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# Economic Performance and Political Mobility: Chinese provincial leaders

ZHIYUE BO\*

*Chinese provincial leaders, unlike their counterparts in a democratic system, are not elected but selected. Hence the criteria by which the center uses to select and retain provincial leaders would be critical for the political mobility of provincial leaders. As China has been a developmental state since 1949, it is not unreasonable to expect that the center would retain or promote or demote provincial leaders according to the economic performance of their provinces. To test the hypothesis, I conducted multinomial regressions with a data set of Chinese provincial leaders between 1949 and 1994 in thirty provincial units. As the results show, the political mobility of provincial leaders is determined not only by the political movements of the PRC but also by the economic performance of the provincial leaders. The worse the economic performance record the more likely the provincial leader will be demoted. Moreover, the revenue contributions of the province during the provincial leader's tenure are also a determinant of the political mobility of the provincial leader.*

## Introduction

Chinese provincial leaders are a group of important players in Chinese politics. They form the largest bloc in the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and they constitute a major link through which the center implements its social, economic, and political policies. Yet these powerful leaders do not operate without constraints. They are the central government appointees, and their political mobility is dependent on their superiors in the center. Studies of Chinese provincial leaders are abundant,<sup>1</sup> yet few have systematically analyzed the political mobility of Chinese provincial leaders. Those who studied Chinese provincial leaders have paid almost exclusive attention to the recruitment and composition of political leaders in China. But for an individual, admittance to the club

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1. These include Frederick C. Teiwes (1966, 1967, 1971 and 1974), Victor C. Falkenheim (1972), Lynn T. White, III (1972), Donald H. McMillen (1979), David S. G. Goodman (1984), and Ezra F. Vogel (1989). For a recent literature review, see Jae Ho Chung, 'Studies of central-provincial relations in the People's Republic of China: a mid-term appraisal', *China Quarterly* 142, (June 1995), pp. 487–508.

of political leaders is not the end of a political career. What happens afterwards may reveal much about the dynamics of the political system. Hence this study starts where most studies end. Moreover, existing studies of provincial and municipal leaders have paid little systematic attention to the impact of provincial conditions and performances on mobility. This study seeks to fill this vacuum.

## Data and method

Because until recently the PRC government did not publish the rotations of officials systematically, one had to scan the PRC media to 'identify' which person holds what post. This method of 'positive identification'<sup>2</sup> has been used by Wolfgang Bartke<sup>3</sup> and David S. G. Goodman to great effect.<sup>4</sup> But, as Donald W. Klein pointed out, the problem with this method is that the 'earliest-identification' date in the various directories may be months or even years off the mark,<sup>5</sup> i.e. the appointment date. Often a provincial leader did not appear in the media until long after his or her appointment. For instance, Buhe, a son of Ulanhu, was appointed the Governor of Neimenggu (Inner Mongolia) in December 1982, but he was not identified by the media as such until four months later.<sup>6</sup> Chi Biqin was a deputy secretary of Beijing between August 1966 and April 1967, but this totally escaped the media.<sup>7</sup>

In the last few years, however, provinces began to publish systematic data on their leaders, making it feasible to revisit an old topic. Two book series on provincial leaders and provinces have been published. One is *Dangdai Zhongguo* [Contemporary China], which includes lists of provincial leaders from 1949 to 1987–1989. This series is supplemented by another series entitled *Shengqing* [Provincial Data].<sup>8</sup>

These data are superior because they provide appointment dates instead of identification dates. With these data we can more confidently reconstruct the political career of provincial leaders. We then can see to what extent the career of a provincial leader is affected by local conditions. There are thirty provincial units in China excluding Taiwan (twenty-two provinces, five autonomous regions, and three centrally administered municipalities). Out of the data on

2. David S. G. Goodman, *China's Provincial Leaders, 1949–1985. Volume I: Directory* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1986), p. vi.

3. Wolfgang Bartke, *Who's Who in the People's Republic of China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1981), p. vii.

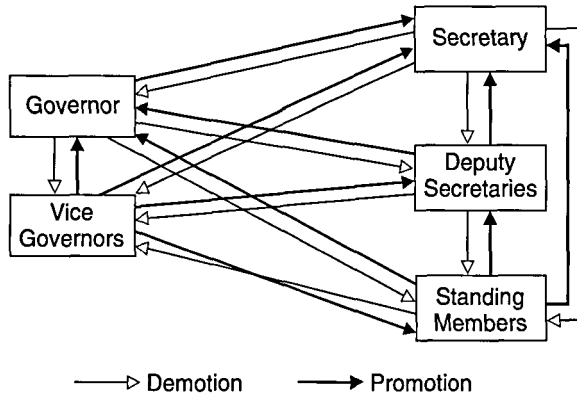
4. Goodman, Volume I: Directory, *op. cit.*, p. iii.

5. Donald W. Klein, 'Sources for elite studies and biographical materials on China', in Robert A. Scalapino, ed., *Elite in the People's Republic of China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. 621.

6. Goodman, Volume I: Directory, *op. cit.*, p. 76. See also Directory of Chinese Officials: provincial organizations 1984, p. 122.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

8. These two series are further supplemented by two compilations of provincial data. One is *Zhongguo Shengshi Zizhiqiu Ziliao Shouce* [Handbook of Materials of Provinces, Municipalities, and Autonomous Regions of the People's Republic of China] (Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji Chubanshe, 1990) and the other is *Quanguo Gesheng Zizhiqiu Zhixiashi Lishi Tongji Ziliao Huibian, 1949–1989* [Historical Data of Provinces, Autonomous Regions and Municipalities of the People's Republic of China, 1949–1989] (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 1990). The former compiles information about provincial leaders (1949–1989) and the latter gives information about provincial economic performance (1949–1989). As for the data from 1989 to 1994, I have mainly utilized Taiwan sources (such as *Yearbook on Chinese Communism*, *Mainland China Studies*, and *Studies on Chinese Communism*), with occasional reference to Mainland sources.



**Figure 1.** Power structure of provincial government.

the thirty provincial units, we have produced a set of data of Chinese provincial leaders with 19,627 cases.<sup>9</sup>

The major tool in this study is multinomial logit analysis. This is because the dependent variable—political mobility—in the study is a discrete variable with several options, and the independent variables include both discrete and continuous variables. The results are relative risk ratios (RRR) which are ratios of probabilities of different features. A simple reading of the coefficients is that, if RRR is less than 1, it can be understood as a coefficient of a negative sign; or, if RRR is greater than 1, it can be seen as a coefficient of a positive sign.

### The political mobility of provincial leaders

The PRC provincial leaders<sup>10</sup> in this study include: provincial party secretaries; provincial deputy secretaries; governors; and vice governors.<sup>11</sup> The political mobility of Chinese provincial leaders refers to five kinds of movement (or non-movement). The first is promotion. A provincial leader is considered promoted if he or she moves from a lower rank to a higher rank within the party or government apparatus, or from a government position to a party position of the same rank (Figure 1). A deputy secretary is promoted if he or she is appointed governor or secretary. A governor is promoted if he or she becomes a secretary. The second kind of political mobility is demotion. This, in fact, includes both demotions and purges or dismissals. The third is lateral transfers with no changes in rank. The fourth is retirement. This is particularly true of provincial leaders since the 1980s.

9. These are individual-years. A governor of a five-year tenure, for instance, is counted as five cases.

10. The phrase 'provincial leaders' is used here instead of 'provincial élites' because 'provincial élites' in the Chinese political system may include many other political actors such as regional and provincial military leaders, leaders of provincial people's congresses, and leaders of provincial political consultative conferences.

11. During certain historical periods such as that of the 'cultural revolution', these leaders may have different titles. Party secretaries were called provincial first secretaries; deputy secretaries include party secretaries and deputy secretaries except for first secretaries; governors include mayors of the municipalities under central control and chairmen of the autonomous regions as well as chairmen of the 'revolutionary committees' during the 'cultural revolution'; and vice governors include vice mayors of the municipalities under central control and vice chairmen of the autonomous regions as well as vice chairmen of the 'revolutionary committees' of provinces during the 'cultural revolution'.

Table 1. Political mobility of provincial leaders (1949–1994)

Year	Continue	Promoted	Mobility		Retired	Total
			Lateral	Demoted		
1949	111	2	6	2	0	121
1950	145	4	7	8	2	166
1951	154	3	9	1	1	168
1952	144	11	26	15	1	197
1953	175	9	15	6	3	208
1954	201	11	20	24	2	258
1955	264	9	9	18	2	302
1956	375	6	10	9	0	400
1957	402	2	3	12	2	421
1958	363	15	13	53	5	449
1959	439	12	1	19	2	473
1960	472	0	7	14	1	494
1961	485	7	11	7	2	512
1962	502	3	11	22	2	540
1963	480	4	15	35	2	536
1964	487	5	11	25	3	531
1965	496	18	16	17	6	553
1966	453	10	4	85	8	560
1967	13	3	3	464	3	486
1968	276	1	3	22	0	302
1969	295	2	3	4	0	304
1970	355	3	2	23	2	385
1971	451	8	7	26	1	493
1972	475	7	9	17	4	512
1973	503	5	22	28	2	560
1974	517	8	7	15	2	549
1975	492	19	21	27	5	564
1976	512	5	1	36	2	556
1977	308	37	33	181	6	565
1978	503	26	34	58	14	635
1979	407	91	37	39	80	654
1980	536	33	10	12	31	622
1981	567	14	17	7	14	619
1982	504	20	10	8	101	643
1983	162	28	11	22	343	566
1984	302	2	2	0	23	329
1985	220	27	8	11	68	334
1986	290	12	3	9	14	328
1987	276	9	16	11	14	326
1988	246	11	12	16	52	337
1989	281	17	9	10	9	326
1990	282	8	18	8	11	327
1991	300	12	10	4	12	338
1992	304	11	13	8	15	351
1993	219	31	25	18	71	364
1994	349	9	1	2	2	363
Total	16093	590	541	1458	945	19627

Table 1 shows that the Chinese provincial leadership has been very stable.<sup>12</sup> Out of 19,627 cases, 16,093 (or 82%) are cases of 'continue', i.e. staying in present positions.<sup>13</sup> This image of stability, however, has been shattered three times between 1949 and 1994. The first serious blow came in 1967 when 97% of the provincial leaders were purged at the beginning of the 'cultural revolution'. The second major change occurred in 1983 when a majority of the provincial leaders were retired to make a way for younger and more energetic leaders under the reforms. The third shift came in 1993 when the center restructured the provincial leadership as part of the political transition preparing for the post-Deng era.

It is surprising that the provincial leadership during the 'cultural revolution' period was the most stable, with more than 90% of provincial leaders staying where they were. This contradicts the conventional wisdom which has portrayed the 'cultural revolution' period as one of turbulence when one's political career was very unpredictable. Once one survived the first blow of the 'cultural revolution' or entered into the provincial leadership at the beginning of the 'cultural revolution', one would very likely survive in the following years. The provincial leadership of the economic reform era, on the other hand, was the most mobile.

Over 1949–1994, only a small number of provincial leaders experienced upward mobility. Out of 19,627 cases, only 519 (or 3%) could be identified as cases of promotion. It has been difficult for provincial leaders to climb the ladder of success further because they are already quite high in the hierarchy. The distribution of opportunities over the years, however, has not been even. In some years there were almost no promotions, while in others the proportion of provincial leaders who were promoted surpassed 10%. In the 1950s, 2–5% of the total provincial leaders got promoted each year. In the following years, however, the chance for further promotion became smaller, less than 1% in most years. Since the 1980s, however, the chances for upward mobility have increased dramatically. Every few years, there has been a year of promotions for more than 5% of the provincial leaders. This has probably resulted from the Party's effort to institutionalize the cadre system. As older leaders gave up their positions, the opportunities for younger leaders dramatically increased.

Lateral transfers among provincial leaders are even more rare than promotions. There are only 541 (or 2.76%) cases of lateral transfers out of 19,627 cases. There are several big waves of lateral transfers, nonetheless. The first wave lasted from 1952 to 1954 during which 61 provincial leaders were transferred. Several factors may explain this first wave. First of all, provinces were in a formative stage in those years and some provincial leaders who had worked in established provinces were moved to newer provinces. Second, the center may have been trying to reduce the power of certain regional leaders by transferring their followers out. Thirdly, the center also transferred some provincial leaders to the central government. From 7 to 13% of the total provincial leaders was transferred each year during this period.

12. For a detailed description of political mobility, see Zhiyue Bo, 'Chinese provincial leaders: economic performance and political mobility', PhD dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of Chicago, (1995), ch. 4.

13. It should be indicated that some of those provincial leaders did experience some changes in their same post. For instance, a deputy secretary may be promoted from a junior position to a senior position without changing the title of deputy secretaryship. Or a vice governor may be demoted from first vice governor to second vice governor. Cases of these kinds are not included in this study.

The second largest wave of lateral transfers occurred over 1977–1979. In absolute numbers these years witnessed even more lateral transfers. More than 30 provincial leaders were transferred each year, totalling more than 100. These numbers represent about 5% of the provincial leadership each year. This wave was directly related to the reshuffle of provincial governments in favor of the rehabilitated leaders in the center.

The third wave took place immediately after 1989 when the center decided that local governments had too much independence and transferred provincial leaders among provinces. In 1990, for instance, three governors were exchanged between provinces. Li Changchun of Liaoning was transferred to Henan, Yue Qifeng of Hebei to Liaoning, and Cheng Weigao of Henan to Hebei. Transfers to the center also became frequent during this period.

For Chinese provincial leaders, demotions and purges are more likely to occur than either promotions or lateral transfers. Out of 19,627 cases in our sample, there are 1,458 cases of demotions or purges. This represents about 7% of the total. Among these 1,458 cases, 114 cases are governors, 103 secretaries, 774 vice governors, and 467 deputy secretaries.

The most massive demotions or purges occurred in 1967, when 96% of the provincial leaders were purged. This is followed by 1977, when 32% of provincial leaders lost their posts. In 1958, many provincial leaders were also demoted or purged (12%). The reasons for these three waves are well-known: 1967 was the beginning of the ‘cultural revolution’ at the provincial level; 1977 witnessed the return of those who had been purged at the start of the ‘cultural revolution’; and 1958 was the year of the ‘great leap forward’. The victims of these years, thus, were ‘capitalist roaders’, the followers of the Gang of Four, and rightist provincial leaders, respectively.

For a long time in the PRC’s history, there was no retirement system for high-ranking officials.<sup>14</sup> Veteran revolutionaries did not leave their positions until they died or were purged or promoted. This mentality has been described as one of ‘only going up but not down, (*neng shang bu neng xia*). For this reason, upward mobility for young and ambitious officials of lower ranks was blocked. Moreover, many provincial leaders who had been purged during the ‘cultural revolution’ recovered their positions in the late 1970s. They saw the ‘cultural revolution’ as nothing but an interruption of their political careers. Yet these rehabilitated provincial leaders were much older by the late 1970s. In 1965, the average age of provincial leaders was 55. In 1980, the average age of provincial leaders had risen to 62, and many of them were well over 70. As China shifted its focus from politics to economics in 1978, more energetic and better-educated provincial leaders were needed. To make way for a younger generation of provincial leaders, the Chinese central leadership decided to institutionalize a system of retirement.

As the veteran leaders were reluctant to leave the power structure entirely, some transitional measures were adopted. First, like central leaders who left the formal structure to join the Central Advisory Commission, provincial leaders ‘retired’ to similar commissions at the provincial level. This was politically consequential. It is well-known that the Central Advisory Commission members intervened in the formal

14. For a detailed study of retirement of cadres in China, see Melanie Manion, *Retirement of Revolutionaries in China: public policies, social norms, private interests* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

power structure and were instrumental in purging general secretary Hu Yaobang in 1987. Local advisory commissions may have played a similar but less intrusive role at the provincial level. Second, many veteran provincial leaders 'retired' from their positions in the party or government to work in provincial People's Political Consultative Conferences or provincial People's Congresses. Finally, retiring provincial leaders left the power structure completely but retained all benefits and perks.<sup>15</sup>

Retirement age from office is rank-based. Generally speaking, male cadres are supposed to retire at the age of 60, and female cadres at 55. But if a cadre is a vice governor or deputy secretary, he or she may retire at 60. Provincial secretaries and governors retire at 65.<sup>16</sup> We classify all these cases (as well as those who died in office) as 'retirement'. Before 1979 there were few who actually retired. From 1979 to 1994, a system of retirement was initiated and institutionalized. 1983 was a watershed. Before 1983, few veteran provincial leaders were retired. In 1980 and 1981, only 2–5% of provincial leaders were retired. In 1983, however, more than 60% of provincial leaders were retired. Since 1983, retirement of provincial leaders has been more or less institutionalized and three waves have occurred in 1985 (20%), 1988 (15%), and 1993 (20%). As retirement proceeded, the average age of provincial leaders has dramatically declined.

To summarize, Chinese provincial leaders are the most likely to stay in the same positions in the same provinces. When they do exit from their positions, the most likely causes are demotions or purges. Next comes retirement, then promotion. Transfers are rare.

### Personal characteristics and political mobility

The differences in patterns of provincial leaders' mobility may be explained by three groups of variables. The first are social and political movements. Provincial leaders fared worse in certain years of political movements than in other 'normal' years.

The second group of variables is personal characteristics. These include the following (Table 3): (1) educational background (variable edu2); (2) party membership (variable nonCCP); (3) number of years of being a CCP member (variable paryears); (4) age (variables age49 through age90);<sup>17</sup> (5) gender (variable female); (6) nationality (variable nation2); (7) native or outsider (variable homeprov); (8) central or local origins (variable center); and (9) specific offices (gov through depsec).

#### *Education*

In traditional China, education was the ladder to success. After 1949, however, good educational backgrounds were no longer assets for upward mobility. During the Anti-Rightist movement and the 'cultural revolution', good educational backgrounds even became liabilities.

15. For detailed presentations on the benefits of retirement for high-ranking officials in China, see Hong Yung Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 234–245; and Melanie Manion, *op. cit.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

17. People of different ages are divided into four groups: age49 includes age 18 to age 49; age59 includes age 50 to age 59; age64 includes age 60 to age 64; and age90 includes age 65 to age 90.



**Table 2.** Political mobility of provincial leaders (1949–1994)

Province	Continue	Promoted	Mobility		Retired	Total
			Lateral	Demoted		
Beijing	549	25	27	54	32	687
Tianjin	445	26	24	34	37	566
Hebei	700	22	21	52	41	836
Shanxi	604	27	24	49	33	737
Neimeng	609	13	18	42	30	712
Liaoning	691	23	15	68	35	832
Jilin	642	21	18	54	32	767
Heilongj	559	15	17	74	34	699
Shanghai	601	30	10	64	37	742
Jiangsu	504	20	13	42	32	611
Zhejiang	478	25	10	41	28	582
Anhui	553	12	12	59	44	680
Fujian	571	15	18	48	32	684
Jiangxi	512	16	14	41	32	615
Shandong	576	26	26	50	37	715
Henan	496	25	23	47	23	614
Hubei	605	22	27	48	36	738
Hunan	553	26	20	50	23	672
Guangdon	614	33	33	48	39	767
Guangxi	522	17	14	43	35	631
Sichuan	615	30	10	54	41	750
Guizhou	458	10	17	61	27	573
Yunnan	509	15	20	41	39	624
Xizang	592	15	18	47	15	687
Shaanxi	539	17	18	58	39	671
Gansu	543	22	21	62	35	683
Qinghai	454	11	21	45	25	556
Ningxia	390	8	17	38	24	477
Xinjiang	547	23	12	40	23	645
Hainan	62	0	3	4	5	74
Total	16093	590	541	1458	945	19627

Since 1978, however, education has become an important criterion for selecting cadres and thus has become a major asset for upward mobility. Scholars of China studies have found that the composition of political élites has experienced a transformation ‘from revolutionaries to bureaucratic technocrats’ (Hong Yung Lee, 1991). Here we want to examine whether education is a determinant of the political mobility of provincial leaders.

### Age

Age may have an impact upon mobility. In American politics, for instance, there is a minimum age requirement for presidential candidates. In PRC, for most of the period we examine, there is neither minimum nor maximum age requirements for entrance to provincial leadership. The question here is not the age requirement for provincial leaders but the impact of age on political mobility. Were older leaders more likely to get promoted than younger ones? Does the impact of age vary from one historical period to another?

**Table 3.** Summary statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
<b>Dependent variables</b>					
Continue	19627	0.8199419	0.3842456	0	1
Promoted	19627	0.0300606	0.1707585	0	1
Lateral	19627	0.0275641	0.1637243	0	1
Demoted	19627	0.0742854	0.2622415	0	1
Retired	19627	0.048148	0.2140843	0	1
<b>Independent variables</b>					
gov	19627	0.0656748	0.2477192	0	1
sec	19627	0.0631273	0.243198	0	1
vicgov	19627	0.5447088	0.4980098	0	1
depsec	19627	0.326489	0.4689404	0	1
paryears	12247	33.80011	9.295372	0	58
edu2	5882	0.6414485	0.4796159	0	1
nation2	19627	0.0930351	0.290489	0	1
homeprov	14520	0.3447658	0.4753082	0	1
center	19627	0.0159884	0.1254335	0	1
female	19627	0.0333214	0.1794792	0	1
nonccp	13217	0.0733903	0.260786	0	1
age49	14536	0.2436709	0.4293112	0	1
age59	14536	0.4271464	0.4946809	0	1
age64	14536	0.1867089	0.389691	0	1
age90	14536	0.1424739	0.3495475	0	1
period1	19627	0.3757579	0.4843303	0	1
period2	19627	0.2440516	0.4295344	0	1
period3	19627	0.3801906	0.4854459	0	1
growth	18195	7.576831	12.09922	58.29205	76.69266
income	18823	3.6175	2.21076	0.1246062	10.76967
revenue	18479	6.362395	21.88478	- 32.99	155.55
pop	18216	3.572421	2.464938	0.1681375	11.31764
mav	19627	6.420887	6.844274	- 45.13326	50.81633
revave	19627	5.517292	19.19251	- 32.16	155.42
Beijing	19627	0.0350028	0.1837915	0	1
Tianjin	19627	0.0288378	0.1673548	0	1
Shangha	19627	0.0378051	0.1907294	0	1

### *Party membership*

Provincial leaders are not all communist party members. Some started as non-communists and then joined the party later on. Wu Han, former vice mayor of Beijing, for instance, started out as a non-communist in 1949 but was admitted into the party in 1957.<sup>18</sup> Do communist provincial leaders have more chance for upward mobility than non-communists? Do non-communists suffer more than communists?

In our sample, 970 cases (7%) out of 13,217 with known party status are non-communist provincial leaders. The majority (744) assumed their positions during the first period while only 30 could be found during the second period. During the third period, there were 196 non-communist provincial leaders. We

18. See Su Shuangbi and Wang Hongzhi, *Wu Han Zhuan* (Beijing: Beijing Chubanshe, 1984), p. 102.

expect that they did worse in terms of political mobility than their communist colleagues.

### *Party-years*

Party-years is a measure of political seniority, which is a more important seniority measure than age. Being a long time member of the party, however, could have diverse implications for political mobility. One may be able to establish extensive personal connections and thus is more likely to get promoted. One may also have more chances to encounter conflicts with central leaders as well, increasing the likelihood of being demoted. Being long in the party may also mean that a person may be old enough for retirement during the third period.

### *Home province advantage?*

It is well-known that presidential candidates in the US have a vote advantage in their home states over 'outsiders' because the home state favors its native son over his out-of-town rival.<sup>19</sup> In traditional China, however, officials were forbidden to serve in their home towns and even an adjacent town within 500 *li* (155 miles) in any direction.<sup>20</sup> In the PRC, the party not only ignored this rule but even sent officials to their home provinces. The question is, do those leaders who serve in their home provinces have any advantage in political mobility?

### *Gender*

We know that Chinese women are extremely underrepresented in the provincial leadership, accounting for only 3% of the provincial leadership. Do these female élites fare better than their male colleagues in political mobility? Or are they a disadvantaged group? In a male-dominated bureaucracy, we expect that female leaders would do less well than their male colleagues.

### *Minority leaders*

Minorities are over represented in the provincial leadership. Minorities are 6% of the total population, but minority provincial leaders account for 9% of the provincial leadership (1,790 out of 19,264). Do these minority provincial leaders do better than their Han counterparts? What are their prospects for further promotions? Are they equally likely to be demoted as their Han colleagues? Or are they more vulnerable to purges because of their minority origins?

Since minority provincial leaders may have to overcome language and cultural barriers to work in the center and elsewhere, we would expect that minority provincial leaders are less mobile than Han provincial leaders.

19. Michael S. Lewis-Beck and Tom W. Rice, 'Localism in Presidential elections: the home state advantage', *American Journal of Political Science* 127(3), (August 1983), pp. 548–556.

20. See Wei Hsiu-mei, *Qingdai zhi Huibi Zhidu* [The Avoidance System of the Ch'ing Dynasty] (Taipei: Institute of Modern History Academia Sinica, 1992), ch. 1, pp. 5–56.

*Central or local origins*<sup>21</sup>

One group of provincial leaders stand out in their relationship with the center. They usually start in the center as ministers or vice ministers (or in a similar rank) and then are sent down to provinces to gain some local experience before being promoted back to the center.

Among these people, we find: Zhu Rongji, former mayor of Shanghai and now first vice premier; Hu Jintao, former party secretary of Tibet and now a member of the politburo standing committee; and many others. We label this small group of provincial leaders as people of central origins. In contrast, the majority of provincial leaders thrive and wither where they work and are labelled for their local origins. We expect that these two groups of provincial leaders have different patterns of political mobility. Provincial leaders of central origins are more likely to be promoted because they have stronger connections with the center. But those of central origins may also be more likely to be demoted since they may not perform well due to their ignorance of local conditions.

**Provincial characteristics and political mobility**

The third group of variables pertain to provincial characteristics and performances. They include: (1) provincial population (variable pop); (2) provincial income (variable income); (3) provincial economic performances (variables growth and mav); and (4) provincial revenue contributions (variables revenue and revave).

*Population*

Provinces of different population sizes differ in central representation. The bigger the population, the larger the representation.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, population size is an indicator of provincial political weight in China. The question is what is the impact of population size on the political mobility of provincial leaders? Do leaders of more populous provinces, for instance, have more chances for upward mobility than those of smaller provinces? Or are they more likely to be demoted than their colleagues from smaller areas?

Because we are interested in cross-sectional variations holding time constant, we use the percentage of one province in the total population of a particular year to indicate the relative standings of different provinces across time. Because populations are political resources, we would expect that leaders of bigger provinces have certain political advantages over those in smaller provinces.

*Provincial income*

Different provinces of China are at different stages of development. Some provinces, such as Guangdong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang, may be quite advanced, while others such as Qinghai and Ningxia are still developing. Both total provincial income and provincial income per capita count in the national politics of China. In

21. I thank Dali Yang for pushing me to think hard along this line.

22. For a definition of central representation and its provincial variations, see Zhiyue Bo, 'Chinese provincial leaders', ch. 2.

fact, total provincial income is probably even more important than provincial income per capita in determining directions of the political mobility of provincial leaders because the more aggregate provincial income a province has, the more leverage the province may have over the total national income. The national government may thus treat leaders of rich provinces differently from those of poor provinces. Provincial income per capita, on the other hand, is less important because it does not have direct impact on the welfare of the central government. However, we would expect that provincial leaders from less developed provinces to have more incentive to change their places than those in more prosperous provinces.

#### *Economic performance: economic growth*

Economic growth (variable growth) measures provincial economic performance. Average growth rate (variable mav) measures the provincial economic performance during the tenure of the provincial leader.<sup>23</sup> The former is yearly based and varies from province to province, while the latter is more individually oriented and varies from one person to another in the same province. Since personnel changes may occur any time of a year, we use the growth rates of current years if mobility occurred in the late months of a year (beyond June) and those of the previous year if changes took place in the early months of a year (before July).<sup>24</sup>

Although the economic growth of a province may have some impact on the political mobility of provincial leaders, the economic record of a provincial leader may be more relevant. In other words, we would expect that a provincial leader who has a better record of economic performance may be more likely to get promoted than a provincial leader whose province is doing well in a particular year. This is because the economic record is an indicator of ability while the good performance for one year may be the result of sheer luck.

#### *Economic performance: revenue contributions*

Provincial financial contributions (variable revenue) measure how much a province contributes to the central coffer in a year (the contribution is negative when the province gets a subsidy). The average revenue contribution (variable revave) measures how much a province contributes to the central coffer during the tenure of a provincial leader. As in the case of growth, we will look at the impact of these measures according to which month the change occurred. Again, we would expect provincial financial contributions to be relevant, but the records of financial contributions of provincial leaders may be more important in determining the orientation of their political mobility.

### **Findings**

#### *Education*

Surprisingly, even during the third period, college education still does not make any difference with respect to the political mobility of Chinese provincial leaders. As

23. This is in fact a cumulative average. It is the same as the growth rate of the year in the first year of the tenure of the provincial leader. It is a mean of the first year and second year in the second year. It is a mean of the first three years in the third year, and so on.

24. I thank Bill Parish for his suggestions in this regard.

**Table 4.** Educational backgrounds and political mobility

Variable	Promoted	Lateral	Demoted	Retired (Continue)
sec	0.338***	1.592	0.534	1.301
vicgov	1.222	0.570	0.303***	8.259***
depsec	0.716	0.974	0.281***	3.210**
gov	—	—	—	—
nonccp	0.064**	1.017	0.510	0.546*
ccp	—	—	—	—
college	0.544***	0.716	0.861	0.978
no college	—	—	—	—
Minority	0.820	0.765	0.891	0.646
Han	—	—	—	—
natives	1.228	0.489**	0.636	1.026
outsiders	—	—	—	—
central	5.786***	1.330	1.276	1.11e-14
local	—	—	—	—
female	0.502	1.031	2.454**	0.850
male	—	—	—	—
age49	0.829	1.000	0.773	0.158*
age64	1.530*	0.703	0.807	11.393***
age90	2.845***	0.518	0.580	28.412***
age59	—	—	—	—
Number of obs = 2404				
$\chi^2(48) = 425.44$				
Pseudo $R^2 = 0.1147$				

\* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Notes: 1. Continue is the comparison group. 2. Period3 (1978–1993) only.

Table 4 shows, most coefficients for education are not statistically significant. Provincial leaders were not transferred, demoted or retired by educational level. An important exception is that provincial leaders with college education were less likely to be promoted than those with no college education by a factor of two. This contradicts with the common sense that, during the third period, college-educated people were more likely to get promoted than those with less education. There may be two reasons for this phenomenon. On the one hand, college education is a credential for the entrance to the leadership, but not for further upward mobility. On the other, investing a lot of time in education may have cost those provincial leaders opportunities to make connections.

This finding is important. It shows that recent studies of Chinese élites overestimated the role of educational backgrounds in the political mobility of political élites. A good education, as mentioned above, may be a ticket to the officialdom during the third period, but not a credential for further political mobility. Indeed, provincial leaders with college education are less likely to be promoted than those with no college education.

#### *Basic determinants of political mobility*

Since education is not a significant determinant of the political mobility of provincial leaders, a baseline model can be established without this variable. The

Table 5. Determinants of political mobility

Variable	Promoted	Lateral	Demoted	Retired (Continue)
sec	0.268***	1.159	0.857	0.776
vicgov	0.840	0.456***	0.508***	3.511***
depsec	0.576***	0.777	0.587***	2.206***
gov	—	—	—	—
nonccp	0.103***	0.624	0.712	0.453***
ccp	—	—	—	—
Minority	0.592***	0.467***	0.887	0.637**
Han	—	—	—	—
natives	1.037	0.647***	0.838	0.965
outsiders	—	—	—	—
female	0.450*	0.904	1.615	1.400
male	—	—	—	—
central	3.217***	1.846**	1.904**	0.405*
local	—	—	—	—
age49	1.209	1.188	0.749**	0.361**
age64	1.446***	0.789	0.805	10.244***
age90	1.544***	0.737	0.873	34.385***
age59	—	—	—	—
period1	0.376***	1.737	6.194***	0.734
period2	0.345***	1.734	3.808**	0.484**
period3	—	—	—	—
year78	0.823	4.235***	7.572***	0.852
year79	3.627***	5.312***	5.164**	3.994***
year81	0.393**	1.708	1.859	0.455*
year82	0.797	1.966	2.103	4.253***
year83	2.311***	3.204*	12.084***	38.284***
year84	0.101***	0.227	4.15e-15	3.918***
year85	1.949**	2.198	3.554*	26.866***
year86	0.654	0.660	2.225	4.800***
year87	0.518	3.229**	3.094*	4.601***
year88	0.673	2.662*	5.210**	23.612***
year89	0.903	1.984	3.602*	4.045***
year90	0.463*	3.856***	3.160*	4.866***
year91	0.507*	2.201	1.584	4.030***
year92	0.558	2.706*	2.603	4.424***
year93	2.804***	8.170***	12.328***	37.545***
year80	—	—	—	—
Number of obs = 12281				
$\chi^2(112) = 2619.61$				
Pseudo $R^2$ 0.1659				

\* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Note: 1967 and 1977 are excluded.

results of this baseline model are reported in Table 5. The political mobility of Chinese provincial leaders, as Table 5 shows, is determined by social and personal variables. In terms of upward mobility, several factors are very important. First, a provincial leader is about three times as likely to get promoted during the third period as before. Second, a communist provincial leader is about ten times as likely

to get promoted as a non-communist. Third, governors are more likely to get promoted than other types of provincial leaders. Fourth, provincial leaders of central origins are more likely to get promoted than those of local origins. One is also better off if one is a Han Chinese, male, and older.

In terms of lateral transfers, several variables make differences. Senior provincial leaders (such as governors and secretaries) are generally more likely to be transferred than junior provincial leaders (such as vice governors and deputy secretaries), probably because the center does this to ensure its control over the provinces. Minority provincial leaders and those who serve in their provinces, however, are both less likely to be transferred. Minority provincial leaders are less likely to be transferred due to cultural barriers, while natives are less likely to be transferred because of their rich local experiences.

Several factors account for downward mobility. During the third period, provincial leaders were much less likely to be demoted or purged than before. Junior provincial leaders, not surprisingly, were less likely to be demoted than senior provincial leaders because they are less visible. Provincial leaders of central origins are twice as likely to be demoted as those of local origins. Central experience does not help in making a good provincial leader. Those from the center may have conflicts with local leaders, and they may not perform well because of their ignorance of local conditions. Younger provincial leaders are also less likely to be demoted than older provincial leaders.

Not surprisingly, older provincial leaders are more likely to be retired during the third period than younger ones. What is interesting about retirement is that minority provincial leaders are less likely to be retired than Han provincial leaders and that non-CCP provincial leaders are less likely to be retired than CCP provincial leaders. Minority provincial leaders are less likely to be retired because they are scarce resources, while non-CCP provincial leaders are less likely to be retired because they are mostly new entrants. Moreover, it seems that junior provincial leaders are more likely to be retired than senior provincial leaders. This finding, however, is biased because leaders of different ranks have different age requirements for retirement and the likelihood that junior provincial leaders were retired was greatly overestimated. Controlling for different ages for different provincial leaders, we find no statistically significant differences between governors and vice governors and deputy secretaries.

### *Performance and mobility*

Although the above determinants are important, they can not fully explain the dynamics of the political mobility of Chinese provincial leaders. A full account has to include provincial conditions and provincial performance. The results of the full model are reported in Table 6. Clearly, provincial conditions and performances do have impact on the political mobility of provincial leaders. First, as expected, provincial leaders of bigger or richer provinces are more likely to get promoted than those of smaller or poorer provinces.<sup>25</sup> It seems that both political and economic resources count in upward mobility for provincial leaders in China.

25. Since provincial populations are highly related to provincial total income (0.71), their impacts are examined in separate models.



Table 6. Provincial performance and mobility

Variable	Promoted	Lateral	Demoted	Retired (Continue)
Model 1				
growth	0.999	1.004	1.006	1.013*
income	1.105***	0.963	1.007	1.031
revave	0.980***	0.992	0.967***	0.984***
Beijing	1.900***	1.126	1.764**	1.293
Tianjin	2.062***	1.419	2.312***	1.429
Shangha	3.844***	0.894	3.034***	4.214***
Others	—	—	—	—
Number of obs: 11113				
$\chi^2(136)$ : 2548.48				
Pseudo $R^2$ : 0.1830				
Model 2				
mav	0.931***	0.936***	0.945***	0.908***
pop	1.093***	0.967	0.991	1.048*
revave	0.982***	0.991	0.968***	0.986***
Beijing	2.895***	1.583	2.862***	1.484
Tianjin	2.165***	1.295	2.107**	1.337
Shangha	7.069***	0.869	4.240***	4.092***
Others	—	—	—	—
Number of obs: 11103				
$\chi^2(136)$ : 2783.76				
Pseudo $R^2$ : 0.2004				

\* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*\*;  $p < 0.01$ .

Note: The items in Table 5 are all included but not reported.

Second, individual-oriented performance indicators account for the political mobility of Chinese provincial leaders better than provincial performance indicators. Those provincial leaders whose provinces do well economically are not statistically significantly different from those whose provinces do not do well. A minor exception is that those whose provinces did well in a particular year were more likely to be retired than those whose provinces did not do so well. This may be because in a year of abundance the center can afford to devote attention to retirement issues. In contrast, two individual-oriented performance variables (performance record—mav and revenue record—revave) both generated significant results. Provincial leaders whose provinces grew well or contributed a lot to the central coffer during their tenure are less mobile than those whose provinces grew less well or contributed less to the center. It seems that the center likes to retain in their original positions those who had good performance or revenue records.

Finally, three municipalities under central control stand out in terms of political mobility.<sup>26</sup> Leaders of these municipalities are significantly more likely to get promoted than those of other provincial units. The leaders of Beijing, for instance, are more than twice as likely to get promoted as those of other provincial units. This is also the case for the leaders of Tianjin. When population share is controlled,

26. Cheng Li and David Bachman (1989) included the mayors of these municipalities in their study of Chinese mayors. This is, I believe, a serious mistake because the mayors of the three municipalities under central control enjoy the rank of provinces (*shengji*) while mayors of other cities enjoy the rank of municipalities (*shiji*).

the leaders of Shanghai are more than seven times as likely to get promoted as those of other provincial units (Model 2). The effect of Shanghai is outstanding. Many former or current leaders of Shanghai are among the most important players in national politics. Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, Wu Bangguo, and Huang Ju are all politburo members. Jiang Zemin is the general secretary of the party and president of the state. Zhu Rongji is a member of the politburo standing committee and first vice premier in charge of economic affairs. Wu Bangguo was recently elected vice premier and put in charge of industrial construction in April 1995. Huang Ju is now party secretary of Shanghai and a member of the politburo. There is much talk in the mass media about a 'Shanghai clique'. It is evident that Jiang Zemin has promoted a lot of his followers from Shanghai since the late 1980s, and this makes Shanghai an outlier.

What is interesting about Shanghai, as well as other municipalities, however, is that its leaders are also more likely to be demoted than those of other provincial units. Shanghai leaders, for instance, are more than four times as likely to be demoted as those of other provincial units. Leaders from Beijing and Tianjin are more than twice as likely to be demoted as those of other provincial units. This indicates that being a leader of municipalities under central control also runs a bigger risk of being demoted. The leaders of Shanghai are also more than four times as likely to be retired than those of other provincial units.

These findings show that municipalities under central control, Shanghai in particular, are dramatically different from other provincial units in terms of their leaders' political mobility. The leaders of these cities are generally more mobile than those of other provincial units. They are more likely to be promoted and also more likely to be demoted. In the case of Shanghai, the leaders are also more likely to be retired.

## Discussion

### *Performance and mobility*

It is not surprising that those with better economic performance or revenue records are less likely to be demoted or retired because of their better performance. It is difficult to understand why these people are also less likely to be promoted.<sup>27</sup> To find out what is going on, we reran the regression (Model 2 of Table 6) with different comparison groups. As a result, we found that provincial leaders with better performance records are different from those with better revenue records (Table 7). With promotion as the comparison group (Model 2.1 of Table 7), we find that economic performance records make no difference in terms of demotions, while revenue records do. In other words, those with better revenue records are more likely to be promoted than to be demoted.

These findings seem to show that whether a provincial leader is to be promoted or demoted is not dependent on his or her economic performance record. Provincial leaders with better growth records are as likely to be demoted as to be promoted. But given their economic performance records, the provincial leaders with better

27. I thank Adam Przeworski for his comments in this regard.

**Table 7.** Provincial performance and mobility

Variable	Promoted	Lateral	Demoted	Retired	Continue
Model 2.1 (promoted as the comparison group)					
mav	—	1.007	1.016	0.976*	1.075***
pop	—	0.885***	0.907***	0.959	0.915***
revave	—	1.009	0.985**	1.004	1.018***
Number of obs: 11103					
$\chi^2(136)$ : 2783.76					
Pseudo $R^2$ : 0.2004					
Model 2.2 (demoted as the comparison group)					
mav	0.985	0.991	—	0.961***	1.058***
pop	1.103***	0.977	—	1.058	1.010
revave	1.015**	1.025***	—	1.019**	1.034***
Number of obs: 11103					
$\chi^2(136)$ : 2783.76					
Pseudo $R^2$ : 0.2004					

\* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Note: The items in Table 5 are all included but not reported.

revenue records were more likely to be promoted than to be demoted. In other words, the center cares more about revenue contribution than about economic performance.

As for retirement, provincial leaders with better economic performance records are also different from those with better revenue contributions. The former are more likely to get promoted or to be demoted than to be retired, while the latter are more likely to be retired than to be demoted. In other words, a better revenue contribution record may secure the provincial leader a nice arrangement after all, while a better economic performance record may leave the provincial leader's career uncertain in the end.

## Conclusion

What have we learned so far? To what extent does this study contribute to our understanding of Chinese politics? In the following, we summarize the major findings of the study and explore their implications.

### *The chinese political system is a centralized system*

This is nothing new about the Chinese political system, but it sheds light on central–local relations. Since provincial leaders in China are controlled by the center, their political mobility depends on what criteria the center adopts to manage provincial personnel.

This finding implies that although Chinese provincial leaders are diverse in terms of personal experiences and characteristics, they do not represent independent interests. Since their political careers depend on the center instead of their provincial general public, they are very unlikely to challenge central policies due

to 'local interests'. In this sense, pluralist models which are products of analyses of democratic systems are largely nonapplicable to Chinese politics.<sup>28</sup>

*Chinese provincial leaders had different fates during different historical periods*

In the history of the PRC, there are three distinctive periods: 1949 to 1967; 1968 to 1977; and 1978 to the present. Provincial leaders had difficult times during the first and second periods because they were targets in numerous political campaigns. During the third period, however, provincial leaders were able to leave their posts without losing face. They retired to take positions in provincial People's Congresses or provincial Political Consultative Conferences. Or they left the power structure with great retirement benefits. At the same time, younger leaders have enjoyed greater chances for upward mobility. During this period, no evidence suggests that provincial leaders were massively demoted or purged in the wave of the purges of certain central leaders. Hu Yaobang's departure as general secretary in 1987 had no effect on the downward mobility of provincial leaders. The same is true of Zhao Ziyang's purge as general secretary in 1989.

These findings show that the appointment system at the provincial level has been largely institutionalized during the third period. Since provincial leaders retire at the retirement age, it becomes relatively predictable who will leave provincial leadership in which year. This should direct our attention more to the institutional aspect of the Chinese political system than to the personal aspect of the system.

*Chinese politics is basically the politics of big provinces*

In China although provincial leaders of different provinces have the same ranks,<sup>29</sup> leaders of big provinces are usually considered more powerful than those of smaller provinces. Big provinces such as Sichuan, Guangdong, and Shandong are major producers of the Central Committee (CC) members or even politburo members.

This finding directs our attention to provincial variations and indicates the importance of big provinces in Chinese politics.

*Performance counts in the era of economic reforms*

In the era of economic reforms, this study shows, performance counts in the political mobility of provincial leaders. Provincial leaders who had better economic growth records or revenue contribution records during their tenure are less likely to be demoted. They are also less likely to be retired. In other words, those who did not perform well during their tenure are more likely to be demoted or retired.

Revenue contributions, it should be noted, are more important than economic performances in terms of promotions for provincial leaders. Those who contributed

28. Scholars of China studies have tried to approach Chinese politics from the pluralist perspective since the 1970s. Although their efforts have generated a more realistic picture of Chinese politics than a totalitarianist perspective dictates, they often exaggerated the independence of provincial leaders. Prominent examples include Paris H. Chang's *Power and Policy in China* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978); and Susan L. Shirk's *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

29. Governors and secretaries enjoy the rank of ministers and vice governors and deputy secretaries have the rank of vice ministers.

a lot to the central treasury are more likely to be promoted than to be demoted, while economic growth records make no difference. The center cares more about revenue contributions than about economic growth records.

All these findings direct our attention to structural factors. In studies of communist systems, it is not uncommon for scholars to overestimate the role of personal factors in the political mobility of élites. For politics in these political systems is usually perceived as politics behind the scenes. Speculations or even fabrications of personal connections between élites are thus inevitable. Although this study does not provide full support for the performance model, it does show that performance counts in the political mobility of provincial leaders.

### *The leaders of Shanghai are a distinctive group*

The leaders of Shanghai are much more likely to get promoted than those of other provincial units. Three reasons may account for this difference. One is that Shanghai is an economic powerhouse in China. As richer provinces produced more promotions than poorer ones, Shanghai was no exception. Second, Shanghai has been the most important contributor to central revenue since 1959. Third, since 1989, Jiang Zemin has promoted a great number of his followers from Shanghai. Being a leader in Shanghai, however, one also has greater chance to be demoted or retired. This indicates that Shanghai is a more competitive place, and its retirement system is also more institutionalized.

These findings show that any understanding of Chinese politics may be inadequate without some understanding of the role of Shanghai in the system. In the history of the People's Republic of China, 'Shanghai clique' experienced three rises. Before the 'cultural revolution' one finds Chen Yi and Ke Qingshi in the politburo. During the 'cultural revolution', Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen (three of the Gang of Four) were among the standing members of the politburo. Now Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, and Wu Bangguo are general secretary, the first vice premier, and vice premier, respectively.

In sum, this study shows that in a centralized system, the political mobility of provincial leaders is also related to the economic performance of provincial leaders in an era of economic reforms. This is not because provincial leaders had to win votes from their constituents in provinces by 'delivering the goods'. Instead, provincial leaders had to perform to win recognition from central leaders.