



City Administrative Level and Municipal Party Secretaries' Promotion: Understanding the Logic of Shaping Political Elites in China

Yang Yan and Chunhui Yuan

Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Beijing, P.R.China

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the following important but often overlooked variable in studies investigating China's cadre system: the city administrative level. Using a dataset covering Chinese municipal party secretaries from 2000 to 2017, this article finds that secretaries from sub-provincial cities are more likely to be promoted than those from prefecture-level cities. This result reveals that serving as a party secretary in sub-provincial cities may be a key step towards further promotion among those who become vice ministers at a young age. In addition, economic performance has a negligible effect on sub-provincial secretaries' better promotion prospects, highlighting the existence of heterogeneity caused by the city administrative level in the promotion tournament.

Introduction

Chinese politics have always been characterized by a strong meritocracy because in the power structure of the socialist system, a power elite represented by party bureaucrats exists.¹ In studies investigating Chinese elite politics, the cadre system (Nomenklatura) is an important research area because regardless of the number of years since the communist revolution or founding of P.R. China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has always governed all aspects of the country through absolute and continuous control of the cadre team.² Scholars even believe that China's economic rise after the 1980s is closely related to its effective cadre management.³ Scholars have attempted to understand the career mobility of Chinese political elites by exploring different mechanisms of CCP cadre management. Although existing studies have revealed some mechanisms of the CCP in selecting local political elites, many important questions remain partially answered. In contrast to countries in the West, in communist China, chance, luck and other sudden political tidbits have less impact on officials' careers.⁴ Specifically, since the Deng era, all cadres are promoted sequentially. Thus, a cadre at the bureau level cannot be directly promoted to the ministerial level. Even cadres at the same administrative level may have completely different promotion prospects due to their different positions. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the entails of cadres' different positions and their administrative level. This study focuses on party secretaries in cities with different administrative levels and attempt to identify the differences in their promotion prospects.

CONTACT Chunhui Yuan  chunhui_yuan@hotmail.com

¹János Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²Hon S. Chan, 'Cadre personnel management in China: the Nomenklatura system, 1990–1998', *The China Quarterly* 179, (2004), pp. 703–734.

³Bo Rothstein, 'Understanding the quality of government in China: the cadre administration hypothesis', (Working paper, Stanford University, 2012).

⁴Kjeld E. Brødsgaard, 'Cadre and personnel management in the CPC', *China: An International Journal* 10(2), (2012), pp. 69–83.

In contrast to earlier studies, which focused more on the personal experience of the founding leaders, currently, the priority of research investigating Chinese elite politics tends to respond to the reality.⁵ Since the 1970s, scholars have paid increasing attention to interactions among China's political elites and formed two theoretical paradigms to explain the relationship structure of elites: factionalism and informal politics.⁶ Many studies have explained the features of China's cadre system from these two perspectives because political connection (Guanxi) widely exists in the bureaucratic ladder in China.⁷ Scholars argue that the political faction still has a significant effect on cadres' career advancement after the Cultural Revolution.⁸ Oppen et al. found that provincial leaders who share an origin, education and work experience with central leaders have a higher probability of becoming members of the Politburo.⁹ Although political connection is always an important variable in studies investigating Chinese elite politics, some studies have also noted that the CCP gradually removed the radical colors of the Mao era from cadre management and returned to rationality since the 1980s. A group of technocrats began to take leadership positions and gradually entered top leadership.¹⁰ Furthermore, some studies show that the CCP began to focus on the economic performance of local cadres instead of their red background during the post-Mao era because the new leaders shifted their focus from class struggle to economic construction after the Cultural Revolution; thus, the criterion used to select local cadres changed from purely political loyalty to economic performance.¹¹ This shift resulted in local officials competing with each other for better economic performance, and a political promotion tournament with economic growth as the core indicator was established.¹² Zhou et al. proposed that economic performance is easy to measure and relatively fair.¹³ Therefore, economic performance can help the central government effectively screen competent cadres and boost economic reform. In addition to economic performance, scholars have found more characteristics of cadre management during the reform era. For example, Dickson et al. and Li et al. found that educational background has become an important factor affecting local cadres' political prospects.¹⁴ Many cadres have obtained college diplomas through adult education or party school training, thus increasing their possibility of promotion to important leadership positions. Zheng's research notes the impact of age and tenure on the elites' careers.¹⁵ During the period of Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, the CCP abolished the life-long cadre system and gradually introduced retirement and term limits for cadres, which created more vacant posts and ensured the frequency of cadre mobility.¹⁶ Overall, the above studies have attempted to identify the key variables influencing the career of local cadres, which could provide diversified perspectives enhancing people's understanding of Chinese elite politics.

⁵Robert A. Scalapino and Gordon A. Bennett, *Elites in the People's Republic of China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972).

⁶Andrew J. Nathan, 'A factionalism model for CCP politics', *The China Quarterly* 53, (1973), pp. 34–66; Lowell Dittmer, 'Chinese Informal Politics', *The China Journal* 34, (1995), pp. 1–34.

⁷Lucian W. Pye, 'Factions and the politics of Guanxi: paradoxes in Chinese administrative and political behaviour', *China Journal* 34(34), (1995), pp. 35–53.

⁸Jing Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁹Sonja Oppen, Victor Nee and Stefan Brehm, 'Homophily in the career mobility of China's political elite', *Social Science Research* 54, (2015), pp. 332–352.

¹⁰Frederick C. Teiwes, 'Normal politics with Chinese characteristics', *The China Journal* 45, (2001), pp. 69–82.

¹¹Zhiyue Bo, 'Economic performance and political mobility: Chinese provincial leaders', *Journal of Contemporary China* 5(12), (1996), pp. 135–154; Ye Chen, Hongbin Li, and Li'an Zhou, 'Relative performance evaluation and the turnover of provincial leaders in China', *Economics Letters* 88(3), (2005), pp. 421–425.

¹²Jing Wu et al., 'Incentives and Outcomes: China's environmental policy', *Social Science Electronic Publishing* 9(1), (2013), pp. 1–41.

¹³Li'an Zhou, 'Governing China's local officials: an analysis of promotion tournament model', *Economic Research Journal* 7, (2007), pp. 36–50.

¹⁴Bruce J. Dickson and Maria R. Rublee, 'Membership has its privileges: the socioeconomic characteristics of communist party members in urban China', *Comparative Political Studies* 33(1), (2000), pp. 87–112; Bobai Li and Andrew G. Walder, 'Career advancement as party patronage: sponsored mobility into the Chinese administrative elite, 1949–1996', *American Journal of Sociology* 106, (2001), pp. 1371–1408.

¹⁵Shipin Zheng, 'The new era in Chinese elite politics', *Issues & Studies* 41(1), 2005, pp. 190–198.

¹⁶Lowell Dittmer, 'Leadership change and Chinese political development', *The China Quarterly* 176, (2003), pp. 903–925.

Numerous studies investigating China's local political elites have emerged over the past few decades, but some puzzles remain unsolved, requiring more research. First, since the CCP is a pyramidal elite system, most research is based on a certain level of cadre data to explore the variables affecting their promotion. Therefore, the existing studies cannot provide an intensive exploration or comparison for some special arrangements of cadres' different positions and its administrative levels. For example, as cities under the jurisdiction of Guangdong Province, the party secretaries of Shenzhen and Guangzhou are at the sub-ministerial level, while the secretaries of other cities are at the bureau level. Furthermore, are there any differences between these party secretaries' promotion prospects? How is one to explain these differences? It is difficult to resolve the above questions based on current studies. Representing another important weakness, existing studies often ignore the complexity of China's political reality.¹⁷ Promotion tournament theory posits that economic performance is a key variable explaining cadre promotion in China after the Mao era; however, is this statistics-based claim reliable? Since studies have found that provincial leaders' promotion is significantly influenced by nepotism, political sect, and loyalty, rather than economic factors, should we consider the limitations of promotion tournament?¹⁸ Even if better economic performance is closely related to cadre promotion, this relationship may change according to the cadres' different administrative levels. Landry et al. found that economic performance has a smaller effect on the promotion of provincial party secretaries (or governors) than on municipal secretaries (or mayors).¹⁹ Overall, the existence of the administrative level complicates studies investigating Chinese elite politics and forces us to arrive at a reasonable explanation of the meaning of different administrative levels in the context of elite politics.

This article studies the promotion paths of municipal party secretaries (MPS) in different types of administrative level cities and finds that, compared with the secretaries from prefecture level cities (PPS) or provincial capitals (PCS), secretaries from sub-provincial cities (SPS) are more likely to be promoted. As a result, this study identifies the effects of city administrative levels on cadre promotion. On the one hand, most cadres who can become SPS have advantages in their age and sub-ministerial experience; thus, these cadres are always regarded as key persons by the central organization department (COD). On the other hand, the unique position of sub-provincial cities in China's economic and political landscape further increases their 'political experience', increasing their qualification for promotion. In addition, this study finds that better economic performance can increase the probability of promotion among all MPS, but this effect varies according to the city administrative level. Although political connections can increase secretaries' probability of promotion, this effect has no significant difference at the city administrative level. This result shows that heterogeneity caused by the city administrative level in local promotion tournament indeed exists. For cadres who are candidates for the central committee of the CCP (CCP CC), economic performance has a smaller impact on their promotion.

This article examines an important but often overlooked variable in studies attempting to understand elite mobility in China: the city administrative level. This study performs an in-depth analysis of its real meaning in the promotion of local cadres. Previous studies have noted that the CCP spared no effort in promoting the institutionalized reform of cadre management after the Mao era.²⁰ Therefore, the CCP has set many conditions related to the cadres' age, educational background, economic performance and even moral level that deeply influence their promotion. However, this study finds that, in addition to the above obvious conditions, the city administrative level embedded in China's political system is also

¹⁷Dali L. Yang, Huayu Xu and Ran Tao, 'A tragedy of the Nomenklatura? Career incentives, political loyalty and political radicalism during China's Great Leap Forward', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(89), (2014), pp. 864–883.

¹⁸Sonja Oppen and Stefan Brehm, 'Networks versus performance: political leadership promotion in China', Lund University, Working paper, 2007.

¹⁹Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, 'Does performance matter? Evaluating political selection along the Chinese administrative ladder', *Comparative Political Studies* 32(1), (2017), pp. 15–20.

²⁰Barry J. Naughton and Dali L. Yang, *Holding China together: Diversity and National Integration in the Post-Deng Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

closely related to cadre promotion. The quantitative and qualitative analyses show that SPS are more likely to have better promotion prospects, which is related, not only to their own conditions (such as age and years of working in sub-ministerial positions), but also to the uniqueness of serving as the head of a sub-provincial city. This finding reflects the following unwritten practice of the COD in cadre management: although it always took local cadres a long time to progress through elite hierarchy during the reform era, the COD could exert effort to deliberately cultivate some cadres. Appointing cadres as SPS is an example of such cultivation methods. Further, those cadres who already have the advantages of age and administrative ranking can obtain political experience governing important cities, which could better meet the promotion requirements set by the COD. In addition, this research contributes to studies investigating promotion tournament theory by suggesting that the promotion tournament ignores heterogeneity in cadres' administrative levels. This study offers more empirical evidence supporting this heterogeneity. The local levels, such as the provincial party committee (CCP PC), are under pressure from the central government to develop the local economy. Therefore, provincial leaders pay more attention to economic performance when they select PPS, while central leaders do not regard economic performance as the single decisive indicator and tend to consider more factors because they might be more concerned about the stability of the meritocracy.

The structure of this article is organized as follows. The next section provides the background necessary for understanding the MPS's political careers and China's urban hierarchy. In the third part, the authors introduce variables and data source and explain the model specification. In the fourth section, the authors report the empirical results and provide a theoretical discussion of the meaning of the city administrative level in the political elite promotion process. Finally, the conclusion and research prospects on related issues are proposed.

The Career Path of the Municipal Party Secretary

Who are the Municipal Party Secretaries?

China now has 334 municipal administrative units, which include 293 cities and 41 other prefectural administrative units. The principal of the party committee of these administrative units is the MPS. According to China's cadre hierarchical system (Figure 1), the administrative level of most MPS is 5th degree (bureau level).²¹ Cadres at the bureau level are controlled by the CCP PC; thus, their appointment power ultimately lies in the provincial leaders. If a MPS is promoted, he or she will become a 4th degree cadre (sub-ministerial level), and the personnel appointment will transfer to the COD. Officials at or above the 4th degree are considered senior cadres of the CCP, and senior cadres enjoy more privilege and power. Therefore, the MPS is a critical node for local cadres to transform their political status on the Chinese bureaucratic ladder.

Before cadres become MPS, they usually work in different departments, and most of them start their career at the grass-roots level.²² The term of a MPS is five years with the possibility of re-election. However, unlike the central leaders, MPS are unlikely to have complete tenure.²³ MPS who are close to retirement age (60 years old) are removed and placed in a non-powerful department, such as the Provincial People's Congress (PPC) or the Provincial Committee of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC PC), until retirement. Another factor related to short tenure may be the absolute personnel control of the higher level over the lower officials because CCP can use term restrictions to eliminate corruption and factionalism.²⁴

²¹The ten official administrative levels in China from high to low are as follows: national level, sub-national level, ministerial level, sub-ministerial level, bureau level, deputy-bureau level, division level, deputy-division level, section level, and deputy-section level.

²²The grassroots government refers to the government at or below the county level.

²³Melanie Manion, *Retirement of Revolutionaries in China: Public Policies, Social Norms, Private Interests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

²⁴Pierre F. Landry, 'Controlling decentralization: the party and local elites in post-Mao Jiangsu' (PhD diss., The University of Michigan, 2000).

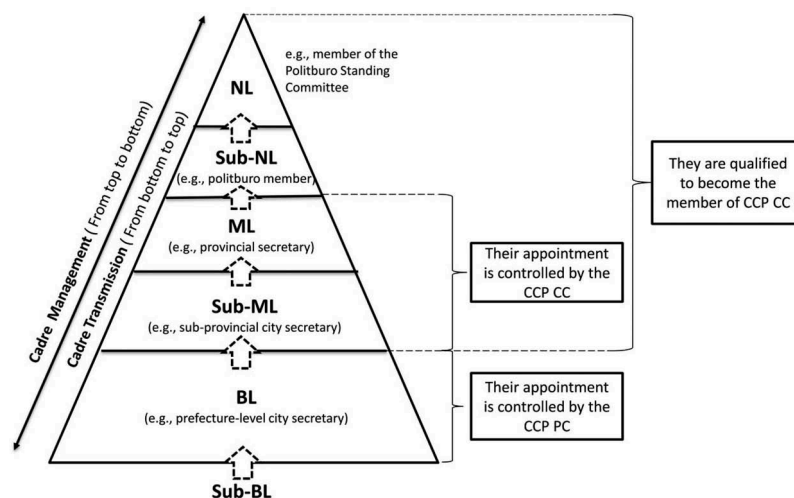


Figure 1. The features of the CCP's promotion system.

Notes: BL = Bureau Level, ML = Ministerial Level, NL = National Level.

There are two types of career prospects for MPS: promotion and non-promotion. For those who have been promoted, their administrative level is upgraded to sub-ministerial. The positions of promoted MPS cover many departments (Table 1). Promoted secretaries may continue to work in the original province or be transferred to another province or the central government. Apart from retirement or resignation, the career prospects for those who have not been promoted are mainly of two types: transfer to another position at the same administrative level or leaving the bureaucratic ladder. Secretaries who have a lateral movement are always appointed as another city's secretary and remain at the bureau level. They may also become the leaders of provincial government departments or the first deputy directors of provincial party departments. A small minority are transferred to the central government and serve as leaders of the sub-ministry department. Overall, the most important feature of the 'promotion pyramid' is that moving up means not only promotion but also elimination. This feature can be observed in the secretaries' career data from 2000 to 2008. (Figure 2) Of all 720 MPS, only 2 of them finally entered the top leader body, the Politburo Standing Committee.

City Administrative Level and Secretaries' Political Promotion

There is a remarkable aspect of the Chinese hierarchical system, which is that the administrative level of secretaries in some cities is higher than that of secretaries of other cities. Cities with higher

Table 1. A list of positions after PPS change their position

Position (promotion)	Position (non-promotion)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of Standing Committee of Provincial Party Committee • Mayor of sub-provincial city • Deputy provincial governor • Deputy director of Standing Committee PPC • Deputy chairman of CPPCC PC • Mayor of provincial capital • Deputy minister of departments controlled by the CCP CC • Deputy minister of ministry • Other posts at sub-ministerial level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary of prefecture-level city • Mayor of prefecture-level city • Deputy secretary of sub-provincial city • Deputy of sub-provincial city's Standing Committee of People Congress or Municipal Committee of the CPPCC • Secretary-general of Standing Committee PPC or CPPCC PC • First deputy of departments controlled by the provincial party committee • Director-general of department of provincial government • Secretary-general of provincial government • Other posts at bureau level

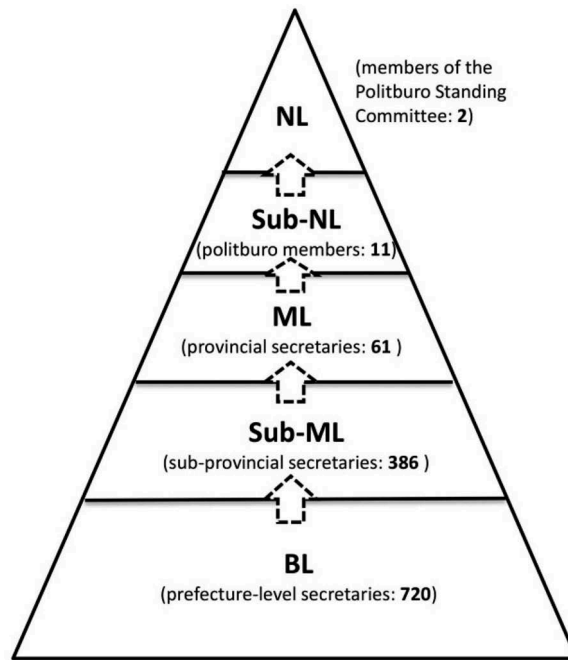


Figure 2. The career mobility of all prefecture-level secretaries from 2000 to 2008 (from the prefecture level to the national level).

administrative levels are called ‘sub-provincial cities.’ Sub-provincial cities represent a unique institutional arrangement in China’s urban hierarchy. The sub-provincial city is still administered by the provincial government, but its administrative level is higher than that of other prefecture-level cities. China has 15 sub-provincial cities.²⁵ Compared with the prefecture-level city, the principal of the party committee, government, People’s Congress and CPPCC in sub-provincial cities are sub-ministerial, so their political appointment is controlled by the COD. Sub-provincial cities enjoy higher economic and social management authority than prefecture-level cities. For example, the financial revenue and expenditure of sub-provincial cities are directly linked to the central government, so they do not have to send all fiscal revenue to provincial finances.

The higher level of sub-provincial cities results in different career paths for their secretaries. Since SPS are also the members of the standing committee of the CCP PC, their promotion channels are narrower than those of PPS, which means that fewer positions can help them achieve political advancement (Table 2). Technically, due to the narrow promotion channel, it is intuitively believed that the promotion of SPS is more difficult than PPS. However, according to the career data of 70 secretaries from all sub-provincial cities from 2000 to 2017 (Table 3), the empirical results do not find evidence that SPS have difficulty being promoted; their career prospects are much better. From 2000 to 2017, two-thirds of SPS received promotions, and of those who were promoted, more than half were directly appointed as provincial secretaries or provincial governors and subsequently entered the CCP CC. Not only does this mean that their political life is extended; most importantly, they have more opportunities to be selected into the politburo. These considerations lead to the following hypothesis: MPS from different administrative level cities have different promotion prospects, while SPS are more likely to be promoted than PPS.

²⁵These 15 sub-provincial cities are Guangzhou, Wuhan, Harbin, Shenyang, Chengdu, Nanjing, Xi ‘an, Changchun, Jinan, Hangzhou, Dalian, Qingdao, Shenzhen, Xiamen and Ningbo.

Table 2. A list of positions after SPS change their position

Position (promotion)	Position (non-promotion)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial party secretary • Provincial governor • Deputy provincial secretary • Director of Standing Committee PPC • Chairman of CPPCC PC • Minister of ministry • First deputy minister of departments controlled by the CCP CC • Other posts at ministerial level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of Standing Committee of CCP PC • Deputy director of Standing Committee PPC • Deputy chairman of CPPCC PC • Director of sub-provincial city's Standing Committee of People Congress • Chairman of CPPCC in sub-provincial city • Deputy of ministry • Deputy of departments controlled by the CCP CC • Other posts at sub-ministerial level

Table 3. Promotion prospects of SPS, 2000–2017

Position	Number	Proportion
1.Provincial party secretary	1	1.43%
2.Provincial governor	16	22.9%
3.Deputy provincial party secretary	21	30%
4.Director of Standing Committee PPC	1	1.43%
5.Chairman of CPPCC PC	3	4.29%
6.First deputy minister of CCP CC	2	2.86%
7.Minister of ministry	1	1.43%
8.Secretary of All-China Women's Federation	1	1.43%
9.Deputy minister of ministry	5	7.14%
10.Member of Standing Committee of CCP PC	4	5.71%
11.Deputy of PPC or PC CPPCC	14	20%
12.Retirement	1	1.43%
Total	70	100%

What Factors Influence the Promotion of Municipal Party Secretaries?

After analyzing the features of MPS's promotion, a question naturally arises: What factors influence their promotion, and why do SPS have greater career prospects? Scholars have found a positive correlation between local economic growth and the probability of promotion at both the provincial and the prefecture levels, after the late 1970s.²⁶ They believe that good economic performance is a major contributor to local officials' promotion. Economic reform has become the highest priority after the Mao era, and the central government has pressured local levels to develop the economy to cater to the central government's needs. Local officials spare no effort to develop the regional economy and display their competence through good economic growth. Therefore, economic performance has become an effective signal that helps the central government to screen cadres who are more suitable for promotion. If better economic performance contributes to secretaries' political advancement, it is easy to explain why SPS can be promoted easily because sub-provincial cities always create better economic performance during the reform era. They not only enjoy preferential policy from the central government but are also seen as the vanguard of China's economic reform. More importantly, SPS have more power and privilege to develop the regional economy. For example, SPS have more approval power over investment projects, reducing the risk faced by enterprises and ensuring that new projects are launched successfully. Therefore, if economic growth contributes to local officials' promotion, the SPS should have greater motivation to create better economic performance. However, in political reality, if the central government uses economic performance as the main indicator to screen SPS, they will face a potential risk. In contrast to PPS, SPS are both candidates for ministerial-level positions and members of the CCP CC.

²⁶周黎安 [Li'an Zhou], 转型中的地方政府:官员激励与治理 [Local Governments in Transition: Motivating and Managing Public Officials] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, Shanghai sanlian chubanshe, and Gezhi chubanshe, 2017), pp. 161–207.

If the central government focuses more on a cadre's competence in developing the local economy while neglecting other qualities, such as the probity and loyalty, this may produce uncertainty in central leadership. As a result, the central government does not rely only on economic performance to assess SPS and tends to seek a balance between different indicators. Thus, this article believes that heterogeneity caused by the city administrative level exists in MPS's promotion. On this basis, a hypothesis is put forward: economic performance has less impact on the promotion of SPS than on PPS.

Political connections (Guan xi) are another important factor that significantly influence local officials' careers.²⁷ Some studies show that connections can contribute to provincial leaders' promotion because they are closer to central leadership and easily influenced by factionalism.²⁸ However, the role of political connections remains to be discussed because the methods used to measure political connections directly influence the results. Further, measuring connections remains challenging because it is difficult to define the intensity and dimension of political connections. Another argument is whether political connections affect the relationship between economic growth and officials' promotion. Li and Zhou believes that corruption-based connections undermine the rules for selecting local officials, which tend to cause cronyism and ultimately invalidate the effect of economic performance on cadres' promotion.²⁹ Landry et al. argues that the existence of connections does not change the significant effects of economic performance on cadres' promotion because many cadres can bring more resources to the local economy through their strong political connections with the central government.³⁰ In this article, the authors tend to believe that political connections can increase MPS's chances of promotion, since most secretaries started their careers at the grass-roots level within a province, and working in the same province for a long time gives them more opportunities to build connections with their leaders. As for whether the effect of political connections on secretaries' promotion is affected by the city administrative level, existing research emphasizes that higher-level cadres' promotion is more sensitive to political connections, but this study believes that this proposition may not tenable because neither central leaders nor provincial leaders are willing to promote officials they do not trust. Political connections are ubiquitous in China's bureaucratic system and play an important role at all administrative levels. According to the above considerations, the authors propose the following hypothesis: Political connections have a significant impact on the promotion of MPS and this effect will not vary with the different city administrative levels.

Data and Model

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is defined as the occupational mobility of a MPS in a given year. Therefore, this study measures the dependent variable by determining whether a secretary is promoted in a given year. In practice, the career prospects of MPS are complicated because cadres at different administrative levels have different promotion standards. In this study, there are two standards to judge whether a secretary is promoted in a given year: one is for sub-ministerial secretaries and the other is for bureau-level secretaries. The principle for judging secretaries' promotion is that the administrative rank of the new position should be higher than the current one. This article collects 1360 shifts of MPS from 2000 to 2017, including 70 shifts of

²⁷Nicola Persico, José CR Pueblita, and Dan Silverman, 'Factions and political competition', *Journal of Political Economy* 119(2), (2011), pp. 242–288.

²⁸Eun Kyong Choi, 'Patronage and performance: factors in the political mobility of provincial leaders in Post-Deng China', *The China Quarterly* 212(212), (2012), pp. 965–981.

²⁹Hongbin Li and Li'an Zhou, 'Political turnover and economic performance: the incentive role of personnel control in China', *Journal of Public Economics* 89(9–10), (2005), pp. 1743–1762.

³⁰Landry, Lü and Duan, 'Does performance matter?', pp. 22–26.

sub-provincial city secretaries, 61 shifts of provincial capitals and 1229 shifts of prefecture-level cities. Furthermore, 701 shifts were promotion and 659 shifts were non-promotion.

Independent Variables

Economic Performance

Economic performance measures the city's economic growth of a party secretary during his or her tenure. The growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP growth rate) is a dynamic index reflecting the degree of change of economic growth in a certain period. Some scholars emphasize that the evaluation of officials' economic performance is based on relative performance (like the average GDP growth rate) because it can guarantee fairness and efficiency. However, the average GDP growth rate cannot accurately identify the economic performance of secretaries because this indicator cannot reflect the difference in economic performance from that in other cities within a province. Therefore, this article uses the relative urban average GDP growth rate during the tenure to measure secretaries' relative economic performance.³¹ This index refers to the GDP growth rate relative to other cities within a province during secretaries' tenure, which can reveal the secretaries' work performance more accurately and objectively. The formula is as follows:

$$RP = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^t (AG - PG)}{t}, \quad (1)$$

where RP represents the relative economic performance of a secretary during his or her tenure, AG represents the city's annual GDP growth rate during a secretary's term, PG represents the provincial annual GDP growth rate with which the city is affiliated, and t represents the term.

The Administrative Level

To test whether better career prospects exist for SPS, the authors set a dummy variable to measure whether a secretary is from a sub-provincial city. The SPS are coded 1, while others are coded 0. However, in China, according to political conventions, the secretaries of provincial capitals also serve at the sub-ministerial level.³² Provincial capitals do not have unique status as sub-provincial cities because they are still at the prefecture level. To explore whether the career prospects of PCS are the same as those of SPS, the authors not only set the 'provincial capitals' dummy variable of the entire dataset but also add an addition analysis of a subset of the data that includes only SPS that are not capital cities and PCS that are not sub-provincial cities.³³

Political Connections

The measure of political connections is challenging because it is difficult to find indicators to accurately reflect the nature of relations between two officials. Some studies use friendship to measure political connections, but this approach is impractical because friendships are hidden, so it is impossible for the public to capture them.³⁴ Another widely used variable to represent political connections is joint workplace or joint birthplace.³⁵ These two variables are available, but they tend to cause serious bias because there is no evidence that joint workplace or joint birthplace can definitively strengthen connections. Bo argues that cadres from the same political faction may have stronger political connections because some cadres are members of China's Communist Youth

³¹Chen, Li, and Zhou, 'Relative performance evaluation', p. 423.

³²Most PCS also serve as Members of the Standing Committee of the CCP PC.

³³In the entire dataset, secretaries from provincial capitals (not including the ten sub-provincial cities that are also provincial capitals) are coded 1; otherwise, the secretaries are coded 0.

³⁴Sonja Oppor and Stefan Brehm, 'Networks versus performance: political leadership promotion in China' (Working paper, Lund University, 2007).

³⁵Ruixue Jia, Masayuki Kudamatsu, and David Seim, 'Political selection in China: Complementary roles of connections and performance', *Journal of the European Economic Association* 13, (2015), pp. 631–668.

League (CCYL), which serves as an important political faction in China.³⁶ However, this study believes that using a particular political faction to measure connection is also flawed because there are many political factions in China. It is one-sided to judge the political connections between officials only according to a particular political faction. In this study, the authors use a more rigorous indicator to define the political connections at the prefectural level, which means that a PPS who has political connections must meet the following two conditions: first, secretaries must have experienced a position change under the watch of the provincial secretary who appointed them to their current positions; second, the secretary must have joint work experience with the provincial secretary who promoted him or her to the current position.³⁷ PPS who meet both requirements have political connections and are coded 1. For SPS, their personnel appointment was controlled by the COD, so the authors use the traditional measurement in which a political connection is coded 1 when a SPS has joint work experience with a member of the politburo and 0 otherwise.

Control Variables

Age

Age is an important factor for cadres' promotion because China implemented strict retirement system after Mao era. For PPS, the retirement age is 60, but most secretaries who have not been promoted at the age of 57 will be placed in non-powerful departments. SPS are placed in non-powerful departments at the age of 60 or 61. This article takes the age at which a secretary changes his or her position as the control variable. In all 1360 cases, the average age is 54.6; for the SPS, their average age is 57.2, while the average age for PPS is 54.4.

Tenure

MPS can hold office for two terms, but in reality, few secretaries can hold one position for two terms. From 2000 to 2017, only 1 secretary served 10 years; the average tenure of MPS is 3.53 years. Generally speaking, the longer a secretary's tenure, the closer he or she is to retirement. However, for those who became MPS at a young age, the influence of tenure on their promotion may not significant.

Educational Background

In 1980, Deng Xiaoping proposed that cadres should be revolutionary, younger, better-educated and professional. Since then, educational background has become an important criterion for cadres' assessment. Currently, a college degree is a basic threshold for the promotion of bureau-level cadres.³⁸ Since the 1990s, a large number of local officials have begun to accept adult college education or party school training, and an increasing number of highly educated cadres have been selected for important positions. In this study, the authors collected information on 1173 MPS's educational background. A total of 942 secretaries had a graduate background, 39.3% were Party-school educated, and 72.1% were on-the-job graduates. Cadres who had a graduate degree were coded 1.

³⁶Zhiyue Bo, "Preface to" China's elite politics: political transition and power balancing', *Social Science Electronic Publishing* 8(194), (2009), pp. 429–430.

³⁷Joint work experience refers to the fact that the municipal secretary and provincial secretary have served in the same department or city.

³⁸中共中央 [CCP CC], '党政领导干部选拔任用工作条例' [The Regulations of party and government leading cadres' appointment], 人民网 [Peoples Network], January 15, 2014, accessed January 16, 2014, <http://renshi.people.com.cn/n/2014/0116/c139617-24132485.html>.

Center

Work experience can influence cadres' promotion prospects. Scholars use work experience in a department directly under the central government as a control variable because working in the central department can increase the chance of contact with central leadership.³⁹ Therefore, secretaries who have work experience in the central government are coded 1.

Time and Region Control Variables

At the provincial level, secretaries from developed eastern provinces are more likely to be promoted than those from undeveloped provinces.⁴⁰ Thus, following other studies, the authors also sets a provincial fixed effect for all cities because regional economic development can affect cadres' promotion. Additionally, due to the existence of the transition for the politburo and local government, this study controls the year fixed effect.

Data Collection and Model Specification

In this article, for information on MPS, the authors obtained the officials' resumes from the Local Officials' Database of People.cn and the municipal yearbook. The authors obtained economic data through the CNKI China Economic and Social Development Database. This study obtained 1360 items and checked for outliers and missing values by querying local statistical bulletins, finally, 1323 sets of valid data were obtained, and their descriptive analysis is as follows (Table 4).

Based on the three hypotheses, following other studies, this study uses a probit estimate and builds the basic model:

$$y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Growth}_i + \beta_2 \text{Rank}_i + \beta_3 \text{Connections}_i + \gamma \text{Control} + \text{Year}_i + \text{Province}_i + \varepsilon_i, \quad (2)$$

where y_{it} is the career change of a cadre i in a given year t , promotion is coded 1, and all non-promotion situations are coded 0. Growth is the relative urban average GDP growth rate of a secretary i during his or her term, Rank is a dummy variable that represents the city administrative level, and secretaries from sub-provincial city are coded 1 and 0 otherwise. Connection is also a dummy variable that measures the political connections of each secretary. This basic model can be used to examine the relationship among economic performance, city administrative level, political connection and the promotion of secretaries. To test whether the influence of economic performance and political connections on promotion varies with the city administrative level, the

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of all variables

VARIABLES	(1) N	(2) mean	(3) sd	(4) min	(5) max
rgdp	1,323	0.698	1.799	-7.080	7.100
age	1,323	54.59	3.846	41	68
promotion	1,323	0.511	0.500	0	1
term	1,323	3.572	1.758	1	10
education	1,323	0.941	0.236	0	1
center	1,323	0.0711	0.257	0	1
subprovince	1,323	0.0522	0.222	0	1
capital	1,323	0.0446	0.206	0	1
political	1,323	0.450	0.498	0	1

³⁹Jun Zhang and Yuan Gao, 'Term limits and rotation of Chinese governors: do they matter to economic growth?', *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy* 13(3), (2008), pp. 274-297.

⁴⁰Danglun Luo, Guoman She and Jie Chen, 'A new re-examination of the relationship between economic performance and local leader's promotion: new theory and new evidence from city-level data', *China Economic Quarterly* 14(3), (2015), pp. 1145-1172.

basic model was expanded. In the expanded model, the authors add two interaction terms to test whether the city administrative level affects the relationship between economic performance (or political connections) and secretaries' promotion:

$$y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Growth}_i + \beta_2 \text{Rank}_i + \beta_3 \text{Connections} + \beta_4 \text{Growth}_i * \text{Rank}_i + \beta_5 \text{Connections}_i * \text{Rank}_i + \gamma \text{Control} + \text{Year}_i + \text{Province}_i + \varepsilon_i, \quad (3)$$

Results and Discussion

Results

The Relationship between Independent Variables and Promotion

This study first reports the effect of economic performance on the promotion of MPS. The results suggest that relative economic performance is positively correlated with promotion (model 1). This relationship is statistically significant, regardless of whether the secretaries' characteristics are controlled. Economic performance has a significantly (1%) positive effect on secretary's promotion opportunities with a marginal effect of 0.059 (Table 5) or 0.064 (Table 6). These findings are consistent with studies that support a positive correlation between performance and promotion.

This study also finds that the effect of political connections on promotion is positive and statistically significant (model 1 in Table 5). After controlling for secretary characteristics, the relationship remains significant (model 2 in Table 6). Meanwhile, the existence of connections does not affect the significance of performance contributing to promotion (model 3 in Table 6). This finding indicates that political connections do not necessarily undermine the role of economic performance in officials' promotion.

Compared with PPS, SPS has a significantly (5%) positive effect on promotion opportunities with a marginal effect of 0.378 after controlling the officials' characteristics (model 3 in Table 6). However, the results for PCS are not consistent with those of SPS. Although both are at the sub-

Table 5. City administrative ranks, performance, political connections and promotion with fixed effect, 2000–2017

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Rgdp	0.0592*** (2.80)	0.0567*** (2.68)	0.0649*** (3.06)	0.0681*** (3.15)	0.0575*** (2.72)	0.0584*** (2.72)	0.0633*** (2.98)
Political	0.206*** (2.79)	0.205*** (2.78)	0.202*** (2.74)	0.214*** (2.89)	0.229*** (3.03)	0.207*** (2.79)	0.233*** (3.09)
Sub-province		0.231 (1.36)		0.729*** (2.83)	0.439* (1.93)		
Capital			−0.497** (−2.51)			−0.932*** (−3.11)	−0.164 (−0.66)
Rgdp*sub-pro				−0.341*** (−2.69)			
Political*sub-pro					−0.466 (−1.40)		
Rgdp*capital						0.314 (1.97)	
Political*capital							−0.838** (−2.11)
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
_cons	−0.0672 (−0.34)	−0.0743 (−0.38)	−0.0282 (−0.14)	−0.0442 (−0.23)	−0.0784 (−0.40)	−0.0549 (−0.28)	−0.0604 (−0.31)
Pseudo R2	0.0905	0.0915	0.0940	0.0957	0.0926	0.0962	0.0965
Log likelihood	−831.94,908	−831.01313	−828.71,557	−827.17,511	−830.03212	−826.70,058	−826.42,618
N	1320	1320	1320	1320	1320	1320	1320

t statistics in parentheses.

FE = fixed effect.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.



Table 6. City administrative ranks, performance, political connections, cadres' characteristics and promotion with fixed effect, 2000–2017

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
R _{gdp}	0.0636*** (2.98)		0.0624*** (2.92)	0.0593*** (2.77)	0.0684*** (3.18)	0.0695*** (3.18)	0.0600*** (2.80)	0.0633*** (2.91)	0.0668*** (3.11)
Political		0.214*** (2.87)	0.210*** (2.81)	0.213*** (2.84)	0.206*** (2.74)	0.221*** (2.93)	0.234*** (3.04)	0.236*** (2.78)	0.236*** (3.08)
Sub-province				0.378** (2.14)		0.834*** (3.17)	0.560** (2.41)		
Capital					−0.543*** (−2.66)			−0.891*** (−2.91)	−0.213 (−0.83)
Age	−0.0554*** (−5.15)	−0.0553*** (−5.13)	−0.0571*** (−5.28)	−0.0621*** (−5.61)	−0.0577*** (−5.32)	−0.0605*** (−5.45)	−0.0617*** (−5.57)	−0.0567*** (−5.22)	−0.0582*** (−5.36)
Term	0.0348 (1.38)	0.0329 (1.31)	0.0353 (1.40)	0.0373 (1.48)	0.0426* (1.68)	0.0318 (1.25)	0.0363 (1.44)	0.0425* (1.67)	0.0452* (1.78)
Education	0.413** (2.50)	0.406** (2.46)	0.391** (2.36)	0.359** (2.15)	0.400** (2.41)	0.363** (2.18)	0.358** (2.15)	0.404** (2.43)	0.393** (2.35)
Center	0.211 (1.41)	0.209 (1.40)	0.184 (1.23)	0.139 (0.91)	0.198 (1.32)	0.151 (0.99)	0.140 (0.92)	0.186 (1.23)	0.193 (1.28)
R _{gdp} *sub-pro						−0.315** (−2.46)			
Political*sub-pro							−0.412 (−1.22)		
R _{gdp} *capital								0.252 (1.55)	
Political*capital									−0.842** (−2.06)
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
_cons	2.544*** (4.01)	2.443*** (3.84)	2.550*** (4.00)	2.827*** (4.34)	2.583*** (4.03)	2.792*** (4.28)	2.810*** (4.31)	2.502*** (3.90)	2.573*** (4.02)
Pseudo R ²	0.1107	0.1103	0.1150	0.1176	0.1190	0.1210	0.1184	0.1203	0.1214
Log likelihood	−813.42,967	−813.77,653	−809.48,661	−807.16,125	−805.849	−803.9783	−806.42,011	−804.61,826	−803.6662
N	1320	1320	1320	1320	1320	1320	1320	1320	1320

t statistics in parentheses.

FE = fixed effect.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

ministerial level, their promotion prospects are completely different. The results show that PCS have a significantly negative effect on promotion (model 5 in Table 6); in addition, the results of the sub-dataset analysis further confirm the first hypothesis (Table 7) that SPS has a significantly (1%) positive effect on promotion than PCS, regardless of whether the secretaries' characteristics are controlled or not. The results indicate the uniqueness of SPS in the CCP's bureaucratic hierarchy system.

The Result of Interaction Term Effect

The authors turn to test whether the effect of economic performance on promotion varies with city administrative levels, and the results confirm the second hypothesis. The interaction term of economic performance and sub-provincial city has a significantly negative effect (-0.341 & -0.315) on promotion (model 4 in Table 5; model 6 in Table 6), which means that the effect of economic performance on PPS's promotion is stronger than that of SPS. In other words, compared with the PPS, economic performance has little effect on SPS's better promotion prospects. To verify whether this result is also present in PCS, this study tests the interaction term of economic performance and provincial capital. The effect is positive but not statistically significant after the cadres' characteristics were controlled. These results indicate that although sub-provincial cities enjoy better economic development conditions and preferential policies, SPS's excellent promotion prospects may not have a strong relationship with economic performance. Finally, this study explores the interaction term of political connection and sub-provincial city, but the authors do not find a statistically significant estimation (model 5 in Table 4 and model 7 in Table 5). The results indicate that political connections have a great influence on MPS's promotion, regardless of their administrative level and provide empirical support for the argument that political connections are more like a lubricant that is strongly entrenched in China's bureaucratic system.

The Results of Control Variables

Age has a significantly negative effect on promotion, which shows the influence of the retirement system. Cadres who are approaching retirement age are transferred to a non-powerful department. This institutional arrangement has been strictly implemented at all local levels.

Table 7. Promotion prospects of SPS and CPS: year fixed effect estimation

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
rgdp	0.0999 (1.16)		0.104 (1.18)	0.0551 (0.61)		0.0570 (0.61)
sub-province	0.882*** (3.36)	0.875*** (3.32)	0.890*** (3.36)	1.048*** (3.45)	1.076*** (3.46)	1.078*** (3.46)
political		0.367 (1.65)	0.372 (1.66)		0.465* (1.86)	0.466* (1.86)
age				-0.0901^{**} (-2.39)	-0.0970^{**} (-2.55)	-0.0946^{**} (-2.47)
term				-0.0774 (-1.00)	-0.102 (-1.30)	-0.0962 (-1.22)
center				0.376 (0.79)	0.433 (0.90)	0.388 (0.80)
education				0.0764 (0.25)	0.0180 (0.06)	0.0289 (0.09)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
_cons	-0.711^{**}	-0.624^{**}	-0.876^{**}	4.844**	5.338**	5.032**
Pseudo R2	0.1529	0.1634	0.1725	0.2045	0.2288	0.2312
Log likelihood	$-68.111,606$ (-2.05)	-67.2681 (-2.12)	$-66.535,498$ (-2.41)	$-63.406,486$ (2.23)	$-61.467,512$ (2.47)	$-61.277,507$ (2.27)
N	116	116	115	115	115	115

t statistics are shown in parentheses.

FE = fixed effect.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Educational background has a positive correlation with promotion. Since the Deng Xiaoping era, the CCP has paid great attention to building a highly qualified cadre team. At the same time, China has restored the entrance examination for higher education and established a party school education system. All these measures offer cadres opportunities to improve their educational background.

This article does not find any evidence that the term is correlative with secretaries' promotion. After Xi Jinping became the leader of China in 2013, he created an unprecedented anti-corruption campaign within the entire CCP. Local officials' terms became shorter than before. The central government prefers to split long terms into shorter periods, and local officials must work in more positions before being promoted, so a shorter tenure of secretaries does not mean they are more likely to be promoted.

Discussion

Local Cadre Directly Appointed by the COD—SPS

In 1984, to mobilize the local initiative, the two-level-down system of cadre management was abolished, while the one-level-down system was established. This important reform by the central government devolved its authority over municipal cadre appointment to the provincial level. Therefore, all secretaries at the prefecture level city are appointed by the provincial organization department, and the COD is only responsible for the appointment of cadres above the sub-ministerial level, but the management of SPS has never been affected by this reform. In contrast to PPS who are managed by the provincial party committee, the selection and appointment of SPS are ultimately decided by the COD. In addition, the COD is responsible for the performance assessment and removal of SPS. Therefore, according to the empirical results in this study, if SPS is a special existence in China's bureaucracy, so much so that once a cadre is appointed as a SPS, he or she is much more likely to be further promoted, then the question becomes what explains appointment as a SPS in the first place. Thus, it is necessary to understand how the COD selects SPS before explaining the real meaning of the city administrative level in cadres' promotion.

SPS are More Likely to Be Promoted: contingency or Necessity?

During the reform era, one of the main tasks of the COD is to regulate the 'entry' and 'exit' of cadres, and a series of rules were established for this purpose, such as the requirements of age and educational background, which have been written into the official documents of CCP and became hard constraints for cadre promotion.⁴¹ In addition, some 'soft standards' can influence cadres' promotion, such as holding different responsible administrative positions in the hierarchy.⁴² Interestingly, most cadres appointed as SPS meet these basic requirements. After analyzing the career information of all 70 SPS in China from 2000 to 2017 (Appendix 1), the authors find that the cadres who became SPS shared the following two features. First, most SPS have an age advantage, especially those with good promotion prospects, such as Huang Xingguo, and Li Hongzhong, who were younger than fifty years when they were appointed as SPS. As sub-ministerial cadres, the age advantage undoubtedly provided the most basic competitive strength for their further promotion. Second, almost all SPS worked at sub-ministerial level positions for many years before they became SPS, and some cadres, such as Zhang Gaoli, Li Yuanchao and Gong Zheng, even held several leading positions before serving as SPS. Therefore, compared with cadres who have just been promoted as the sub-ministers, these cadres have more sub-ministerial experience before their appointment as SPS. Overall, a young age and years of serving as a sub-ministerial level cadre

⁴¹Lowell Dittmer, 'Leadership change and Chinese political development', *The China Quarterly* 176, (2003), pp. 903–925.

⁴²Barry J. Naughton and Dali L. Yang, *Holding China Together: Diversity and National Integration in the Post-Deng Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

reflect the COD's preferences in selecting SPS, and these conditions could help cadres become candidates for further promotion.

Among cadres who have advantages in age and administrative ranking, the appointment of SPS is another important advantage for promotion because they can further enrich their 'political experience' by serving as SPS, while serving as the head of an important region is an important indicator for the selection of senior cadres during the reform era.⁴³ Therefore, among cadres who have been appointed as SPS, this experience is of great significance for their careers because sub-provincial cities represent a special area in China's political landscape. The sub-provincial city partly enjoys the same economic and social management authority as the provincial level, which means that it has the status and channels to communicate with the central government directly. Generally, the central government's important economic reforms and strategic decisions are often first attempted in sub-provincial cities.⁴⁴ Thus, sub-provincial cities are endowed with a special mission to drive the development of the entire province and are regarded as an important platform for the development of cadres' competence in managing a province. These features indicate that the appointment of some cadres as SPS is an important way for the COD to further cultivate these cadres. For example, cadres, such as Li Yuanchao and Yuan Chunqing, who had long worked at the central departments, or such as Ma Xingrui and Gong Zheng, who are typical technocrats, serving as SPS can compensate for their lack of local political experience and further exercise their leadership skills.

Overall, the promotion path of SPS reflects an important characteristic of CCP's cadre management as follows: under the circumstance of the hierarchical promotion system, cadres' positions and administrative levels have different meaning for their political careers. Serving as SPS may be a key step towards further promotion for those who become sub-ministers at a young age. For the COD, the system of city administrative levels not only realizes the hierarchical management of local cadres but also can further cultivate potential elites by appointing them as SPS.

The Effect of Performance on Secretaries' Promotion: the Existence of Heterogeneity

This study finds that economic performance is less important to the promotion of SPS than to PPS. This result indicates that there are some differences in cadres' promotion between the central and provincial levels. On the one hand, most SPS have served as PPS, so for those who have already won the prefecture-level political tournament, their economic performance has been recognized. The central government tends to seek more effective signals to screen them. Especially when SPS are important candidates for provincial leaders and members of the CCP CC, it is necessary for the COD to ensure that these candidates are both reliable and competent. In some circumstances, political reliability may be more important because the central government must maintain stability for top leadership. On the other hand, SPS face many competitors in the political promotion tournament, including not only secretaries from other sub-provincial cities and provincial capitals but also all members of the standing committee of the CCP PC. Apart from SPS, other cadres are the principals who take charge of one specific department, such as the organization department, propaganda department or united front work department. It is obvious that their performance and competence cannot be measured by economic growth, so the COD needs to find other indicators to determine the winner of their promotion tournament. Therefore, economic performance plays an important role in cadres' selection. However, this role has clear limitations. For the tournament of sub-ministerial cadres, economic performance cannot serve as the single indicator.

⁴³David Shambaugh, 'The dynamics of elite politics during the Jiang era', *The China Journal* 45, (2001), pp. 101–111.

⁴⁴江艇等 [Ting Jiang et al.], 城市级别、全要素生产率和资源错配 [Administrative Rank, Total Factor Productivity, and Resource Misallocation in Chinese Cities], *管理世界* [Management World] 3, (2018), pp. 38–50.

Conclusion

An important task of the CCP in the post-Mao era is to select loyal and capable cadres at all levels, to promote economic development and enhance the regime legitimacy.⁴⁵ Therefore, the CCP began to reform the cadre system after the 1980s; in addition to establishing requirements regarding the cadres' age, educational background and tenure, the CCP attempted to influence cadres' careers by establishing a temporary transfer system, democratic recommendations, and NPC supervision. This article attempts to explore the features of China's elite promotion process from another perspective, i.e., city administrative level and finds that SPS tend to have better promotion prospects than PPS. This reveals the preference of the CCP in their cultivation and selection of local cadres. In addition to age and other conditions, the leadership experience of cadres in some important regions is often valued more. Therefore, the SPS is of special significance in the CCP's cadre hierarchical system. Although it is a sub-ministerial position, SPS is much more valuable for potential elites. Additionally, this study finds heterogeneity in the economic performance of local cadres' promotions. Compared with SPS, economic performance is more important to the promotion of PPS. PPS are controlled by the provincial party secretary, who also faces the task of economic growth from the central government. To complete this task, the provincial secretary tends to use economic performance as the main indicator to select and stimulate PPS. However, for SPS, economic performance may not be an effective signal because most competitors' performance and capacities cannot be measured by economic growth. More importantly, to maintain the stability of central leadership, the importance of economic performance also declines.

China's cadre system has long been in the spotlight, largely because of the party's continuous reform of the system. Currently, under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the CCP has further strengthened the reform of cadre management. For local cadres, the requirements for promotion have become increasingly stringent because COD has added more requirements regarding cadres' moral standards. Furthermore, Xi launched a massive anti-corruption campaign since 2013; some scholars believe that Xi's effort to replace the old rules with new rules is an institutionalized attempt to strength the country because the cadre system plays an important role in national governance.⁴⁶ However, how effective are Xi's efforts? Can these efforts really transform China's political elites? These questions should be the main topics of Chinese elite politics in the future.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Yang Yan is a PhD candidate at the School of Economics and Management, Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications. His research focuses on contemporary Chinese politics.

Chunhui Yuan is a Professor at the School of Economics and Management, Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications. Her research focuses on political economy

⁴⁵Graham Young and John P. Burns, 'The Chinese communist party's Nomenklatura system: a documentary study of party control of leadership selection, 1979–1984', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 26, (1991), p. 194.

⁴⁶Zhengxu Wang and Jinghan Zeng, 'Xi Jinping: the game changer of Chinese elite politics?', *Contemporary Politics* 22(4), (2016), pp. 469–486.



Appendix 1. Career information of SPS, 2000–2017

Name	Time of becoming sub-ministerial cadre/Age	Position before appointment as SPS/Time/Age	Time of becoming SPS/Age	Position after serving as SPS/Time/Age
Zhang Xingxiang	1995/50	Deputy secretary of PCP/1997/52	2001/56	Deputy of CPPCC PC/2006/61
Chen Zhenggao	1998/46	Mayor of Shenyang/2003/51	2005/53	Provincial governor/2007/55
Zeng Wei	2004/48	Secretary general of PCP/2004/48	2008/52	Deputy director of SCPPC/2016/60
Bo Xilai	1993/44	Mayor of Dalian/1993/44	1999/50	Provincial governor/2000/51
Sun Chunlan	1995/45	Deputy secretary of PCP/1997/47	2001/51	Secretary of ACFTU/2005/55
Zhang Chengyin	2000/50	Deputy of WCO/2002/52	2005/55	Deputy secretary of PCP/2009/59
Xia Deren	2001/46	Mayor of Dalian/2003/48	2009/54	Deputy secretary of PCP/2011/56
Tang Jun	2007/45	Minister of POD/2008/46	2011/49	Deputy minister of SAIC/2017/54
Du Xuefang	1997/48	Minister of POD/1997/48	2001/52	Deputy secretary of PCP/2004/55
Wang Rulin	1998/45	Deputy provincial governor/2001/48	2004/51	Deputy secretary of PCP/2007/54
Gao Guangbin	2007/44	Secretary of MCP/2003/40	2007/44	Deputy provincial governor/2015/52
Wang Zongzhang	1993/50	Deputy provincial governor/1997/54	1999/56	Deputy director of SCPPC/2003/60
Yang Yongmao	1998/51	Secretary general of PCP/1998/51	2002/55	Deputy secretary of PCP/2003/56
Du Yuxin	1999/46	Secretary of PCPL/2002/49	2003/50	Deputy secretary of PCP/2009/56
Gai Ruyin	2007/54	Deputy provincial governor/2008/55	2009/56	Deputy director of SCPPC/2012/59
Lin Duo	2010/54	Mayor of Ha'erbin/2010/54	2012/56	Secretary of PCDC/2014/58
Chen Haibo	2008/46	Mayor of Shenyang/2010/48	2014/52	Deputy secretary of PCP/2017/55
Wang Wulong	1993/51	Mayor of Nanjing/1993/51	1995/53	Director of SCMP/2001/59
Li Yuanchao	1993/43	Deputy secretary of PCP/2000/50	2001/51	Secretary of PCP/2002/52
Luo Zhijun	2001/50	Mayor of Nanjing/2001/50	2003/52	Provincial governor/2008/57
Zhu Shanlu	2002/49	MSC of PCP/2003/50	2008/55	Deputy secretary of PCP/2011/58
Huang Lixin	2003/41	Secretary of MCP/2012/50	2015/53	Deputy provincial governor/2016/54
Wu Zhenglong	2007/43	Secretary of MCP/2014/50	2016/52	Provincial governor/2017/53
Wang Guoping	1998/48	Secretary general of PCP/1998/48	2000/50	Director of SCMP/2010/60
Huang Kunming	2007/51	Minister of PPD/2007/51	2010/54	First deputy minister of CPD/2013/57
Gong Zheng	2003/43	Deputy provincial governor/2008/48	2013/53	Deputy secretary of PCP/2015/55
Zhao Yide	2012/47	Secretary general of PCP/2012/47	2015/50	Deputy secretary of PCP/2018/53
Huang Xingguo	1998/44	Secretary general of PCP/1998/44	1998/44	Deputy secretary of PCP/2003/49
Bayinchaolu	1998/43	Deputy provincial governor/2001/46	2003/48	Deputy secretary of PCP/2010/55
Wang Huizhong	2003/47	Secretary of PCPL/2007/51	2010/54	Deputy secretary of PCP/2013/57
Liu Qi	2008/51	Mayor of Ningbo/2011/54	2013/56	Provincial governor/2016/59

(Continued)



Appendix 1. (Continued).

Name	Time of becoming sub-ministerial cadre/Age	Position before appointment as SPS/Time/Age	Time of becoming SPS/Age	Position after serving as SPS/Time/Age
Tang Yijun	2011/50	Mayor of Ningbo/2016/55	2016/55	Provincial governor/2017/56
Hong Yongshi	1995/53	Mayor of Xiamen/1995/53	1999/57	Director of SCMP/2002/60
Zheng Lizhong	2001/50	MSC of PCP/2002/51	2002/51	Deputy of TAO/2005/54
He Lifeng	2001/46	Secretary of MCP/2001/46	2005/50	Deputy secretary of PCP/2009/54
Yu Weiguo	2006/51	Minister of POD/2006/51	2009/54	Deputy secretary of PCP/2013/58
Wang Menghui	2011/51	Deputy provincial governor/2011/51	2013/53	Deputy secretary of PCP/2016/56
Sun Shuyi	1993/48	Secretary of PCPL/1993/48	1995/50	Chairmen of CPPCC PC/2004/59
Jiang Daming	1993/40	Deputy secretary of PCP/2001/48	2004/51	Provincial governor/2007/54
Yan Rongzhu	2004/52	Minister of PPD/2006/54	2007/55	Deputy of CPPCC PC/2012/60
Wang Wentao	2011/47	Secretary of MCP/2011/47	2015/51	Provincial governor/2018/54
Zhang Huilai	1996/54	Secretary of PCPL/1996/54	1997/55	Provincial consultant/2001/59
Yan Qijun	2002/52	Secretary of PCPL/2005/55	2006/56	Provincial consultant/2010/60
Li Qun	2007/45	Minister of PPD/2007/45	2010/48	Deputy provincial governor/2017/55
Luo Qingquan	1998/53	Secretary of PCDC/1998/53	1999/54	Provincial governor/2002/57
Chen Xunqiu	1998/43	Secretary of PCPL/2001/46	2002/47	Deputy secretary of PCP/2005/50
Miao Wei	1997/42	Manager of Dongfeng Corporation/1999/44	2005/50	Deputy minister of MIT/2008/53
Yang Song	1993/43	Deputy secretary of PCP/2006/56	2008/58	Chairman of CPPCC PC/2011/61
Ruan Chengfa	2004/47	Mayor of Wuhan/2007/50	2011/54	Provincial governor/2016/59
Chen Yixin	2014/55	Deputy director of OCLG/2015/56	2016/57	General secretary of CCPL/2018/59
Huang Huahua	1992/46	Deputy secretary of PCP/1996/50	1998/52	Provincial governor/2003/55
Lin Shusen	1996/50	Mayor of Guangzhou/1996/50	2002/56	Provincial governor/2006/60
Zhu Xiaodan	2002/49	Minister of PPD/2003/50	2006/53	Provincial governor/2012/59
Zhang Guangning	2002/49	Mayor of Guangzhou/2003/50	2010/57	Chairman of Anshan Steel Corporation/2012/59
Ren Xuefeng	2008/43	Deputy mayor of Tianjin/2008/43	2014/49	Deputy secretary of PCP/2018/53
Zhang Gaoji	1988/42	Deputy provincial governor/1988/42	1997/51	Provincial governor/2001/55
Huang Liman	1998/53	Deputy secretary of PCP/1998/53	2001/56	Director of SCPPC/2005/60
Li Hongzhong	2001/45	Mayor of Shenzhen/2003/47	2005/49	Provincial governor/2007/51
Liu Yupu	1998/49	Secretary of PCPL/2007/58	2007/58	Director of SCMP/2010/61
Wang Rong	2004/46	Mayor of Shenzhen/2009/51	2010/52	Chairman of CPPCC PC/2015/57
Ma Xingrui	2007/48	Secretary of PCPL/2013/54	2015/56	Provincial governor/2016/57
Tao Wuxian	1996/48	Secretary general of PCP/1996/48	1997/49	Deputy secretary of PCP/2000/52

(Continued)

Appendix 1. (Continued).

Name	Time of becoming sub-ministerial cadre/Age	Position before appointment as SPS/Time/Age	Time of becoming SPS/Age	Position after serving as SPS/Time/Age
Wang Rongxuan	1993/49	Mayor of Chengdu/1993/49	2000/56	Deputy director of SCPPC/2004/60
Li Chuncheng	2001/45	Mayor of Chengdu/2001/45	2003/47	Deputy secretary of PCP/2011/55
Huang Xinchu	2007/50	Minister of PPD/2007/50	2011/54	Deputy director of SCPPC/2017/60
Cui Lintao	1990/48	Mayor of Xi'an/1990/48	1995/53	Deputy director of SCPPC/2002/60
Li Zhanshu	1993/43	Minister of POD/2000/50	2002/52	Deputy secretary of PCP/2003/53
Yuan Chungqing	1992/40	Deputy secretary of PCP/2001/49	2004/52	Provincial governor/2006/54
Sun Qingyun	2002/48	Mayor of Xi'an/2002/48	2006/52	Deputy secretary of PCP/2012/58
Wei Minzhou	2007/51	Secretary general of PCP/2007/51	2012/56	Deputy director of SCPPC/2016/60

Note: PCP (CCP Provincial Committee); WCO (Working Committee of Organs directly under the CPC CC); POD (Provincial Organization Department); MCP (CCP Municipal Committee); PCPL (Provincial Committee for Politics & Law); MSC (Member of Standing Committee); PPD (Provincial Propaganda Department); PCDC (Provincial Committee for Discipline Inspection); OCLG (Office of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensive Reform); SCPPC (Standing Committee of Provincial People's Congress); ACFTU (All-China Federation of Trade Unions); SAIC (the State Administration of Industry and Commerce); SCMP (Standing Committee of Municipal People's Congress); CPD (Central Propaganda Department); TAO (Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council); MIIT (Ministry of Industry and Information Technology); CCPL (Central Committee of Politics and Law)