing the sheer number of appointments. Third, since the PSC members vary in their formal authority and responsibilities, the key supporters may be appointed to more powerful posts than ordinary cadres. Finally, given the limited number of key supporters, the paramount leader may want to rotate them more frequently than other officials. The experience of governing multiple provinces can both extend the patron's influence over more regions and make a stronger case for the promotion of these well-tested clients.

Thus, to the extent that the balance of power within the ruling coalition is vulnerable to personal control over political institutions, empirical data of provincial appointment should be consistent with the following hypotheses:

- *H1*: The number of transfers for the key supporters should increase significantly when their patron is serving as the CCP's general secretary.
- *H2*: The key supporters should be transferred to more important provinces than ordinary cadres, other things being equal.
- *H3*: The key supporters should be transferred to more important posts than ordinary cadres, other things being equal.
- *H4*: The key supporters should be rotated more frequently than ordinary cadres, other things being equal.

Conversely, if collective decision-making processes are effective in restraining the general secretary's personal power, these hypotheses should receive no support from empirical analysis.

## 2.4 Data and measurement

As mentioned previously, this paper focuses on the appointment to the principal provincial decision-making body, the Provincial Standing Committees (PSC). The provincial equivalent of the Politburo Standing Committee, the PSC brings together 10 to 15 most powerful provincial leaders such as the Provincial party secretary, the governor, the heads of the most important functional departments and so on. I collected data on inter-provincial rotation of PSC members from 1992 to 2014 by taking the following steps. First, I browsed the provincial yearbooks and supplementary materials to obtain the rosters of PSC members for each province. I then read the official CV of each PSC member to determine whether he or she



was transferred to the current province from another province or the central government.<sup>6</sup> If so, I coded the relevant information regarding the transfer, including the year of transfer, the supplying and receiving province<sup>7</sup>, the post assumed by the transferee, etc. This procedure identified a total of 556 transfers in which an official was appointed either to a PSC post (446 cases) or to a lesser post and was later promoted to the PSC in the same province (110 cases). The latter category is included to preserve more information about cadre rotation, but the following analysis will also run sensitivity tests using only direct transfers to PSC posts. To my knowledge, this is the most comprehensive dataset of inter-provincial transfers in China collected thus far, as most previous studies only focus on rotation of provincial party secretaries and governors (e.g. *Huang*, 2002; *Sheng*, 2010).

#### 2.4.1 Measuring key supporters

A formidable challenge to the empirical analysis is the identification of key supporters of the Party's paramount leaders. Recall that the CCP general secretary depends his influence upon a group of clients who share personal ties with the patron, owe their career advancement to the patron, and can be counted on to rally behind the patron during a power struggle. Formed around patron-client relationships, these groups are highly informal and display no organizational arrangements. In the absence of formally organized groupings as the basic unit of political competition, Chinese leaders tend to build their support groups based on previous professional ties. During the studied period, three individuals have served as the CCP's general secretary: Jiang Zemin from 1989 to 2002, Hu Jintao from 2002 to 2012, and Xi Jinping since 2012. Each of the three paramount leaders seems to have drawn support from an informal group unified by common experience in a geographical region or bureaucratic unit.

For Jiang Zemin, who was picked by the Party elders to serve as the general secretary after the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, consolidating power in Beijing was closely associated

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<sup>6</sup>By contrast, some PSC members developed their career entirely within one province.

<sup>7</sup>The supplying unit could also be the central government.

with the ascendance of the “Shanghai Gang” (*Li*, 2002). As its name suggests, Jiang’s support group was mainly composed of officials who advanced their careers in Shanghai, China’s economic and financial center. Between 1985 and 1989, Jiang honed his political skills as the mayor and then Party chief of Shanghai, impressing the national leaders with his handling of the 1989 crisis (*Gilley*, 1998). Jiang had also “cultivated a web of personal ties based on Shanghai connections” and, after becoming the general secretary, “promoted many of his friends from Shanghai to important national leadership positions” (*Li*, 2004, 40).

Unlike Jiang, Hu Jintao’s power base was primarily defined by membership in a Party-controlled mass organization, the Communist Youth League (CYL). With an hierarchical structure that resembles the CCP, the CYL was designed as a “reserve army” that prepared young activists for Party leadership positions. Hu’s leadership of the CYL dated back to 1982-1985, when he served as the secretary and later First Secretary of the CYL’s central secretariat. After Hu became a Politburo Standing Committee member in 1992, managing the CYL was also part of his portfolio (*Wang*, 2006, 105). During Hu’s tenure as the general secretary, the promotion of officials with CYL background received much attention and was widely interpreted as Hu’s attempt to firm up his standing as the paramount leader (*Li*, 2005). Officials that hailed from the CYL, according to one observer, “were (Hu’s) troops, ‘fielded’ in various locations, waiting to take over” (*Wang*, 2006, 106).

Among the three top leaders, Xi Jinping has the longest experience of local administration, spending 17 years in Fujian province and 5 years in Zhejiang province. The close personal contacts that Xi developed in these provinces helped him build a broad, solid power base (*Miller*, 2010; *Li*, 2014). After Xi came to power in late 2012, it was often reported that Xi’s old associates were inserted into key provincial and central positions.<sup>8</sup> Foreign observers were quick to note that officials who advanced their careers in Fujian and Zhejiang

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<sup>8</sup>For example, see: “Two of Xi Jinping’s associates promoted to key public security ministry posts”, *South China Morning Post*, March 29, 2015. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1749910/two-xi-jinpings-associates-promoted-key-public-security-ministry-posts>. Accessed May 13, 2015.

under Xi's leadership had become "trusted members of Xi's team" and were "likely to play an even more important role as Xi consolidates his power" (*Li*, 2014, 15).

In sum, the political connections and mentor-protégé ties formed in their early careers lay the foundation of the paramount leaders' support group. Building on previous research on China's elite politics, I use these leaders' past work experiences as the basis for identifying their key supporters. For Jiang, I define as his key supporters those officials who had work experience in Shanghai. Thus, any inter-provincial transfer involving Jiang's key supporters between 1992 and 2014 is considered a "patronage transfer", one that spreads the influence of Jiang's clients. Note that the period of patronage distribution is not limited to the 1992-2002 period, when Jiang served as the general secretary. This is because even after Jiang stepped down in 2002, he still wielded great influence over personnel matters as the central figure of the "Shanghai Gang" (*Li*, 2007). Thus, whether the appointment of Jiang's supporters was institutionally constrained after 2002 can still reflect the state of elite power-sharing. For Hu, key supporters are defined as those who had work experience in the CYL's national apparatus.<sup>9</sup> Again, the period of Hu's patronage extends beyond his tenure as general secretary between 2002 and 2012, as he was the designated heir apparent after 1992 and might have retained substantial influence after retirement in 2012. Finally, Xi's supporters are defined as those who had worked in Fujian or Zhejiang province. However, only those appointments of Xi's key supporters after 2007 should be regarded as patronage transfers. The reason is that Xi's promotion from provincial leadership to the Politburo Standing Committee occurred in 2007 and probably had little influence over provincial personnel prior to that point. Using these criteria, a total of 72 patronage transfers are identified; among them, 16 are attributed to Jiang, 41 to Hu, and 16 to Xi.<sup>10</sup> The way I define the three leaders' key supporters and periods of patronage influence is summarized in Table 2.1.

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<sup>9</sup>Officials who had CYL experience at the provincial level or below are excluded as their ties to Hu are more tenuous.

<sup>10</sup>Li Yuanchao has work experience in both Shanghai and CYL and is therefore classified as a key supporter for both Jiang and Hu.

**Table 2.1: Paramount leaders' key supporters and periods of patronage influence: 1992-2014**

Leaders	Tenure as general secretary	Key supporters	Period of patronage distribution
Jiang Zemin	1992-2002	Officials with work experience in Shanghai	1992-2014
Hu Jintao	2002-2012	Officials with work experience in central CYL	1992-2014
Xi Jinping	2012-2014	Officials with work experience in Fujian and Zhejiang	2007-2014

Admittedly, this method cannot encompass the entire personal network developed by the CCP's top leaders. For one thing, patron-client ties may be cultivated outside of the professional arena, often through family ties, common hometowns, or alumni relations. Moreover, all three paramount leaders have worked in a variety of localities and bureaucratic units, providing them with opportunities to build personal support elsewhere. Despite these complicating factors, this coding scheme has accounted for the most important professional ties developed by the paramount leaders during critical periods of their careers. Therefore, the preferential treatment received by the general secretaries' confidants, or lack thereof, should be manifested amongst the key supporters identified in this study.

#### 2.4.2 Measuring the importance of provinces

Testing the hypothesis that the key supporters are appointed to more importance provinces requires a measure of such importance. In terms of economic significance, it can be assumed that provinces with higher rankings of GDP per capita tend to carry greater strategic value. Thus, I calculate the mean GDP per capita for each province over the 1992-2014 period and rank the 31 provincial units based the average value. Politically, the importance of a province is indicated by whether its party secretary occupies a seat in the CCP's Politburo. In communist regimes, it is common for the national government to co-opt powerful regional leaders into the Politburo as a preemptive measure against separatism. The granting of provincial representation is highly selective: at any given time, only the party secretaries

from four to six provinces are assigned Politburo seats. As a general rule, Politburo membership are distributed to provinces that are larger, more export-oriented, more urbanized, and more susceptible to ethnic unrest (*Sheng*, 2009), making it a good proxy of a province’s political clout.

### 2.4.3 Measuring the importance of provincial posts

In inter-provincial rotation, officials are appointed to a variety of posts that differ in authority and responsibility. Among them, the provincial party secretary and governor are accorded full-ministerial rank in the national administrative system, and other PSC members and vice governors are ranked at vice-ministerial level. While the party secretary and governor are clearly at the top of the provincial political system, there is no ready-made criteria to rank other positions in the pecking order. Thus, differentiating posts at the vice-ministerial level inevitably requires making judgement calls that reflect the author’s understanding of authority relations in provincial politics. Considering the role of each post in the paramount leader’s grand scheme to maintain overall control, provincial offices are classified into six tiers. Below I explain and justify this particular ordering of provincial posts; readers not interested in the details of our coding scheme may turn to Table 2.2 for a summary of the six tiers.

**Table 2.2: The ordering of provincial posts based on political importance**

Tier	Positions	Index of position importance
Tier 1	Provincial party secretary	5
Tier 2	governor	4
Tier 3	Vice party secretary, Vice governor	3
Tier 4	Head of Organization Department, Head of Disciplinary Inspection Committee	2
Tier 5	Other PSC members	1
Tier 6	Non-ministerial-level posts	0

- In the first tier stands the party secretary as the indisputable number one figure in the province. As the Party center’s chief representative, the party secretary is charged with the faithful implementation of central policies and the overall management of provincial affairs, with an emphasis on political stability, personnel appointment, and ideological control (*Tan, 2007*).
- Although also at the full-ministerial level, the governor does not exercise the type of all-encompassing power accorded to the party secretary. Instead, he or she is mainly responsible for maintaining economic growth and a healthy level of employment. Thus, it is reasonable to regard the governor as sitting one tier below the party secretary.
- Into the third tier I place the Vice Party Secretaries (VPS) and Vice governors (VG). A VPS can serve concurrently as the head of a functional department, strengthening the Party’s control over various policy domains. Alternatively, he or she can remain a “full-time” VPS charged with assisting the party secretary’s day-to-day work, leaving actual responsibility flexible to suit practical needs. Similarly, the governor is assisted by a multitude of VGs, each of whom assumes responsibility for a set of policy areas.<sup>11</sup>. The VPSs and VGs are located above other vice-ministerial officials partly because they are in pole position to be promoted to Party Secretaries and governors, respectively.
- The rest of the vice-ministerial positions are mostly heads of important functional departments. Among them, there are two posts which stand out for their massive influence on officials’ career advancement. First, the head of the Organizational Department (OD) assists the party secretary on personnel matters. By nominating and vetting candidates, conducting internal opinion polls, and offering professional advice, the OD head plays a pivotal role in cadres’ promotion. Second, the head of the Dis-

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<sup>11</sup>In 2012, there are on average 7.6 VGs in each province. See “How many Vice governors are there in China?” [http://news.k618.cn/xda/201207/t20120703\\_2248681.htm](http://news.k618.cn/xda/201207/t20120703_2248681.htm). Accessed May 14, 2015. However, only the first VG is guaranteed a seat in the PSC. Because of the PSC membership, the first VG is ahead of others in the provincial pecking order. He or she is usually in charge of the most important functional areas such as finance and taxation

cipline Inspection Commission (DIC) is responsible for coordinating the Party's anti-corruption work. With the power to investigate and discipline corrupt Party officials, the DIC can be a handy instrument for removing political opponents and reshaping factional balance. Because the reward and and deprivation of political office constitute the core element of elite power struggle, the OD and DIC positions should be weighted more heavily than other functional bureaucracies.

- In the fifth tier, I group together all the other positions in the PSC, including head of the Propaganda Department responsible for shaping the citizens' values through media control, head of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission which run the civilian coercive apparatus, head of the General Office that manages logistical affairs for the provincial Party committee, among others.
- All the positions that are below the vice-ministerial level are naturally ranked at the lowest tier. Examples include the deputy head of a provincial department, the governor's advisor, and the party secretary of a prefecture-level city.

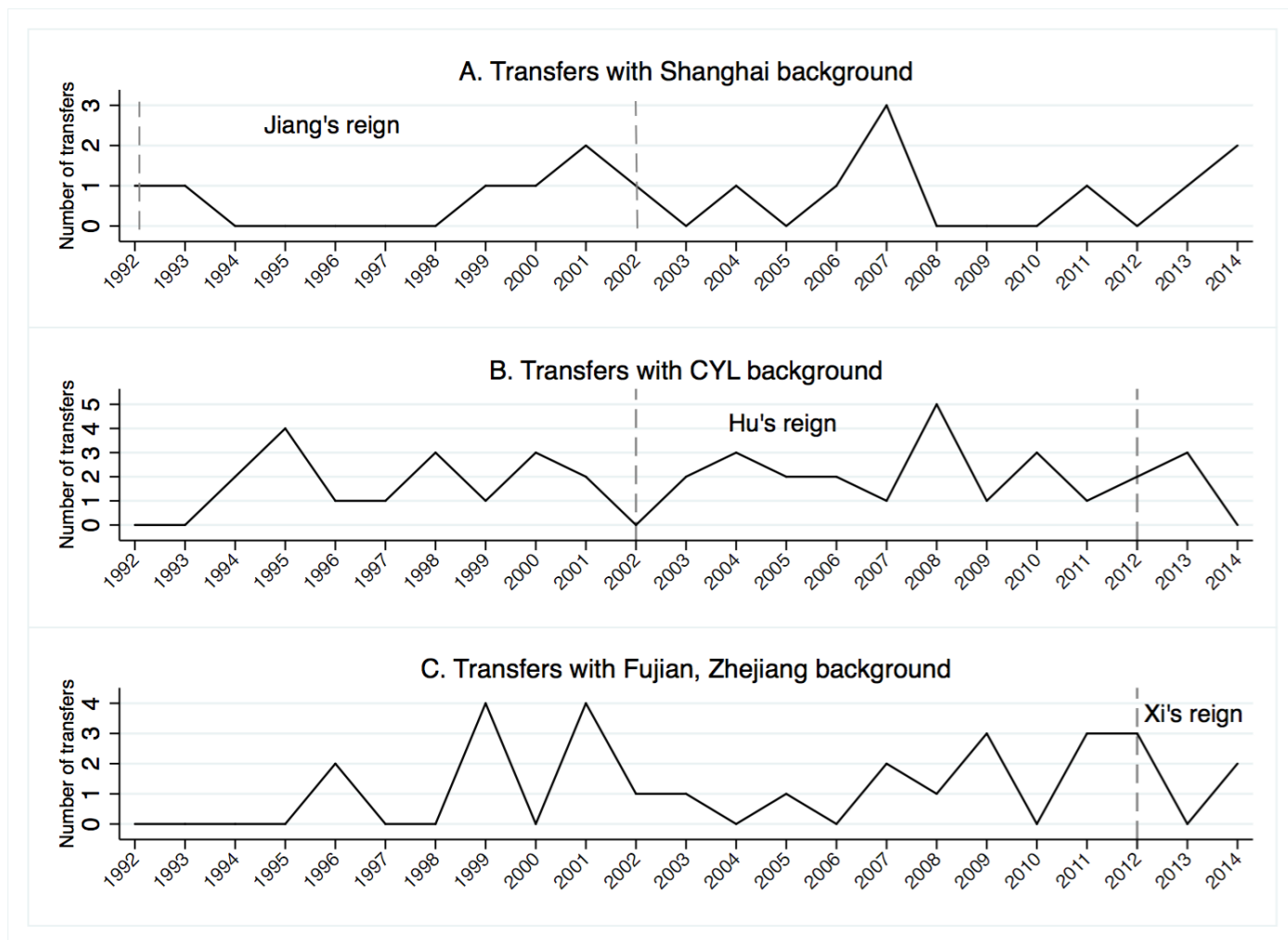
## 2.5 Empirical analysis

This section tests the hypotheses regarding the general secretary's upper hand in influencing provincial personnel. To the extent that these hypotheses receive support from empirical data, it would suggest that formal power-sharing institutions are ineffective in constraining the paramount leader, and *vice versa*.

### 2.5.1 Clientelism and the number of transfers

The first hypothesis states that, once a CCP leader assumes the office of general secretary, the number of transfers for his key supporters should increase substantially. That is, although the period of patronage distribution may extend beyond a leader's formal tenure (Table 2.1), his influence on personnel decisions should be strongest when serving as the general

**Figure 2.1: Patronage transfers to the provinces under 3 paramount leaders: 1992-2014**



secretary. In Figure 2.1, I show the temporal trend of the number of transfers involving the three paramount leaders' key supporters. Thus, Graph A presents the number of officials with work experience in Shanghai, namely Jiang's supporters, that were transferred from 1992 to 2014. Graph B depicts the transfers of Hu's key supporters, officials with CYL experience, and Graph C does the same for Xi's supporters.

The overall picture presented in these graphs goes against the notion that key supporters experienced much more transfers when their patron is in power. For Jiang, the total number of transferred officials with Shanghai background is quite small, with a mean of 0.65 per year over the studied period. Moreover, there is no evidence that such transfers occurred

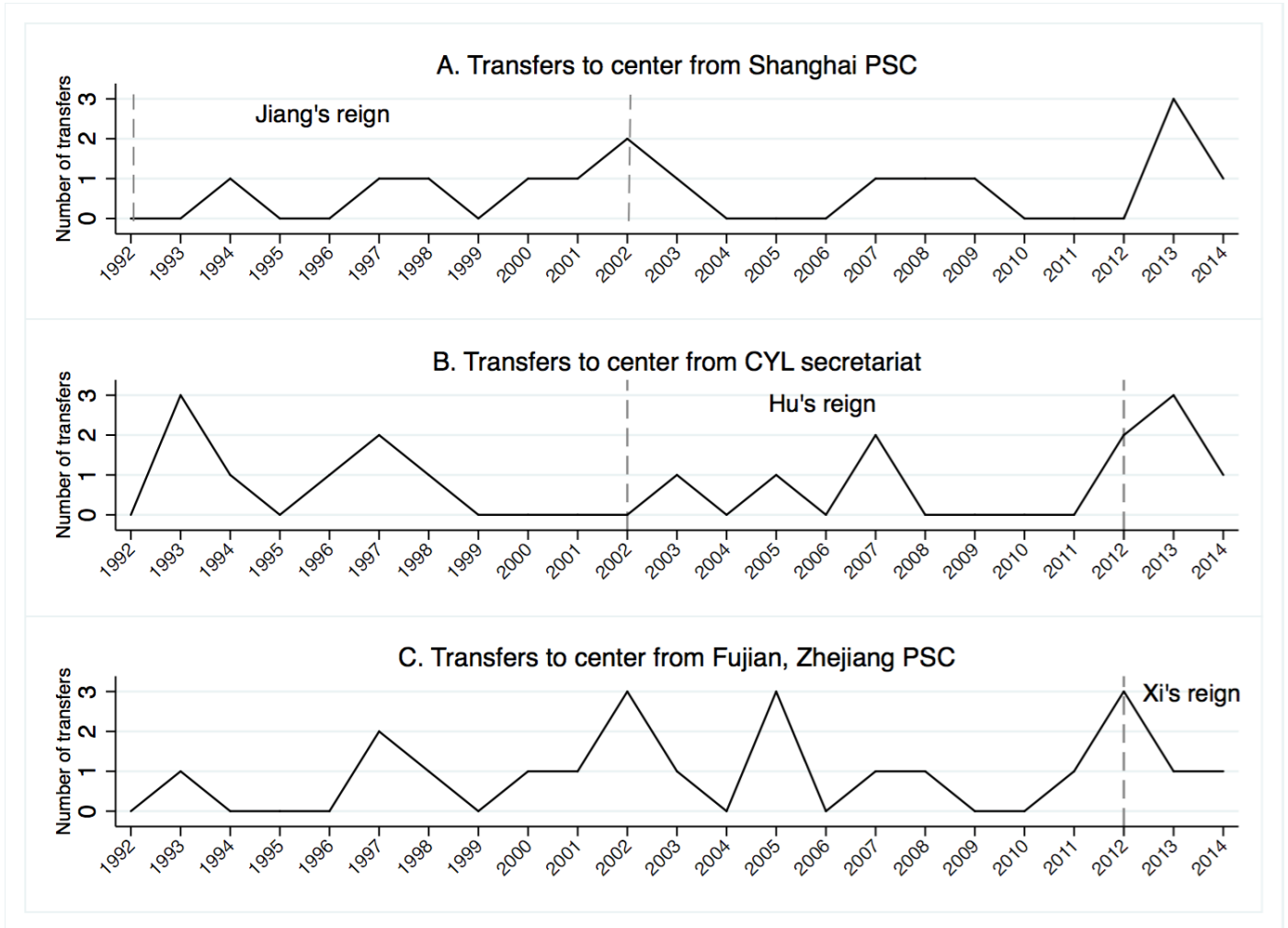


more frequently during Jiang's 1992-2002 reign. Regarding officials hailed from the CYL, the pattern of transfers was also rather consistent before and after Hu became the general secretary. There is simply no indication that the "CYL faction" received significantly more patronage under Hu's watch. Finally, since Xi is less than three years into his tenure at the time of writing, we only have some tentative evidence on the movement of his supporters. Again, officials with Fujian and Zhejiang background did not seem to receive more transfers after Xi took office in 2012.

Some earlier studies of official transfer in China reached similar conclusions. Cheng Li, an expert of Chinese elite politics, argue that "the Shanghai Gang's efforts to transfer Shanghai officials to other provinces and major cities thus far (appeared) unsuccessful" (*Li*, 2004, 45). However, while Li attribute the lack of transfer to "strong local resistance in appointing Shanghai officials to serve on the other's turf"(46), I suggest that the pattern may result from the internal policy-making rules of the Politburo Standing Committee. The collective, consensus-based model of decision-making could have forced the general secretary to respect his colleagues' sphere of influence and refrain from rampant distribution of patronage to his supporters.

It could be argued that, although the paramount leaders cannot freely appoint their loyalists to the provinces, this setback is more than compensated by their ability to promote them to key posts in the central government. After all, central officials are better positioned to affect national policy-making and supervise the provinces. Although the main focus of this study is inter-provincial transfer, our data also allow a preliminary investigation of whether the key supporters' transfers to the center increase substantially owing to their patron's coattails. In Figure 2.2, I plot the transfers to central posts involving those who had served in Shanghai's PSC (Jiang's supporters, Graph A), the CYL's secretariat (Hu's supporters, Graph B), and Fujian and Zhejiang's PSCs (Xi's supporters, Graph C). As the Figure shows, there is no major increase in the number of transfers that can be attributed to the patron's reign. For Hu and Xi, the promotion of their associates to the center seems to follow the

**Figure 2.2: Patronage transfers to the center under 3 paramount leaders:  
1992-2014**



pattern that was established before they assumed the CCP's top position. On balance, there is little evidence that a patron's rise to the supreme position increases significantly the transfers of his supporters.

### 2.5.2 Clientelism and the importance of transfer destination

The second hypothesis posits that the general secretary would take advantage of his superior position to appoint his clients to more important provinces, either in an economic or political sense. First, I examine whether key supporters are more likely to receive appointment to more affluent provinces. To do this, I use the sample of 556 transfers to estimate a

**Table 2.3: OLS estimation of the relationship between patronage transfer and economic importance of destination province**

Dependent variable: GDP per capita ranking of destination province			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	full sample	full sample	PSC members only
patronage transfer	-0.9688 (-0.87)	0.1075 (0.11)	0.2797 (0.24)
GDP per capita ranking of source province		0.4628*** (12.13)	0.4204*** (9.47)
transfer from center		-1.0152 (-1.46)	-1.0704 (-1.33)
age of official		-0.1711** (-2.56)	-0.1858** (-2.12)
Constant	17.0392*** (43.01)	21.8942*** (5.44)	24.2766*** (4.72)
Year fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes
Adjusted $R^2$	-0.000	0.228	0.187
Observations	556	556	446

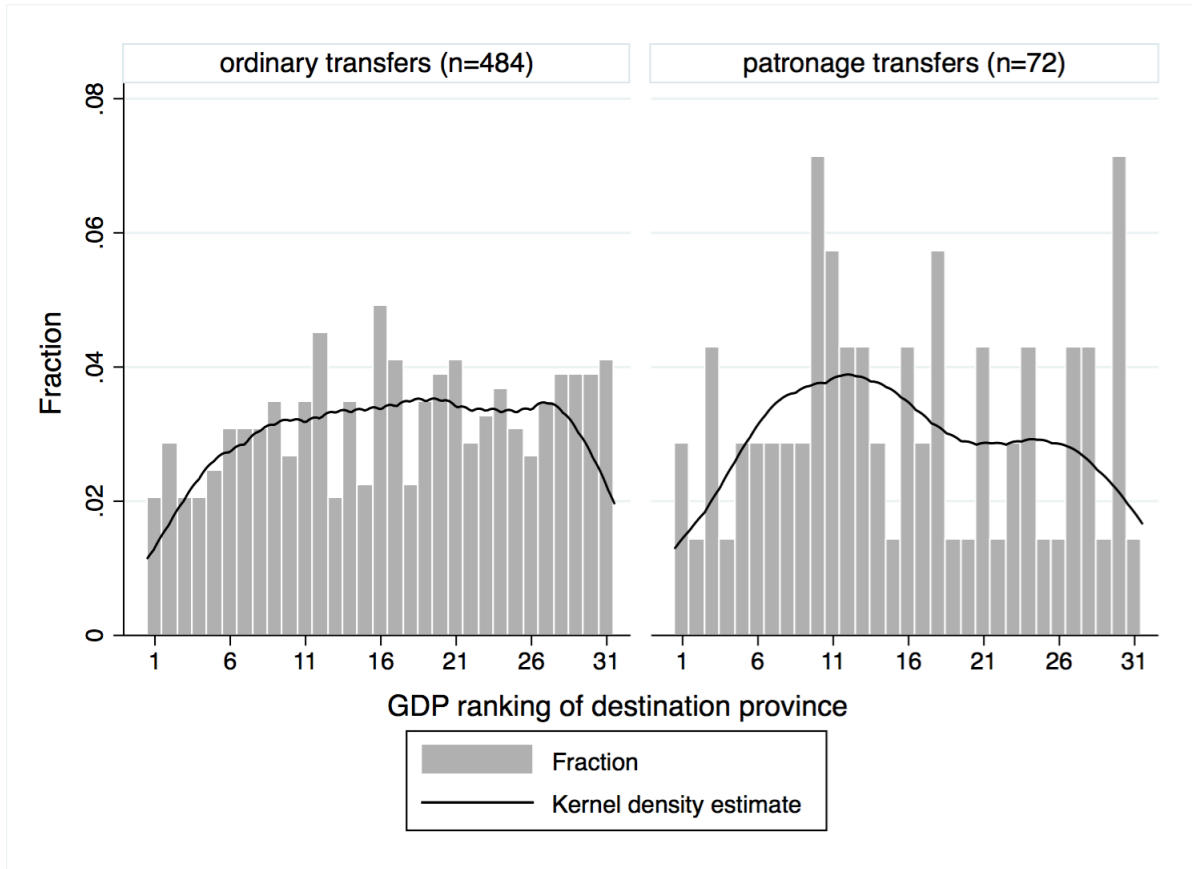
*t* statistics in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

linear regression model with the GDP per capita ranking of the destination province as the dependent variable (highest ranking=1 and lowest ranking=31). The explanatory variable is a binary indicator of whether the transfer involves a paramount leader's key supporter. Thus, the second hypothesis will receive support if patronage transfers are negatively with the ranking number. Control variables include the GDP per capita ranking of the province out of which an official is transferred, a dummy for transfer from the central government, the age of the official at the time of transfer, and year dummies. Table 2.3 reports OLS estimations of the bivariate model (column 1), the fully specified model (column 2), and the model using the sub-sample of PSC transfers (column 3).

Clearly, there is no evidence that key supporters are transferred to more affluent provinces than ordinary cadres, as the coefficients for patronage transfer are statistically insignificant in all models. Figure 2.3 uses histograms to show the distribution of transfer destinations

Figure 2.3: Distribution of transfer destination: 1992-2004



across the provinces, which are arranged from the richest to poorest. Similar to ordinary transfers, the regional distribution of patronage transfers are not particularly tilted towards either end of the economic spectrum. Turning to other variables, there is a positive and highly significant correlation between the economic status of the source province and that of the receiving province, indicating that officials tend to circulate within provinces of similar economic conditions. In addition, more senior officials tend to be deployed to richer provinces, showing that officials with greater experience are entrusted with more important assignments.

Next, I test the proposition that key supporters are more likely to arrive in politically important provinces. Here, the dependent variable is whether the destination province is represented in the Politburo, and the explanatory and control variables are the same from the previous estimation. A logit model is used to take into account the binary nature of the dependent variable. As can be seen in Table 2.4, there is again no significant rela-

**Table 2.4: Logit estimation of the relationship between patronage transfer and political importance of destination province**

Dependent variable: The Politburo status of destination province			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	full sample	full sample	PSC members only
patronage transfer	0.1873 (0.53)	-0.0219 (-0.06)	-0.4047 (-0.88)
GDP per capita ranking of source province		-0.0797*** (-4.69)	-0.0803*** (-4.32)
transfer from center		-0.0809 (-0.29)	-0.3149 (-1.02)
age of official		0.0382 (1.32)	0.0097 (0.27)
Constant	-1.8837*** (-14.04)	-3.4866* (-1.89)	-1.9618 (-0.95)
Year fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes
Log likelihood	-219.8080	-190.1222	-155.8761
Pseudo $R^2$	0.001	0.114	0.124
Observations	556	520	393

*t* statistics in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Note:** In model 2, transfers that occurred in 1993 and 1999 are dropped since they predict failure perfectly. In model 3, transfers that occurred in 1992, 1993, 1994, and 1999 are dropped for the same reason.

tionship between the clientelist nature of transfer and political importance of the assignment. The only covariate that has significant effect is the economic ranking of the source province, suggesting that cadres from more wealthy provinces have a higher probability of being transferred to a province with Politburo representation. This result shows that the wealthy provinces can translate their economic clout into political influence, as cadres from these regions have the inside track to be deployed to strategic locations.

### 2.5.3 Clientelism and appointment to powerful posts

The evidence presented so far paints a picture of equitable power-sharing among the CCP's top elites. There is little sign that a paramount leader can increase considerably

the transfers of his key supporters or deploy them to more importance provinces. There are, however, subtle ways in which the general secretary may expand his power without manipulating the number or destination of transfers. According to hypothesis 3, the key supporters may be transferred to more powerful positions in provincial governments than officials without ties to the supreme leader. As discussed earlier, some provincial posts assume a more critical function for exercising political control due to their inherent authority or functional specialization. Thus, I created an index of political importance that assigns a number to each of the six tiers of provincial posts, with 5 representing the first tier, 4 the second tier... and 0 the sixth tier (Table 2.2).

Because the index of position importance is an ordinal variable wherein the six tiers are ordered but the exact distances between adjacent tiers are unknown, I use ordinal logit regression to estimate the relationship between patronage transfer and the nature of appointed post. Table 2.5 reports how the index is affected by a number of factors. The main explanatory variable is again the dummy for patronage transfer, and control variables include the age of transferred official, GDP per capita of the source and destination province, and a binary indicator of transfer from the center. The fully specified models provide strong support for hypothesis 3, as the coefficients for patronage transfer are positive and highly significant. I focus on the model of full sample (column 2) to examine the substantive difference between patronage and ordinary transfer. Converting the log-odds coefficient (1.19) into proportional odds ratio (3.29)<sup>12</sup>, the interpretation is that, switching from an ordinary transfer to a patronage transfer, the odds of obtaining a tier  $k$  position rather than a position in lower tiers are 3.29 times greater, holding other variables constant.

A graphic illustration of this effect is presented in Figure 2.4, which plots the actual distribution of provincial posts over the six tiers for ordinary and patronage transfers. As shown in the bar graph, key supporters are far more likely to be appointed as party secretary and governor, the two commanding positions in provincial government. They are also slightly

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<sup>12</sup>This is done by exponentiating the ordered logit coefficient:  $e^{1.19} = 3.29$ .

**Table 2.5: Ordered logit estimation of the relationship between patronage transfer and importance of appointed posts**

Dependent variable: Index of position importance (0-5)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	full sample	full sample	PSC members only
patronage transfer	0.4386* (1.89)	1.1916*** (3.67)	1.0448** (2.48)
age of official		0.3031*** (13.31)	0.2595*** (8.23)
GDP per capita of source province		-0.5215 (-0.97)	-0.6759 (-1.18)
GDP per capita of destination province		3.0705** (1.98)	3.6783** (2.19)
transfer from center		0.1416 (0.66)	0.2023 (0.85)
Destination fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes
Log likelihood	-927.2383	-766.0431	-576.8807
Pseudo $R^2$	0.002	0.175	0.151
Observations	556	556	446

*t* statistics in parentheses

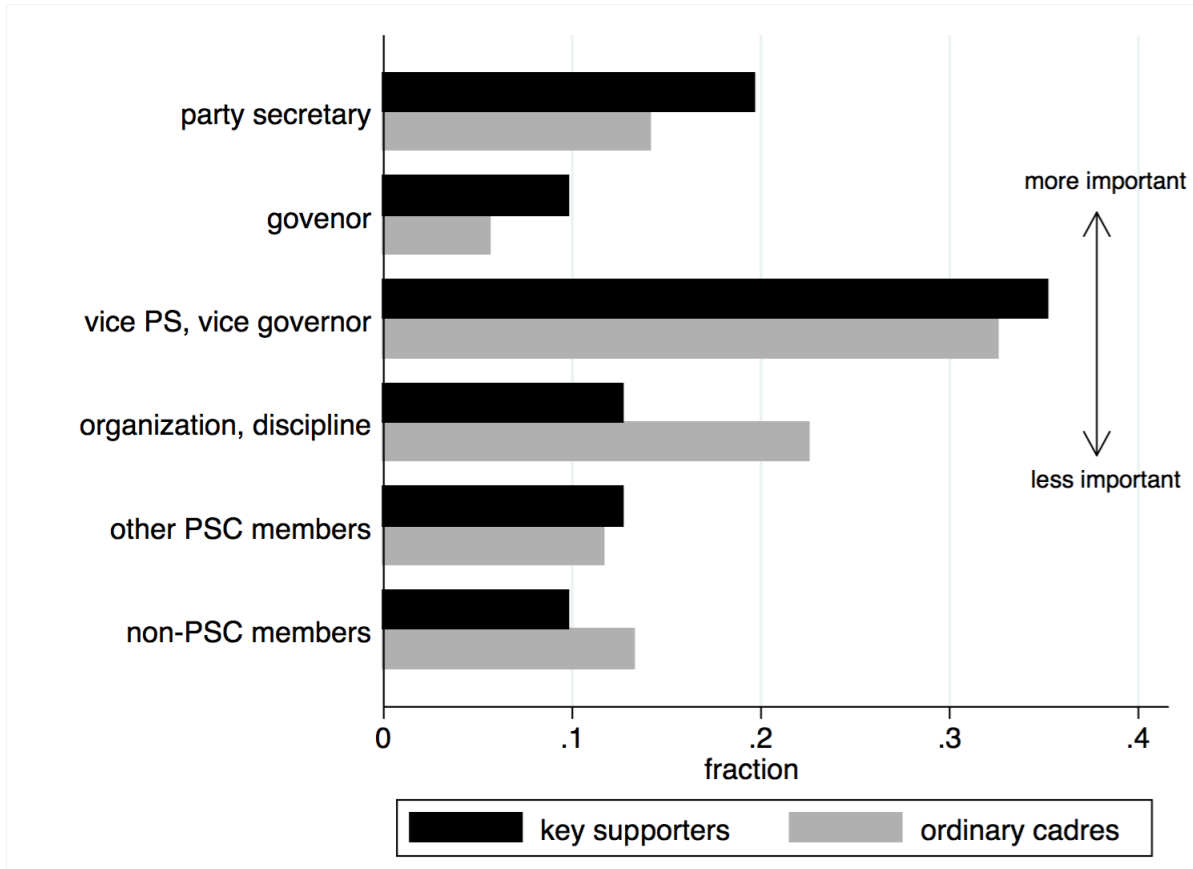
\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Note:** standard errors are clustered for transfers to the same province.

more likely than ordinary cadres to receive the third tier posts of vice party secretary and vice governor. Somewhat counterintuitively, the proportion of key supporters appointed to OD and DIC is significantly smaller than it is the case for ordinary cadres, despite the crucial role these two agencies play in personnel matters. A possible explanation for this pattern is that the paramount leader, having established his supremacy over top-tier positions, finds it sensible to make certain concessions to rivaling factions. As expected, the positions in the lowest tier, which are below vice-ministerial rank, are much less likely to be occupied by key supporters.

Turning to other variables in the model, the age of the transferred official has a statistically significant effect on the importance of appointed post, indicating the salience of

Figure 2.4: Distribution of posts over six tiers: 1992-2014



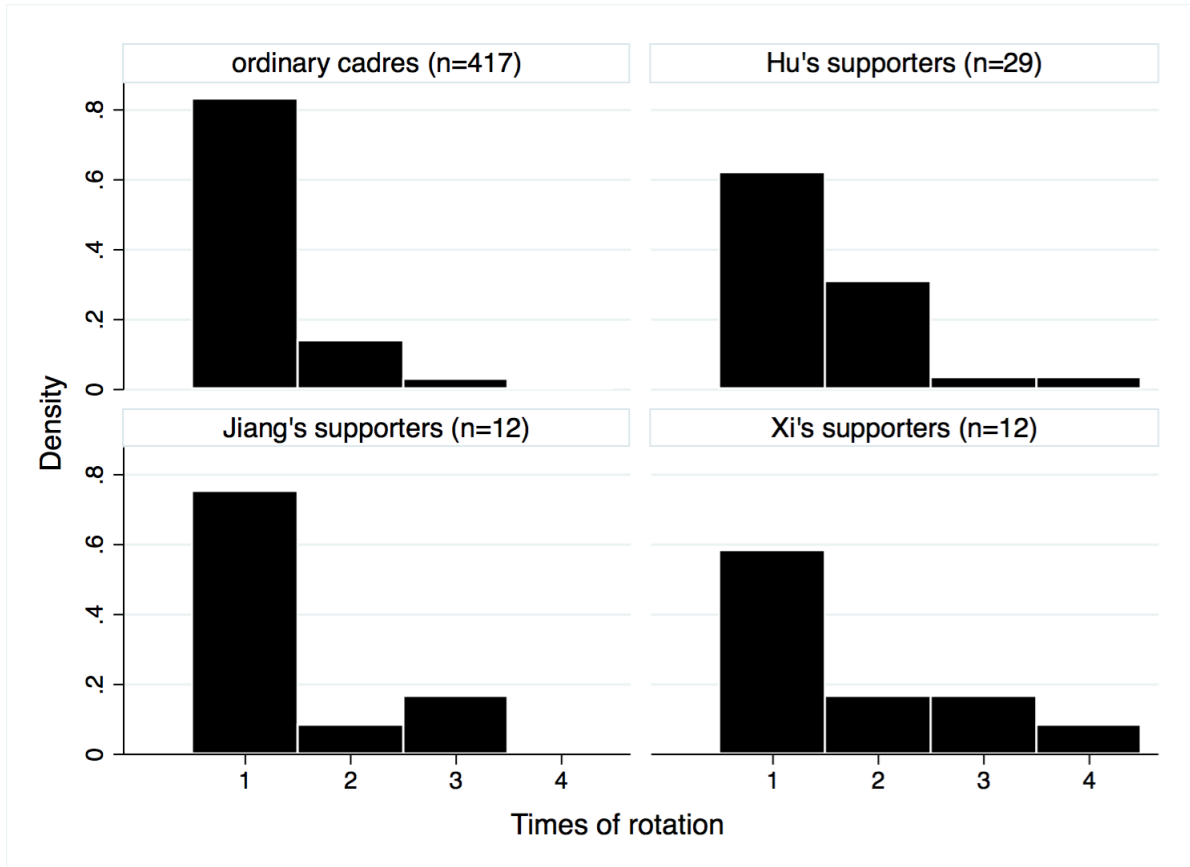
seniority and experience in job assignment. Also positively and significantly correlated with position importance is the level of economic development for the destination province. In other words, when cadres are transferred to economically important regions, they tend to take offices vested with greater authority. This pattern reflects a carefully arranged rotation system designed to reinforce the center’s control over wealthy provinces.

#### 2.5.4 Clientelism and individual frequency of rotation

The final part of the empirical analysis probes whether the paramount leader can capitalize on his authority to rotate his supporters more frequently than ordinary cadres. The purpose of this strategy is to make full use of a given number of core loyalists to “cast a longer shadow” over provincial politics. To test the fourth hypothesis, the unit of analysis is changed from transfers to individuals. A separate dataset is constructed which contains 464



Figure 2.5: Frequency of rotation for individual cadres: 1992-2014



officials that served in PSC between 1992 and 2014. By the end of 2014, these individuals have experienced at least one and at most four inter-provincial transfers. Figure 2.5 shows the proportion of cases that fall into each of these four categories. As the histograms made clear, over 80 percent of ordinary cadres have been transferred only once. By contrast, for the key supporters of each paramount leader, there is a greater proportion of cases that experienced two or more transfers.

To see whether this difference is significant in a statistical sense, I estimate an OLS regression with the total times of inter-provincial rotation for an individual as the dependent variable. The explanatory variable is a binary indicator of whether the individual is a key supporter. The economic status of the province from which the official was first transferred is used as a proxy for provincial origins. The model also controls for the age of the official when the first transfer occurred, as the earlier one experienced the first move, the more

**Table 2.6: OLS estimation of the relationship between patronage and times of rotation**

Dependent variable: Total times of rotation by 2014		
	(1)	(2)
key supporter	0.3233*** (4.29)	0.2873*** (3.71)
GDP per capita of source province		-0.0981 (-0.60)
age when first transferred		-0.0104** (-2.13)
Constant	1.1952*** (46.75)	2.1557*** (3.52)
Adjusted $R^2$	0.036	0.064
Observations	464	464

*t* statistics in parentheses  
\* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01

transfers might be accumulated over one’s career. Table 2.6 provides the results of the analysis. Clearly, being a client of paramount leaders increases the number of rotations, and the effect is highly significant. Column 2 shows that, holding other variables constant, key supporters on average experience 0.29 more transfers than ordinary cadres. There is also some evidence that, the later one receives his or her first rotation during the career, the fewer transfers one will experience in the end. The magnitude of the effect, however, is very small.

The finding that key supporters are rotated more intensively complicates the conventional wisdom on leadership reshuffling in developing countries. In existing studies, frequent rotation of subordinates is usually explained by the ruler’s sense of distrust and insecurity: state officials are reshuffled to prevent the development of strong power bases (*Migdal, 1987; Bratton and Van de Walle, 1994*). Accordingly, the more the dictator trusts his agents, the less need to rotate them intensively. This view fails to recognize how rotation of personal supporters may be used to extend the dictator’s influence over more agencies or geographical

regions. Specifically in the Chinese context, rotation is also employed to award loyalists with the credential of governing multiple provinces, which will considerably strengthen the case for selecting them into national leadership in the future.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The global spread of one-party autocracies has sparked a heated discussion about the effect of party institutions on authoritarian durability. In this debate, a prevailing school of thought contends that parties promote equitable distribution of power among the ruling elites, reducing the danger of destructive, destabilizing conflicts among regime insiders. It is argued that impersonal decision-making rules embedded in authoritarian parties afford different factions an opportunity to participate in the political process; regular meetings of collective bodies makes it easier for the ruling elites to monitor and contain the dictator's unilateralism. The sense of collective security encourages power-holders to pursue their interests within the party organizations rather than challenge the regime from without.

But can one-party regimes really establish institutional rules to meaningfully constrain the dictators? Policy-making process in authoritarian countries is widely known to be highly informal, with the supreme leaders often bypassing laws and regulations to benefit their inner circle. Cross-national studies focus on the empirical correlations between the presence of party organizations and regime resilience, whereas the actual effects of formal institutions on the dynamics of power-sharing are little discussed. In this paper, I utilized an in-depth study of China's appointment system to examine whether the CCP's collective decision-making rules can constrain the paramount leader's personal agenda of patronage distribution.

Our analysis reveals a complicated relationship between formal institutions, informal rules, and the distribution of political influence that is rarely captured in previous studies. On the one hand, there is no evidence that the CCP's general secretary can appoint a much greater number of key supporters to provincial posts during his tenure, or assign them to provinces with greater strategic value. This findings shows that the general secretary faces

strong intra-party pressure to share high-level positions with other factions, and such power-sharing is effectively enforced through formal personnel procedures and collective deliberation inside the Politburo Standing Committee. On the other hand, the general secretary does manage to favor his supporters in subtle, less blatant ways. The loyalists are markedly more likely to get important provincial posts such as party secretary and governor, and they are rotated more frequently to spread the influence of their patron. The paramount leader may have accomplished this feat by manipulating or circumventing existing procedures. It is also possible that other ruling elites recognize the need to grant the general secretary “constrained supremacy” so that the actions of the oligarchy are better coordinated to deal with various challenges, while the danger of personal dictatorship is contained by institutions.

Given that the paramount leader’s assertion of personnel power is at once constrained by formal rules and enabled by behind-the-scene maneuvers, we may need to reconsider the conventional wisdom regarding the sources of authoritarian resilience. It is true that strong institutions play a key role in preventing personal dictatorship and enhancing elite solidarity, but overly rigid rules might smother leadership initiative and discretion that is badly needed in rapidly changing societies. In closed regimes that proscribe any political organization outsider of the ruling party, personal cliques founded on patron-client ties could provide a cohesive support group for the paramount leader to consolidate power and impose authority. In reality, most authoritarian regimes probably sustain themselves by maintaining a delicate balance between stable institutions and strong personal leadership. Here, intensive studies of authoritarian internal politics can still provide invaluable insights to supplement cross-national quantitative analysis.

## CHAPTER III

# The implementation of intra-party democratic reform and the preservation of top-down authority

### Abstract

This chapter examines the CCP's "intra-party democratic reforms" that have the declared goal of empowering more Party members to participate in the leadership selection process. Since the early 1990s, these reforms were promoted as a remedy to the corruption and social tension that resulted from overly concentrated personnel power. How effective are these formal procedures in constraining the appointment power of first tier leaders and institutionalizing the influence of a larger group of cadres? Drawing on document research, interviews and descriptive statistics, this chapter studies two components of intra-party democratic reform: the practices of "democratic recommendation" that serve as a gateway to cadre promotion and the semi-competitive elections at Party congresses. This in-depth study finds that the efforts to expand bottom-up participation are hindered by loopholes in formal regulations, informal practices and the frequent rotation of Party officials. The reforms did bring changes to the way first tier leaders exercise their appointment power and to the office-seeking behavior of ambitious cadres, although attempts of horizontal networking and collective action at lower levels are swiftly crushed. Despite the reform rhetorics, the first tier leaders at each administrative level maintain their monopoly of personnel power, with little evidence of reciprocal accountability.

### 3.1 Introduction

Since the CCP came to power in 1949, it has confronted two crises that brought into question the very survival of the party state: the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Incident. In the aftermath of both upheavals, the CCP turned to intra-party democracy as an important part of its reform program to avert the fate of collapse. Intra-party democracy has been seen by some CCP leaders as a way to inject vitality into the Party and ameliorate the many ills associated with overly concentrated power. Party intellectuals and outside observers have both suggested that democratic practices within the Party could set the stage for broader political reform (*Shambaugh*, 2008; *He*, 2006; *Li*, 2009).

Intra-party democracy (IPD), defined as “an institution whereby all party members can participate in party affairs directly or indirectly on an equal basis” (*He*, 2006, 194), consists of multiple institutional components. One element of IPD concerns how CCP leaders at various levels are selected. Rather than having a small number of Party leaders, especially the Party secretary, monopolize the power to select officials, IPD entails more expansive participation in the selection process by Party members. To a large extent, the decision to broaden bottom-up participation was a response to the corruption and social tension that flowed from the concentration of personnel power. How effective are these formal procedures in constraining the appointment power of core Party leaders and institutionalizing the influence of a larger group of cadres?

To answer this question, I focus on two components of IPD reforms: the practice of “democratic recommendation” that serves as a gateway to the promotion of cadres and the semi-competitive elections at Party congresses. These aspects of IPD have received little attention in the existing literature of China’s democratic reform, which has largely focused on village elections and the experiments of township elections. While these grassroots reforms provide exciting signs of democratization in China, their impacts are highly limited as they are carried out at the lowest rung of the hierarchy and often restricted to pilot projects in specific locales. By comparison, the IPD measures under study here, although more

incremental in nature, are implemented throughout the Party hierarchy and have systemwide significance.

Drawing on archival research, interviews with local officials and systematic appointment data, this chapter aims to arrive at an accurate assessment of the Party's IPD reforms in the area of cadre selection. Because data regarding leadership selection at the central level are difficult to collect, most of the evidence in this chapter is gathered at or below the provincial level. Since the CCP's power structure largely duplicates itself at each of the territorial levels, members of the CCP's local standing committees at various levels are essentially treated as the local equivalents of Politburo Standing Committee members. My analysis shows that the efforts to promote bottom-up participation are hindered by loopholes in formal regulations, informal practices and the frequent rotation of Party officials. Meanwhile, IPD reform did bring changes to the way first tier leaders exercise their appointment power and to the office-seeking behavior of ambitious cadres. Attempts by lower tier officials to engage in collective action and horizontal networking, however, are swiftly suppressed to maintain top-down authority. As argued in the introductory chapter, the rejection of reciprocal accountability frees the first tier leaders from bottom-up pressure and reduces the danger of demagogic outreach by the oligarchs.

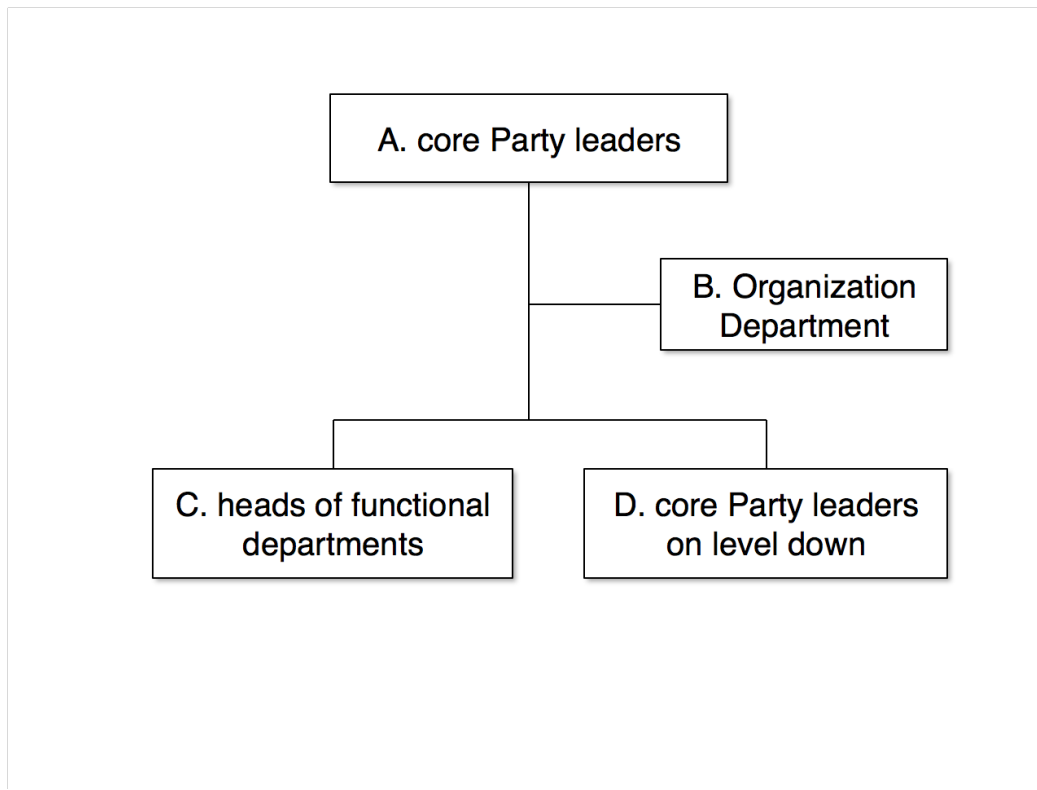
The chapter will be organized as follows. Section II presents a simplified, ideal-typical model of the CCP's one-level-down appointment system. It also explains how corruption and social tension induced by the system have led to IPD reforms aimed at opening the selection process to more players. The next two sections will examine the implementation of democratic recommendation and congressional semi-competitive elections, respectively. In doing so, the analysis seeks to shed light on the changes that these reform measures have brought to the CCP's selection process. The final section summarizes the findings and discusses the larger political implications of IPD institutions.

### 3.2 The CCP's appointment system and its discontent

It is a defining feature of the Leninist political system that the ruling party monopolizes the power of appointing office-holders in all public institutions. As noted earlier in the dissertation, the personnel system is often considered the cornerstone of the CCP's political control in the age of economic reform. To understand the origins and significance of the Party's IPD reforms, it is helpful to sketch the way personnel power was distributed across different levels of the Party hierarchy.

China's bureaucratic system consists of five administrative levels: the center, the province, the prefecture, the county and the township. At each level, the locus of political power lies in the Party committee and its standing committee.<sup>1</sup> To illustrate the operation of personnel power in this multilayered bureaucracy, figure 3.1 presents a simplified, ideal-typical model that depicts the essential dynamics of the CCP's personnel system.

**Figure 3.1: The CCP's personnel system**



<sup>1</sup>At the central level, the two corresponding bodies would be the Politburo and its Standing Committee.



In this figure, cell A represents the core Party leaders at a particular administrative level. The “core Party leaders”, a central concept of this chapter, can be roughly equated with the members of the CCP’s standing committee.<sup>2</sup> Cell B represents the organization department (OD), an agency that specializes in assisting the core Party leaders in the domain of personnel management. All the standard procedures associated with nomination, evaluation, appointment and dismissal are carried out by the OD. Cells C and D represent the major leaders at the next lower level, including the core leaders of various functional departments (C) and the territorial jurisdictions one level down (D).

Since the mid-1980s, the CCP has adopted the principle of one-level downward cadre management. In practice, this meant that A, with the staff support of B, has the authority to appoint C and D with little interference from Party leaders one level above A. As one scholar summarized, “the shift to one-rank-down system meant that leaders in provincial and lower territorial units gained almost complete control over appointments and dismissals of officials within their territorial jurisdiction”(Lieberthal, 2003, 236).

Initially, this arrangement was designed to grant local leaders sufficient autonomy to promote socioeconomic development. As a consequence, the CCP’s personnel system has evolved into one in which the Party secretary, in consultation with his close colleagues, monopolizes the making of appointment decisions (*Fewsmith*, 2010, 3). The concentration of personnel power has created ample room for the core Party leaders to engage in faction-building, nepotism and even outright office-selling.<sup>3</sup> These “unhealthy tendencies”, an umbrella phrase used in the CCP’s discourse to describe personnel practices that go against the principle of transparency and fairness, have become a major source of popular discontent and social tension that the CCP’s leadership cannot afford to ignore.

Irregular personnel practices that trigger popular outrage usually take one of the fol-

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<sup>2</sup>The size of the Party’s standing committee varies across administrative levels. The number of standing committee members ranges from 5-9 at the central level, 10-15 at the provincial level, 9-11 at the city level, to 7-9 at the county level. The Party committee at the township level, which has 5-9 members, is too small to warrant a standing committee.

<sup>3</sup>For an in-depth account of how concentration of power led to corrupt personnel practices, see *Zhu* (2008).

lowing forms. First, Party leaders are often accused of promoting their relatives and close associates, typically in violation of existing rules such as the law of avoidance and step-by-step promotion.<sup>4</sup> Also drawing heated criticism is the promotion of “cadres with sickness”, referring to those who moved up in the bureaucratic ladder despite previous engagement in corrupt activities. Such phenomenon is invariably caused by the failure of the OD’s vetting process that is supposed to weed out corrupt officials. Finally, intense public outcry is always aroused by the scandals of buying and selling public offices. For example, a prefecture-level Party leader in Heilongjiang province reportedly received 23.85 million yuan as bribes between 1996 and 2002. In exchange, he sold offices under his control to as many as 260 officials.<sup>5</sup>

The statements by top CCP leaders reveal their recognition that the woes of the personnel system pose an alarming threat to the regime’s legitimacy<sup>6</sup>. They also realize that corruption and nepotism must be contained by limiting the influence of the core Party leaders over the cadre selection process. Since the early 1990s, the CCP has taken a variety of measures to restrain the exercise of personnel power through due process requirements, administrative oversight and intra-party democratic reforms. This study focuses on the last set of these measures, that is, the efforts to open up the selection process to more players within the Party. By expanding the rights of Party members to access information and participate in the political process, IPD not only dovetails with modern democratic ethos but may also inject bottom-up oversight over cadres as a way to improve their quality. It is therefore not surprising that top CCP leaders have expressed strong endorsement of IPD by calling it “the lifeblood of the Party”(Li, 2009, 2). But can these reforms realize their declared goals? This chapter studies the implementation of two crucial ingredients of IPD: the practices of

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<sup>4</sup>“Pogetiba mo cheng renrenweiqin ‘dangjianpai’ ”(“Do not let ‘exceptional promotion’ become an excuse for nepotism”), 24 April 2012, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/pinglun/GB/17737276.html>. Accessed 13 June 2014.

<sup>5</sup>“Ma De ‘wusha pifabu’ zhenjing Heilongjiang”(Ma De’s wholesale store of offices shocks Heilongjiang), Lianzheng Liaowang (Honest and Clean Government Perspectives), 2003 (12), 24-5.

<sup>6</sup>Zeng, Qinghong. 2002. Speech addressed to the leadership group of the Central Organization Department. Zu Gong Tong Xun (News Dispatch of Organizational Work) Beijing: Dangjian duwu chubanshe, 45-6.

“democratic recommendation” and the semi-competitive elections at party congresses.

### 3.3 Democratic recommendation as a gateway to promotion

#### 3.3.1 The formal process of democratic recommendation

The post-Tiananmen era has seen the CCP making strenuous efforts to regularize the cadre selection process with rules and procedures.<sup>7</sup> According to the regulations promulgated in 2002, selecting a cadre for promotion consists of four basic steps: democratic recommendation, organizational vetting, deliberation and decision. Appendix A provides a brief summary of the statutory procedures with regard to cadre selection. In this process, democratic recommendation plays a gatekeeper’s role of generating the candidates entitled to enter the following stages. The regulations stipulate that the recommendation procedure should apply to two scenarios: the changeover of the leadership group and individual promotions. The former scenario refers to the periodic changeover of the Party committee’s leadership group at Party congresses, while the latter include promotions to individual vacant posts between two congresses. In both cases, the preliminary list of candidates must be generated through democratic recommendation.<sup>8</sup>

Among the four steps of cadre selection, democratic recommendation is arguably the one most relevant for realizing the core values of IPD such as participation, representation and inclusiveness (*He*, 2006, 195). Designated to participate in the recommendation process are the following political elites: members of Party committees, governments and congress standing committees at the levels for which leaders are being selected; party and government leaders one level down; leaders in the courts, procuratorates, Party discipline inspection committees and mass organizations; and other members that the OD deems necessary to

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<sup>7</sup>In 1995, the CCP’s Central Committee promulgated provisional regulations to govern the promotion of party officials. In 2002, the regulations were revised into a permanent version with more procedural clarity. The CCP’s Central Committee. Provisional regulations on the selection and appointment of leading party and government cadres. (1995) Regulations on the selection and appointment of leading party and government cadres. (2002).

<sup>8</sup>The 2002 regulations, Article 11.

include.<sup>9</sup> The OD of the next higher level will solicit opinions from these participants through meetings and individual interviews. At the recommendation meeting, the participants will complete ballots to express their preferences. Based on the votes and individual interviews, the recommendation decision is then made jointly by the OD one level up and the standing committee at the levels for which leaders are being selected. The regulations stress that while the vote counts should be considered “one of the most important bases” for the decision, the practice of “deciding candidates through simple voting” should be avoided.

Despite the CCP’s efforts to update its regulations and flesh out the operational details of the selection process, the general and sometimes vague statutory language still gives the implementing agencies substantial room for interpretation. Drawing on research conducted by Chinese scholars, the CCP’s internal circulars and reports and the author’s interviews, the following paragraphs examine how democratic recommendation is implemented on the ground, the various impediments to expanding participation during the process and the effects of this particular reform on the selection of CCP officials.

### **3.3.2 The implementation of democratic recommendation**

A study by a former OD official provided a detailed account of the implementation of democratic recommendation prior to the 2003 changeover election in the districts and counties of the Shanghai Municipality (*Xu*, 2006). Because Shanghai is a provincial-level municipality, the leaders of the districts and counties (simply referred to as districts henceforth) within its jurisdiction are ranked at the prefecture level. Therefore, this description should be viewed as a case study of the operation of the recommendation procedure at the prefecture level.

In China’s political system, the periodic changeover of local leadership groups is a complex personnel project meticulously planned and implemented by the OD under the aegis of the Party committee. As the first step of the 2003 changeover, the Shanghai Municipal Party

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<sup>9</sup>The 2002 regulations, Article 12.

Committee determined the number of posts in each district's leadership group.<sup>10</sup> The OD at the district level would then set out to prepare the following paperwork:

- The cadre roster. The roster was designed to provide the participants in the recommendation process with basic information about the leading cadres in their jurisdictions. The names on the roster thus formed the pool of candidates to be recommended for the leadership group. The roster included the incumbent leaders of the district's Party committee, government apparatus, people's congress, courts, procuratorates, various functional departments and so forth. Biographical information such as a cadre's age, date of joining the Party, educational background and current office were provided on the roster.
- List of recommendation meeting participants. Although the CCP's propaganda touts democratic recommendation as a demonstration of the Party's "mass line" policy, almost all participants were Party leaders in their own right. Differentiated by their bureaucratic status, the participants largely fell into five groups: the incumbent leaders of the district's Party and government apparatus; those who have retired from the district's leadership posts; the leaders of the district's functional departments and mass organizations; the leaders of the various sub-district offices/townships; and the representatives of democratic satellite parties and non-communists. Xu's study did not reveal the exact number of cadres that participated in the meeting. According to official report, an average of 230-odd cadres took part in the recommendation meetings at the prefecture level during the 2006-7 changeover period. The corresponding number for the provincial level was 570.<sup>11</sup>
- Recommendation forms. These forms would list all the vacant posts, and the partici-

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<sup>10</sup>For the Party apparatus, this includes the number of depute Party secretaries and standing committee members.

<sup>11</sup>"Chinese agency says local party elections reflect 'inner-party democracy' ". 11 August 2007, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/460896281?accountid=14667>. Accessed 15 July 2014.

pants should fill in a candidate's name to match each of the available offices. Because the regulations stipulate that the ballots cast by officials with different bureaucratic ranks should be counted separately,<sup>12</sup> the recommendation forms would be divided into five categories in correspondence to the five groups of participants discussed above.

After the Shanghai Municipal OD approved the relevant documents and forms, the recommendation meeting was ready to be held. At the meeting, a task force dispatched by the Municipal OD delivered an address to the participants, emphasizing various requirements regarding the size, age structure and gender quota of the incoming leadership group. The participants were then asked to complete the recommendation forms and place them in the ballot boxes. After the forms were collected, the task force sorted them by group, counted the votes among each group and summarized the results. The meeting was followed by the task force's interviews with a selected group of main leaders at the district level. The average number of interviewees at the prefecture level during the 2006-7 national changeover was reportedly 140.<sup>13</sup>

The vote counts, together with the information gathered from individual interviews, were reported both to the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and the Party secretaries at the district level. In light of this report, the standing committee of the district's Party committee convened a meeting to determine the candidates to be vetted by the Shanghai Municipal OD. The list of candidates was finalized after consultation with and approval from the Municipal OD.

### **3.3.3 Impediments to political participation during the recommendation process**

As an integral part of the CCP's efforts to reform its problematic personnel system, democratic recommendation was designed to expand Party members' right to "assess information,

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<sup>12</sup>2002 regulations, Article 13.

<sup>13</sup>"Chinese agency says local party elections reflect 'inner-party democracy' ", BBC monitoring Asia Pacific.

participate, select and supervise” over the course of cadre promotion.<sup>14</sup> The Party’s official rhetoric notwithstanding, there are two major factors that restrict the influence of those cadres who are formally empowered to participate. The first factor is the ambiguous statutory language surrounding the role of recommendation votes. On the one hand, the number of votes received should be considered “one of the most important bases” for deciding the candidates to be vetted for the posts. On the other hand, as mentioned, the importance of votes is qualified by the clause that “the practice of electing someone through simple voting should be avoided”. In part, this caveat reflects the genuine concern that candidates with the highest number of votes may not be most suitable for the posts. A comment made by an educational official with rich personnel management experience is representative of many Party leaders’ views:

The number of recommendation votes is very important, but we should look at this issue from a scientific perspective...Some people might vote out of personal affection or resentment (instead of public interest)...In recent years, the climate of the officialdom has nurtured many cadres who try to offend nobody, to build personal relations and to form their own inner circles. These people are more likely to win votes than cadres who are not afraid to tackle hard problems and offend people...Therefore, my approach of dealing with the promotion of some cadres is that, as long as they received more than half of the votes, they should be eligible for closer vetting (even if someone else received more votes).<sup>15</sup>

In practice, the ambiguous language gives the core Party leaders considerable discretion in applying voting results. When they nominate someone who has failed to receive the most votes, they could justify the decision by the need to adopt a holistic approach rather than “electing someone through simple voting”. Therefore, the insertion of the caveat clause diminishes the binding force of recommendation votes in favor of the will of core Party

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<sup>14</sup>Central Organization Department, 2006. “Ba kuoda minzhu de yaoqiu guanchuan yu huanjie quancheng” (“To expand democracy throughout the changeover process”), in Central Organizational Department (eds.), *Zu Gong Tong Xun* (News Dispatch of Organizational Work), Beijing, Dangjian duwu chubanshe, 184-6.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with a director of educational bureau at the prefecture level, Fujian, 26 February 2014.

leaders. The latitude enjoyed by the Party leaders is reinforced by the secret nature of voting results. In actual operation, the number of votes received by each candidate is rarely announced to the voters.<sup>16</sup> Should the vote counts be made public, the leaders will probably come under great pressure to respect the results and nominate the winner. The lack of transparency, however, means that no such pressure exists (*Xianhui*, 2012, 55-6).

Another major impediment to Party members' participation in the selection process has to do with the frequent rotation of Party leaders across localities and functional departments. The primary goal of the rotation system is to enhance monitoring over local officials and prevent the development of local factions (*Eaton and Kostka*, 2014). The rotation of cadres can take two forms: transfer via promotion and transfer between positions of equal rank. In both cases, the higher-up party committee dominates the transfer decision at the expense of bottom-up participation from the affected units.

Transfer via promotion refers to the scenario where a cadre leaves his current unit to serve a higher-ranking position in a different unit. In this case, the Party leaders one level up always have clear intent as to which individual should be promoted. Although the standard procedure of recommendation still has to be performed, it is nothing more than a formality to confirm the higher-level leaders' preference (*Xu*, 2006, 17-8). Furthermore, since the recommendation procedure is always carried out in the cadre's current unit,<sup>17</sup> the participants are essentially nominating someone who will soon have no impact on their lives, while the members of the receiving unit have no say in selecting their new boss. In the case of transferring cadres between positions of equal rank, there is no procedural requirement for democratic recommendation.<sup>18</sup>

To assess the degree to which cadre rotation weakens Party member's input in the ap-

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<sup>16</sup>Some localities claim that they have publicized the results "when the timing is proper and to a proper degree)". Central Organizational Department (eds.) 2005. *Zu Gong Tong Xun* (News Dispatch of Organizational Work), Beijing, Dangjian duwu chubanshe. p.128.

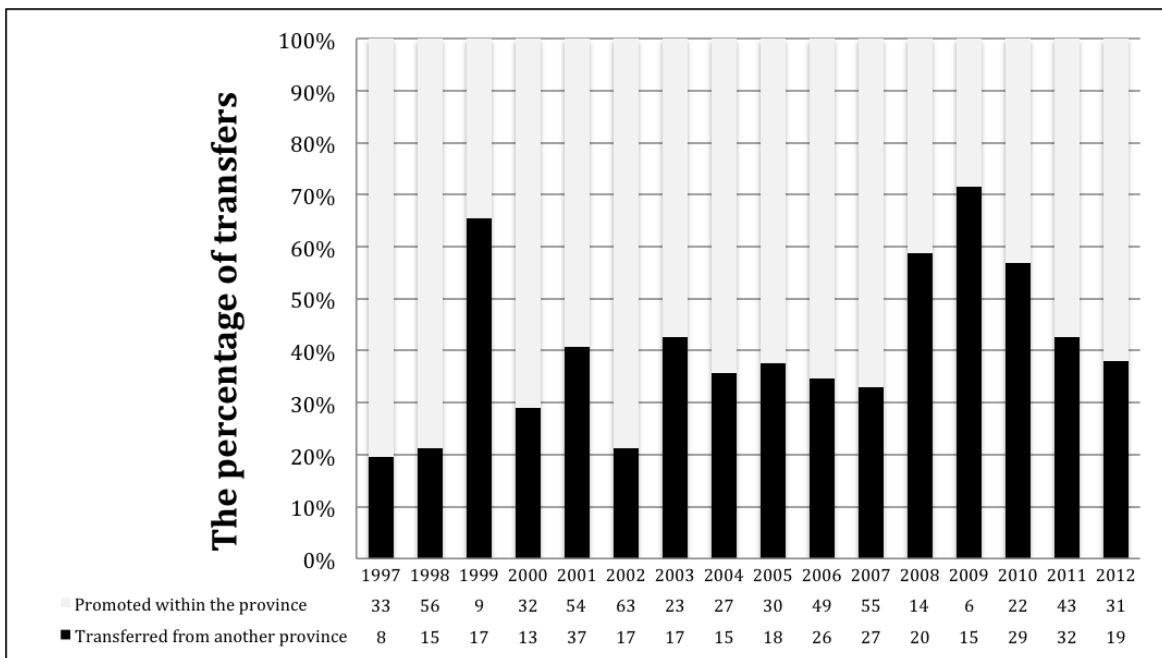
<sup>17</sup>Interview with a deputy director of OD at the county level, 18 February 2014.

<sup>18</sup>For the procedure of transferring equal-raking officials, see: The CCP's Central Committee. Provisional regulations on the transfer work of Party and state leading cadres. (1999) Article 4; Regulations on the transfer work of Party and state leading cadres. (2006) Article 19.



pointment decision, we need to measure the proportion of total appointments that are made in the form of transfer. If the vast majority of major appointments take the form of promotion within the affected unit, a process in which recommendation has more substantive meaning, the negative impact of rotation on bottom-up participation should be regarded as moderate, and vice versa. To make this assessment, I coded all the appointments to the standing committee of the Provincial Party Committee (PSC) across China between 1997 and 2012.<sup>19</sup> Figure 3.2 depicts the proportion of all appointments accounted for by cross-provincial transfers as opposed to within-province promotions, with the black columns representing the percentage of transfers. As shown in the figure, the proportion of transfers is by no means negligible. On average, about 41 percent of all appointments in a given year are accounted for by transfers arranged by higher-level Party committees. This analysis provides strong evidence that the institution of cadre rotation indeed imposes substantial limits on bottom-up participation in the selection process.

**Figure 3.2: The proportion of PSC appointments accounted for by cross-provincial transfers: 1997-2012**



<sup>19</sup>The conclusions drawn from this data set concerns the provincial level only. Whether they can be generalized to other administrative levels should be investigated in future studies.

### 3.3.4 The impact of democratic recommendation on cadre selection

The discussion above raises the question of whether democratic recommendation can play any role in wresting control from a handful of first tier leaders and redistributing power to lower-level Party members. Ideally, a researcher would like to collect a random sample of cases to examine the binding force of recommendation votes vis-à-vis the will of core Party leaders. Since the appointment process always operates behind a thick curtain of secrecy, such data is understandably difficult to obtain. Instead, I make use of interview data, the CCP's disciplinary measures, and internal policy debates to show that the process does bring some changes to the dynamics of the selection process and office-seeking behavior of lower level cadres.

One of the impacts of the voting process is to block the nomination of those highly unpopular candidates, however much the core Party leaders would want to pick them. Potential candidates who fail to pass a threshold, which varies from one third to half of the votes across localities, are usually eliminated from the process. My interviews confirm that this mandatory threshold is widely established across the country.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, the recommendation process partly accomplishes its intended purpose of preventing the appointment of very disreputable but well-connected cadres.

Another way in which the recommendation votes might make a difference is when power is relatively diffused among the core Party leaders and no individual can dictate proceedings. For instance, after two districts were merged to create Beijing's Dongcheng district in 2012, the Party secretary and head of government each represented the bureaucracy of one old district and possessed roughly equal power. They therefore found it difficult to reach compromise on key appointment decisions. Situations like this, which previously would have been resolved through behind-the-scene maneuvers and horse-trading, tend to elevate the

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<sup>20</sup>Interview with a former deputy mayor, Fujian, 8 February 2014; interview with a deputy OD director at county level; interview with a former county Party secretary, Fujian, 19 February 2014; an OD official working at the county level, Chongqing, 13 March 2014; and an OD official working at the prefecture level, Beijing, 14 December 2014.

influence of the voting process as a way acceptable to both Party leaders to settle their differences.<sup>21</sup>

Democratic recommendation has affected not only how core Party leaders wield their personnel power but also how cadres pursue promotions. One example is the widespread practice of vote solicitation among candidates as revealed by the CCP's disciplinary measures taken against such activities. The formal procedure provides almost no platform for the candidates to introduce themselves or articulate policy positions, and the Party's discipline strictly prohibits campaign activities that are not closely managed by the OD. Despite the official ban, candidates have engaged in a variety of clandestine canvassing activities such as gift-giving, inviting the recommenders to dinners and sending text messages. Judging from the Party's repeated warnings against vote solicitation and the high-profile disciplinary actions taken against the perpetrators, these activities are probably quite common. As the CCP prepares itself for the periodic changeover of leadership across the country, the Party center will typically issue a circular to remind its members that "it is necessary to resolutely investigate and punish those who engage in buying votes through bribery and in other illegal activities during the period of replacing old party committees with new ones, especially during the period of democratic recommendation and election".<sup>22</sup>

In 2010, the Party publicized twelve typical cases of violating personnel rules and disciplines.<sup>23</sup> Of these cases, three involved illicit canvassing during the process of democratic recommendation. For example, Li Weiqun, the then-secretary-general of Qiqihar Municipal Government, was dismissed for soliciting recommendation votes when the Heilongjiang Provincial OD was selecting candidates to join the reserve list of prefecture-level leaders. In

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<sup>21</sup>Interview with an OD official working at the prefecture level, Beijing, 14 December 2014.

<sup>22</sup>Central Disciplinary Commission Circular on Election of Local Party Committees. "Circular of CPC Central Committee's Central Discipline Inspection Commission and Organization Stresses It Is Necessary To Strengthen Organizational and Personnel Discipline When Local Party Committees Stand for Re-election When the Current Term Expires" – Xinhua headline. Xinhua Domestic Service (provided by World News Connection) [Beijing, China] 19 May 2006.

<sup>23</sup>Gz.ahxf.gov.cn 2010. The CCP Central Committee's Central Discipline Inspection Commission and Organization. "Firmly stop unhealthy tendencies in personnel management —Circular regarding twelve typical cases of violating personnel rules and disciplines", <http://gz.ahxf.gov.cn/Article/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=9216>. Accessed 16 July 2014.

the space of four days, Li sent over 410 text messages to more than 180 cadres. The content of these messages ranged from “I intend to fight for the reserve list of the court president. Your support will be greatly appreciated” to “Devoted to prosecutorial work for 30 years. Among them, 11 years as municipal deputy procurator-general. National senior prosecutor. Great reputation in the profession”.<sup>24</sup> Although these campaign messages contained little more than a highlight of career achievements and requests of support, they are considered severe violation of Party discipline and, once discovered,<sup>25</sup> can lead to a devastating blow for a cadre’s political career.

That the recommendation votes started to exert influence on the selection process did not escape the attention of Party officials and intellectuals, many of whom criticized the practice of “electing someone through simple voting”. The critics contended that many localities overly emphasized the importance of recommendation votes, inducing some cadres to perform their daily work with an eye towards attracting more votes. As a result, they had become “afraid to criticize people, offend people and lose votes”, while those cadres who were “conscientious and responsible in their work” and “can stick to principles” tended to be disadvantaged under the current system (*Xu*, 2008, 30). It is worth noting that the analysts are criticizing existing practices rather than expressing opposition to hypothetical scenarios, although the sensitivity of the issue does not allow them to name specific cadre or location. Indeed, concerns about the excessive importance attached to votes led the Party center to revise the statutory language regarding democratic recommendation in 2014.<sup>26</sup> Instead of being “one of the most important bases” for deciding candidates, the results of recommendation are now defined as “important references” for selecting cadres.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Zzb.bjtu.edu.cn 2009. The CCP Organization Department of Heilongjiang Province. “Circular on Li Weiqun’s vote-soliciting activities during recommendation for reserve cadres”, October 22 2009, <http://zzb.bjtu.edu.cn/xxz1/4936.htm>. Accessed July 16 2014.

<sup>25</sup>The CCP’s OD and disciplinary agency send teams of inspection to supervise the changeover of leadership across the country. These teams are responsible for spotting and reporting any irregular activity during the changeover process. Interview with a deputy director of OD at the county level.

<sup>26</sup>Interview with a former deputy OD director at the prefecture level, Fujian, 18 February 2014; interview with a professor at Central Party School, Beijing, 10 March 2014.

<sup>27</sup>The CCP’s Central Committee. Regulations on the selection and appointment of Party and government leading cadres. (2014)

To sum up, while there exists significant institutional barriers to the expansion of Party members' participation, the introduction of democratic recommendation has brought new dynamics into the personnel system. The loopholes and inconsistencies in the formal institution allow the core Party leaders to retain control over the appointment decision, but in most cases the voting process does serve as a firewall to block the nomination of highly unpopular candidates. The core leaders are also more likely to defer to the results of recommendation when they are divided among themselves. This phenomenon confirms a general pattern in oligarchic politics: when the oligarchy is divided against itself, the influence of lower level bodies tends to grow. For ambitious cadres, it has become part of their office-seeking strategy to win the approval of colleagues during daily work and to solicit votes prior to the recommendation meeting. The core Party leaders are deeply weary of the attempts by lower level cadres to engage in horizontal networking and vote solicitation. They spend considerable resources to detect such efforts and punish those who try to organize any form of collective action from below. The core leaders are extremely determined to maintain top-down control.

As hinted in the Party's injunction against bribery and "other illegal activities" amid leadership changeover, vote-seeking maneuvers are found not only at the stage of recommendation but also during the periodic intra-party elections to produce new leadership group at all levels. What are intra-party elections? How are they implemented in practice? Does the electoral process have any effect on opening the selection process to a wider group of Party members? These questions will be addressed in the next section.

### **3.4 Managed contestation in intra-party election**

Similar to democratic recommendation, election is hailed by the CCP as an important institution for promoting intra-party democracy. According to the CCP's Constitution, "(t)he Party's leading bodies at all levels are elected except for the representative organs dispatched

by them and the leading Party members' groups in non-Party organizations.”<sup>28</sup> For the most part of the CCP's history, intra-party elections were merely ritualistic proceedings designed to legitimize the personnel decisions made by higher-level Party leaders. However, with the idea of intra-party democracy gaining popularity amongst the CCP's leaders and the introduction of semi-competitive elections in the 1980s, the role of intra-party elections in the political system was no longer negligible. This section will first delineate the electoral institutions that select the Party's leadership groups. It then describes how the Party organizations use informal practices and formal rules to minimize the constraints imposed by semi-competitive elections. Despite these formal and informal obstacles, I will show that limited contestation still manages to complicate the core Party leaders' personnel authority by creating electoral uncertainties. For the convenience of discussion, I use the election of leadership groups at the provincial level —members of the CCP's provincial standing committee (PSC) —as an illustration of the dynamics of the electoral system.

### 3.4.1 Election of PSC members at provincial party congresses

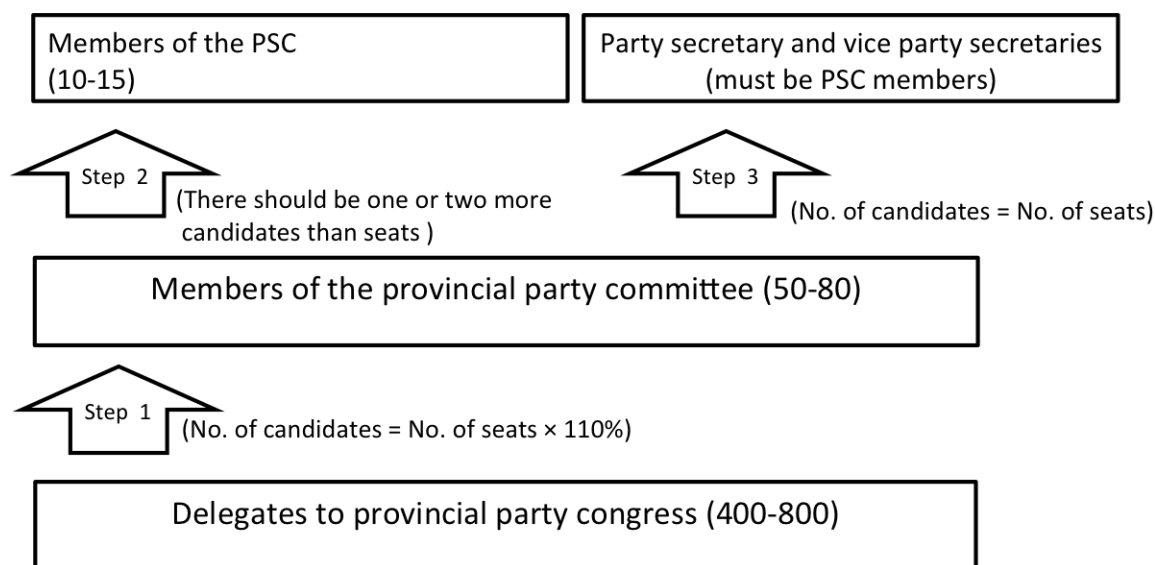
According to the Party Constitution, members of the PSC —the top provincial decision-making body composed of 10-15 members —should be elected at the provincial party congress once in five years. To be precise, the PSC is selected through a bottom-up, progressive electoral process that contains three tiers (Figure 3.3). At the lowest level, party organizations in various sub-provincial work units hold party conferences to elect their delegates to the provincial party congress. These work units represent a wide range of organized interests at the sub-provincial level recognized by the party-state. The total number of delegates may range from 400 to 800.<sup>29</sup> The second-tier election takes place at the provincial party

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<sup>28</sup>The Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party. Article 2. The CCP's Constitution was amended at every National Party Congress (NPC). The phrase “the Party's leading bodies at all levels are elected” has appeared in every version of the Constitution except for the versions passed at the 9th and 10th NPC, both held during the Cultural Revolution. In those two versions, it was stated that the Party's leading bodies at all levels should be selected through “democratic consultation and election”, which in practice became synonymous with appointment by Party leaders of the next higher level. See *Lin* (2011, 546)

<sup>29</sup>The CCP's Central Committee. Regulations governing CCP organization of local elections. (1994) Article 9.

**Figure 3.3: Semi-competitive election at provincial party congress**



congress, where the delegates elect the members of the provincial party committee. Party regulations suggest that the size of the provincial party committee should vary from 50 to 80.<sup>30</sup> At the top level, immediately after the conclusion of the provincial party congress, the newly elected provincial party committee holds a plenum to elect the PSC. It then elects the provincial party secretary and deputy party secretaries, all of whom must be chosen from the newly elected PSC members.

During Mao’s reign, intra-party electoral procedures played a negligible role in the political process. These elections were conducted with the number of candidates equal to the number of seats. The lack of electoral competition meant that the candidate nominated for a post only needed to receive majority vote to be elected, a foregone conclusion under normal circumstances. Moreover, frequent political campaigns and turmoil made it impossible to observe routine democratic procedures (*Lin, 2011*).

With the passing of Mao, the CCP moved quickly to restore Party members’ democratic rights to prevent the excessive concentration of power that characterized the Mao era. In 1980, the Party adopted a decision on “Several Principles on Political Life in the Party”

<sup>30</sup>The Central Organization Department. Provincial regulations on several specific questions regarding the Party’s local congress at various levels. (1995) Article 6.

that, among other things, called for improvement in electoral procedure during leadership selection. Most importantly, the document endorsed for the first time the idea of the *cha'e* election, or an election in which there are more candidates than seats (Niu, 1999, 32). At the 13th National Party Congress held in 1987, the Party Constitution was amended to make the *cha'e* method mandatory in intra-party elections.

The plan to introduce electoral contestation was later fleshed out in specialized Party regulations. In 1990, the Central Committee promulgated the Provisional Regulations Governing Grassroots CCP Organizing Elections, which were formalized in January 1994 as the Regulations Governing CCP Organization of Local Elections. The regulations applied the *cha'e* method to the election of local Party committees and their standing committees.<sup>31</sup> More importantly, the regulations clarified the degree of contestation in local Party elections by specifying the ratio of candidates to seats. When congressional delegates elect the local Party committee, the candidates should exceed the size of the committee by 10 percent of the number of candidates.<sup>32</sup> In the next step, when the local Party committee elects its standing committee, there should be one or two more candidates than seats (Figure 3.3).<sup>33</sup>

Admittedly, the amount of electoral competition guaranteed by formal institutions remains highly restricted. First of all, the minimum level of electoral contestation mandated by the regulations is extremely low, requiring only ten percent of the candidates for local Party committee and one to two candidates for the standing committee to lose the election. Moreover, the regulations exempt the Party secretary and deputy secretaries, the most powerful Party posts, from electoral contestation.<sup>34</sup> Apart from these restrictive measures, the regulations are extremely vague with respect to how candidates are nominated. Although all nominees are required to go through the procedure of democratic recommendation, organizational vetting and deliberation as in the case of promoting individuals to leadership posts, the loosely-worded regulations grant sufficient discretion for the core Party leaders to

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<sup>31</sup>Regulations governing CCP organization of local elections. Article 4.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.* Article 17.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.* Article 20.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.* Article 4.



control nomination one level down.

### **3.4.2 Mechanisms to minimize the constraints of electoral contestation**

Subjecting candidates to semi-competitive election not only adds a veneer of democracy to China's one-party rule but also forces Party committees at all levels to be more prudent in the selection of candidates. More careful scrutiny of the quality of candidates might help prevent the selection of highly unpopular, corrupt officials, reduce state-society tension and improve the status of the CCP as an organization (*Manion, 2008; Fewsmith, 2010*). However, the CCP wants to have the cake and eat it too: that is, it wants to enjoy all the benefits associated with electoral procedure without relinquishing the authority to firmly control the selection of leadership at lower levels. Therefore, months before the opening of the provincial party congress, the OD at the central level would work in tandem with its provincial counterparts to prepare a personnel plan to be realized at the congress. The plan slates specific individuals to be elected to the PSC; it also matches each of these individuals with a specific post traditionally held by a PSC member (provincial Party secretary, governor, head of the provincial OD, etc.) (*An, 1994*).

Once the personnel plan for the PSC is nailed down, the provincial OD will be handed the task of ensuring the electoral success of the candidates designated by the center (the designated candidates henceforth). Ever since intra-party elections were held to select Party leaders, the CCP has developed a variety of informal practices with dubious legitimacy to shape the outcome of these elections. The discussion below focuses on two such practices: the nomination of "partner candidates" and informal campaigning on behalf of the designated candidates.

One mechanism to control electoral contestation is for the Party committee to nominate sure losers to compete with the designated candidates. Known as "partner candidates", these designated losers usually lack name recognition and diverse career experience. Placing these weak candidates on the ballot is supposed to guarantee the election of the more well-known,

senior designated candidates (*Lin*, 2011, 550). In some localities, the delegates are explicitly informed of the identities of the partner candidates to avoid any confusion.<sup>35</sup> After losing the election as planned, the partner candidates can expect a reward of some other kind. “You have sacrificed yourself for the Party organization. The next time a good position becomes vacant, you will be picked.”<sup>36</sup> Some local Party committees use the low proportion of votes received by the partner candidates as an indicator of their organizational success. That the People’s Daily, the CCP’s principle mouthpiece, published an article denouncing the designation of partner candidates in local elections betrays the widespread, regularized nature of this practice.<sup>37</sup>

In case the nomination of weak rivals is not sufficient to ensure the desirable outcome, the OD also resorts to informal campaigning on behalf of the designated candidates (*Wu*, 2000). In preparation for the party congress, the organizers of the congress often conduct opinion polls among the delegates to assess the challenges faced by the designated candidates. Based on this valuable information, the organizers will make use of multiple strategies to influence the views of individual voters: at the preparatory meeting for the party congress, the provincial Party secretary will make speeches to exhort the voters to “realize the intent of the Party organization”;<sup>38</sup> the OD will also contact individual voters to change their preferences and vote for the designated candidates. In the final analysis, these informal measures are taken because the main provincial leaders face strong top-down pressure to ensure that the designated candidates get elected. Otherwise, “the party congress is a failure. The Party secretary will be regarded as lacking the ability to coordinate and lose the trust of higher-level leaders.”<sup>39</sup>

In addition to informal practices that skew the playing field, the center can overcome

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<sup>35</sup>Interview with a former deputy mayor.

<sup>36</sup>Interview with an OD official at provincial level, Chongqing, 15 March 2014.

<sup>37</sup>News.xinhuanet.com 2012. “Xuanju qiemo gao peixuan” (“Be sure not to nominate partner candidates during elections”). People’s Daily, 2 February 2012, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-02/02/c\\_122644253.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-02/02/c_122644253.htm). Assessed 16 July 2014.

<sup>38</sup>Interview with a provincial official, Fujian, 12 February 2014.

<sup>39</sup>Interview with a former deputy mayor.

the constraints of electoral institutions by making “recess appointments”. While the CCP’s Constitution stipulates that the Party’s leading bodies should all be elected, it also allows the Party center, when it “deems it necessary”, to transfer or appoint PSC members between provincial party congresses. In theory, the power of recess appointment was designed to deal with a narrow set of contingencies such as the resignation of incumbent leaders due to health issues or corruption. Intuitively, the more frequently recess appointments are made, the less meaningful the electoral process becomes. Somewhat surprisingly, none of the existing studies has examined the percentage of Party leaders who come into office through congressional election as opposed to through recess appointment. Using systematic data on the provincial level, the following analysis takes a first step to measure the relevance of Party congressional election for the turnover of leadership group.

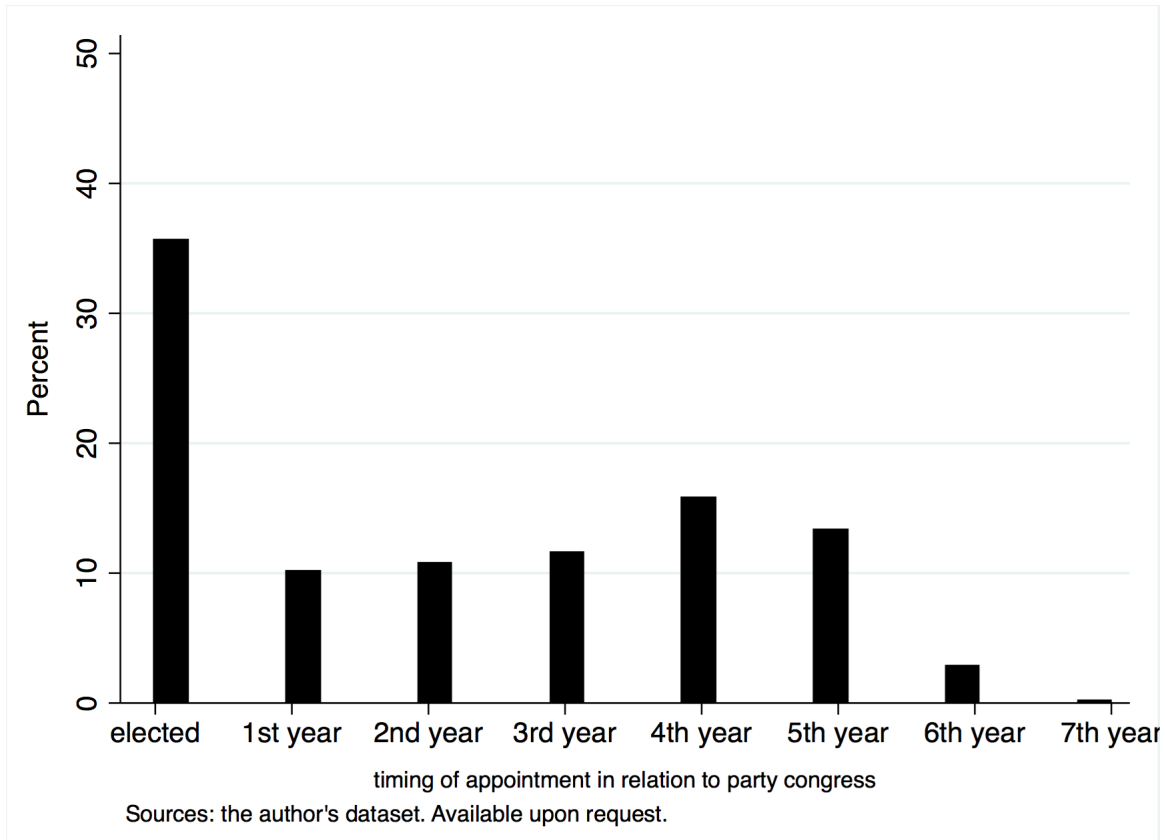
Towards this end, the author has identified 855 cases of new PSC members taking office between 1997 and 2012.<sup>40</sup> Figure 3.4 presents how these cases are distributed over the interval between two adjacent party congresses. In this graph, the tick “elected” on the X-axis indicates the cases in which PSC members took office through election; “1st year” indicates the cases in which a PSC member is appointed during the 12-month interval after the Party congress; “2nd year” indicates the 12 months after that and so forth.<sup>41</sup> As shown in the figure, only about 35 percent of new PSC assignments took the form of congressional election. Recess appointments account for the rest of the 855 cases, which were more or less evenly distributed between the recess periods. On this evidence alone, it can be concluded that recess appointment is by no means merely an emergency measure tailored for unpredictable contingencies. The large proportion of such appointments significantly erodes the substantive meaning of congressional election and the limited degree of contestation introduced.

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<sup>40</sup>This data set only includes the cases for which the month of taking office can be identified from the official CVs. Without this information, we cannot tell whether the new PSC member came into office through recess appointment or congressional election. The availability of this information seems to be random, so the results are not driven by any systematic difference between the selected and missing cases.

<sup>41</sup>Before the 2001-2002 national changeover period, some provinces did not strictly implement the Party Constitution’s provision that provincial party congress should be held once in five years. Some congresses were not held until the 6th or 7th year after the previous congress. This explains why a small portion of PSC members were appointed in the 6th or 7th year.

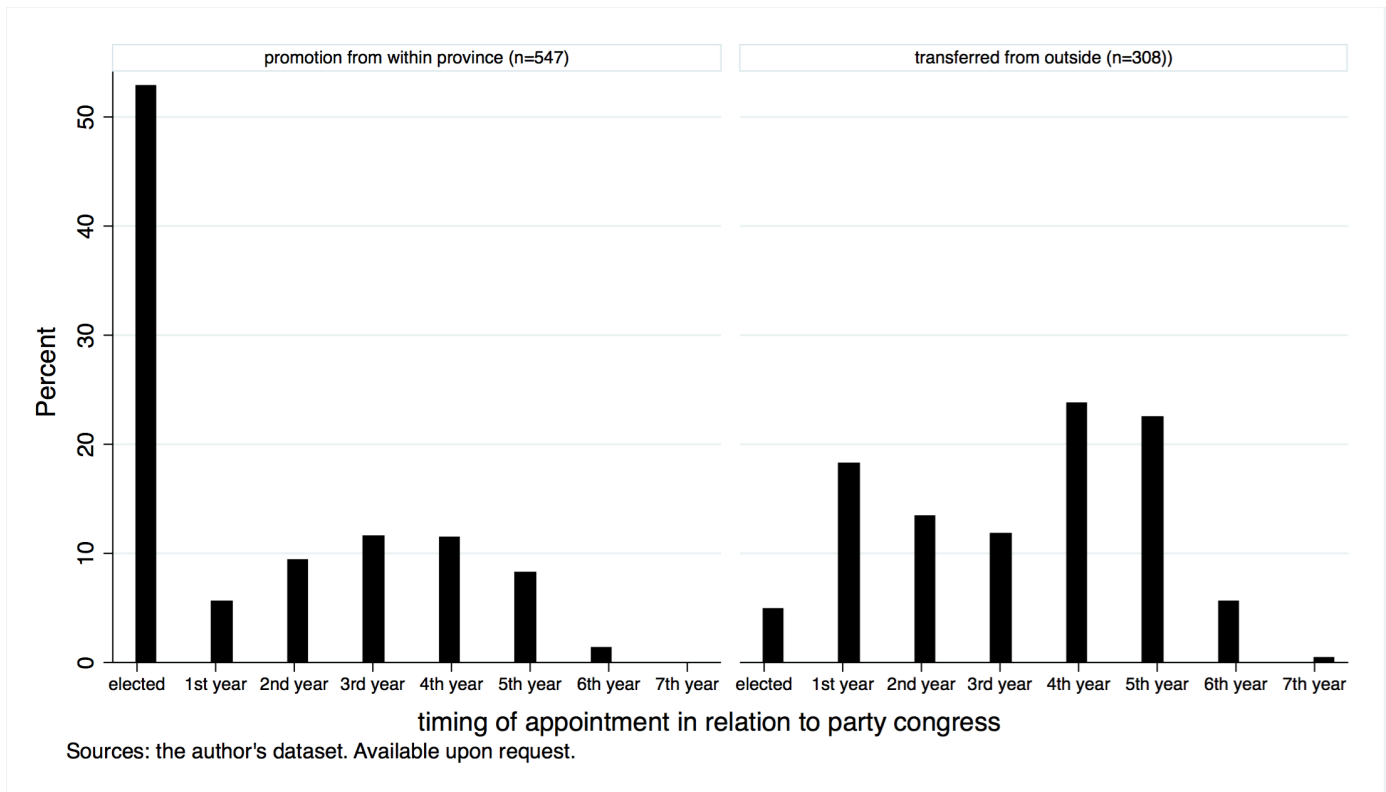
**Figure 3.4: The distribution of PSC appointments between two party congresses: 1997-2012, n=855**



Further inquiry reveals that recess appointment is mainly employed as a mechanism to facilitate cross-provincial transfer of officials. The 855 cases of PSC assignments are composed of 547 promotions from within the province and 308 transfers across provinces. As shown in Figure 3.5, over 95 percent of the 308 transfers were conducted through recess appointment, while the equivalent number is less than 50 percent for promotions within the same province. In other words, the five-year changeover cycle does have some relevance for the locally promoted cadres as the majority of them came into office at the party congress. For the transferred cadres, however, the election cycle is largely meaningless.

One of the reasons most transfers were completed through recess appointment is to better prepare the rotated cadres for the next congressional election. Because these cadres are outsiders without support base in the province, fielding them in the semi-competitive

**Figure 3.5: Comparing the timing of recess appointments vs. promotion within province : 1997-2012, n=855**



election carries significant risks. Lack of familiarity and the sentiment of localism may very well lead the delegates to vote against the outsiders. “In local elections,” according to Li Cheng, “people are highly likely to choose a native candidate to be their local leader if the other candidates’ qualifications are roughly equal” (*Li*, 2004, 52). Recess appointment not only bypasses the electoral procedure but also gives the outsiders time to build a local constituency for the upcoming election. During the period leading up to the next party congress, the outsider will be given opportunities to build a reputation of competence as well as a network of local support. The outsider’s status as a PSC incumbent with some working experiences in the province makes it easier for the organizers to conduct informal campaigning for him and secure his election. Interviews with local OD officials confirmed the importance of transferring officials well before the congress to hold the most critical positions in the Party committee:

More than a year before (the changeover), we will reshuffle the Party secretary, head of government, head of OD and head of Disciplinary Commission. These people will not be replaced at the changeover election. This is because they have to be transferred into positions first and take stock of the surroundings. They have to get the situation under control, otherwise problems will occur at the changeover ... Those positions that go through turnovers at changeover election are not what we consider core positions, because there are many uncertainties at the changeover.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, much like what happens with democratic recommendation, bottom-up participation in the congressional election is tightly managed and impeded by informal measures as well as the formal power of recess appointment. In spite of these impediments, the very existence of semi-competitive elections creates an element of uncertainty that complicates the core Party leaders' personnel authority. In the absence of systematic election data, the following analysis studies a few cases to probe the patterns of electoral uncertainties.

### 3.4.3 Electoral uncertainties at provincial party congresses

Since the adoption of the cha'e method in the 1980s, "democratic accident", a sarcastic term used by political insiders to describe the electoral defeats of designated candidates, has occurred from time to time. Due to the extreme sensitivity of election results, the Chinese authorities do not publicize systematic data about the candidates and the votes they received.<sup>43</sup> Fortunately, sources such as the Chinese press, western publications and Internet blogs revealed a number of cases in which designated candidates for the PSC suffered unexpected electoral defeats. These cases offer a tantalizing glimpse of how the center's personnel plans may be thwarted by the electoral processes that the Party itself has created.

For example, one of the earliest and most high profile victims of cha'e elections was Chen Yuan, son of Chen Yun who served as one of China's most influential leaders during the 1980s (*He and Gao*, 1996, 179-89). Chen Yuan's prominent family background led to

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<sup>42</sup>Interview with OD official at the provincial level.

<sup>43</sup>Even if such data were available, an outsider lacking knowledge of the list of designated candidates would still be unable to ascertain whether the electoral results have deviated from the center's plan.

his speedy ascent to high-level positions in the Municipality of Beijing. Before Beijing's 6th Party Congress to be held in 1987, the central OD had slated Chen to be the deputy Party secretary of Beijing. To get this job, Chen first needed to be elected a member of the Beijing's Party committee. At the Congress, 750 delegates were given the task of choosing by secret ballot 50 people to serve on Beijing's Party committee from a list of 55 candidates. Unexpectedly, Chen was among the five people who lost. The electoral loss dealt a heavy blow to Chen's political ambition. The rest of Chen's career was mainly spent in the state-owned banking sector.

Table 3.1 provides a summary of the eight cases identified from various sources in which designated candidates suffered electoral defeats. It must be stressed that these cases were selected based on the availability of information instead of a rigorous sampling procedure. With this caveat in mind, three important facts can still be learned from the table. First, the phenomenon of intra-party elections thwarting "the intent of the organization" seems to have persisted since the introduction of the cha'e election in 1987: two of these cases occurred in the 1980s, another two in the 1990s and four in the 2000s. Thus, although the Party has adopted a variety of measures to avoid unexpected electoral results, they cannot make the election of designated candidates a sure bet.

Second, candidates for the PSC faced two electoral roadblocks: three cases saw the candidates failing to get elected as members of the provincial party committee, and in the remaining five cases they lost in the PSC election. Third, five out of the eight lost candidates were rotated officials who had worked for an average of four years in the province when the election took place. This is consistent with the observation that "democratic accidents" were typically an expression of local cadres' distrust of outsiders. The electoral loss of a designated candidate, especially someone transferred from another province, represents a serious disruption of the center's overall personnel plan and requires significant workload for the OD to cope with the aftermath.<sup>44</sup> Because the CCP treats personnel affairs across the

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<sup>44</sup>In October 2001, for example, Li Jinzao was unexpectedly elected to the PSC of Guangxi province at the expense of an incumbent PSC member, Wang Hanmin. The provincial OD was utterly unprepared for the

**Table 3.1: Electoral defeats of designated PSC candidates**

Centrally designated candidate	Timing of election	provincial party congress	election lost	Slated post	candidate's career background	The candidate elected instead
Chen Yuan	December 1987	Beijing's 6th Party congress	provincial party committee	deputy party secretary	outsider	unknown
Song Ruixiang	May 1988	Qinghai's 7th Party congress	provincial party committee	governor	outsider	unknown
Liu Hongren	Nov 1993	Shandong's 6th Party congress	PSC	unknown	localist	Han Yuqun
Hou Wujie	1995	Shanxi's PSC special election	PSC	head of propaganda department	localist	unknown
Wang Hanmin	Oct 2001	Guangxi's 8th Party congress	PSC	unknown	outsider	Li Jinzao
Jiang Xiaoyu	May 2002	Beijing's 9th Party congress	PSC	head of propaganda department	localist	Sun Zhengcai
Bao Kexin	April 2007	Guizhou's 10th Party congress	provincial party committee	deputy governor	outsider	Shen Yiqin
Bayinchaolu	May 2012	Jilin's 10th Party congress	PSC	deputy party secretary	outsider	Zhuang Yan

Sources: *He and Gao* (1996) and various web blogs. Admittedly, the authenticity of information provided by Internet blogs is more questionable than in the case of print media. This concern can be somewhat eased by the fact that I only collect information from the largest blog space providers in China such as sina.com and 163.com. Whenever possible, I corroborate this information with the published CVs of the officials involved as well as official press coverage of the party congresses.

country as “a single chessboard” in which one wrong move will endanger the entire game, unexpected results must be avoided at all costs. As a local OD official explained:

These rotated officials constitute a giant chessboard in our city. The same thing is true on the national level. For example, if there are 1000 (rotated) officials, we must make sure that they get elected so that 1000 positions are filled. If one loses the election and another person that comes  
 election of Li, who was at that point serving as the number two leader (the mayor) of Guilin City. The CCP's organizational procedures have it that only the number one leader (the Party secretary) of an important city may enter the PSC. To resolve the personnel chaos in the wake of Li's election, the Party secretary of Guilin City had to be transferred to lead the provincial department of united front, vacating his post for Li to fill in.



from nowhere gets elected, then we have one redundant person. If all the posts in the leadership groups are already occupied, then there is nothing we can do, and the entire chess game is disrupted ... so we have to ensure that rotated officials get elected. This is one of the things that we have to guarantee when we supervise the changeover.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined two critical components of the CCP's ongoing reform within its personnel management system. Ostensibly, both democratic recommendation and semi-competitive election were inaugurated to enhance Party members' stake and participation in the political process. On a more practical level, these measures were taken to address mounting corruption scandals and social tension caused by the core Party leaders' monopoly over personnel matters. This study has identified several key factors in the implementation stage that impede meaningful participation by the Party's rank and file. In the case of recommendation, the ambiguous status assigned to recommendation votes, coupled with their secret nature, allowed the will of core Party leaders to supersede the voting results. For Party congressional elections, competitiveness was dampened by informal practices that skewed the playing field in favor of candidates designated by higher-level Party leaders. In both cases, the substantive meaning of participatory institutions was compromised by frequent rotation of officials across administrative boundaries.

In the mean time, IPD procedures have had some tangible effects on the way core Party leaders wield their personnel power and lower tier cadres fight for office. For the core Party leaders, the exercise of their nomenklatura authority is placed under more institutional constraints. To get their preferred candidates appointed, the Party leaders have to micro-manage every step of a prolonged selection process and coordinate the decisions of numerous political actors. In trying to control the personnel outcome, they may have to bend recommendation results and conduct electoral fraud, actions that border on violation of Party discipline and

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<sup>45</sup>Interview with an OD official at the provincial level.

are vulnerable to punitive measures in the future. Sensing new possibilities created by participatory institutions, ambitious office-seekers have begun to engage in horizontal networking to solicit support from colleagues. These nascent forms of collective action, however, are swiftly crushed before they could develop into mature institutions that will hold the core Party leaders accountable to lower tier cadres.

Despite the potential benefits of improving regime legitimacy and gathering information about candidates, intra-party democracy can only operate within the straitjacket of the Party's hierarchical control. Thus, when the CCP leadership observed that recommendation votes had become sufficiently important to "hijack" the selection process in certain localities, it released a new personnel regulation in 2014 to downplay the salience of votes and stress the principle that "the Party controls the cadres". Such regressive moves speak volumes about the central leaders' determination to reject any form of reciprocal accountability found in other communist regimes such as former Soviet Union and Vietnam. Even in its heyday, intra-party democracy is unlikely to diminish the supremacy of first tier leaders, as embodied by the personnel power of Party standing committee members at various administrative levels.

## CHAPTER IV

# Central agenda-setting and anticorruption enforcement in the provinces

### Abstract

In authoritarian regimes, anticorruption measures are fundamentally mechanisms of controlling agents at various levels. To do this, the principal can either rely on routine bureaucratic management or resort to *ad hoc*, intense mobilization to discipline its agents. In this chapter, I explore which mode of top-down control exerts greater influence on the pattern of anticorruption enforcement in China. Based on provincial enforcement data from 1998-2008, I find that the the vigor of enforcement in the provinces responds strongly to national policy priorities, suggesting a highly centralized disciplinary system. Moreover, provinces of greater economic importance are under more central pressure to conform. By contrast, institutionalized rotation of provincial officials has no significant impact on enforcement outcomes. These findings suggest that periodic campaign mobilization remains an important instrument for the central leaders to address principal-agent problems, while provincial officials are mostly passive followers of the centrally set agenda.

## 4.1 Introduction

This and the next chapter turn to the punitive side of the cadre management system, exploring the dynamics of China’s anticorruption enforcement. Almost all modern governments take a public stand against political corruption. In addition to diverting scarce resources, impeding economic development and crippling the provision of basic public goods, corruption also erodes the legitimacy of the political system (*Seligson*, 2002). The sinister nature of corruption is amplified in non-democratic countries, where corruption can become a rallying point for the public to protest against the regime and demand political reform. It is therefore common for authoritarian rulers to portray themselves as enemies of corrupt officials. After taking power through military coup, for example, the generals habitually cited corruption as a justification and conducted “house cleaning” exercises. Even Suharto, whose 31-year reign in Indonesia was considered highly corrupt, enacted cosmetic reforms to tackle corruption (*Quah*, 1999, 486).

Corruption control is, at its core, a problem of collective action and principal-agent interaction. Autocrats can tolerate a certain degree of corruption as a way to reward loyal agents, but will be keen to prevent it from reaching a proportion that ignites popular rebellion. Punitive measures against graft and embezzlement play a role in keeping corruption within tolerable boundaries; importantly, they also provide a legitimate channel to remove agents who are building power bases to challenge the autocrats. The imperative to monitor and control state agents holds the key to understanding anticorruption efforts in authoritarian regimes.

In democratic societies, institutions that impose legal constraints on political power and promote government accountability are essential for monitoring state agents and building clean government (*Rose-Ackerman*, 1999; *Yusuf*, 2011; *Ackerman*, 2013). For authoritarian rulers bent on maintaining absolute power, however, establishing checks and balances will be a hard pill to swallow, as will be the attempt to foster a vibrant civil society. In contrast to external supervision, autocrats are more receptive to measures that enhance top-down

oversight and control within the government apparatus. Internal government control can take one of two forms. First, authoritarian rulers can design rational bureaucratic structure and binding rules to minimize corruption and clientelism. Contract design and selection mechanisms can shape the incentive structure of state agents (*Kiewiet, 1991*), restraining them from engaging in rampant corruption that threatens the long-term survival of the regime. This mode of corruption control mainly relies on routine bureaucratic procedures and monitoring. By contrast, regimes can also employ *ad hoc*, campaign-style enforcement (*Wedeman, 2005*) that periodically mobilizes resources to detect and penalize corrupt officials. These mobilizations are initiated unpredictably, usher in a period of rapid action and harsh punishment, and gradually fizzle out.

Under authoritarian regimes, which mode of top-down control is likely to dominate the dynamics of anticorruption efforts? Does the design of bureaucratic management have systematic impacts on anticorruption enforcement? Or do authoritarian leaders primarily count on cyclic mobilizations to discipline its agents and contain corruption? This chapter addresses this question in the context of China's prolonged fight against corruption. Since China embarked on market reform in the late 1970s, the problem of corruption has escalated notably and become increasingly salient in the country's political discourse (*Gong, 1997; He, 2000; Wedeman, 2004*). The conceptual distinction between routine bureaucratic management and *ad hoc* mobilization is useful for understanding the various anticorruption strategies pursued by the ruling Communist Party in China (CCP). On the one hand, bureaucratic procedures in the form of appointment, reporting, and auditing are performed to overcome information asymmetry and monitor lower-level cadres (*Huang, 1995, 2002*). On the other hand, the central Party leaders make speeches and issue directives to dictate the pace of national anticorruption activities, often oscillating between hyper enforcement and relative calm (*Manion, 2004; Wedeman, 2005*).

The CCP employs a wide range of bureaucratic procedures to manage its large cadre corps. Among them, the cadre rotation system stands out as a widely used approach to

monitor and control bureaucrats. Under this system, provincial officials in China are frequently reshuffled to serve in new jurisdictions. One of the professed benefits of rotation is to separate the officials from established network of local elites, giving them fewer rent-seeking opportunities and a freer hand to combat corruption. However, using different measures of anticorruption enforcement, my empirical analysis reveals little evidence that cadre rotation plays any part in strengthening anticorruption efforts. Rather, I find that the intensity of enforcement at the provincial level respond strongly to varying central emphasis on anticorruption, suggesting a centralized disciplinary system. The empirical results imply that the periodic campaign approach dominates China's law enforcement patterns, while the regime's routine monitoring devices are largely ineffectual.

Reform-era China has often been described as “decentralized authoritarianism”, denoting the coexistence of substantial local autonomy in economic affairs and the center's tight grip on political matters (*Oi*, 1992; *Montinola et al.*, 1995; *Landry*, 2008; *Sheng*, 2010). While the Party center's unchallenged authority to appoint and transfer officials is often seen as the foundation of the CCP's political survival, less is known about the degree of centralization in the realm of anticorruption activities. By documenting the lack of local autonomy in enforcing anti-graft rules, this chapter shows that the dominance of the first tier oligarchs over provincial leaders, who constitute a significant portion of the Central Committee, spans the rewarding and punitive side of the cadre management system. As noted in the introductory chapter, the absence of reciprocal accountability in the disciplinary system was designed to stabilize oligarchic rule by the Politburo, which controls the central government. Centralization both grants the oligarchs enormous discretion to adapt anticorruption efforts to changing environments and prevents demagogic outreach to a weakened second tier group.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. The next section explores the determinants of subnational anticorruption efforts from the perspective of both routine personnel management and periodic mobilization. This is followed by an introduction of China's main anticorruption agencies, the knowledge of which allows us to use different indicators to mea-

sure the strength of enforcement. The empirical section then draws upon an original dataset to explore the effects of cadre rotation and shifting central priorities on anticorruption enforcement. The final section discusses the findings and concludes the chapter.

## **4.2 Cadre rotation, central agenda-setting, and bureaucratic control**

The CCP's top leaders acknowledge that rampant corruption, with its negative effects on economic growth, upward social mobility, and the ruling Party's internal cohesion, poses an alarming threat to the regime's legitimacy. Therefore, simultaneous with the launching of market-oriented reform in the late 1970s, China has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to combat corruption. For example, extensive administrative reforms were implemented to reduce the government's regulatory authorities and limit the officials' rent-seeking opportunities. Moral education that uses study sessions and meetings to indoctrinate Party officials with communist beliefs also constitutes a mainstay of the CCP's anticorruption efforts (*He*, 2000).

However, the Chinese leaders understand, quite correctly, that the root causes of corruption lie in the inability of the Party organization to effectively oversee its agents at various levels. For one thing, Maoist-era mass campaigns that mobilize ordinary citizens to denunciate and police Party officials were repudiated in the reform period for their disruptive effects on social stability (*Manion*, 2004, 160). In the mean time, the media and civic groups are still under tight government control and only play a timid role in holding the officials accountable (*Gallagher*, 2004). The problem of monitoring is also exacerbated by the multilayered structure of the Chinese state that governs a territory of vast size. Geographical distances and the need to communicate through a multileveled hierarchy magnify information asymmetry between central and local governments (*Wedeman*, 2001).

The CCP's strategies to control its far-reaching bureaucracy can be classified into two

broad categories. On the one hand, the Party can implement structural reforms to overcome information asymmetry and align the state agents' incentives with the political system. I use cadre rotation as an example to illustrate the potential effects of personnel management. On the other hand, the Party can launch periodic anticorruption initiatives to assert central control and deter activities harmful to the principal's interests. The rest of this section discuss each mechanism of agency control in greater detail.

### 4.2.1 Cadre rotation

Post rotation as a method of bureaucratic control is a centuries-old practice developed by China's imperial dynasties to manage a sophisticated civil service. To prevent the development of undue attachment or associates, civil servants were prohibited from serving in their home province and were rotated frequently, with the usual term of office being three years (*Sterba, 1978, 72*). Since the founding of the CCP regime, the Party has continued to use its monopoly of personnel assignment to rotate officials across localities as well as between the central and local governments. Detailed regulations have been promulgated to guide the transfer of Party officials. For example, Party leaders with substantial responsibilities cannot hold the same position for more than ten years, and rotation should focus on certain key functional areas such as personnel and law enforcement.<sup>1</sup> In theory, there are several reasons to expect cadre rotation to enhance top-down oversight and anticorruption enforcement.

First, compared to cadres whose careers have been confined to the same locality, rotated officials generally enjoy higher upward mobility. In recent years, the CCP has increasingly emphasized leadership experiences in multiple provinces as a prerequisite for assuming top national posts (*Li, 2008*). Thus, the transfer to a different jurisdiction can be interpreted as a signal of forthcoming promotion, inducing the rotated officials to execute the superior's policies more zealously.

Second, rotation reduces officials' attachment to existing local networks that are prone

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<sup>1</sup>The General Office of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. 2006. *Regulations on the Transfer Work of Party and State Leading Cadres*.

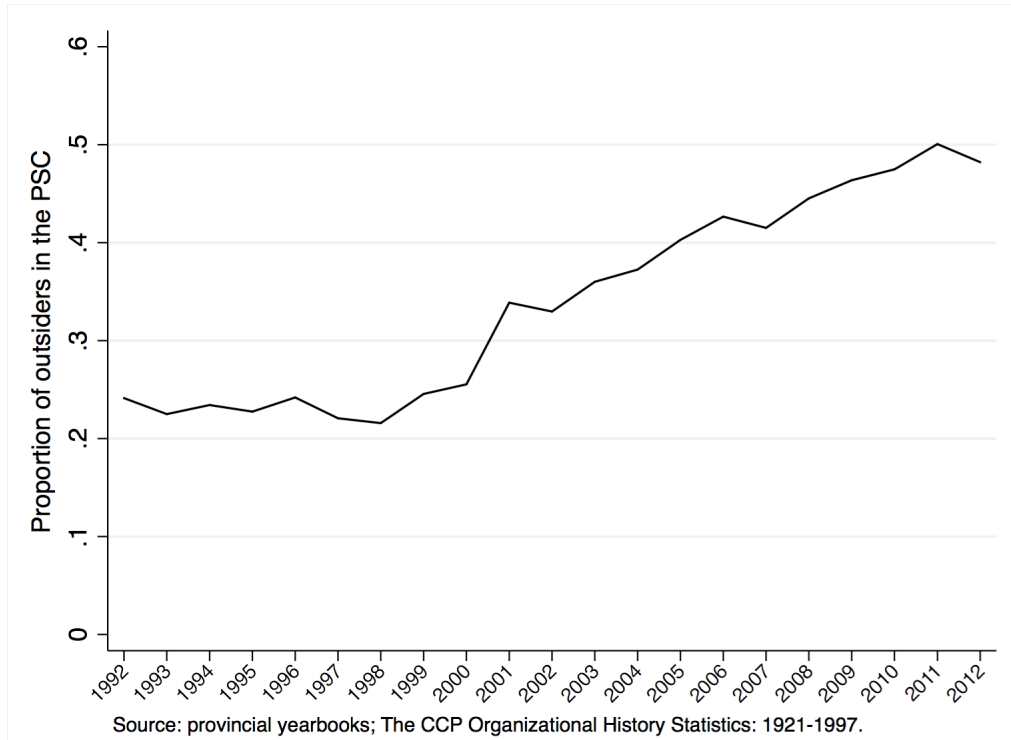


to organized, syndicated corruption. During the reform period, corruption in the Chinese bureaucracy has increasingly acquired a collective nature (*Gong*, 2002; *Guo*, 2008). Collaboration in massive corrupt activities generates more illicit gains and involves participants in different fields to smooth the way and cover up the operation. To the extent that officials are themselves immersed in corruption network, they are incapable of tackling corruption seriously. Because rotated officials are assigned to serve a short spell in an unfamiliar locality, they are more likely to be detached from existing networks and take harsh measures against organized corruption.

Lastly, a related benefit of rotation is to improve information flow to the center. Compared to those who have served long periods in a locality, rotated officials have less incentive to cover up ongoing corruption since they will not be held accountable for such corrupt activities. In a study of the management of the American forest service, Kaufman found that no matter how successfully a ranger can conceal his malpractices from his superiors, he cannot hide them from his successor. Indeed, to avoid becoming complicit in pre-existing deficiencies, the successors have strong incentives to bring the wrongdoings to the superiors' attention (*Kaufman*, 1967, 155-6).

Before I proceed with the analysis, it is informative to get a sense of the scale of provincial official rotation. The discussion of this chapter focuses on the transfer of outsiders to serve in the provincial CCP standing committees (PSC) —the highest provincial decision-making body. This is because cross-provincial transfer is primarily applied to leaders at the PSC level, as cadres at lower levels are predominantly natives with no outside experience. Composed of 10-15 members, the PSC incorporates the incumbents of the most powerful provincial posts such as the Party secretary, the governor and the heads of key functional departments. To illustrate the extent of cross-provincial rotation, I define “outside” as an official who, at the time of becoming a PSC member in a given province, has spent a longer period of his career outside of the province than within the province. Anyone who does not meet this criterion is coded as a localist. Data on the PSC members of China's 31

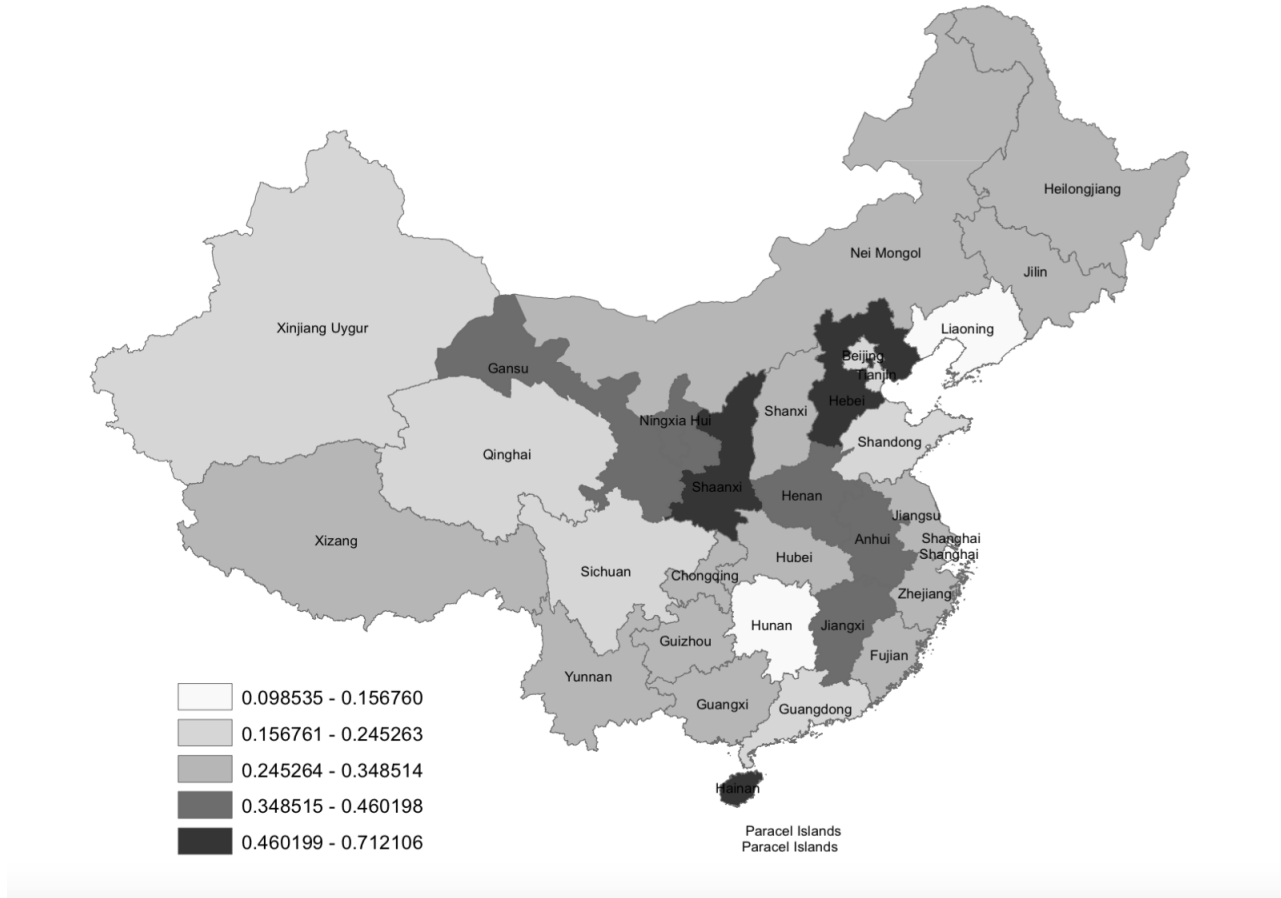
Figure 4.1: Average proportion of outsiders in the PSC 1992-2012



provincial-level units from 1992-2012 are collected and coded, with Figure 4.1 showing how the average proportion of outsiders in the PSCs have evolved during this period. Clearly, the proportion of outsiders started a secular trend of increase after 2000 until it reached a height of 50 percent in 2011. This upward trend presents strong evidence that the center has strengthened its control over the make-up of provincial leadership.

To see the cross-provincial variation in the proportion of outsiders over the studied period, we turn to Figure 4.2. In this map, colors with different depth are assigned to the provinces based on the average proportion of outsiders in the PSCs between 1998 and 2008. As the map shows, the practice of rotation has been exercised quite unevenly across the provinces. At one end of the spectrum, provinces such as Hainan have been dominated by outsiders who claim an average of 71 percent of the PSC seats. At the other, Shanghai and Liaoning have seen the average proportion of outsiders stay at around 10 percent over this period. The temporal and cross-sectional variation in the intensity of rotation allows us to examine the

**Figure 4.2: Regional variation in the proportion of outsiders in the PSC 1998-2008**



effects of this policy on anticorruption. If rotation can indeed enhance the center’s ability to supervise provincial officials, those provinces governed by a greater proportion of centrally assigned outsiders should exhibit stronger enforcement against corruption.

*Hypothesis 1:* Increase in the proportion of outsiders in the PSC will lead to *more* vigorous anticorruption efforts.

Whether this hypothesis is plausible depends on several factors. One possible complication is that the proceeds from corruption might outweigh the payoff of promotion. Also relevant is the amount of time it takes for an outsider to be absorbed into the local network and become indistinguishable from the native cadres. If the outsiders are rapidly “localized”,

the center is simply unable to rotate them frequently enough to preserve their detachment. Most importantly, the hypothesis assumes that provincial leaders enjoy considerable autonomy in determining the intensity of anticorruption efforts. As we will see below, making this assumption may be problematic because the central government plays a key role in setting the pace of anticorruption activities.

#### **4.2.2 Central agenda-setting and anticorruption campaigns**

For most of the CCP's history, there has been an intra-party cleavage over the appropriate means to overcome organizational problems such as corruption. One school of thought advocates institutional reform to build a rationalized bureaucracy, involving the design of proper incentives and the establishment of binding rules. Regularized cadre rotation, division of labor, inspection and monitoring agencies are but a few examples of structural reform (*Harding*, 1981, 9). Meanwhile, there is an intellectual current that rejects the bureaucratic mode of management and instead emphasizes leadership initiative, mobilization, and improvisation. Proponents of the mobilization ethos regard "policy-making as a process of ceaseless change, tension management, continual experimentation, and ad-hoc adjustment" (*Heilmann and Perry*, 2011, 4). This technique of governance calls for enormous leadership discretion to cope with changing environment and contrasts sharply with the bureaucratic and legalistic approach.

In the realm of anticorruption, the logic of mobilization is manifested in the periodic launching of campaigns to temporarily strengthen enforcement. Every so often, central Party leaders make speeches and circulate directives to underscore the severity of official corruption and demand increased anticorruption enforcement. The issue of corruption gains salience in state-controlled media, reporting centers and hotlines are set up to facilitate public denunciation, and local leaders are urged to investigate more cases of corruption. After a period of hyper enforcement, however, the central leaders would call an end to the campaign, adopting a more modest tone in their speeches to imply a shift in priority. At the end of the

1995 campaign, for example, the CCP general secretary Jiang Zemin announced that “we are gradually finding a way, centered on the task of economic construction, to integrate the anticorruption struggle with reform, development, and stability”(Manion, 2004, 162).

Once the center announces the initiative, local responses are often swift. For example, after Beijing launched a new campaign in August 1993, the anticorruption agency in Jiangsu province reported that “disciplinary and inspection organs at all levels further strengthened leadership over case investigation; allocation of personnel, responsibilities, and fundings were all guaranteed”.<sup>2</sup> In Jilin province, enforcement gained momentum immediately after August: “(In 1993) disciplinary and inspection organs received 48,921 reports, and 26,264 reports (53.7%) were received between September and December. 5340 cases were filed, and 2035 (38.1%) were filed during the same period”.<sup>3</sup>

If the CCP’s anticorruption system is highly centralized and carefully coordinated, the observable implication is that enforcement level should ebb and flow *in tandem* across the provinces in response to shifting central signals. In other words, when the Party center conveys demands for heightened enforcement, anticorruption efforts will go up throughout the country. Conversely, when the center signals a shift of priority to other matters, anticorruption in all provinces will wane together. This leads to the second hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* Levels of anticorruption enforcement in the provinces are *positively correlated* with the degree of central emphasis on anticorruption work.

It should be noted that the bureaucratic mode management and cyclic mobilization need not be mutually exclusive. It is possible that the two mechanisms of agency control can both be effective and supplement each other. The centralized nature of the anticorruption system, however, suggests that mobilization is likely to dominate the pattern of enforcement and deprive provincial agencies of operational autonomy, thereby undermining the effectiveness of cadre rotation. Before these claims can be adjudicated by data analysis, we need to discuss how to measure anticorruption enforcement. The next section outlines the main features of

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<sup>2</sup>Jiangsu provincial yearbook 1994. p.48.

<sup>3</sup>Jilin provincial yearbook 1994. p.84.

China's anticorruption agencies and explains how different indicators can be used to capture the degree of enforcement.

### 4.3 Measuring anticorruption

Hidden from public view and politically sensitive, corruption and its related social phenomena are notoriously difficult to measure. For a long time, "corruption was something to live with, something to gossip about, and something to complain with, but not something to reflect upon" (*Krastev, 2004, 23*). Like corruption itself, anticorruption enforcement has multiple dimensions, each of which presents unique challenges for observation and measurement. In this study, I use two indicators to measure anticorruption at the provincial level:

- The number of senior officials disciplined by the Party (DIC cases).
- The number of senior officials investigated by the government procuratorate (procuratorate cases).

Below I provide a sketch of the two main anticorruption agencies operating within China's one-party system. Their different missions and area of focus enables researchers to capture important aspects of the regime's enforcement efforts.

#### 4.3.1 China's dual-track anti-corruption system

An important feature of China's anticorruption regime is the coexistence of a specialized agency in the Party apparatus and its counterpart in the state's judicial system. This organizational structure was created to ensure that the Party has the final say over important policies and can supervise their implementation by state apparatus. Thus, on the Party side, a Disciplinary Inspection Committee (DIC) is placed within every Party branch to enforce Party disciplines. On the government side, a procuratorate is located in every territorial unit at or above the county level. Both agencies were first established after the founding

of the People's Republic in 1949, but their operations were disrupted during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. After a decade of political turmoil, the Party's DIC and government procuratorate were soon reinstated to enforce anticorruption rules as the regime embarked on market-oriented reforms (*He*, 2000, 266). In terms of organizational location, both agencies have a national office sitting at the top of a hierarchy that extends down to lower levels of government.<sup>4</sup>

As a special-purpose agency within the Party apparatus, the DIC enforces the Party's regulations by accepting public accusations, conducting investigations and imposing penalties on disciplinary violations. The CCP's disciplinary requirements cover a wide range of political and economic offenses, not all of which involve corruption as conventionally defined (*Wedeman*, 2012, 147). For example, CCP members are prohibited from forming factions within the Party, refusing to promote "reform and opening" policies, resisting personnel decisions on appointments or transfers, and so forth. These transgressions are apparently more related to organizational indiscipline than abuse of power for private gain. However, the reform period has seen the DIC adapting its mission to focus on rampant corruption among Party members. Internal Party rules regarding disciplinary inspection devote most attention to various forms of economic misconducts such as embezzlement of public assets and bribery, and the majority of cases investigated by the DIC now involve economic violations instead of ideological or moral lapses (*Manion*, 2004, 126-7). Since the early 2000s, the DIC has been firmly established as the chief coordinator of the Party's various anticorruption efforts (*Gong*, 2008, 147).

The procuratorate, on the other hand, is assigned the responsibility of fighting corruption according to China's Criminal Law. By the Constitution, the procuracy is an independent arm of government with equal authority to the executive branch. It supervises criminal investigation, approves arrests and prosecutes criminal cases. Most importantly, it also

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<sup>4</sup>Under the Supreme People's Procuratorate at the central level, there are procuratorates at the provincial, municipal, and county level. The DICs are more pervasive, as they are also located "at grassroots level, in rural villages, urban neighborhoods, and within workplaces" (*Manion*, 2004, 132).

has exclusive authority to investigate and prosecute “duty crime” (*zhiwu fanzui*), an umbrella term that covers a full array of specific crimes involving officials. According to the 1997 Criminal Law, duty crimes include three broad categories: embezzlement and bribery, malfeasance, and civil rights violations (*Wedeman*, 2004, 910-4). While the legal definition of duty crimes may not be totally coterminous with conventional conception of corruption, it is a reasonable approximation of the latter. With some possible exceptions such as leaking state secrets and violating religious freedoms, the majority of duty crimes are consistent with common understanding of official corruption.

Differences in institutional and legal status determine that the DIC and the procuratorate apply different methods of punishment for corrupt activities. In general, in-house disciplinary actions meted out by the DIC are significantly milder than criminal punishments in the judicial system. Disciplinary actions, in order of increasing severity, consist of warning, serious warning, dismissal from party positions, probation within the party, and expulsion from the party.<sup>5</sup> By comparison, the criminal system imposes much harsher punishments such as fixed-term imprisonment, life imprisonment, death penalty with suspension of execution, and death penalty (*Manion*, 2004, 128). The two systems of punishment are linked in that the standards for expulsion from Party parallel the threshold for criminal punishment (130). In the case of bribery, for example, Party regulations require expulsion for offenses involving more than 5,000 yuan, which is the threshold for legal punishment. In fact, the DIC is required to forward the case files to the procuratorate in a timely manner if its investigations reveal evidence of criminal offenses.<sup>6</sup>

If relevant laws and regulations are enforced independently and faithfully, the nature of punishment imposed should reflect the severity of misconduct: minor wrongdoings are only met with disciplinary measures whereas severe corrupt activities are subject to criminal

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<sup>5</sup>Each disciplinary decision may be followed by additional restrictions on the political rights of the recipient. For example, Party members that received warning or serious warning are prohibited from a promotion within a year; members who are expelled from the Party cannot be admitted again within five years. *Chinese Communist Party's Regulations on Disciplinary punishment* (2004), article 12; 15.

<sup>6</sup>*Chinese Communist Party's Regulations on Disciplinary punishment* (2004), article 32.



punishment. However, due to the Party's routine intervention into the agencies' operation, the method of punishment indicates not so much the objective degree of misconduct as the protection and favor available to the corrupt official from high-ranking Party leaders. At each level, the Party committee exercises leadership over anticorruption agencies in numerous ways, most importantly through the appointment of agency officials and the control over agency budgets (*Manion*, 2004, 124-6). Moreover, when it comes to the investigation of corruption cases, the Party's DIC routinely initiates the process and only transfers cases to the procuratorate at a time it considers "appropriate" (130). As such, the dual-track system allows the Party to retain maximum discretion over anti-corruption enforcement: the Party can decide not only whether to initiate an investigation but, in the midst of a DIC investigation, whether to forward the case to the judicial system. Failure to transfer a case, which usually leads to the substitution of disciplinary measures for criminal punishment, can be used to protect Party members from the law. This institutional arrangement enables the Party leaders to fine-tune the degree of enforcement and, when necessary, shield their political clients from harsh punishment.

#### **4.3.2 Measuring enforcement with two indicators**

China's dual-track system of sanctioning corruption allows us to measure enforcement with the figures of both disciplinary and criminal punishment. Specifically, I use two publicly available figures: the number of senior officials disciplined by the DIC and the number investigated by the procuratorate. "Senior officials" in this study are defined as those whose bureaucratic ranks are at or above the county level. The analysis focuses on senior officials because cases involving them are more likely to warrant the attention of provincial leaders than ordinary cases. Sitting at the mezzo level of the bureaucracy, the county level officials serve in a variety of positions ranging from the top leaders of a county to division chiefs in a municipal government to bureau chiefs in a provincial government. Senior officials have acquired enough political importance to require additional caution when their cases

are handled. In criminal investigations, for example, clues related to these cases must be filed to the provincial procuratorate for record.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, how many corrupt county-level officials are punished by disciplinary or criminal measures convey rich information about the strength of enforcement.

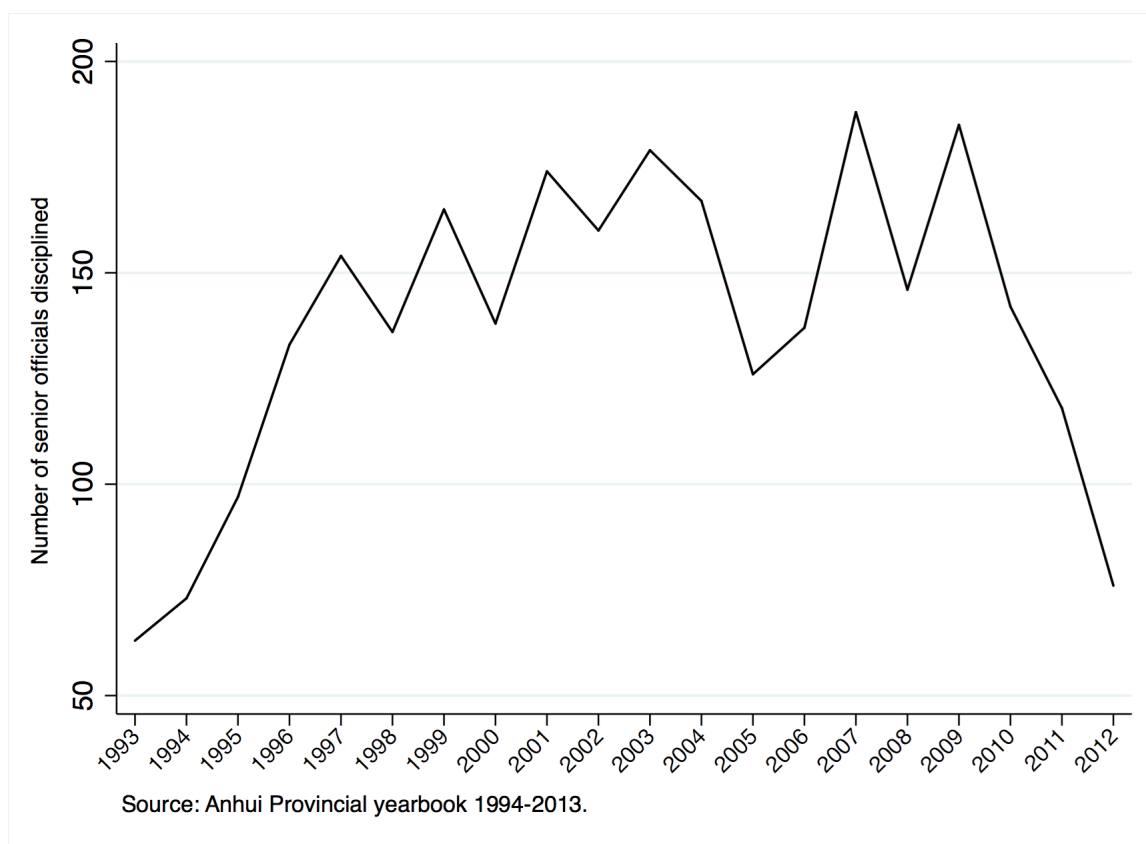
It is intuitive to measure anticorruption using the number of punished officials, which demonstrates vividly a regime's resolution to keep its agents honest. For example, Indonesia's anticorruption agency KPK was considered to be much more effective than its Philippine counterpart due to the larger number of high-ranking officials prosecuted and convicted by the former (*Bolongaita*, 2010). However, an obvious problem of this approach is the conflation of enforcement with the objective level of corruption. It is unclear whether high level of prosecutions should be interpreted as low tolerance for corruption or the existence of rampant corruption. In the Chinese context, though, I maintain that the enforcement figure is mostly an indicator of enforcement vigor because it is highly sensitive to the shifting emphasis that Party leaders place on anticorruption. To illustrate this point, I show in Figure 4.3 the annual number of disciplined senior officials in Anhui province from 1993 to 2012. Based on common sense, the zigzag shape of the line is much more likely to reflect the vicissitudes in policy priority than changes in objective corruption. For instance, it is simply implausible that the level of corruption had experienced a threefold increase between 1993 and 1997 or improved so dramatically after 2009. We are therefore sympathetic to the view that, in China, "a higher number of cases would actually indicate better governance and less corruption, as perpetrators are more likely to be brought to justice" (*Malesky*, 2014, 9).

To sum up, this study measures anticorruption with two indicators that capture different dimensions of enforcement. The number of DIC cases indicates the extent to which the Party uses relatively lenient measure to discipline its members; the number of procuratorate cases reflects the Party's tendency to impose criminal punishment on corrupt officials. For both indicators to be valid, the key assumption is that enforcement outcomes are mainly a function

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<sup>7</sup>Criminal Litigation Rules of the People's Procuratorates (Trial), article 163, [http://www.spp.gov.cn/flfg/gfwj/201212/t20121228\\_52197.shtml](http://www.spp.gov.cn/flfg/gfwj/201212/t20121228_52197.shtml) Accessed Feb 11 2015.

Figure 4.3: Number of senior officials disciplined by the DIC, Anhui province



of the CCP's policy emphasis rather than actual level of corruption. In a country where law enforcement agencies lack independence from the Party authorities, this assumption is likely to capture political reality. The purpose of using different measures is to generate persuasive evidence through a triangulation of measurement processes. If the results of analysis survive multiple imperfect measures, more confidence can be placed in them (*Webb et al.*, 1966, 3).

## 4.4 Empirical analysis

### 4.4.1 Data and method

I assembled a panel dataset to examine the determinants of anticorruption vigor in China's provinces. As explained above, the dependent variables are the two indicators of enforcement: the number of senior officials punished by the DIC and investigated by the

procuratorate per 10,000 public employees, respectively. Both numbers are normalized by the size of public employment so that they're comparable across provinces.<sup>8</sup>

The main source of data is the provincial yearbooks that include work reports from both the provincial DIC and procuratorate. The DIC work reports detail the number of Party members disciplined in a given year and, among them, how many are at or above the county level. Similarly, the procuratorate regularly reports the number of officials, including the senior ones, for whom a case has been filed and investigated. Annual corruption data are collected for China's 31 provincial units from 1998 to 2008. The year 1998 is selected as the starting point because China promulgated a new Criminal Law in 1997 that redefined criminal corruption, making the figures after 1997 incomparable with previous years (*Manion*, 2004, 141-2).

Figure 4.4 depicts the temporal trend of the indicators of anticorruption on the national level. As can be seen, the enforcement activities by the DIC displays substantial fluctuation during the studied period. The normalized number of senior officials disciplined by each province (black column) increased steadily until 2001, dropped significantly from 2004 to 2006, and rose again in 2007. In comparison, the number of criminal investigations (grey column) has remained relatively stable, although it also peaked around 2002. Overall, the trends suggest that anticorruption efforts experienced ascendance from 1998 to 2001, declined after 2004, and had a temporary boost in 2007. This is consistent with the cyclic pattern of enforcement described in the existing literature.

Using linear regression analysis, I estimate the following model:

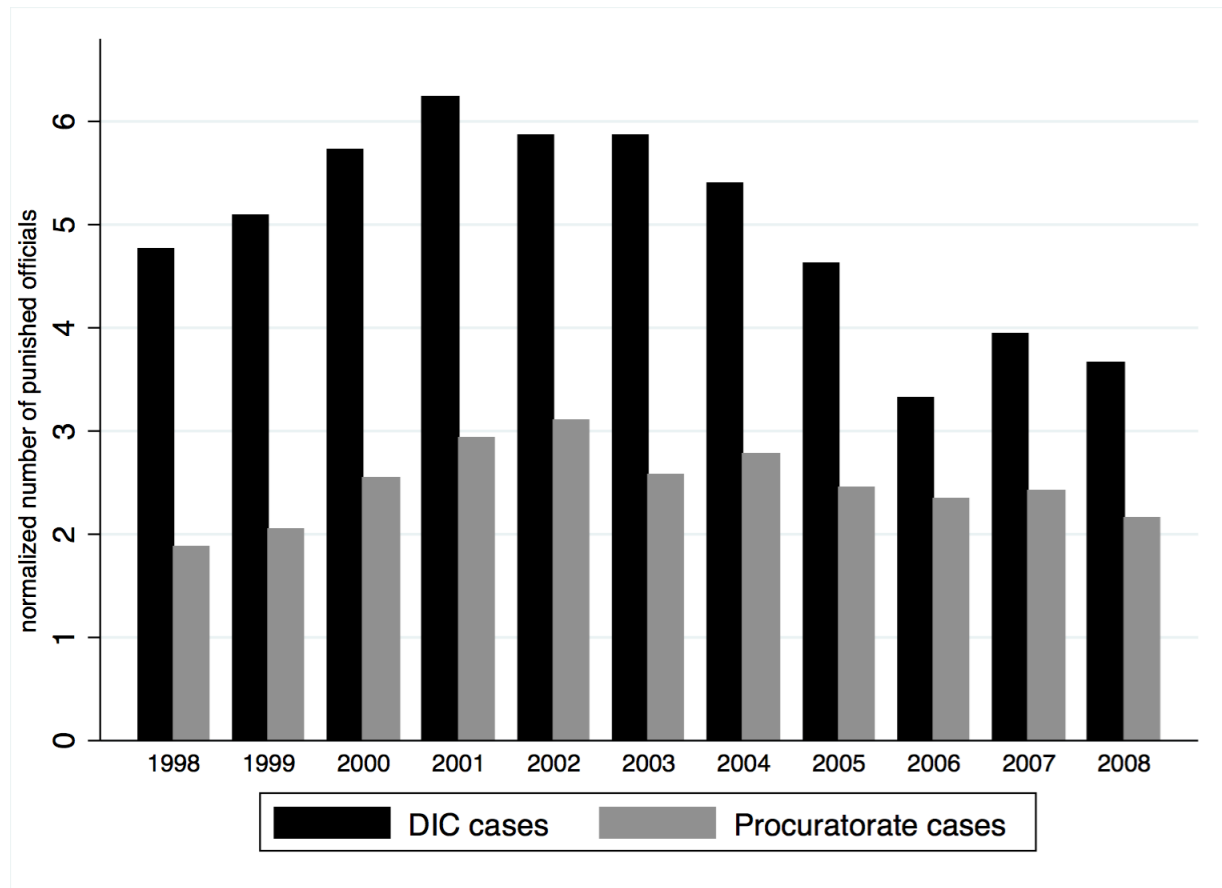
$$y_{it} = \alpha + \beta x_{it} + \gamma z_{it} + \nu_i + \epsilon_{it} \quad (4.1)$$

In this equation,  $\nu_i$  stands for the unit-specific effects, and  $\epsilon_{it}$  is an idiosyncratic error

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<sup>8</sup>To be precise, they are weighted by the number of people employed in the "public management and social organization" sector, which covers Party and state organs, People's Conference of Political Consultation and democratic parties, People's court and procuratorate, and state-sponsored mass organizations. The data are collected from China Labor Yearbooks and China Statistics Yearbooks.

Figure 4.4: National trend in anticorruption indicators: 1998-2008



term.  $x_{it}$  is a matrix of the main explanatory variables. The first variable is the proportion of outsiders in the PSC.<sup>9</sup> If more intense rotation contributes to vigorous anticorruption enforcement, the coefficient for this variable should be positive.

The second hypothesis states that enforcement outcome in one province is positively correlated with central emphasis on anticorruption efforts. As mentioned above, the center's policy agenda is conveyed through speeches by top Party leaders and documents issued by the central government. Thus, I measure central policy emphasis with an index that synthesizes the information from three major official statements. First, the Chinese Premier delivers a government work report to the opening meeting of the annual National People's Congress,

<sup>9</sup>Since the personnel of the PSC will experience changes over the course of a year, this variable is defined as the proportion of outsiders as of the beginning of the year. Technically, the yearbooks report the list of PSC members as of December 31.

which is held in early March. In the Premier’s comprehensive speech, the need to crack down on corruption is only one of many national issues addressed. The portion of the report that is devoted to anticorruption, however, varies from year to year. I therefore conduct content analysis of the speeches and count the percentage of the texts that touches upon the topic of corruption.<sup>10</sup> This constitutes the first component of the policy emphasis index.

Second, the central organ of the DIC (CDIC) holds a meeting at the beginning of every calendar year to assign work tasks for the coming year. By convention, the Secretary of CDIC delivers a speech to summarize last year’s achievements and lay out the key points of next year’s anticorruption project. I assume that when the central government intends to step up its anticorruption efforts, the Secretary’s speech tends to be more elaborate. Thus, the total length of the speech forms the second component of the index. Lastly, at the conclusion of the same meeting, the CDIC issues a communique that formally announces the work arrangements for the following year. Again, I posit that the length of this document is positively correlated with central emphasis on anticorruption and treat this length as the third component of the index. Note that I have deliberately chosen policy announcements made at the beginning of a year to ensure that they are exogenous to the actual enforcement outcome of that year. To construct the policy emphasis index, I first normalize the quantitative indicator of each component to a 0-1 scale. Then, the index is calculated by taking the mean of the three standardized values. A summary of the three components, their standardize values, and the composite index is provided in Table 4.1 .

The matrix  $z_{it}$  represents a wide range of confounding factors. The existing literature has identified a series of socioeconomic factors that affect the severity of corruption in a society (*Treisman, 2000; Sung, 2004; Del Monte and Papagni, 2007*). Among other things, the level of economic development is considered to increase the spread of education and literacy, raising the likelihood that corrupt officials will be noticed and challenged. Moreover, the size of government and degree of state intervention in the economy will affect the opportunities

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<sup>10</sup>Texts that touch upon corruption include key words and phrases such as “corruption”, “building a clean government”, “investigation of major cases”, “against bureaucratism”, and “against waste and extravagance”.

**Table 4.1: Index of central policy emphasis on anticorruption: 1998-2008**

Year	Premier's speech		CDIC Secretary's speech		CDIC Communique		Index
	percentage devoted to corruption	0-1 scale	total words	0-1 scale	total words	0-1 scale	
1998	0.97%	0.10	11431	0.44	3726	0.72	0.42
1999	2.40%	0.34	11304	0.41	2944	0.44	0.40
2000	6.35%	1	12512	0.66	2760	0.38	0.68
2001	0.40%	0	13141	0.79	4471	0.98	0.59
2002	5.42%	0.84	11492	0.45	4539	1	0.77
2003	1.24%	0.14	13792	0.92	3740	0.72	0.60
2004	1.24%	0.14	14161	1	3570	0.66	0.60
2005	1.06%	0.11	9775	0.10	1696	0.01	0.07
2006	1.51%	0.19	10512	0.25	1666	0	0.14
2007	1.70%	0.21	9588	0.06	2669	0.35	0.21
2008	1.59%	0.2	9282	0	2788	0.39	0.19

**Note:** The Premier's speech can be found at [www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/16/content\\_200719.htm](http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/16/content_200719.htm). Accessed May 22, 2015. The CDIC Secretary's speech and CDIC Communique are printed in the periodical *Supervision in China (Zhongguo Jiancha)*.

for officials to offer “rents” —issuing licenses and tinkering with regulations —to their private partners. The ability of officials to provide such particularistic benefits is also believed to depend on how open the domestic market is to foreign competitions. In light of these widely recognized findings, the following control variables are included:

- The log of GDP per capita.
- The share of foreign direct investment in GDP.
- Size of government as measured by the percentage of the population employed in the public management sector.
- The percentage of the population employed in the private sector.
- The percentage of the population enrolled in college.
- The size of the province as measured by the log of provincial population.

- The degree of urbanization as measured by the percentage of work force employed in urban areas.

Finally, a dummy variable is created that equals one if the provincial-unit is a Centrally Administered Municipality (CAM). Four megacities in China —Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Chongqing —have been placed under the center’s direct control due to their exceptional importance in economic development and national security. It is plausible that the center’s intent to closely monitor these CAMs (*Su and Yang, 2000*) will lead to more stringent anti-corruption enforcement. A second dummy variable is created to indicate the five provincial units that are designated as “autonomous regions” owing to the concentration of ethnic minorities. Since the danger of ethnic tension and secession is particularly acute in autonomous regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet, it will come as no surprise if anticorruption measures are taken with special caution to avoid political instability. To account for the possibility that the provincial party secretary exerts such political influence that he can single-handedly manipulate the degree of anticorruption efforts, with little regard for the collegial nature of the PSC, I also include a dummy variable that describes the career background of the party secretary, with the expectation that an outsider will fight corruption more zealously than a localist. The descriptive statistics for the variables are summarized in Table 5.1.

A major obstacle to a reliable estimate of  $\beta$  in equation (4.1) is the potentially endogenous nature of the main independent variable, proportion of outsiders. That is, while the presence of outsiders may strengthen anticorruption, vigorous enforcement could also lead the center to appoint more outsiders to a province. The center may use frequent corruption as a rationale to justify the parachuting of outsiders and neutralize provincial resistance. If such a relationship of mutual causality exists, OLS estimates of all parameters will be biased.

Finding a valid instrumental variable for the proportion of outsiders is challenging, since most factors that will affect the appointment of outsiders are also likely to influence anticorruption.<sup>11</sup> To deal with this problem, I use the proportion of outsiders in the 1992

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<sup>11</sup>For example, minority regions tend to have fewer outsiders, but the center could also adopt a different



**Table 4.2: Summary statistics**

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
<b>Dependent variables:</b>					
DIC cases	4.96	2.886	0.895	16.667	294
procuratorate cases	2.466	1.567	0.417	16.467	305
<b>Explanatory variables:</b>					
proportion of outsider 0.327	0.167	0	0.875	341	
index of central policy	0.425	0.228	0.074	0.765	341
<b>Control variables:</b>					
log of GDP per capita (lagged)	3.989	0.289	3.352	4.826	341
FDI share (lagged)	2.778	2.82	0.001	16.462	341
size of gov (lagged)	1.021	0.339	0.589	2.669	341
private employment (lagged)	22.382	14.415	0	69.210	341
college enrollment (lagged)	0.842	0.673	0.107	3.565	341
log of population	8.029	0.885	5.529	9.182	341
urbanization (lagged)	8.029	0.885	5.529	9.182	341
municipality	0.129	0.336	0	1	341
minority region	0.161	0.368	0	1	341
localist party secretary	0.191	0.393	0	1	341

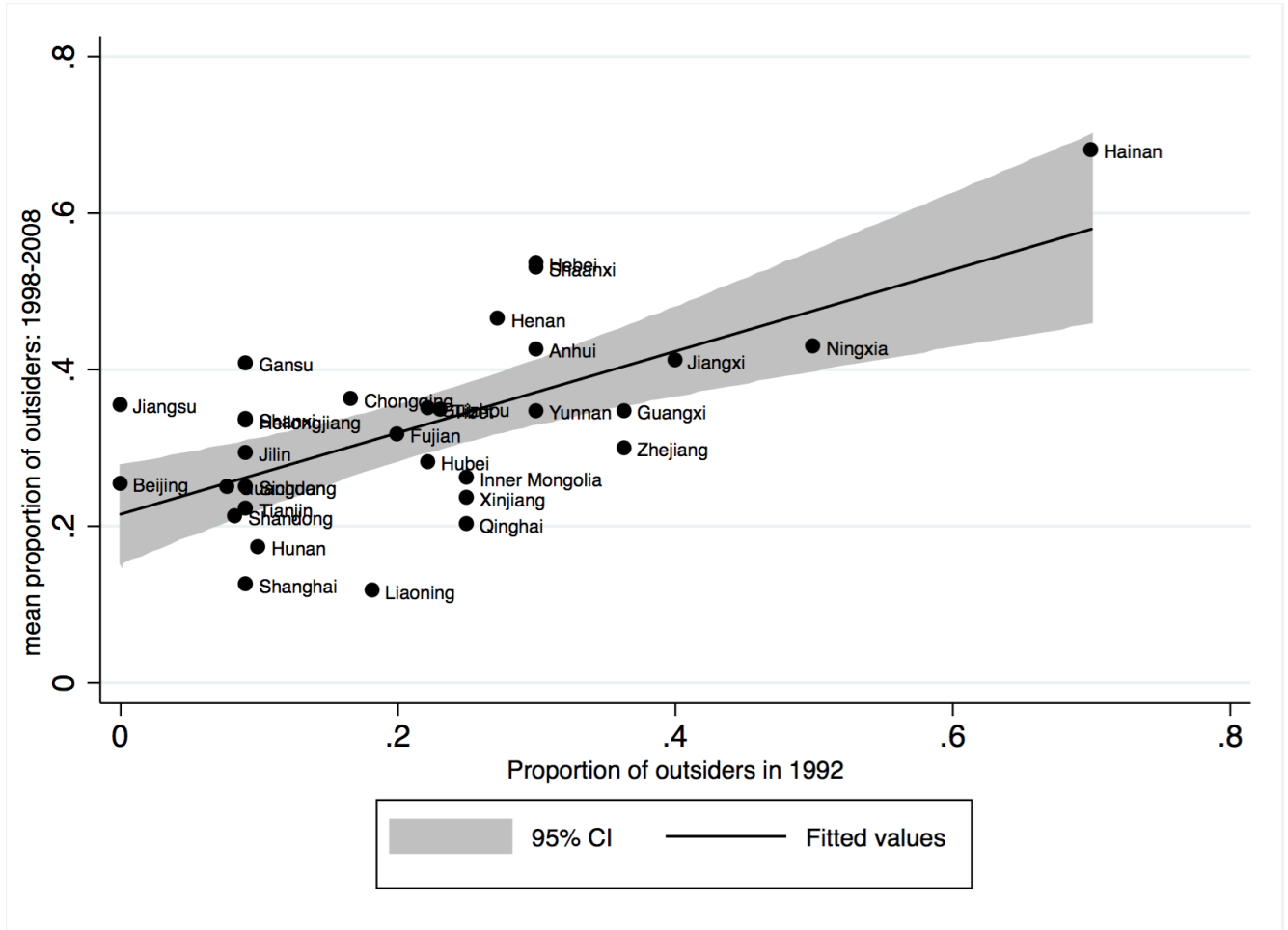
PSCs as an instrumental variable. Because members of the PSC usually experience a major reshuffle at the provincial party congress, which takes place once in five years, the leadership composition during the 1998-2008 period was very different from that of 1992. Meanwhile, the pattern of outsider appointment for any province is path dependent and shows certain degree of continuity. As can be seen in Figure 4.5, provinces with more outsiders in 1992 also tend to have more outsiders from 1998 to 2008. Therefore, I argue that the proportion of outsiders in 1992 is unlikely to affect anticorruption enforcement between 1998 and 2008, except through its effects on the appointment of outsiders during the studied period.<sup>12</sup>

A common problem that arises when estimating models with panel dataset is the existence of unmeasured factors associated with each cross-sectional unit,  $\nu_i$ . One solution to this problem is to use the random effects model that, instead of computing a fixed unit-specific

approach to corruption in regions with large minority populations.

<sup>12</sup>Moreover, due to the six year interval between the endogenous variable and its instrument, we are relatively confident that the instrument will not be correlated with  $\epsilon_{i,1998-2008}$  via the autocorrelation of  $\epsilon_i$  across different periods.

Figure 4.5: Correlation between proportion of outsiders in 1992 and later periods



intercept, assumes that the unit effect follows a specified probability distribution. This approach will allow us to include time-invariant variables of substantive interest. I will therefore first adopt the random effects approach, and then check the robustness of results with fixed effects models. Furthermore, to address the presence of autocorrelation within time-series data, I estimate models with first-order autoregressive disturbance (*Greene, 2012, 966-9*). This method first uses an iterative procedure to estimate the correlation of the error terms,  $\rho$ . Using this estimate, the dependent and independent variables are transformed to remove the serial correlation.

#### 4.4.2 Results of analysis

I use the two-staged least squares (2SLS) approach to deal with the possible endogeneity of the outsider variable. As the first step, the endogenous variable is regressed on the instrument and other exogenous variables. Table 4.3 presents the results of the first stage regression. Clearly, the proportion of outsiders in 1992 is a strong predictor of the appointment of outsiders in later periods. A Wald test shows that the coefficient of the instrument is significantly different from zero at  $p = 0.001$  level, with a  $\chi^2$  statistics of 19.63. The partial  $R^2$  between the endogenous variable and instrument is 0.16. These tests provide robust evidence that we do not have a weak instrument.

Table 4.4 provides the results of the 2SLS approach as well as OLS estimation. The first thing to note is that none of these models produce evidence supporting the first hypothesis. The proportion of outsiders has no statistically significant impact on anticorruption. Meanwhile, all models confirm that provincial enforcement outcomes are highly susceptible to national influences. In the case of DIC enforcement, a one-standard-deviation increase (0.228) in the index of central policy emphasis is associated with 0.415 more senior officials disciplined per 10,000 public employees ( $p < 0.01$ ). The same change in the explanatory variable will lead to 0.302 more senior officials subject to criminal investigation per 10,000 public employees ( $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, empirical analysis show that provincial-level enforcement tends to move up and down in response to central policy signals, supporting hypothesis 2.

Figure 4.6 presents a graphic illustration of how central emphasis on anticorruption affects provincial-level anticorruption enforcement. Subgraphs a-c plot the relationship between the national average of senior officials disciplined and the central signals conveyed in the three major official statements. As shown in the graphs, the level of provincial enforcement is strongly correlated with the lengths of CDIC communiques and the secretary's speeches, and is weakly correlated with the proportion of the Premier's speech that is devoted to anticorruption. When the three policy statements are synthesized into one single index of central agenda, the latter becomes a strong predictor of provincial enforcement outcomes

**Table 4.3: First stage regression for the proportion of outsiders**

Dependent variable: Proportion of outsider 1998-2008		
	(1)	(2)
proportion of outsiders 1992	0.4951*** (4.74)	0.5222*** (4.43)
index of central policy		0.0539** (2.30)
log of GDP per capita (lagged)		-0.0718 (-1.00)
FDI share (lagged)		-0.0006 (-0.15)
size of gov (lagged)		0.0849* (1.72)
private employment (lagged)		0.0025** (2.21)
college enrollment (lagged)		0.1277*** (4.14)
log of population		-0.0113 (-0.47)
urbanization (lagged)		-0.4082*** (-3.15)
municipality		-0.0536 (-0.94)
minority region		-0.0860* (-1.88)
localist party secretary		-0.0672*** (-3.98)
Constant	0.2170*** (7.94)	0.4783 (1.43)
Overall $R^2$	0.2161	0.4910
Observations	341	341

Random-effects linear models with an AR(1) disturbance.  $t$  statistics in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

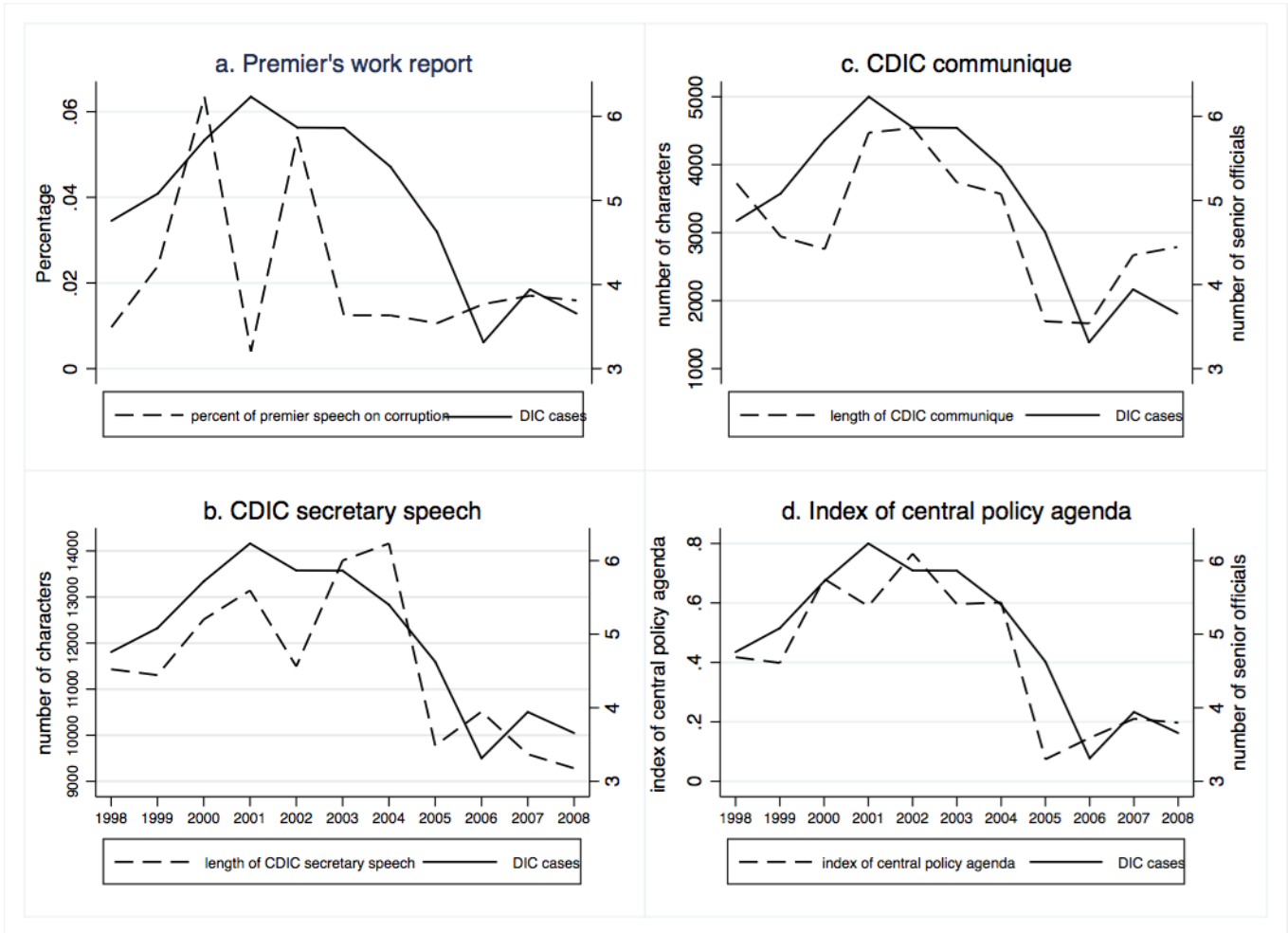
**Table 4.4: Effects of cadre rotation and central emphasis on provincial enforcement**

Dependent variable	OLS estimation		2SLS estimation	
	(1) DIC cases	(2) procuratorate cases	(3) DIC cases	(4) procuratorate cases
proportion of outsider	-1.3717 (-1.32)	0.0943 (0.15)	-4.7667 (-0.91)	-2.3759 (-1.32)
index of central policy	1.6866*** (3.41)	1.2150*** (3.29)	1.8202*** (3.22)	1.3254*** (3.50)
log of GDP per capita (lagged)	-0.4265 (-0.30)	1.6345* (1.95)	-0.6944 (-0.47)	1.4550* (1.72)
FDI share (lagged)	-0.1275* (-1.81)	-0.0742* (-1.90)	-0.1240* (-1.74)	-0.0679* (-1.73)
size of gov (lagged)	-1.7315* (-1.78)	-1.7521*** (-3.65)	-1.6717* (-1.69)	-1.7944*** (-3.78)
private employment (lagged)	0.0063 (0.28)	-0.0039 (-0.30)	0.0144 (0.54)	0.0016 (0.12)
college enrollment (lagged)	-0.8752 (-1.51)	-0.3329 (-1.09)	-0.4351 (-0.49)	0.0028 (0.01)
log of population	-0.5227 (-1.05)	-0.3084* (-1.70)	-0.7088 (-1.22)	-0.4790** (-2.25)
urbanization (lagged)	5.7218** (2.12)	1.6092 (1.33)	4.0805 (1.08)	0.3972 (0.27)
municipality	2.6028** (2.05)	1.9153*** (4.26)	2.2061 (1.55)	1.5998*** (3.27)
minority region	-1.0098 (-0.96)	-0.6265* (-1.70)	-1.1837 (-1.08)	-0.7556** (-2.03)
localist party secretary	0.1826 (0.53)	0.1436 (0.62)	-0.0608 (-0.12)	-0.0977 (-0.35)
Constant	11.2404* (1.74)	-0.4725 (-0.14)	14.8599* (1.76)	2.4703 (0.64)
Overall $R^2$	0.3422	0.4131	0.3440	0.4196
Observations	294	305	294	305

Random-effects linear models with an AR(1) disturbance.  $t$  statistics in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Figure 4.6: Correlation between central policy signals and provincial anticorruption enforcement: 1998-2008**



(Graph d).

Turning to the control variables, there is some evidence that the Central Administrated Municipalities are subject to tighter corruption control. For example, holding other variables constant, being a CAM will increase the number of procuratorate cases per 10,000 public employees by 1.60 ( $p < 0.01$ ). This finding is consistent with the received wisdom that densely populated cities pose serious threats to authoritarian survival by facilitating collective actions, and autocrats take active measures to manage discontent in the cities (Wallace, 2014). On the other hand, enforcement tends to be milder in ethnic minority regions, which

will lower the normalized number of procuratorate cases by 0.76. ( $p < 0.05$ ). There are two possible explanations for this discrepancy. First, cadres who are transferred to work in poor, remote minority regions are compensated by lower risk of exposure. Second, enforcement against native minority cadres is moderated to avoid exacerbating ethnic tension.

The foregoing analysis has revealed strong evidence that anticorruption vigor at the subnational level are dictated by central demands. When the center initiates a wave of stringent enforcement, the provinces are under great pressure to respond. In this sense, anticorruption campaigns serve as a convenient channel for the center to assert and confirm its authority. However, local conformity to central priorities may not be the same across all provinces. Some localities, because of their political and economic importance, may be subject to tighter central scrutiny. To inquire whether the pressure to conform is contingent on provincial characteristics, I create an interaction term between central policy emphasis and provincial GDP per capita. If more affluent and resourceful provinces face stronger pressure to comply with central agenda, the coefficient for the interaction term should be positive.

Table 4.5 reports the regression estimates with the interaction term. All the confounding factors listed in Table 5.1 are included, but in the interest of space I only present the interaction and main effects. I find that the interaction terms are positive and highly significant in all models, meaning that the effects of central policy priority on enforcement *increase* as GDP per capita goes up. In Figure 4.7, I present graphically the effects of central policy index on DIC enforcement as a function of provincial GDP per capita. As the figure shows, at lower levels of economic development, the effects of national policy signal are statistically insignificant. Only after the log of GDP per capita passes the threshold of about 3.85 (roughly equivalent to GDP per capita of 7,000 RMB) does the positive effects become significant, and the magnitude increases along with income level. Thus, further analysis yields evidence that economically developed provinces are more responsive to the national rhythm of enforcement.

**Table 4.5: Effects of central emphasis on provincial enforcement conditional on economic development**

Dependent variable	OLS estimation		2SLS estimation	
	(1) DIC cases	(2) procuratorate cases	(3) DIC cases	(4) procuratorate cases
proportion of outsider	-1.3936 (-1.35)	0.0313 (0.05)	-4.6965 (-0.89)	-2.3932 (-1.33)
index of central policy	-16.9517** (-2.39)	-12.9457** (-2.48)	-16.3871** (-2.30)	-12.8571** (-2.47)
log of GDP per capita (lagged)	-2.3757 (-1.50)	0.1754 (0.18)	-2.5615 (-1.57)	-0.0039 (-0.00)
policy index×GDP per capita	4.6732*** (2.64)	3.5636*** (2.72)	4.5632** (2.57)	3.5688*** (2.73)
Constant	19.1739*** (2.70)	5.5668 (1.42)	22.4143** (2.52)	8.4650* (1.93)
Overall $R^2$	0.3539	0.4285	0.3554	0.4354
Observations	294	305	294	305

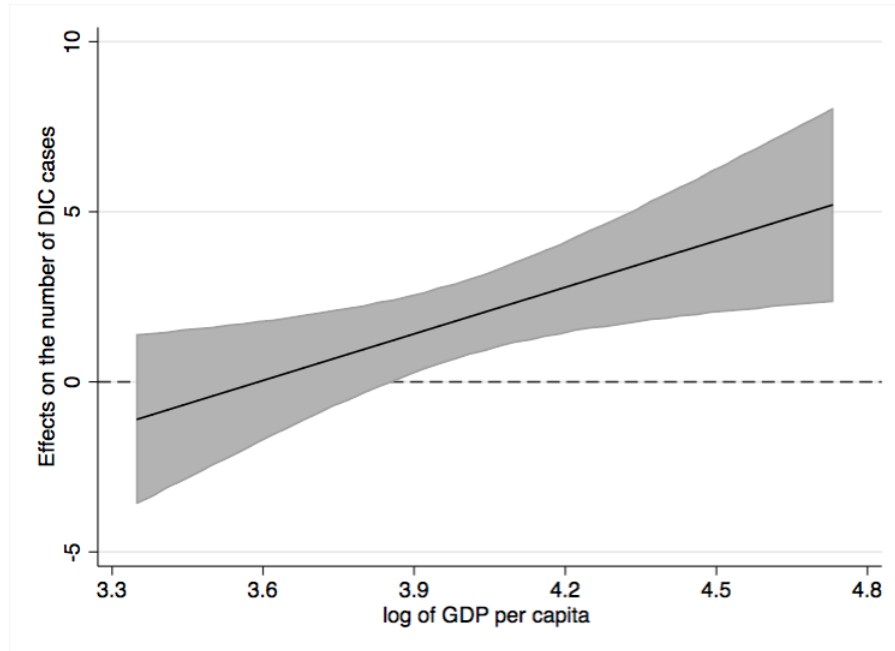
Random-effects linear models with an AR(1) disturbance.  $t$  statistics in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

The estimations above have all used random effects models, which allows us to include time-invariant variables such as CAM and minority status. The consistency of such models, however, relies on the assumption that unobserved unit-specific effects are uncorrelated with the independent variables. As a sensitivity test, I reestimate the models by introducing a dummy variable for each cross-sectional unit. The fixed effects approach will generate consistent estimates even if the unobserved unit effects are correlated with included variables. As reported in Table 4.6, the fixed effect estimators produce results that are consistent with random effects models. Again, I find no statistically significant effect of cadre rotation on anticorruption enforcement. On the other hand, the interaction terms are significantly positive across different specifications, confirming the heterogeneous effects of central agenda-setting conditional on the level of economic development.



Figure 4.7: Marginal effect of national forces on the number of DIC cases



Note: grey area indicates 95 percent confidence interval

## 4.5 Conclusion

Non-democratic regimes can ensure agency control by building a rationalized bureaucracy or resorting to cyclic mobilization to curb corruption. These two modes of top-down control may supplement each other; alternatively, one mode of control mechanism may dominate the political system at the other's expense. Using China as a case study, I find that the ebbs and flows of central priority have major impacts on enforcement patterns at subnational level, and provinces with more developed economies are under greater pressure to conform. By comparison, routinized rotation of cadres has little influence on the vigor of anticorruption enforcement. Thus, the basic framework of corruption control in China follows the logic of cyclic, top-down mobilization instead of routine bureaucratic management.

Admittedly, this study only examined one particular type of routine management. Future research may further inquire whether other bureaucratic methods—the design of compensation scheme, the recruitment mechanism, the checks and balances between institutions

**Table 4.6: Effects of central emphasis on provincial enforcement: fixed effects models**

Dependent variable	OLS estimation		2SLS estimation	
	(1) DIC cases	(2) procuratorate cases	(3) DIC cases	(4) procuratorate cases
proportion of outsider	-1.4742 (-1.28)	0.3501 (0.39)	-6.9822 (-1.27)	-1.0499 (-0.27)
index of central policy	-12.8265* (-1.86)	-11.7425** (-2.18)	-12.3507* (-1.77)	-11.9737** (-2.23)
log of GDP per capita (lagged)	-0.7813 (-0.41)	0.6654 (0.49)	-1.1260 (-0.59)	0.5294 (0.39)
policy index×GDP per capita	3.5253** (2.03)	3.2601** (2.40)	3.4608** (1.99)	3.3357** (2.48)
Constant	-0.7313 (-0.74)	0.1047 (0.06)	-0.4749 (-0.49)	0.0390 (0.02)
Overall $R^2$	0.1632	0.0070	0.1458	0.0142
Observations	263	274	263	274

Fixed-effects linear models with an AR(1) disturbance.  $t$  statistics in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

—can enhance top-down accountability and reduce agency loss. We have reasons to believe, though, that the prevalence of the mobilization ethos can undermine the effectiveness of all types of bureaucratic norms and procedures. The launching of periodic campaigns inevitably disrupts the operation of formal rules and institutions (*Manion, 2004*), and lower-level leaders must ignore other tasks to fulfill the enforcement quota. Moreover, the unpredictable, ruthless nature of anticorruption campaigns also induces officials to cultivate personal ties with influential leaders for self-preservation, increasing the pervasiveness of factions and informal rules (*Pyne, 1981*).

While the power of agenda-setting allows the national leaders to retain maximum flexibility in adjusting the vigor of anticorruption efforts, a highly centralized disciplinary system also suffers from efficiency loss. The unchallenged authority of the center to direct the anticorruption orchestra fosters obedience, passivity, and cynicism among lower-level officials. As a result, the central government is hardly in a position to gather information necessary

to adapt anticorruption policies to local circumstances. The ills of centralization are particularly worrisome in a large and diverse country like China, where the nature and severity of corruption may vary greatly across regions. In the final analysis, the lack of institutionalization and efficiency is probably the price a single-party regime has to pay for maintaining a hierarchical, monolithic system.

## CHAPTER V

# The role of factional network in anticorruption campaign

### Abstract

The new Chinese leadership that assumed power in late 2012 launched an anticorruption campaign distinctive in its sheer magnitude. The dazzling number of high-level officials struck down by the CCP's disciplinary body provides a unique opportunity to revisit a much speculated question in China studies: how do the dynamics of factional network affect the Party's disciplinary punishment of senior cadres? As a first step to address this question with systematic evidence, this chapter argues that the oligarchs utilize anticorruption campaigns to expand the influence of personal networks and consolidate power. Consistent with this argument, empirical evidence shows that provincial officials tied to incumbent members of the Politburo Standing Committee are less likely to be investigated for corruption. At the same time, officials tied to retired members of the same body are not more likely to be targeted, indicating that the ruling oligarchy is constrained by a code of civility to respect the power networks of retired oligarchs.

## 5.1 Introduction

The Chinese leadership that came to power at the 18th Party Congress in 2012 has made anti-corruption a centerpiece of its reform agenda. While it is not unusual for the CCP leaders to use periodic bursts of hyper enforcement to keep corruption under control, the latest round of anticorruption drive is distinguished by the magnitude with which high-level, well-established politicians are investigated and punished. Within the short space of about two years following the 18th Congress, more than 60 civilian officials at or above the ministerial level<sup>1</sup> were taken down by the Party's anticorruption agency. To put this figure in historical context, between 1987 and 2010 the Party had penalized no more than 120 officials at this top echelon of the political hierarchy.<sup>2</sup> To epitomize the unprecedented scale and intensity of the anticorruption drive, the Party launched an investigation into Zhou Yongkang, former security czar and a Politburo Standing Committee member, breaking the long-standing norm that granted immunity to leaders of the CCP's top governing body.

Observers and scholars are divided over how to interpret and evaluate Xi Jinping's move to target heavyweight politicians with an iron-fist approach. Most analysts are highly skeptical of the effectiveness of campaign-styled enforcement, which depends heavily on Xi's strong personality and centralized power. Indeed, many argue that Xi's signature reform is merely an attempt to remove political opponents and consolidate personal power disguised as a crusade against corruption. "Most telling of all", according to one commentator, "the purge has mainly targeted specific party factions, while those groups that support and pledge loyalty to Mr. Xi appear untouched".<sup>3</sup> Another critic concurred that "(t)he investigation is selective, politically motivated", aimed at removing politicians of rivaling factions so that "actual or potential political supporters are elevated to powerful positions" (*Fu*, 2014). Defenders of

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<sup>1</sup>In this study, we use the term "ministerial" to include both full-ministerial and vice-ministerial positions in the bureaucratic ranking system.

<sup>2</sup>"A record of high-level corruption." October 25 2010, *Caijing(The Finance Magazine)*, <http://magazine.caijing.com.cn/2010-10-24/110550933.html>. Accessed March 26 2015.

<sup>3</sup>"Xi's Selective Punishment". *The New York Times*. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/17/opinion/murong-xuecun-xis-selective-punishment.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/17/opinion/murong-xuecun-xis-selective-punishment.html?_r=1). Accessed March 26 2015.

the campaign, on the other hand, contend that a “shock and awe” approach is necessary to contain the intensification of corruption, winning the regime precious breathing space to implement institutional reform. In other words, “corruption has become so serious that curing the disease would be difficult without treating the symptom first”.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, analyses that center on factional politics are “not only inaccurate and misleading” but “distract from the critical political changes that the anticorruption campaign ... can bring to Chinese society”(Li and McElveen, 2014).

As important as it is to understand the role of faction in anticorruption efforts, the existing literature has offered little more than anecdotal, impressionistic evidence. Few scholars have drawn upon systematic evidence to study the impact of factional network on corruption investigation. In China studies, there is indeed a rich body of literature that examines how factional politics explains the business and reform cycle in the 1980s (*Dittmer and Wu*, 1995), unpredictable shifts in national policies (*Huang*, 2006), inflation cycle and failure to reform the banking system (*Shih*, 2008), and the promotion of Party officials (*Shih et al.*, 2012; *Choi*, 2012; *Keller*, 2014; *Jia et al.*, 2014). However, the extent to which top Party leaders are motivated by factional considerations to target political enemies or protect loyal followers has only been examined in a few case studies, centering on the prosecution of former Politburo members such as Chen Xitong (*Gilley*, 1998; *Fewsmith*, 2001), Chen Liangyu (*Li*, 2007; *Naughton*, 2007), and Bo Xilai (*Miller*, 2012; *Broadhurst and Wang*, 2014).

In this chapter, we argue that the ruling oligarchs utilize anticorruption campaigns to expand the influence of their personal networks and consolidate power. Within the political system, disciplinary actions against corruption are carried out to reinforce hierarchical control rather than to enforce universal, transcendent rules. As a consequence, individuals at the pinnacle of the system exercise substantial discretion over the targets of punishment, and patron-client ties with these individuals provide pivotal security for lower-ranking officials. In

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<sup>4</sup>Zheng Yongnian. “Anticorruption and China’s second political revolution”. August 12 2014. *Lianhe Zaobao*. [http://news.ifeng.com/a/20140813/41564355\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/a/20140813/41564355_0.shtml). Accessed March 26 2015.

the context of China's latest anticorruption campaign, we should observe that particularistic ties to top CCP leaders exert significant impact on an official's likelihood of being targeted by the Party's disciplinary agency.

In previous studies, the lack of empirical evidence on this question is likely due to three main methodological obstacles. The first difficulty is that, prior to Xi Jinping's anticorruption drive, the number of senior officials investigated for corruption had been fairly low. During the 24 years between 1987 and 2010, the Party investigated on average only five ministerial-level officials per year. The relatively small number of corruption cases reduces the power of possible statistical tests. The campaign since 2012, as we show in the next section, has revealed a surprisingly large number of cases that facilitates statistical analysis.

Second, to examine the causal relations between informal network and anticorruption, the researcher cannot only study the exposed officials ( $Y=1$ ), as such an approach will be guilty of selecting on the dependent variable (*Geddes*, 2003). Also required is a representative sample of officials who emerged unscathed from anticorruption activities ( $Y=0$ ). Because the exposed officials served a myriad of positions in various state institutions, it is immensely difficult to identify a sample of "controls" for whom  $Y=0$  that is truly comparable to the "cases" where  $Y=1$ . In this chapter, we overcome this obstacle by selecting a well-defined group of provincial officials as the population under study. Narrowing down the focus to a body of officials serving similar positions ensures that the controls and cases are largely similar in their political statuses. A third challenge for empirical inquiries has to do with the difficulty of measuring factional ties, which by their nature are clandestine and known only to the practitioners. We confront this challenge by adopting an indicator of patron-client ties developed in *Shih et al.* (2010). Based on observable ties such as shared birthplace, *alma mater*, and working experience, it can be argued that the indicator reasonably approximates the underlying true connections.

We use a sample of 555 provincial standing committee members and vice governors who were in office at the beginning of Xi Jinping's reign. Among them, a total of 32 officials have

been placed under investigation by the Central Disciplinary Inspection Committee (CDIC) at the time of writing. Consistent with the argument that the oligarchs use anticorruption campaigns to promote factional influence, officials tied to the incumbent Politburo Standing Committee are less likely to be investigated than those without such ties. At the same time, factional ties with retired members of the same body have no effect on the risks of investigation, indicating that the supporters of the old oligarchy are not subject to intense persecution. The lenient treatment received by former members of the Standing Committee is a sign of the “live and let live” agreement that facilitates the orderly transition and sharing of supreme power.

In the next section we present descriptive statistics to illustrate the intensity and breadth of the latest anticorruption campaign. This is followed by a review of some key features of informal politics and bureaucratic management under China’s one-party system. We argue that these structural features allow the top CCP leaders to expand the influence of personal networks through campaign-style anticorruption efforts. In section 4, we explain the data and empirical strategy used to test the research hypotheses. The results of the empirical analysis will be presented and discussed in the following section. The final section concludes the chapter.

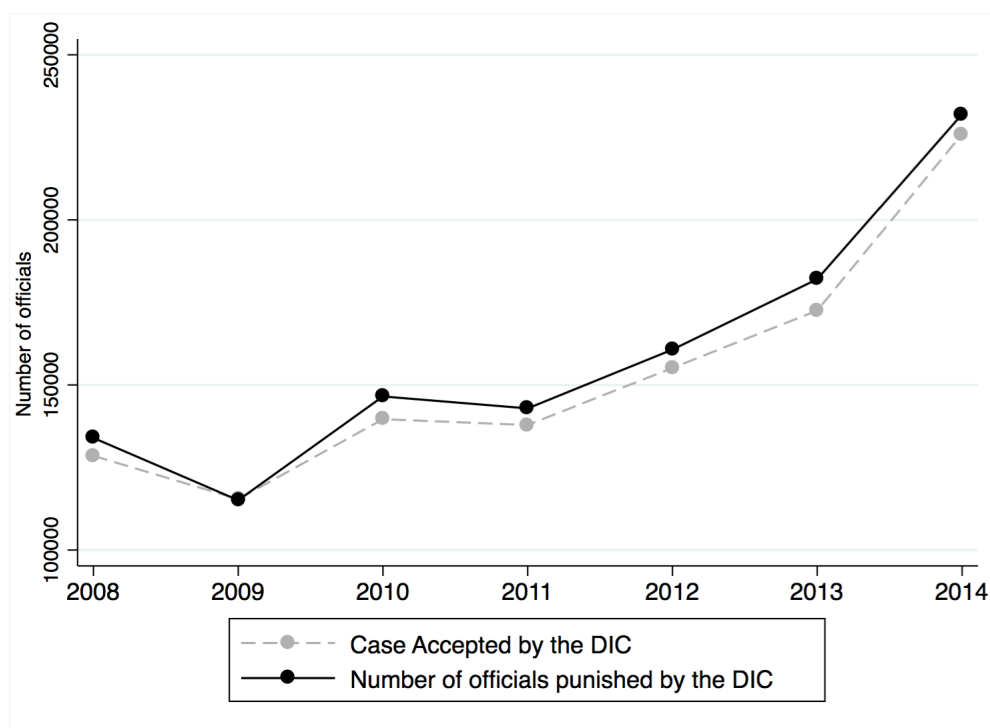
## **5.2 Counting tigers: Xi Jinping’s anticorruption campaign**

In this section, we provide some descriptive information and statistics about China’s current anticorruption campaign to put the ensuing analysis in perspective. While many acknowledge the uniqueness of the campaign manifested by the purge of previously untouchable politicians, few have studied its sheer magnitude systematically. Here, we examine the key characteristics of the current campaign in terms of the number, career status, and geographical distribution of the senior officials punished.

Immediately after being elected as the CCP general secretary in November 2012, Xi Jinping made clear his will to crack down on corruption. In the inaugural speech, Xi claimed



Figure 5.1: Annual number of officials investigated by the DIC: 2008-2014



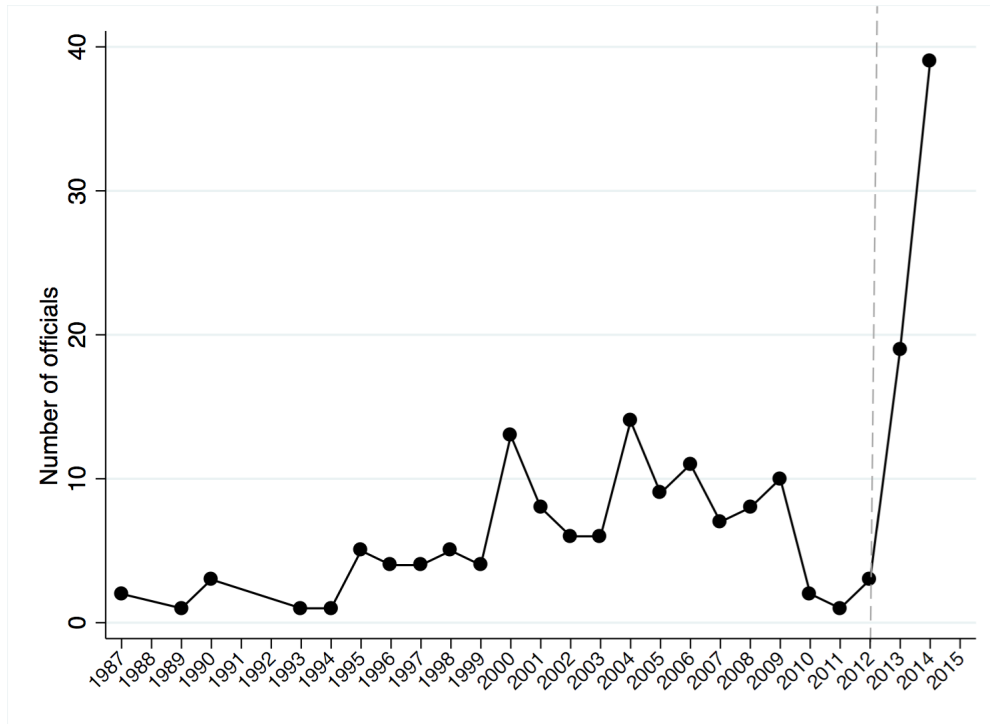
**Source:** The numbers are released by the CDIC and reported in the media. For the latest CDIC report, see “2014 nian shou dangjizhengji chufen renshu chao 23 wan” (More than 230,000 were punished for violating party and government discipline in 2014), *Xinhua*, 31 January 2014, [http://law.chinaso.com/detail/20150131/1000200032711721422664156534204928\\_1.html](http://law.chinaso.com/detail/20150131/1000200032711721422664156534204928_1.html), Accessed 25 March 2015.

that corruption is one of the severe challenges confronting the Party. Xi also vowed that the campaign will target both lowly bureaucrats and powerful leaders. “We must uphold the fighting of tigers and flies at the same time”, Xi declared, and “...power should be restricted by the cage of regulations.”<sup>5</sup>

The CCP’s anticorruption activities are coordinated and implemented by a specialized agency, the Disciplinary Inspection Commission (DIC). The agency is responsible for handling public accusations, conducting investigations, and meting out disciplinary punishment. At each administrative level, the DIC is subject to the dual leadership of the Party committee at the same level and the DIC of the next higher level. Since the 2000s, the CCP has

<sup>5</sup>“Xi Jinping vows to fight ‘tigers’ and ‘flies’ in anti-corruption drive”, January 22 2013. *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/22/xi-jinping-tigers-flies-corruption>. Accessed March 28 2015.

**Figure 5.2: Annual number of high-level officials investigated 1987-2014**



The dotted line indicates the year when the campaign started.

**Source:** Figures from 1987-2010 are from: “A record of high-level corruption.” October 25 2010, *Caijing*(*The Finance Magazine*), <http://magazine.caijing.com.cn/2010-10-24/110550933.html>. Accessed March 26 2015. Figures after 2010 are from the author’s dataset.

introduced reforms to make the DIC a more hierarchical, centralized agency that assumes some degree of independence from local party committees (*Gong, 2008*). The commencement of the current campaign has further centralized policing power to the national headquarter of DIC, the CDIC (*Yuen, 2014*).

To examine the enforcement outcome of the current campaign, we first look at the total number of officials investigated by the DIC (figure 5.1). In 2013, the yearly number of filed cases increased by 11.6 percent, from 155,000 in 2012 to 173,000 in 2013. The number of officials punished for disciplinary issues increased accordingly by 13 percent. The trend of heightened enforcement accelerated in 2014, making the period after the 18th Party Congress a clear break from previous years.

However, what really sets Xi's anticorruption campaign apart from previous ones is not the catching of "flies" but the taming of "tigers". Consistent with conventional Chinese understanding, we defined "high-level" officials as those at or above the ministerial level. Based on a report in a Hong Kong based magazine, *Caijing*, together with publicly reveal data since late 2012, we counted the number of high-level officials subject to DIC investigations from 1987 to 2014.<sup>6</sup> As can be seen in figure 5.2, the number of "tigers" investigated has increased dramatically since Xi came to power in late 2012. Before, very rarely had more than ten senior officials been investigated for corruption in a single year. By comparison, the first year of the campaign saw nineteen senior officials investigated, and the number more than doubled in 2014. The intensity with which the current campaign brings powerful officials to its knees simply has no precedent during the post-Mao period.

Next, we delve into the career types of high-level officials subject to CDIC investigation. Based on the state institution these officials were serving at the time of investigation, we classify them into three broad categories: central government officials, provincial officials, and state-owned enterprise (SOE) managers. As shown in figure 5.2, 48 or two thirds of the investigated officials were serving in the provinces, whereas only 13 central officials fell from grace. It is tempting to surmise that the campaign was biased against cadres away from Beijing, although this claim is difficult to test in the absence of reliable data on the total number of central and local officials. Notably, seven SOE managers have been detained by the CDIC, suggesting that the Party is seriously targeting the internal problems of those government-owned monopolies.<sup>7</sup>

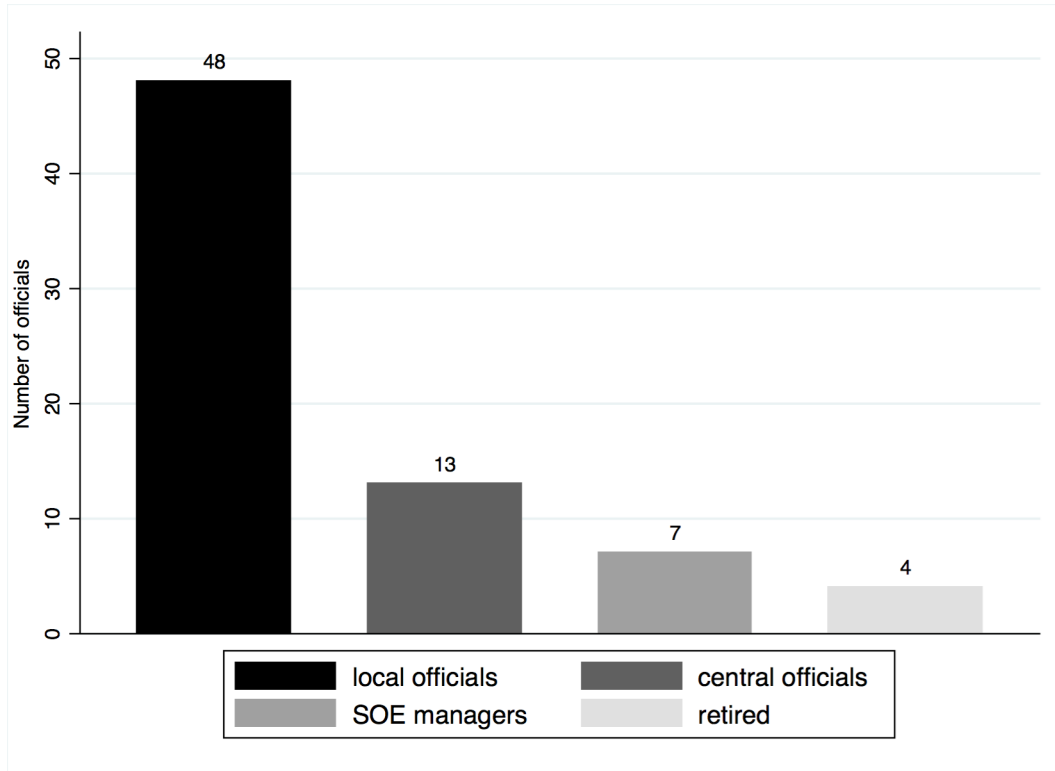
Of course, not all senior officials have the same political stature. One clear distinction is between those who were holding substantive positions and those who had effectively retired. In the Chinese bureaucracy, sinecures in the People's Congress, People's Consultative Con-

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<sup>6</sup>In this study, we only focus on civilian politicians and exclude the military officials investigated for corruption.

<sup>7</sup>"Xi's new year resolution: reform China's state-owned enterprises", *The Diplomat*. Jan 14 2015. <http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/xis-new-years-resolution-reform-chinas-state-owned-enterprises/>. Accessed March 28 2015.

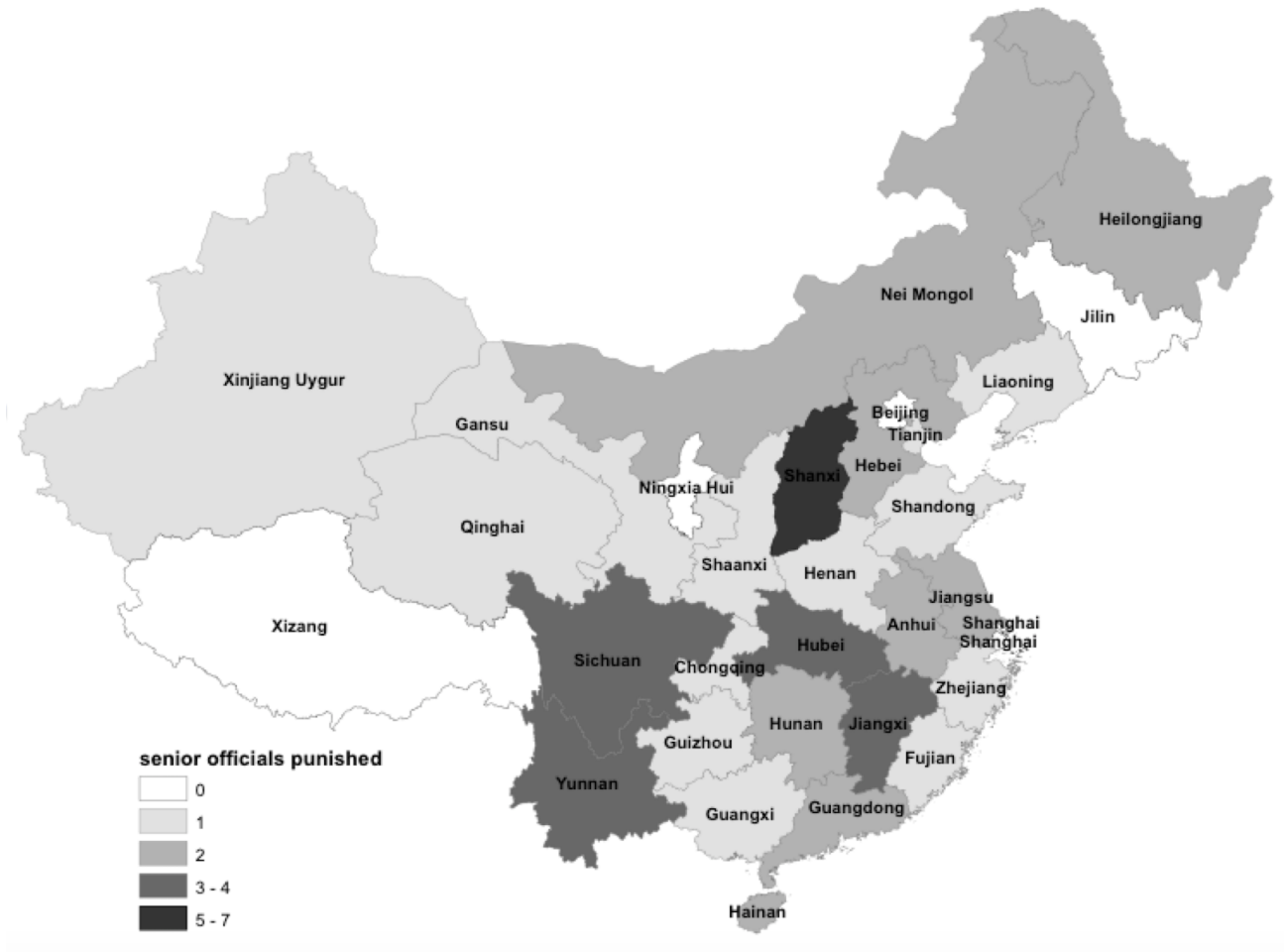
**Figure 5.3: Career types of high-level officials investigated**



**Source:** author's dataset.

ference, and mass organization are usually reserved for officials who have reached retirement age. Thus, focusing on the aggregate number of senior officials could be misleading since the campaign is possibly only targeting people in honorary positions, tigers with no teeth. Our data, however, suggests that the campaign is primarily aiming at incumbent officials at the peak of their power. While 46 senior officials were serving substantive positions before being caught, the corresponding number is only 26 for officials who were either serving honorary posts or have retired altogether.

Figure 5.4: Regional distribution of senior officials investigated



Finally, given that local officials account for the lion's share of the campaign's victims, it is informative to examine whether certain provinces are disproportionately targeted. In figure 5.4, we present the number of senior officials investigated in each of China's 31 provincial units. Clearly, the storm of anticorruption has struck some provinces much harder than others. Shanxi, a northwestern province endowed with rich natural resources, has exposed seven ministerial-level officials and a far greater number of lower-ranking functionaries. So far, all but five provincial units have reported at least one case of senior official corruption. The exceptions include the two metropolises of Beijing and Shanghai as well as the Tibetan autonomous region.

After outlining the contours of the current anticorruption drive, we discuss in the next

section how periodic rectification campaign, along with other features of the bureaucratic system, induces officials to cultivate patron-client ties in search for career security.

### 5.3 Factional ties as a safety net

Recognizing the low degree of institutionalization in China's political process, many researchers have turned to the role of informal politics, and factions in particular, to understand the dynamics of elite conflicts and authoritative decision-making. Despite divergent views on the goals pursued by factions and the mode of factional interaction, some defining features of factions are widely accepted in the literature. Following Andrew Nathan, most scholars see factions as vertically organized structures composed of clientelist ties between a patron and his/her followers. The clientelist ties are usually formed on the basis of kinship, native place, dialect, educational background or common work experience, although the Chinese culture allows people to make creative use of commonalities and "define shared attributes with other individuals in a highly selective manner" (*Dittmer and Wu*, 1995, 473). To cultivate these ties, gifts and services must be constantly exchanged between the patron and clients.

The *raison d'être* of a faction is to expand its power and influence in the political system, or at least defend itself against the expansion of rivaling factions. Factional members, who are scattered throughout the political hierarchy, will be coordinated and mobilized by the leader to work for the overall benefits of the faction. In exchange, the factional leaders will continue to secure and distribute rewards to the followers. These rewards can take the form of prestige, materialist benefits, promotion to key posts and so forth. For our purpose, it is important to stress one particular reward that comes with factional membership. That is, the cultivation of factional ties with higher-level leaders provides critical protection for bureaucrats in a political environment filled with risks and uncertainties. The importance of factional affiliation in enhancing career safety can be best appreciated by considering the following features of the Chinese bureaucracy.

First, the functioning of the bureaucratic system have been punctuated by periodic rec-

tification campaigns that threaten the career status of a large number of cadres. Sudden, intense purges of Party officials can be traced to the Mao era, during which period the campaigns usually involved large-scale mass mobilization and severe ideological struggles (*Harding*, 1981). In the post-Mao era, the campaigns were more closely managed by the bureaucratic apparatus and focused on the theme of corruption control, manifested in “short bursts of intensive enforcement set in motion by the Party leaders” (*Manion*, 2004, 161). The anticorruption campaigns serve the purpose of boosting the regime’s legitimacy and keeping corruption from spiraling out of control (*Wedeman*, 2005). More importantly, these campaigns offer the new Politburo Standing Committee a legitimate channel to remove political foes and create vacancies for their loyal supporters (*Fu*, 2014). Thus, the general secretary and his fellow oligarchs will utilize anticorruption actions, in tandem with the appointment system, to consolidate their power status. Accordingly, cadres who belong to the oligarchs’ personal networks can expect a relatively safe ride as the campaign unfolds, whereas the rest of the officialdom will bear higher risks of being targeted.

Second, due to the lack of alternative career paths available to Chinese bureaucrats, falling from grace during a rectification campaign carries particularly high costs. Once a person has made a decision early in his/her life to pursue a political career, it is not realistic to voluntarily opt out of the political realm (*Oksenberg*, 1968, 67). The option to exit the officialdom and move into the non-state sector is generally unavailable to the bureaucrats. Indeed, for many bureaucrats working in local governments, their careers are trapped in the same geographical unit and tightly controlled by local authorities (*Zhou*, 2009, 72). In a classic study of China’s labor relations under the state socialist system, Walder described the Chinese workers’ economic dependence on the state enterprise due to the lack of mobility to other work units (1988). While economic reform has substantially increased the career choice of ordinary workers, the officials are still locked into a largely closed labor market without an exit option. Because career ambitions can be pursued only within the bureaucratic hierarchy, setbacks in the form of purge or demotion will deal a deadly blow to the bureaucrats as they

cannot be compensated by the pursuit of alternative career opportunities.

Thus, the unpredictable, ruthless nature of top-down campaigns poses an ever-present threat to the Party officials, and the concerns about career and personal safety are aggravated by the absence of a decent exit option. Without independent law enforcement authorities, there is little guarantee that the campaigns will be carried out according to any formal regulation or legal standard. Rather, Party leaders at various levels will exert dominant influence over the selection of targets and the severity of punishment. Faced with the constant threat of campaigns, and knowing that the implementation of anticorruption is entrusted to individual leaders rather than established rules and procedures, rational politicians have strong incentives to attach themselves with influential patrons to enhance their safety. The importance of factional ties as a safety net has been long recognized by observers of China's political system. Dittmer and Wu, for example, argued that the goals of factions "constitute a natural hierarchy: security is the top priority, material interests are second, and ideological and policy preferences are the last" (*Dittmer and Wu*, 1995, 479). Similarly, Lucian Pye contended that factional relations in China are "driven by an anxious search for security in a danger-filled political environment" (*Pye*, 1995, 35).

Chinese and international media routinely provide anecdotes about corrupt officials who were able to stay safe due to connections to powerful patrons. Consider the case of Ma Chaoqun, the former manager of a water supply company in Hebei province. In 2014, the DIC discovered 82 lbs of gold, documents for 68 houses and 120 million RMB in cash in Ma's home. It was also revealed that Ma's embezzlement and bribe-taking was for a long time immune from any investigation thanks to his access to high-level provincial officials. Probes into Ma's scandalous corruption finally started in November 2014 when his main patron, the head of provincial organization department, also came under investigation in the same month.<sup>8</sup> Further up in the CCP hierarchy, Jia Qinglin's rise to the Politburo is another case in point. When serving as the Party chief of Fujian province, a smuggling scandal of

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<sup>8</sup>"Another Hebei Official Is Targeted by Corruption Investigators", November 21 2014. *Caixin*, <http://english.caixin.com/2014-11-21/100754090.html>. Accessed March 26 2015.



epic proportion broke out under Jia's watch, and it was speculated that Jia's family was complicit in the smuggling business. However, Jia avoided any fallout from the case due to his long-running ties to Jiang Zemin, China's paramount leader between 1989 and 2002. The two people worked together at the First Machine Industry Department through the 1960s and 1970s, and Jia even acted as Jiang's best man at his wedding. The BBC's profile of Jia Qinglin conveys the point bluntly: "Jia Qinglin owes his political survival to Jiang Zemin, who took care to protect him when a corruption scandal enveloped his wife."<sup>9</sup>

If the top Party leaders indeed utilize the campaign to expand the influence of their personal networks, we should observe the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* Provincial officials with factional ties to incumbent top CCP leaders are *less* likely to be investigated for suspected corruption than those without such ties.

Moreover, given the capricious nature of factional conflicts, the protection provided to factional members will be contingent on the political standing of patrons. Starting from the late 1990s, the CCP has developed an intra-party norm that requires orderly, peaceful transition of top leadership (*Nathan*, 2003). Since the turn of the century, two successions involving the replacement of the Party's general secretary have taken place in 2002 and 2012, respectively. Although it is impossible to know the extent to which retired elders can intervene in day-to-day politics, their influence over key decisions is expected to have waned after leaving office. Therefore, a lower-level official is likely to receive less protection from those who are no longer holding office than from the incumbents. In the mean time, successful execution of orderly transition requires some guarantee of personal safety for the outgoing leaders and their followers. By refraining from persecuting the supporters of their predecessors, the incumbent oligarchs can expect similar treatment after ceding power to the next leadership cohort. This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* Provincial officials with factional ties to retired top CCP leaders are *neither more nor less* likely to be investigated for suspected corruption than those without such ties.

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<sup>9</sup>BBC China leadership profile. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/asia\\_pac/02/china\\_party\\_congress/leadership\\_changes/html/jia\\_qinglin.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/asia_pac/02/china_party_congress/leadership_changes/html/jia_qinglin.stm). Accessed March 26 2015.

## 5.4 Data and method

In this chapter we use an original data set to examine the role of informal network in the CCP's anticorruption efforts. A major methodological challenge to our empirical effort is how to identify the universe of officials that are at risk of disciplinary investigation. Since we already have information about which ministerial-level officials have been exposed for corruption since Xi Jinping came to power, it would be ideal to define the entire set of ministerial-level officials in China as the underlying population. This strategy, however, will present the researchers with a colossal task, as the ministerial-level officials are not only huge in number but also scattered in a myriad of local governments, central ministries, legislative bodies, state-owned enterprises and mass organizations. We simply do not have access to a full list of officials at this level, let alone obtaining detailed biographical information about them.

Fortunately, we are able to identify a narrower, well-defined group of ministerial-level officials as the universe of observations. In this study, the sample is defined as all officials that are serving either as members of CCP provincial standing committees (PSC) or as vice governors as of the end of 2012. The total number of officials that belong to this group is 555, with 377 PSC members and 178 vice governors. In each province, the PSC members and vice governors count up to about 20 in number and constitute the top echelon of provincial leadership. There are two main benefits for focusing on this group of cadres. First, the identities and biographical information of incumbent PSC members and vice governors immediately after the 18th Party Congress (held in November, 2012) are publicly available. Second, this cohort of provincial officials have borne the brunt of the latest anticorruption campaign, with about half of the 69 investigated ministerial-level officials falling into this group. The significant number of revealed cases allays the concern of very rare events that could lead to bias in statistical analysis (*King and Zeng, 2001*).

Another serious challenge to empirical analysis concerns the measurement of factional ties with top CCP leaders. Since factional relations are built upon personal affinities and display

no formal organizational arrangement, any measure of such ties will have to depend on inferences from some objective indicators. Our study draws upon an approach of measuring factional ties that was first developed in Shih et al. (2010) and later adopted in several studies of China’s informal politics (*Shih et al.*, 2012; *Keller*, 2014; *Jia et al.*, 2014). In essence, this approach codes two officials as sharing factional ties if they were born in the same place, educated in the same college, or have common experience in a work unit. We choose this measurement because it grows out of a long tradition of the China studies, produces indicators that generally accord with impressionistic observations, and minimizes the use of subjective judgments. Thus, we read through the official biography of each of the 555 provincial officials in the sample. If an official was born in the same city, or went to the same college, or has worked in the same bureaucratic unit as a top CCP leader, he is coded as possessing factional ties.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, we make a distinction between ties with incumbent top leaders and ties with retired top leaders. Incumbent top CCP leaders are defined as the seven Politburo Standing Committee members that were elected in 2012, while retired top CCP leaders referred to the ten individuals that served in the same body after 2002 but have retired by the 18th Party Congress (see Appendix B).

This approach of operationalization identifies a total of 143 provincial officials with factional ties to incumbent top CCP leaders. In other words, roughly one in four officials in our sample are blessed with connections to the all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee. Among them, 103 are connected through common work experience, 23 claim school ties, and 19 share the same birthplaces with top leaders.<sup>11</sup> For the sake of convenience, henceforth we refer to this subset of officials simply as the “factional members”. On the other hand, there are 73 officials tied to retired top leaders. Among these “dated factional members”, the number of officials connected through work experience, alma mater, and native place are 43, 20, and 14, respectively. It comes as no surprise that there are fewer dated factional

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<sup>10</sup>Appendix C provides a more detailed account of our coding procedures.

<sup>11</sup>The sum of these three numbers exceeds 143 because there are two officials who share more than one characteristics with top leaders.

members than current ones, partly because new CCP leadership has promoted their own followers to replace the supporters of the old administration.

The dependent variable of our analysis is a binary indicator of whether a provincial official has been placed under investigation by the CDIC during the latest round of anticorruption drive. Our data is right-censored as we stopped following the status of these officials in March 2015, the time of writing. As a first cut to examine the plausibility of our main hypothesis, we compare the rate of investigation between the factional members and the rest of the sample. Among the 143 factional members, three or 2.1 percent of them have been put under CDIC investigation. By contrast, 29 or 7.0 percent of the 412 officials without factional ties have been caught. The difference in the probability of investigation between the two groups is 4.9 percentage points, with a  $t$  statistic of 2.18 and  $p$ -value of 0.01. Thus, a simple bivariate analysis of the data provides some *prima facie* evidence supportive of Hypothesis 1.

Of course, a simple difference-in-means test cannot produce an accurate estimate of the effects of factional ties due to the nonrandom assignment of the factional status. If the factional members are very different from the non-factional members in some important background characteristics, and if these characteristics affect both one's probability of getting factional ties and one's risk of being investigated for corruption, then our estimate of the treatment effects will be biased. For example, it can be presumed that cadres with a wider range of career experience have better chances of forming clientelist ties with their colleagues (*Dittmer, 1978*). At the same time, it is possible that the experience of serving in multiple locations and departments offers officials more opportunities to line their own pockets. In that case, the observed correlation between factional ties and exposed corruption may be driven by the breadth of one's career experience.

In this study, we use propensity score matching to reduce the bias caused by nonrandom assignment of treatment. The validity of the matching method is based on the conditional independence assumption: conditional on a set of observed factors, one's probability of

receiving the treatment is independent of the potential outcomes (*Angrist and Pischke*, 2008, 39). In other words, holding constant the relevant covariates, comparison of career safety between those with factional ties and those without such ties will have a causal interpretation.

The basic logic of matching is analogous to regression analysis with control variables: it is assumed that the treatment is exogenous once we control for enough observed factors. An important advantage of the matching approach is that it does not rely on a particular functional form to identify the population parameters of interest (*Wooldridge*, 2010, 904). Matching can also avoid linear extrapolations that accompany regression estimates by restricting comparisons to treated and control units with overlap in covariate distributions. In our case, matching restricts comparisons to a more homogenous subpopulation of provincial officials that share similar individual characteristics.

Thus, the matching method attempts to identify two groups of officials who have exactly the same observed characteristics except that one has factional affiliations and the other does not. Assuming conditional independence, any difference in the likelihood of being investigated between the two groups can be attributed to the causal effects of factional networks. The propensity score method uses one single variable, the conditional probability of receiving the treatment, to summarize the relevant information in all control variables. When there are many control variables, matching on the single propensity score is more feasible than matching on every covariate (*Rosenbaum and Rubin*, 1983). For each unit, the propensity score is estimated with a logistic regression where a number of covariates are used to predict an official's factional status. Next, one-to-one matching is performed to match each treatment unit with a control unit whose propensity score is the closest. Effective matching should produce a subset of data in which the distribution of covariates is similar between the treated and control group.

For matching to successfully reduce selection bias, it is critical that we identify a set of important covariates that could influence both a unit's probability of receiving treatment and the outcome variable. Below we discuss the covariates that are included as confounding

**Table 5.1: Summary statistics**

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
female	0.101	0.301	0	1	555
minority	0.133	0.34	0	1	555
localist	0.571	0.495	0	1	555
centralist	0.144	0.352	0	1	555
age joining the party	22.805	4.198	16	44	529
age in 2012	54.732	3.86	44	65	555
education	2.103	0.66	0	3	555

factors. The summary statistics of these covariates are shown in table 5.1.

1. *Female.* For women who account for about 10 percent of the officials in our sample, their likelihood of having factional ties is significantly lower than men. As the before-matching balance test shows (table 5.2), only 5.59 percent of factional members are female, compared to 11.65 percent for non-factional members. This imbalance could indicate another dimension of gender bias in Chinese politics. Meanwhile, there are a variety of reasons to suspect that the degree of career security also differs across gender. In the sample, all but one of the 32 officials caught by CDIC are male.
2. *Minority.* Han Chinese, the largest ethnic group in China, seem to be far more involved in factional politics than cadres of ethnic minorities. The before-matching balance statistics in table 5.2 indicate that only 4.89 percent of factional members are ethnic minorities, whereas for non-factional members the proportion is 16.26 percent. Thus, the vast majority of minority cadres are positioned in the periphery of the political system with little access to the top leaders. Owing to concerns of Han-minority relations, minority cadres might receive more lenient treatment amidst the anticorruption campaign. To account for this possibility, we include a dummy variable that equals one for minority cadres.
3. *Localist cadre.* Over half of the officials in the sample have worked exclusively in one province, while the rest have experienced at least one transfer to another province or a post in the central government in their career. Whether a cadre has been rotated

**Table 5.2: Balance statistics**

Variable		Mean factional members (Treated)	Mean non-members (Control)	Mean difference	T statistic
Female	Before matching	.0559	.1165	-.06056**	-2.0759
	After matching	.0567	.0992	-.0425	-1.3317
Minority	Before matching	.0489	.1626	-.1136***	-3.4764
	After matching	.0496	.0425	.0070	0.2830
Localist	Before matching	.4125	.6262	-.2136***	-4.5206
	After matching	.4113	.3546	.0567	0.9782
Centralist	Before matching	.1958	.1262	.0695**	2.0454
	After matching	.1914	.2198	-.0283	-0.5876
Age joining the party	Before matching	22.4042	22.9510	-.5467	-1.3256
	After matching	22.4042	22.6099	-.2056	-0.4139
Age in 2012	Before matching	54.9580	54.6529	.3051	0.8143
	After matching	54.9645	54.4893	.4751	0.9839
Education	Before matching	2.1258	2.0949	.0309	0.4833
	After matching	2.1276	2.2127	-.0851	-1.1135
Sample size	Before matching	143	412		
	After matching	141	141		

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

to multiple jurisdictions can have a major impact on his ability to seek factional ties. Other things being equal, the more diverse one's career experience, the more likely an official will have overlap with future top leaders. The balance test provides strong evidence that rotated cadres have a higher probability of being factional members than localist cadres. On the other hand, it is possible that the campaign will target localist cadres disproportionately as an attempt to assert central power and curb centrifugal tendencies.

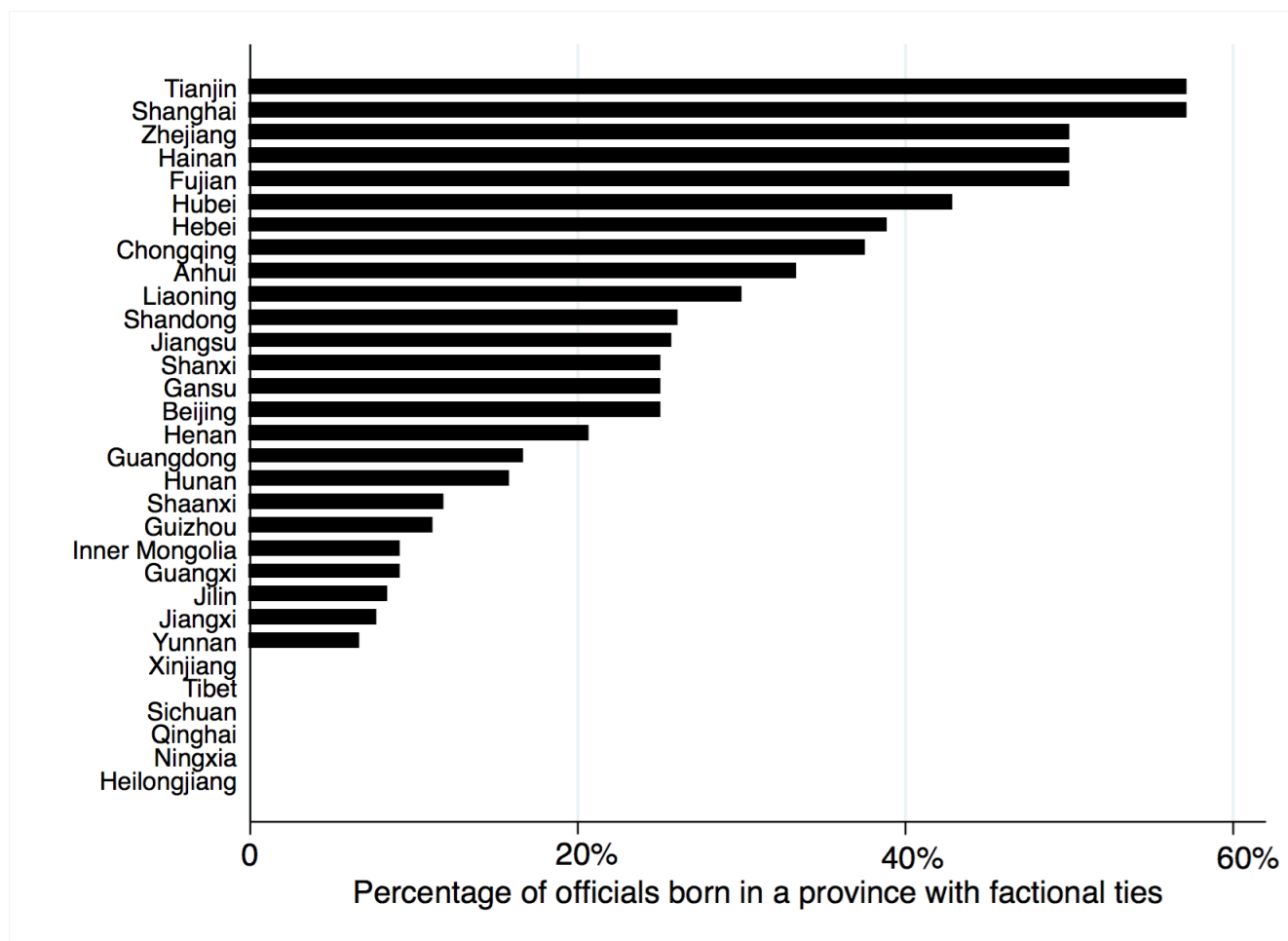
4. *Centralist cadre*. We also include a dummy variable to indicate whether an official has spent most of his career in the central government before being dispatched to a provincial post. Assigning central bureaucrats to the provinces is an important way

for the Party center to maintain control over the localities (Bo, 2004, 97). Naturally, it is those well-connected and well-trusted cadres who are appointed to key provincial posts. For the centralist cadres, their lengthy experience in the nation's capital also provides rich opportunities to ingratiate themselves with national leaders. table 5.2 makes it clear that centralists cadres are significantly more likely to be found among the factional members. Considering that centralist cadres might receive preferential treatment in the campaign, it is important to control for this feature of officials.

5. *Timing of joining the Communist Party.* Loyalty to the Party state and its ideology matters a great deal for career advancement in a Communist regime (Li and Walder, 2001; Zang, 2006). An important way to signal one's political commitment is to join the Party early in one's life, which "permits a more extended process of observation, cultivation, and training" (Li and Walder, 2001, 1380). Using the age of joining the Communist Party as a proxy for political loyalty, we expect early commitment to the Party to be positively correlated with both factional ties and career security. table 5.2, however, shows that the treated and control groups exhibit no statistically significant difference in terms of Party loyalty. Still, we control for this covariate to avoid omitted variable bias.
6. *Home province.* For those officials who did not have the privilege of working in the center, their best hope of having career overlap with future national leaders is when the latter are acquiring governing experiences in the provinces. In recent years, it has become essential for CCP elites to hone their skills in multiple regions before entering into top national leadership (Li, 2008). However, as tabulated in Appendix B, the provinces where top CCP leaders have previously worked are far from randomly selected: they tend to be coastal provinces with highly developed economies (Fujian, Zhejiang), mega-provinces with population close to 100 million (Shandong, Henan), or Centrally Administered Municipalities (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin). Therefore, officials



Figure 5.5: Percentage of officials with factional ties by hometown



from these types of provinces are well-placed to curry favor with future political stars. We present the provincial bias in the distribution of factional members in figure 5.5. Out of the total number of officials born in each province, the bar represents the percentage that has factional ties. Clearly, all men are not created equal in the Chinese officialdom. Cadres from places such as Tianjin and Zhejiang have easy access to the corridors of power, whereas those from Qinghai and the like are mostly left in the cold. As the anticorruption campaign also tends to target some regions more than others (see Section II), it is appropriate to include a set of categorical variables that indicate an official's provincial origin.

7. *Age and Education.* Although it may be suspected that factional members are on average older and better educated than the rest of officials, table 5.2 shows that the two groups are remarkably similar in age and education. Again, we err on the side of caution to control for both covariates. Education is an ordinal variable that equals 3 if the official has a Doctoral degree, 2 if a Master degree, 1 if a college degree and 0 otherwise.

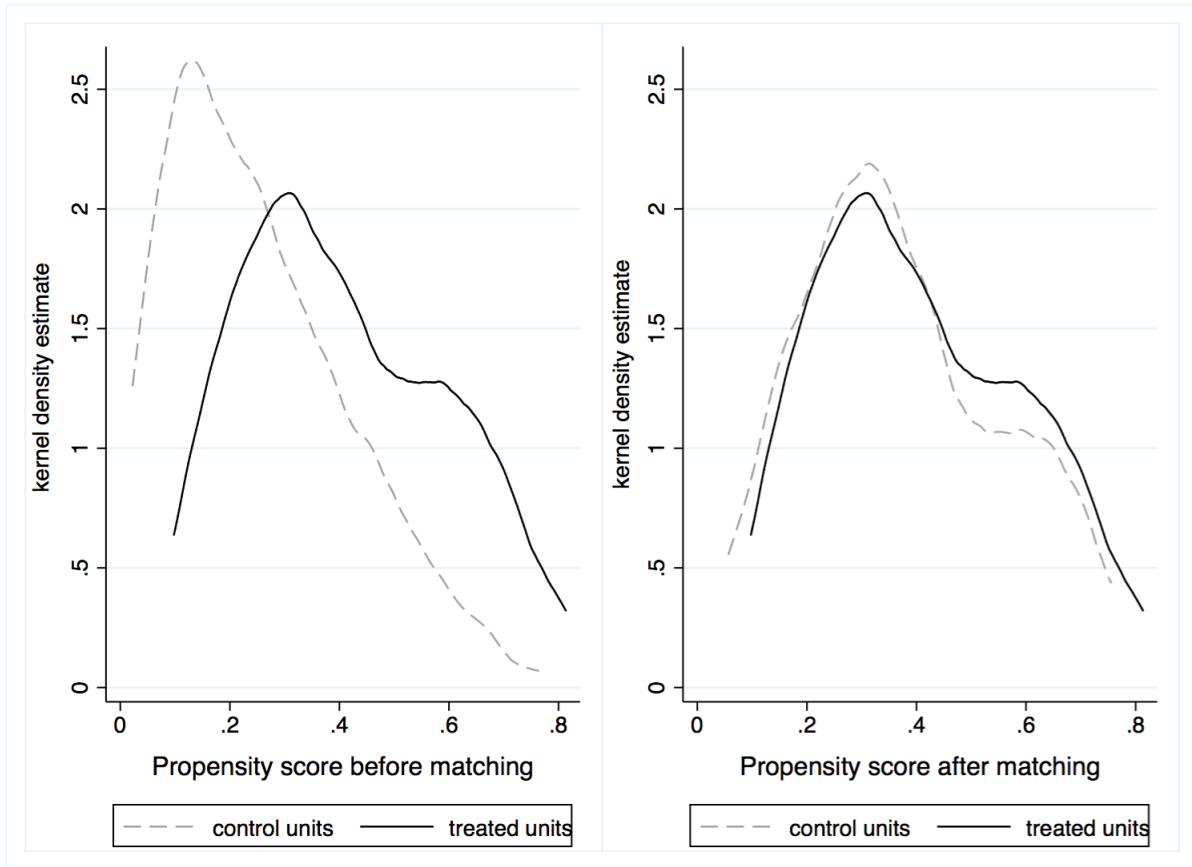
## 5.5 Results and analysis

Using one-to-one matching based on the proximity of propensity score, we generated a matched sub-sample containing 141 factional members and the same number of non-members. Note that 2 treated units were dropped from the matched sample for failing to meet the common support condition. That is, their covariate distributions are so extreme that no control unit can match them. In table 5.2, we present before and after statistics to show that matching has considerably improved covariate balance. While there was significant difference in gender, ethnicity, and career path between treated and control groups before matching, the mean differences of all covariates are no longer statistically significant at  $p=0.05$  level in the matched sample. The only covariate that still exhibits notable imbalance across two groups is gender, with a mean difference of 4.25 percentage points and  $p$ -value of 0.09. The inability to achieve perfect balance across all variables, though, is not uncommon in observational studies.

An alternative way to examine the symmetry of the two groups is to compare the distribution of the estimated propensity score. If matching is successful, the distribution should be similar between the two groups. As shown in figure 5.6, the matching procedure has achieved reasonable balance between the treated group (indicated by the red line) and the control group (indicated by the blue line).

After matching on the propensity score, the average treatment effect on the treated (ATET) is computed by comparing the outcome means across treatment and control groups

**Figure 5.6: Distribution of propensity score before and after matching**



within the matched sub-sample. As presented in the first column of 5.3, fractional ties reduces the probability of being investigated for corruption by 5.67 percentage points, and the result is statistically significant at  $p=0.05$  level. In the sub-sample, the mean probability of being caught is 7.80 percent for the non-factional members. Thus, obtaining factional ties with incumbent top leaders will lower the said probability to 2.13 percent. By any measure, this treatment effect is substantial and slightly larger than the estimated effect in the unmatched sample (4.90 percentage points), showing that we will underestimate the importance of factional ties without correcting for nonrandom assignment.

Turning to the effect of factional ties with retired CCP leaders, the first column of table 5.4 indicates that such ties have no effect on the likelihood of investigation. The coefficient estimate is positive, but without statistical significance. Therefore, Both Hypothesis 1 and 2 are supported by our data analysis.

**Table 5.3: ATET of factional ties to incumbent CCP leaders**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	one-to-one matching	one-to-two matching	nearest neighbor matching
	-0.0567**	-0.0603**	-0.0759**
	(-2.03)	(-2.43)	(-2.18)
<i>N</i>	529	529	529

*t* statistics in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table 5.4: ATET of factional ties to retired CCP leaders**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	one-to-one matching	one-to-two matching	nearest neighbor matching
	0.0141	0.0141	0.0371
	(0.48)	(0.55)	(0.81)
<i>N</i>	529	529	529

*t* statistics in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Given that our conception of factional ties is composed of three types of connections, we are interested in knowing whether the protective effect will differ across these types. At the outset, it should be reported that for the 40 provincial officials who share *alma mater* or native place with incumbent leaders, none has been subject to investigation. The small number of officials falling into this group precludes any definitive conclusion, but it does suggest that ties of a more traditional nature, cultivated through common education or kinship, provide an important safety net for officials. On the other hand, all three officials who were subject to investigation despite factional ties acquired these ties through common working experience. This leads us to examine whether factional ties narrowly defined as overlapping career experience are sufficient to provide immunity from investigation. As shown in the first column of table 5.5, narrowly defined ties lower the probability of investigation by 3.8 percentage points, but the coefficient estimate is not statistically significant.

This finding suggests that native place and school ties lay stronger foundation for informal network than colleague experience. Common local-origins and educational background

**Table 5.5: ATET of factional ties (narrowly defined) to incumbent CCP leaders**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	one-to-one matching	one-to-two matching	nearest neighbor matching
	-0.0388	-0.0194	-0.0303
	(-1.22)	(-0.80)	(-0.98)
<i>N</i>	529	529	529

*t* statistics in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

almost invariably forge affective bonds (*Li*, 1994; *Goodman*, 1995), which will only be amplified when officials are rotated out of their native place and interact with one another on the stage of national politics. What are the odds of running into a fellow townsman or schoolmate in *Zhongnanhai*, the central government compound! In comparison, there is less certainty that working experience will promote friendly ties among colleagues. The potential of bureaucratic infighting means that career overlap can foster jealousy and rivalry as well as camaraderie. While officials who used to work under the same roof are still more likely to share factional ties on average, there is more measurement error when workplace ties are used as a proxy for factional alignment.

In the remainder of this section, we conduct further analysis to examine the robustness of the main findings. First, we employ different matching techniques to see if they produce different results. In addition to one-to-one matching, we also perform one-to-two matching which matches each treated unit with two control units that have the most similar propensity scores. One-to-many matching is more efficient since a bigger subset of data is used, but it also tends to have a larger bias because it is more difficult to find multiple exact matches. In our case, the results of one-to-two matching presented in the second column of table 5.3-5.5 are very similar to those of one-to-one matching. An alternative technique to propensity score matching is nearest-neighbor matching (NNM) based on Mahalanobis distance. Instead of matching on a single continuous variable, NNM uses a specific formula to calculate the distance between the covariates of two observations. As can be seen in column (3) of table

**Table 5.6: ATET of factional ties to incumbent CCP leaders  
(PSC members only)**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	one-to-one matching	one-to-two matching	nearest neighbor matching
	-0.0508	-0.0791**	-0.0690*
	(-1.09)	(-2.40)	(-1.84)
<i>N</i>	377	377	377

*t* statistics in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

5.3-5.5, the results still hold when one-to-one NNM is used to produce the matched sample. In fact, the estimated effect from the NNM approach is 7.59 percentage points, which is significantly larger than its counterpart under propensity score matching.

As previously mentioned, our sample contains 377 provincial standing committee (PSC) members and 178 vice governors. Among the vice governors, there is not a single factional member who has been placed under investigation. In other words, all the cases of factional members subject to investigation are from the pool of PSC members. This leads us to further inquire whether the results will be similar if we restrict the analysis to the PSC members. In table 5.6, we report the estimated effects of factional ties for PSC members only. While the ATET is not statistically significant under one-to-one matching, one-to-two matching and nearest neighbor matching produce estimates that are negative and significant. Considering the reduction of statistical power due to smaller sample size, the evidence are supportive of our hypothesis that factional ties offer protection for PSC members as well as vice governors.

Finally, we take steps to address the concern that the matching procedure, while identifying a control group that closely resembles the treated group, did not achieve perfect balance across all covariates. The gender variable, for instance, still displays marked disparity across the two groups. Therefore, within the matched sub-sample, we employ a Cox proportional hazard model to control for any remaining imbalance with the covariates. This duration model also takes into account the right-censored nature of our data. In duration analysis, the individuals enter an initial state at some point and are either observed to exit the state

or are censored (*Wooldridge*, 2010, 983). In this study, the duration is the time elapsed until an official is investigated by the CDIC, and we are interested in how various covariates affect the length of “survival”. Here, the dependent variable is the number of months a given official remains “safe” after November 2012, roughly the time point when the anticorruption campaign started. The explanatory variable is a dummy for factional ties, and the controls are the same covariates used to predict the receipt of treatment.

The Cox regression results are reported in relative hazard metric in table 5.7. The standard errors are clustered at the provincial level to account for any error correlation between officials serving in the same province. Column 1 and 2 show the results from the unmatched and matched sample, respectively; column 3 presents the analysis only for PSC members in the matched sample; and column 4 shows the effect of ties with retired leaders.

In keeping with our hypotheses, the coefficients for factional ties are statistically significant in the first three columns, but not in column 4. In column 2, for example, the coefficient estimate means that factional ties reduce the hazard rate of investigation by a factor of 0.256 or by 74.4 percent. As an illustration, if the probability that a non-factional member will be investigated in any month is 1 percent, the cultivation of factional ties reduces that probability to 0.256 percent. Again, ties with those septuagenarians who have left office do not have significant effect on the outcome variable. In column 1, the exponentiated coefficient for old factional ties is actually significantly greater than one, indicating that such ties increase the risk of investigation. This finding, however, should be biased as analysis of unmatched sample may violate the common support assumption. As seen in column 4, analysis based on the matched sample reveals no significant effect of old factional ties.

## 5.6 Conclusion

Drawing on a sample of senior provincial officials, we have presented evidence that factional ties to incumbent members of the Politburo Standing Committee reduce the likelihood of being investigated by the Party’s anticorruption organ. By contrast, factional ties with

**Table 5.7: Effects of factional ties on corruption investigation  
Cox proportional hazard model**

	(1) unmatched sample	(2) matched sample	(3) matched sample PSC members	(4) matched sample old factional ties
factional ties	0.2273** (-2.54)	0.2561* (-1.85)	0.2066* (-1.93)	
old factional ties	2.7926** (2.40)			0.8721 (-0.20)
female	0.2611 (-1.60)	1.5176 (0.50)	1.3107 (0.29)	0.0000*** (-72.31)
minority	0.7917 (-0.43)	1.6625 (0.35)	1.4347 (0.23)	7.3322*** (3.17)
education	0.8864 (-0.32)	0.3665** (-2.30)	0.5017* (-1.93)	0.5678 (-0.65)
pure localist	1.2002 (0.40)	0.7117 (-0.41)	1.0740 (0.08)	0.5131 (-0.81)
centralist	0.3262 (-1.49)	0.2945 (-1.32)	0.0000*** (-72.63)	0.2566 (-1.56)
age in 2012	0.9748 (-0.45)	1.0076 (0.10)	1.0634 (0.84)	0.8437 (-1.34)
age joining the party	0.9741 (-0.50)	1.0037 (0.03)	1.0278 (0.22)	1.0739 (0.63)
Observations	529	282	210	142

Exponentiated coefficients;  $t$  statistics in parentheses

Standard errors adjusted for 31 clusters in province

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

retired members of the same body yield neither protective nor detrimental effect. Our main findings are robust to various matching techniques, the isolation of the PSC-members sample, and the use of a Cox proportional hazard model to control for any covariate imbalance after matching. In the concluding section, we discuss the study's limitations and its implications for understanding China's anticorruption campaigns.

First, although we have taken measures to ensure the study's internal validity, the question remains whether the findings can be generalized to other populations of interest. In



addition to high-level provincial officials, the latest campaign has also caused massive casualties for officials serving in other sectors —particularly the military and the SOEs —and those with lower bureaucratic ranks. Will our hypotheses be supported if the sample is extended to other types of state officials at different levels of the political hierarchy? As widely reported in the Chinese media, a large number of officials, SOE managers, and businessmen associated with Zhou Yongkang were arrested and interrogated before the campaign reached the central figure of a huge network. Thus, an analysis that samples from lower-ranking officials might find a positive relationship between ties to the former Standing Committee member and the risks of investigation. While more research is needed to examine the generalizability of our findings, understanding enforcement pattern for senior provincial officials is valuable in itself, given the pivotal role they play in China’s governance.

Second, our inquiry has adopted a dichotomous approach to factional ties, whereas personal connections in real life are better conceived as a continuum ranging from tenuous to strong ties. While we have suggested that common local origin and *alma mater* provide stronger basis for factional networking, there are many other factors that could explain the varying strength of factional ties. Moreover, factional members differ in their centrality to the elite network. Some are located at the heart of the network, serving as key conduits of information and brokering the interactions between members. These brokers are far less likely to be sacrificed by factional leaders than the peripheral members. This chapter will be followed by more empirical work on how career security hinges on the depth of factional ties and the structural positions of individuals.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the campaign depends on our interpretation of its purpose. When considered as an attempt to deter high-level, grand corruption, the success of the campaign is inevitably discounted by the selective nature of enforcement. By increasing the risk of detection, the campaign might have had a deterrent effect on senior officials without factional connections, but those protected by factional network would remain undaunted in their pursuit of illegal gains. To the extent that corruption is particularly rampant among

factional members, who need to constantly exchange gifts and favors, the deterrent effects are further compromised. Indeed, a selectively enforced campaign can be counterproductive as it heightens the need for informal ties with powerful patrons. Thus, the cyclic pattern of campaigns helps explain the tenacity and pervasiveness of factional ties in the officialdom.

Conceived more broadly as a method to consolidate the status of a new oligarchy, anti-corruption campaigns that discriminate against non-factional members serve an important purpose. In a closed political system where only a tiny amount of people can influence leadership selection (a small selectorate), the leaders need to maintain the support of a even smaller group (the winning coalition) to stay in office (*Bueno de Mesquita et al.*, 2003). Therefore, the constellation of political forces incentivizes the oligarchs to provide narrowly tailored benefits, such as exemptions from corruption charges, to their loyal followers. In distributing valuable benefits to their supporters, the patrons will inevitably have to circumvent formal bureaucratic rules which demand merit-based rewards and impersonality. The imperative need for building a winning coalition provides another explanation for the prevalence of informal network, despite the proliferation of formal regulations. Finally, the finding that officials tied to the retired oligarchs are not subject to excessive punishment indicates the relative smoothness of power succession. A code of civility seems to have emerged to constrain the newly enthroned oligarchy, preventing the persecution of retired leaders and paving the way for stable handover of power in the future.

## CHAPTER VI

### Conclusion

#### 6.1 Summary of findings

Personal dictatorship was for a long time viewed as a sign of normalcy for authoritarian regimes, whereas power-sharing among oligarchs was considered a transient, unstable state of affairs that would in due course give way to established one-man rule. Richard Lowenthal, a prominent scholar of Soviet politics, wrote in the 1960s that one-man leadership “is the normal rule of life in the one-party state” (*Lowenthal*, 1962, 119). Another observer argued that collective leadership is “inherently unworkable in an authoritarian system with a strong tendency toward centralization” (*Hyland*, 1979, 61-2). The advent of limited personal rule in Brezhnev’s Soviet Union, though, led some western scholars to entertain the possibility that oligarchy may become a long-term governing style as authoritarianism matures and modernizes. This possibility seems to be confirmed by developments in a diverse set of non-democratic countries ranging from one-party regimes to military dictatorships. Observing the consolidation of modern authoritarian regimes, Huntington concluded that “the institutionalization of leadership in a one-party system requires that it be limited in tenure, limited in power, collectivized, or subjected to some combination of these changes” (*Huntington and Moore*, 1970, 32).

In this dissertation I suggest that elite relations under authoritarianism can be conceptualized along two dimensions: the distribution of power within the first tier leadership and the

interaction between the oligarchs and a broader group of second tier cadres. On the horizontal dimension, power may be concentrated in the hands of a single leader or distributed more or less equally among the oligarchs. On the vertical dimension, the oligarchy may unilaterally dominate the second tier cadres or be held accountable to them in some way. Institutional arrangements are not static but could evolve in both dimensions depending on the stage in a regime's life cycle, macro socioeconomic factors, and agentive actions pursued by elites. Once a particular combination of horizontal and vertical interaction stabilizes, however, it dictates how significant decisions are made and political resources are distributed.

I use the cadre management system of China's ruling party to illustrate the behavioral implications of oligarchic institutions. The CCP regime is characterized as a mixture of personalistic and collective rule that resolutely rejects reciprocal accountability, and the formation of this structure is partly attributed to the various threats that the CCP had to confront in its eventful history. Through the lens of this characterization, we could better explain a series of empirical patterns in the CCP's appointment, promotion, and disciplinary decisions.

Four of these patterns are explored in this dissertation. First, in assigning key provincial leadership posts, the CCP's general secretary has certain means to consolidate his power by providing preferential treatment to his loyal supporters, but the extent of patronage distribution appears modest and constrained (Chapter II). Second, in spite of all the official rhetoric about intra-party democracy, measures to promote lower level participation in the cadre selection process prove old wine in new bottles. Top-down personnel authority is vigorously preserved, while attempts to empower second tier leaders through horizontal networking are nipped in the bud (Chapter III). Third, provincial-level enforcement against corruption does not seem to be affected by different compositions of provincial leadership, but is highly sensitive to shifting central emphasis on anticorruption (Chapter IV). Fourth, provincial officials with personal ties to the incumbent Politburo Standing Committee are more likely to survive the latest anticorruption campaign, while particularistic ties to the retired members

of the same body have no significant effect on the risks of investigation (Chapter V). It is argued that these seemingly unrelated phenomena in the Chinese officialdom in fact have common origins in the oligarchic structure of the regime.

## 6.2 Future directions

For most of recorded history, mankind has lived under regimes that deny political rights and liberties to the ruled population. With the rise of liberal democracy in the Western world, the label of authoritarianism became widely used to designate regimes that fail to meet the standards of political competition and pluralism, however controversial those standards might be. By one measure, even after the “third wave” of democratization, authoritarian rule still accounts for roughly fifty percent of the regime universe in the early 2000s (*Magaloni and Kricheli*, 2010, 124-5). Arguably, the vast majority of regime analysis has tried to explain the beginning and breakdown of authoritarian regimes, with much less attention to their day-to-day functioning. In this dissertation, I drew upon some of the seminal works on authoritarian rule and presented a synthetic framework for analyzing the cohesiveness of governing elites and its consequences. In describing this framework and applying it to the political processes in China, most of the steps are preliminary and much work remains undone. In the concluding paragraphs, I will outline some directions for future efforts that can fill in the gaps of the current project.

First, while the introductory chapter referred to a wide range of factors that may determine the power-sharing arrangements among authoritarian elites, it did not delve into the question why rule-bound, collegial rule takes root in some regimes rather than others. One intriguing element of this puzzle has to do with the relationship between collective rule and a regime’s life cycle: is oligarchy more likely to emerge at a particular stage of authoritarian spell? *Geddes* (2004) contends that collegiality is a trait associated with the formative stage of authoritarian regimes, when institutional rules are still chaotic and undefined. Once a regime consolidates itself, collective rule tends to be replaced by personal domination. This

generalization is contradicted by others who find that the establishment of revolutionary regimes is usually linked to a powerful, charismatic figure, and institutionalized leadership only emerges as the regimes mature in the wake of the strongman's departure (*Baylis*, 1989; *Huntington and Moore*, 1970). The lack of consensus on this question, which is empirical in nature, shows the amount of efforts that still await comparative scholars to examine many cases with a unified analytic framework. Gathering more information about various regimes will lay the foundation for a generalizable theory of how their life cycles affect power-sharing institutions.

Second, although it is difficult to provide a sweeping explanation for institutional formation, most would agree that there are some “critical junctures” in countries' history when institutional rules are particularly fluid and malleable. Political entrepreneurs may successfully seize this moment and lay down rules of the game that continue to shape the behavior of all actors for an extended period of time. These “law-givers”, as they were known in the ancient world, will have a much greater opportunity to define institutions than politicians of normal times. As mentioned in the introduction, the 1980s represents such a critical juncture for the CCP regime, following the death of a political strongman and many years of political turmoil that wrought havoc of party organizations. During this defining decade, Deng Xiaoping and his fellow revolutionary veterans expended enormous efforts towards institutional building and rule making. I argued that the power-sharing arrangements bestowed by these veterans can be understood as attempts to ward off three challenges to oligarchic rule—personalization, demagoguery, and stagnation. The introductory chapter provided only a cursory treatment of the key events of the 1980s, including the restoration of collective rule, the demagogic attempts initiated by two general secretaries, and the fateful split of the oligarchy during the 1989 Tiananmen crisis. In future works I will examine more closely how the veteran leadership's responses to serious crises redefined the regime's institutional rules.

Third, the claim made in Chapter II that the general secretary is endowed with “constrained supremacy” in personnel matters is largely built upon suggestive evidence. The

identification of personal ties was based on common work experience alone, without considering *alma mater* or kinship ties. Moreover, I only examined whether the general secretary's personal followers were treated favorably *in comparison to* the rest of the provincial leaders. Since our theoretical interests lie in the distribution of power within the oligarchy, a better comparison should pit the supporters of the general secretary against those of other Politburo Standing Committee members. Thus, the thesis of "constrained supremacy" predicts that all cadres would benefit from their personal ties with the oligarchy, but the general secretary's men would fare even better than the clients of other oligarchic members. It is my plan to test this particular hypothesis, the support of which will provide more direct evidence for my argument, in future studies.

Fourth, I intend to generalize and extend the argument of central agenda setting, made in Chapter IV, to policy areas other than anticorruption enforcement. The method of campaign-style, top-down mobilization of the bureaucratic apparatus could be utilized to implement a variety of policies that the center initiates and demands immediate outcomes. Thus, we should observe that the vigor with which labor protection standards, anti-sex-industry regulations, and repressive measures are enforced will fluctuate across localities in response to shifting central emphasis. Depending on their political weight, some localities should be under greater pressure to toe the central line than others. These hypotheses, too, will be explored in subsequent inquiries.

Last but not least, in Chapter II and V, I have repeatedly asserted that each oligarch seeks to increase his power by appointing loyal supporters to key administrative posts. But in a system where second tier leaders do not directly participate in the selection of the oligarchs, exactly how do the clients translate their presence into the patron's personal power? Clearly, the lack of reciprocal accountability between the two tiers does not mean that first tier oligarchs do not need the support from below. This support, however, cannot be realized through deliberation and voting process at the Central Committee sessions, since such formal process will empower the second tier body as a whole and endanger the oligarchy's monopoly

of power. Importantly, these formal settings will allow CC members to network and form groups among themselves, increasing their collective action ability vis-à-vis the Politburo Standing Committee. Therefore, exchange of support between the tiers must occur in an individualized, informal manner that does not enable the second tier leaders to conduct horizontal networking. I posit that a principal way by which second tier cadres lend support to their leaders is through their response to the leader's ideological and policy initiatives. By having a larger number of lower-level cadres expressing timely support for his new agenda, a factional leader can create an image of strength and enhance his power within the oligarchy. One observable implication of this reasoning is that, after the CCP's paramount leader launches a new ideological or policy agenda, members of the general secretary's faction will respond with much passion and eagerness, whereas the reactions from non-members will be lukewarm. We are ready to test this implication once an appropriate case study can be identified and accurate measures of lower-level response are developed.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### The formal process of selecting CCP officials

According to the CCP's regulations, selecting a cadre for promotion consists of four basic steps: democratic recommendation, organizational vetting, deliberation and decision. First, the OD of the next higher level will decide on the pool of candidates to be vetted for the post. This decision should be made through extensive consultation with a wide range of officials and colleagues at different levels. Next, the OD will dispatch a vetting team to gather information about the candidates generated by the recommendation procedure. To do this, the vetting team may hold private meetings with relevant individuals, conduct opinion polls or interview the candidates. The vetting team will report the results to the OD, which will in turn report to the party committee one level up.

Third, before the names are presented to the higher-up party committee, the list of candidates must be vetted through a process of deliberation. The participants of the deliberation include the leaders of the party committee, the legislature and the government apparatus. Finally, the higher-up party committee shall hold collective discussions to decide whether a candidate should be promoted to the post. The CCP Constitution delegates the day-to-day duties of the party committee to a smaller standing committee; therefore, the appointment is in fact decided in the meetings of the standing committee. At the meeting, a leader from the OD introduces the candidate in light of the information gathered from the first three stages.

The standing committee members would then deliberate before taking a simple majority vote to decide on the promotion.

## APPENDIX B

### Top CCP leaders and provincial experiences

	Top CCP leader	Province served
	Xi Jinping	Hebei (82-85); Fujian (85-02); Zhejiang (02-07); Shanghai (07)
	Li Keqiang	Henan (98-04); Liaoning (04-07)
<b>Incumbent leaders</b>	Zhang Dejiang	Jilin (83-86, 90-98); Zhejiang (98-02); Guangdong (02-07)
	Yu Zhengsheng	Shandong (85-97); Hubei (02-07); Shanghai (07-12)
	Liu Yunshan	Inner Mongolia (75-93)
	Wang Qishan	Guangdong (97-00); Hainan (02-03); Beijing (03-07)
	Zhang Gaoli	Guangdong (70-01); Shandong (01-07); Tianjin (07-12)
		Hu Jintao
	Wu Bangguo	Shanghai (81-94)
	Wen Jiabao	Gansu (68-92)
	Jia Qinglin	Shanxi (83-85); Fujian (85-96); Beijing (96-02)
<b>Retired leaders</b>	Li Changchun	Liaoning (80-90); Henan (90-98); Guangdong (98-02)
	He Guoqiang	Shandong (69-91); Fujian (96-99); Chongqing (99-02)
	Zhou Yongkang	Sichuan (99-02)
	Zeng Qinghong	Shanghai (84-89)
	Wu Guanzheng	Hubei (68-86); Jiangxi (86-97); Shandong (97-02)
	Luo Gan	Henan (80-83)

## APPENDIX C

### Coding details for Chapter V

This research codes two officials as sharing factional ties if they were born in the same place, educated in the same college, or have common experience in a work unit.

#### 1. Birth Place

We counted two officials as sharing factional ties if they were born in the same city or in the same provincial-level city (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Chongqing). Traditionally, it has been presumed that two officials born in the same ‘province’ possess factional ties. Province, however, is a huge unit both administratively and geographically. Being born in the same province, thus, may not effectively contribute to the faction building process. Instead, we used the ‘city’ level as the criteria for factional ties. For example, both Sun Xinyang (孙新阳) and Bai Zhijie (白志杰) are from Shaanxi(陕西) province where Xi Jinping was born. According to the traditional method, both Mr. Sun and Mr. Bai should be coded as ones possessing factional ties with Xi Jinping. In our case, however, only Mr. Sun was coded as possessing a factional tie with Xi Jinping as both are from Weinan city (渭南市) in Shaanxi province. On the other hand, Mr. Bai was not coded as possessing a factional tie with Xi Jinping as Mr. Bai is from a different city –Yulin city(榆林市) –in Shaanxi province.

## 2. Education

We counted two officials as sharing factional ties if they have graduated from the same university. We did not count two officials who went to same institutions for their post-graduates degrees as ones with factional ties. We assumed graduating from the same universities will offer officials opportunities to cultivate factional ties even when they attended the institutions at different points of time. For example, Yang Yue (杨岳) received his Bachelor's degree in Qinghua University in 1990. Xi Jinping went to the same institution from 1975 to 1979. While Xi Jinping had already graduated from Qinghua University by the time Mr. Yang went to the institution, we coded Mr. Yang as an official with a factional tie with Xi Jinping.

## 3. Common Work Experience

We counted two officials as sharing factional ties if they have worked in the same bureaucratic unit at the same administrative ranks at the same time. Even if two officials have worked in the same bureaucracy, if they have worked at different administrative levels, we did not count it as a case with factional ties. For example, Gong Puguang (宫蒲光) worked as the deputy secretary at the general office of the Party committee of Tibet autonomous region (西藏自治区党委办公厅副处级秘书) from 1988 to 1993. Hu Jintao also worked at the Party committee of Tibet autonomous region as the Party secretary from 1988 to 1992. While the two officials served in the Party committee of the same region at the same time, there's few possibility that the two officials at different administrative ranks interacted with each other. Hence, this case was not counted as one with factional ties.

## APPENDIX D

### List of Provincial Standing Committee members and vice governors investigated since the 18th Party Congress

Name	Chinese Name	Position Held at the Time of Investigation	Time of Investigation	Factional Ties	Old Factional Ties
Li Chuncheng	李春城	Vice Party Secretary of Sichuan Province	Dec. 2012	None	Yes (with Li Changchun)
Wu Yongwen	吴永文	Deputy director of Hubei Provincial People's Congress	Jan. 2013	None	None
Wang Suyi	王素毅	Mongolia Autonomous Region Party Committee	Jun. 2013	None	None
Ni Fake	倪发科	Vice Governor of Anhui Province	Jun. 2013	None	None
Liao Shaohua	廖少华	Guizhou Province Party Committee, Party Secretary of Zunyi city	Oct. 2013	None	None
Guo Youming	郭有明	Vice Governor of Hubei Province	Nov. 2013	None	None
Ji Wenlin	冀文林	Vice Governor of Hainan Province	Feb. 2014	None	Yes (with Zhou Yongkang)
Jin Daoming	金道铭	Vice Party secretary of Shanxi Party Committee	Feb. 2014	None	Yes (with Wu Guanzheng)
Chen Peiping	沈培平	Vice Governor of Yunnan Province	Mar. 2014	None	None
Yao Mugen	姚木根	Vice Governor of Jiangxi Province	Mar. 2014	None	None



Mao Xiaobing	毛小兵	Qinghai Province Party Committee, Party Secretary of Xining City	Apr. 2014	None	Yes (with Luo Gan)
Tan Qiwei	谭栖伟	Deputy director of People's Congress of Chongqing City	May. 2014	None	None
Ren Zehou	任润厚	Vice Governor of Shanxi Province	Aug. 2014	None	None
Chao Zhiyong	赵智勇	Jiangxi Province Party Committee	Jun. 2014	None	None
Su Rong	苏荣	Vice Chairman of National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)	Jun. 2014	Yes (with Zhang Dejiang)	None
Du Xianxue	杜善学	Shanxi Province Party Committee, Vice Governor of Shanxi Province	Jun. 2014	None	None
Wan Qingliang	万庆良	Guangdong Province Party Committee, Party Secretary of Guangzhou City	Jun. 2014	None	None
Tan Li	谭力	Hainan Province Party Committee, Vice Governor of Hainan Province	Jul. 2014	None	None
Zhang Tianxin	张田欣	Yunnan Province Party Committee, Party Secretary of Kunming City	Jul. 2014	None	None
Chen Chuanping	陈川平	Shanxi Province Party Committee, Party Secretary of Taiyuan City	Aug. 2014	None	None

Nie Chunyu	聂春玉	Shanxi Province Party Committee	Aug. 2014	None	None
Bai Yun	白云	Shanxi Province Party Committee	Aug. 2014	None	None
Pan Yiyang	潘逸阳	Mongolia Autonomous Region Party Committee	Sep. 2014	None	None
Qin Yuhai	秦玉海	Party Secretary of Henan Provincial People's Congress	Sep. 2014	None	None
Liang Bin	梁滨	Hebei Province Party Committee	Nov. 2014	None	None
Zhu Mingguo	朱明国	Chairman of Guangdong CPPCC	Nov. 2014	Yes (with Zhang Dejiang)	Yes (with He Guoqiang)
Wang Min	王敏	Shandong Province Party Committee, Party Secretary of Zhinan City	Dec. 2014	Yes (with Zhang Gaoli)	Yes (with He Guoqiang and Wu Guanzheng)
Han Xuejian	韩学键	Heilongjiang Province Party Committee, Party Secretary of Daqing City	Dec. 2014	None	None
Yang Weize	杨卫泽	Jiangsu Province Party Committee, Party Secretary of Nanjing City	Jan. 2015	None	None
Lu Wucheng	陆武成	Deputy director of Gansu Provincial People's Congress	Jan. 2015	None	None

Jing Chunhua	景春华	Secretary-General of Hebei Provincial Party Committee	Mar. 2015	None	None
Qiu He	仇和	Vice Party Secretary of Yunnan Province	Mar. 2015	None	None

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