# Democratic Procedures in the CCP's Cadre Selection Process: Implementation and Consequences*

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**Abstract**

Since the early 1990s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has put in place a series of measures to allow more Party members to participate in the cadre selection process. "Intra-party democracy" was promoted as a remedy to solve the corruption and social tension that resulted from overly concentrated personnel power. How effective are these formal procedures in constraining the appointment power of core Party leaders and institutionalizing the influence of a larger group of cadres? Drawing on archival research, interviews and quantitative data, this paper examines two components of intra-party democratic reform: "democratic recommendation," which serves as a gateway to cadre promotion, and the semi-competitive elections at Party congresses. This in-depth study finds that the efforts to expand bottom-up participation are hindered by loopholes in formal regulations, informal practices and the frequent rotation of Party officials. Meanwhile, the reform measures have brought changes to the personnel system by complicating the Party secretaries' exercise of appointment power and altering the incentives of ambitious cadres. The implementation of intra-party democracy could improve the vitality of one-party rule, and its ebbs and flows imply a divide within China's top leadership over the direction of political change.

**Keywords:** cadre selection; core Party leaders; Chinese Communist Party; intra-party democracy; democratic recommendation; Party congressional election

Since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in 1949, it has had to face two crises which brought into question the very survival of the party-state: the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Incident. In the aftermath of both of these upheavals, the CCP emphasized intra-party democracy as an important

* Research for this article was supported with funding received from the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan. The author wishes to thank Mary Gallagher and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions.

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 doi:10.1017/S0305741015001587 First published online 24 November 2015

part of its reform programme to avert regime collapse. Intra-party democracy has been seen by the CCP leaders as a way to inject vitality into the Party and alleviate the many ills associated with overly concentrated power. Party intellectuals and outside observers have both suggested that democratic practices within the Party could set the stage for broader political reform.[1]

In China, intra-party democracy (IPD), defined as "an institution whereby all party members can participate in party affairs directly or indirectly on an equal basis,"[2] consists of multiple institutional components. One element concerns how CCP leaders at various levels are selected. Rather than having a small number of Party leaders, especially the Party secretary, monopolize the power to choose officials, IPD entails more expansive participation in the selection process by Party members. To a large extent, the decision to broaden bottom-up participation was a response to the corruption and social tension that flowed from the concentration of personnel power. How effective are these formal procedures in constraining the appointment power of core Party leaders and institutionalizing the influence of a larger group of cadres?

To answer this question, I focus on two components of IPD reforms: "democratic recommendation" (*minzhu tuijian* 民主推荐), which serves as a gateway to the promotion of cadres, and the semi-competitive elections at Party congresses. To date, the literature on China's democratic reform has largely overlooked these aspects of IPD and has focused instead on village elections and the experiments with township elections. While these grassroots reforms provide exciting signs of democratization in China, their impacts are highly limited as they are carried out at the lowest rung of the hierarchy and are often restricted to pilot projects in specific locales. By comparison, the IPD measures under study here, although more incremental in nature, are implemented throughout the Party hierarchy and have system-wide significance.

Drawing on archival research, interviews with local officials and systematic appointment data, this paper aims to arrive at an accurate assessment of the Party's IPD reforms in the area of cadre selection. I argue that the efforts to promote bottom-up participation are hindered by loopholes in formal regulations, informal practices and the frequent rotation of Party officials. Despite these obstacles, IPD reform in this area has complicated the Party secretaries' exercise of personnel power and restructured the incentives of ambitious cadres. I suggest that IPD reform could potentially enhance the stability and viability of one-party rule, and that the Party leadership's evolving emphasis on such reform provides an indicator of the influence of liberal forces within the CCP.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a simplified, ideal-typical model of the CCP's one-level-down appointment system. It also explains how corruption and social tension induced by the system have led to the formulation of IPD reforms aimed at opening the selection process to more players. The

1 Shambaugh 2008, 121; He, Baogang 2006, 207; Li 2009.
2 He, Baogang 2006, 194.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

article then continues by examining the implementation of democratic recommendation and congressional semi-competitive elections. In so doing, the analysis seeks to shed light on the changes that these reform measures have brought to the CCP's selection process. The final section summarizes the findings and discusses the larger political implications of IPD institutions.

## The CCP's Appointment System and its Discontents

It is a defining feature of the Leninist political system that the ruling party monopolizes the power to appoint office holders in all public institutions. A growing body of literature has identified the personnel system as the linchpin of the CCP's political control and its success with decentralized authoritarianism.[3] To understand the origins and significance of the Party's IPD reforms, it is necessary to explore the intricacies of the regime's personnel system, namely, the way personnel power is distributed both across different levels of the Party hierarchy and between different players at the same level.

China's bureaucratic system consists of five administrative levels: the centre, the province, the prefecture, the county and the township. At each level, the locus of political power lies in the Party committee and its standing committee. To illustrate the operation of personnel power in this multi-layered bureaucracy, Figure 1 presents a simplified, ideal-typical model that depicts the essential dynamics of the CCP's personnel system. In this figure, cell A represents the core Party leaders at a particular administrative level. The "core Party leaders," a central concept of this article, can be roughly equated with the members of the CCP's standing committee.[4] In some cases, however, power is so concentrated in the hands of the Party secretary that the influence of other standing committee members pales in comparison. Cell B represents the organization department (OD), an agency that specializes in assisting the core Party leaders in the domain of personnel management. All the standard procedures associated with nomination, evaluation, appointment and dismissal are carried out by the OD. Cells C and D represent the major leaders at the next lower level. These include the core leaders of various functional departments (C) and the territorial jurisdictions one level down (D).

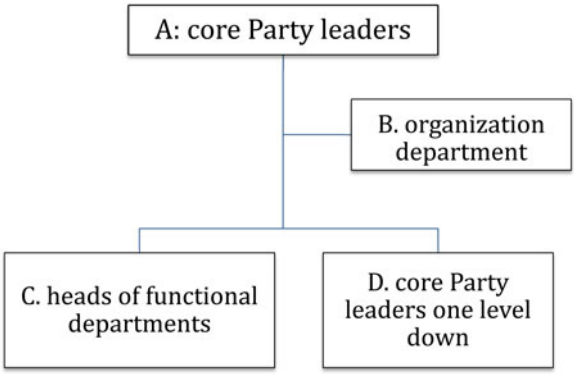
Since the mid-1980s, the CCP has adopted the principle of one-level downward cadre management. In practice, this meant that A, with the staff support of B, has the authority to appoint C and D with little interference from Party leaders one level above A. As one scholar summarized, "the shift to the one-rank-down system meant that leaders in provincial and lower territorial units gained almost

3 For example, see Manion 1985; Burns 1989, 1994; Lam and Chan 1996; Chan 2004; Landry 2008.

4 The size of the Party's standing committee varies across administrative levels. The number of standing committee members ranges between five and nine at the central level, ten and 15 at the provincial level, nine and 11 at the city level, and between seven and nine members at the county level. The Party committee at the township level, which has five to nine members, is too small to warrant a standing committee.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 1: **Personnel System of the CCP**




complete control over appointments and dismissals of officials within their territorial jurisdiction."[5]

Initially, this arrangement was designed to grant local leaders sufficient autonomy to promote socio-economic development. As a consequence, the CCP's personnel system has evolved into one in which the Party secretary, in consultation with his close colleagues, monopolizes appointment decision making.[6] The concentration of personnel power has created ample room for the core Party leaders to engage in faction-building, nepotism and even outright office selling.[7] These "unhealthy tendencies" (*bu zheng zhi feng* 不正之风), an umbrella phrase used within CCP discourse to describe personnel practices that go against the principle of transparency and fairness, have become a major source of popular discontent and social tension that the CCP leadership cannot afford to ignore.

Irregular personnel practices that trigger popular outrage usually take one of the following forms. First, Party leaders are often accused of promoting their relatives and close associates, typically in violation of existing rules such as the law of avoidance and step-by-step promotion.[8] Also drawing heated criticism is the promotion of "cadres with sickness" (*dai bing ti ba* 带病提拔), which refers to those who have moved up the bureaucratic ladder despite having a history of corrupt behaviour. Such a phenomenon is invariably caused by the failure of the OD's vetting process that is supposed to weed out corrupt officials. Finally, intense public outcry is always aroused by scandals involving the buying and selling of public offices. For example, a prefecture-level Party leader in Heilongjiang province reportedly received 23.85 million yuan in bribes between

5 Lieberthal 2004, 236.
6 Fewsmith 2006, 3.
7 For an in-depth account of how the concentration of power led to corrupt personnel practices, see Zhu 2008.
8 Cpc.people.com.cn. 2012. "Pogetiba mo cheng renrenweiqin 'dangjianpai'" (Do not let "exceptional promotion" become an excuse for nepotism), 24 April, http://cpc.people.com.cn/pinglun/GB/17737276.html. Accessed 13 June 2014.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1996 and 2002. In exchange, he sold offices under his control to as many as 260 officials.[9]

Statements issued by top CCP leaders reveal that they recognize the threat posed by the woes of the personnel system to the regime's legitimacy.[10] They realize that in order to contain corruption and nepotism, it is imperative to restrict the amount of influence core Party leaders hold over the cadre selection process. Since the early 1990s, the CCP has taken a variety of steps to restrain the exercise of personnel power through due process requirements, administrative oversight and intra-party democratic reforms. This study focuses on the last set of these measures, that is, the efforts to open up the selection process to more players from within the Party. By expanding the rights of Party members to access information and participate in the political process, IPD not only dovetails with a modern democratic ethos but may also inject bottom-up oversight over cadres as a way to improve their quality. It is therefore not surprising that top CCP leaders have strongly endorsed IPD by calling it "the lifeblood of the Party."[11] As mentioned above, this article explores the implementation of two crucial ingredients of IPD: the practices of "democratic recommendation" and the semi-competitive elections at Party congresses.

## Democratic Recommendation as a Gateway to Promotion

### *The formal process of democratic recommendation*

The post-Tiananmen era has seen the CCP making strenuous efforts to regularize the cadre selection process with rules and procedures.[12] According to regulations promulgated in 2002, the procedure for selecting a cadre for promotion consists of four basic steps: democratic recommendation, organizational vetting, deliberation and decision. (See the Appendix for a brief summary of the statutory procedures with regard to cadre selection.) In this process, democratic recommendation plays a gatekeeper's role of sifting through the pool of candidates for those who are qualified to go through to the next stages. The regulations stipulate that the recommendation procedure should apply to two scenarios: the changeover of the leadership group (*lingdao banzi huanjie* 领导班子换届) and individual promotions (*gebie tiba renzhi* 个别提拔任职). The former scenario refers to the periodic changeover of the Party committee's leadership group at Party congresses, while the latter is used for individual promotions to vacant posts in between congresses.

9 "Ma De 'wusha pifabu' zhenjing Heilongjiang" (Ma De's wholesale store of offices shocks Heilongjiang), *Lianzheng liaowang* 2003(12), 24–25.

10 See Zeng 2002, 45–46.

11 Li 2009, 2.

12 In 1995, the CCP Central Committee promulgated the "Provisional regulations on the selection and appointment of leading Party and government cadres" to govern the promotion of Party officials. In 2002, these regulations were revised into a permanent version, "Regulations on the selection and appointment of leading Party and government cadres," which had more procedural clarity (hereafter, 2002 Regulations).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In both cases, the preliminary list of candidates must be generated through democratic recommendation.[13]

Democratic recommendation is arguably the most relevant of the four stages in cadre selection for realizing the core values of IPD such as participation, representation and inclusiveness.[14] The following political elites are approved for participation in the recommendation process: members of Party committees, governments and congress standing committees at the levels for which leaders are being selected; Party and government leaders one level down; leaders in the courts, procuratorates, Party discipline inspection committees and mass organizations; and any other members that the OD deems it necessary to include.[15] The OD of the next higher level will solicit opinions from these participants through meetings and individual interviews. A ballot is held at the recommendation meeting through which the participants express their preferences. Based on the votes and individual interviews, the recommendation decision is then made jointly by the OD one level up and the standing committee at the levels for which leaders are being selected. The regulations stress that while the ballot should be considered as "one of the most important bases" for the decision, the practice of "deciding candidates through simple voting" (*yi piao qu ren* 以票取人) should be avoided.

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

## *The implementation of democratic recommendation*

A study by a former OD official provides a detailed account of the implementation of democratic recommendation prior to the 2003 changeover election in the districts and counties of the Shanghai municipality.[16] Because Shanghai is a provincial-level municipality, the leaders of the districts and counties (simply referred to as districts henceforth) within its jurisdiction are ranked at the prefecture level. Therefore, this description should be viewed as a case study of the operation of the recommendation procedure at the prefecture level.

In China's political system, the periodic changeover of local leadership groups is a complex personnel project, meticulously planned and implemented by the

13 2002 Regulations, Article 11.
14 He, Baogang 2006, 195.
15 2002 Regulations, Article 12.
16 Xu, Hongbin 2006.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

OD under the aegis of the Party committee. As the first step of the 2003 changeover, the Shanghai municipal Party committee determined the number of posts in each district's leadership group.[17] The OD at the district level would then set out to prepare the following paperwork.

*(1) The cadre roster.* The roster was designed to provide the participants in the recommendation process with basic information about the leading cadres in their jurisdictions. The names on the roster thus formed the pool of candidates to be recommended for the leadership group. The roster included the incumbent leaders of the district's Party committee, government apparatus, people's congress, courts, procuratorates, various functional departments, and so forth. Biographical information, such as a cadre's age, date of joining the Party, educational background and current office, was provided on the roster.

*(2) List of recommendation meeting participants.* Although CCP propaganda touts democratic recommendation as a demonstration of the Party's "mass line" policy, almost all participants were Party leaders in their own right. Differentiated by their bureaucratic status, the participants largely fell into five groups: the incumbent leaders of the district's Party and government apparatus; those who had retired from the district's leadership posts; the leaders of the district's functional departments and mass organizations; the leaders of the various sub-district offices/townships; and the representatives of democratic satellite parties and non-communists. The study does not reveal the exact number of cadres that participated in the meeting. According to one official report, an average of 230-odd cadres took part in the recommendation meetings at the prefecture level during the 2006–2007 changeover period. The corresponding number for the provincial level was 570.[18]

*(3) Recommendation forms.* These forms listed all vacant posts, and the participants had to fill in a candidate's name to match each of the available offices. Because the regulations stipulate that the ballots cast by officials with different bureaucratic ranks should be counted separately,[19] the recommendation forms were divided into five categories in correspondence to the five groups of participants discussed above.

Once the Shanghai municipal OD had approved the relevant documents and forms, the recommendation meeting was ready to be held. At the meeting, a task force dispatched by the municipal OD delivered an address to the participants, emphasizing various requirements regarding the size, age structure and gender quota of the incoming leadership group. The participants were then

17 For the Party apparatus, this includes the number of deputy Party secretaries and standing committee members.
18 BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 2007.
19 2002 Regulations, Article 13.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

asked to complete the recommendation forms and place them in the ballot boxes. After the forms were collected, the task force sorted them by group, counted the votes among each group, and summarized the results. This meeting was then followed by the task force's interviews with a selected group of main leaders at the district level. The average number of interviewees at the prefecture level during the 2006–2007 national changeover was reportedly 140.[20]

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

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

As an integral part of the CCP's efforts to reform its problematic personnel system, democratic recommendation was designed to expand Party members' right to "assess information, participate, select and supervise" during the procedure for cadre promotion.[21] The Party's official eulogy notwithstanding, there are two major factors that restrict the influence of those cadres who are formally empowered to participate. The first factor is the ambiguous statutory language surrounding the role of recommendation votes. On the one hand, the number of votes received should be considered "one of the most important bases" for deciding the candidates to be vetted for the posts. On the other hand, as mentioned, the importance of votes is qualified by the clause that "the practice of electing someone through simple voting should be avoided." In part, this caveat reflects the genuine concern that those candidates with the highest number of votes may not be the most suitable for the posts. A comment made by an educational official with rich personnel management experience is representative of many Party leaders' views:

> The number of recommendation votes is very important, but we should look at this issue from a scientific perspective … Some people might vote out of personal affection or resentment [instead of public interest] … In recent years, the climate of the officialdom has nurtured many cadres who try to offend nobody, to build personal relations and to form their own inner circles. These people are more likely to win votes than cadres who are not afraid to tackle hard problems and offend people … Therefore, my approach of dealing with the promotion of some cadres is that, as long as they received more than half of the votes, they should be eligible for closer vetting [even if someone else received more votes].[22]

In practice, the ambiguous language allows the core Party leaders considerable discretion in applying the voting results. When nominating someone who has failed to receive the most votes, they could use the justification that a holistic

20 BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 2007.
21 Central Organization Department 2006, 184.
22 Interview with a director of an educational bureau at the prefecture level, Fujian, 26 February 2014.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

approach was needed rather than just "electing someone through simple voting." Therefore, the insertion of the caveat clause diminishes the binding force of recommendation votes and gives greater force to the will of core Party leaders. The latitude enjoyed by Party leaders is reinforced by the secret nature of the ballot. In actual practice, the number of votes received by each candidate is rarely announced to the voters.[23] Should the vote counts be made public, the leaders would come under great pressure to respect the results and nominate the winner; the lack of transparency means that there is no such pressure.[24]

Another major impediment to Party members' participation in the selection process has to do with the frequent rotation of Party leaders across localities and functional departments. The primary goal of the rotation system is to enhance monitoring over local officials and prevent the development of local factions.[25] The rotation of cadres can take two forms: transfer via promotion (*tiba jiaoliu* 提拔交流) and transfer between positions of equal rank (*pingji diaodong* 平级调动). In both cases, the higher-up Party committee dominates the transfer decision at the expense of bottom-up participation by the affected units.

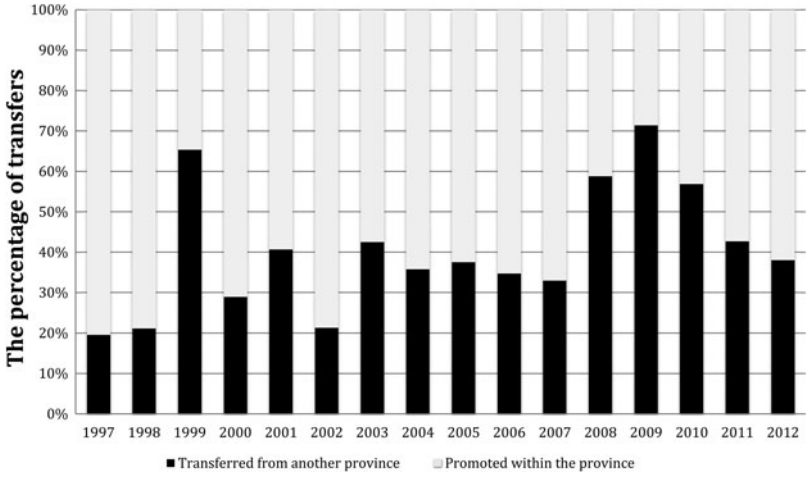
Transfer via promotion refers to the scenario where a cadre leaves his current unit to serve a higher-ranking position in a different unit. In this case, the Party leaders one level up always have a clear intent as to which individual should be promoted. Although the standard procedure of recommendation still has to be performed, it is nothing more than a formality to confirm the higher-level leaders' preference.[26] Furthermore, since the recommendation procedure is always carried out in the cadre's current unit,[27] the participants are essentially nominating someone who will soon have no impact on their lives, while the members of the receiving unit have no say in selecting their new boss. In the case of transferring cadres between positions of equal rank, there is no procedural requirement for democratic recommendation.[28]

To assess the degree to which cadre rotation weakens a Party member's input in the appointment decision, it is necessary to measure the proportion of total appointments that are made as transfers. If the vast majority of major appointments take the form of promotion within the affected unit, a process in which recommendation has more substantive meaning, the negative impact of rotation on bottom-up participation should be regarded as moderate, and vice versa. To make this assessment, I coded all the appointments to the standing committee of the provincial Party committees (PSC) across China between 1997 and

23 Some localities have publicized the results "when the timing is proper and to a proper degree" (*shi shi shi du*). Central Organization Department 2005, 128.
24 Deng 2012, 55–56.
25 Eaton and Kostka 2014.
26 Xu, Hongbin 2006, 17–18.
27 Interview with a deputy director of an OD at the county level, Fujian, 18 February 2014.
28 For the procedure of transferring equal ranking officials, see the CCP Central Committee's 1999 "Provisional regulations on the transfer work of Party and state leading cadres," Article 4; and the 2006 "Regulations on the transfer work of Party and state leading cadres," Article 19.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 2: **The Proportion of PSC Appointments Accounted for by Cross-provincial Transfers, 1997–2012**




*Sources:*
Author's dataset. Available upon request.

2012.[29] Figure 2 depicts the proportion of all appointments accounted for by cross-provincial transfers, as opposed to within-province promotions, with the black columns representing the percentage of transfers. As shown in the figure, the proportion of transfers is by no means negligible. On average, about 41 per cent of all appointments in a given year are accounted for by transfers arranged by higher-level Party committees. This analysis provides strong evidence that the institution of cadre rotation indeed imposes substantial limits on bottom-up participation in the selection process.

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

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

29 The conclusions drawn from this dataset concern the provincial level only. Whether they can be generalized to other administrative levels should be investigated in future studies.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

One of the impacts of the voting process is to block the nomination of highly unpopular candidates, however much the core Party leaders would want to pick them. Potential candidates who fail to pass a threshold, which varies across localities from one-third to half of the votes, are usually eliminated from the process. My interviews confirm that this mandatory threshold is widely established across the country.[30] In this sense, the recommendation process partly accomplishes its intended purpose of preventing the appointment of very disreputable but well-connected cadres.

Another way in which the recommendation votes might make a difference is when power is relatively diffused among the core Party leaders and no individual can dictate proceedings. For instance, after two districts were merged to create Beijing's Dongcheng district 东城区 in 2012, the Party secretary and head of government each represented the bureaucracy of one old district and possessed roughly equal power. They therefore found it difficult to reach agreement on key appointment decisions. Situations like this, which previously would have been resolved through behind-the-scene manoeuvres and horse-trading, tend to elevate the influence of the voting process, as both Party leaders found it an acceptable way to settle their differences.[31]

Democratic recommendation has affected not only how core Party leaders wield their personnel power but also how cadres pursue promotion. One example is the widespread practice among candidates of soliciting votes, as revealed by the disciplinary measures taken by the CCP against such activities. The formal procedure provides almost no platform for the candidates to introduce themselves or articulate policy positions, and the Party strictly prohibits campaign activities that are not closely managed by the OD. Despite the official ban, candidates have engaged in a variety of clandestine canvassing activities such as gift-giving, inviting those in a position to recommend candidates to dinners, and sending text messages. Judging from the Party's repeated warnings against vote solicitation and the high-profile disciplinary actions taken against the perpetrators, these activities are probably quite common. As the CCP prepares itself for the periodic changeover of leadership across the country, the Party centre will typically issue a circular to remind its members that, "it is necessary to resolutely investigate and punish those who engage in buying votes through bribery and in other illegal activities during the period of replacing old Party committees with new ones, especially during the period of democratic recommendation and election."[32]

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

31 Interview, OD official working at the prefecture level.

32 Xinhua. 2006. "Circular of CPC Central Committee's Central Discipline Inspection Commission and Organization stresses it is necessary to strengthen organizational and personnel discipline when local Party committees stand for re-election when the current term expires," 19 May, http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/871261210/14276302982437e6dac/11?accountid=14667. Accessed 13 June 2014.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In 2010, the Party publicized 12 typical cases where personnel rules had been violated and disciplinary action taken.[33] Of these cases, three involved illicit canvassing during the democratic recommendation process. For example, Li Weiqun 李维群, who was then the secretary general of Qiqihar 齐齐哈尔 municipal government, was dismissed for soliciting recommendation votes when the Heilongjiang provincial OD was selecting candidates to join the reserve list of prefecture-level leaders. In the space of four days, Li sent over 410 text messages to more than 180 cadres. The content of these messages ranged from, "I intend to fight for the reserve list of the court president. Your support will be greatly appreciated," to "Devoted to prosecutorial work for 30 years. Eleven of those years as municipal deputy procurator-general. National senior prosecutor. Great reputation in the profession."[34] Although these campaign messages contained little more than a highlight of career achievements and requests for support, they were considered a severe violation of Party discipline. Such actions, if discovered and made public, can be disastrous for a cadre's political career.[35]

The attention of Party officials and intellectuals, many of whom criticized the practice of "electing someone through simple voting," has been drawn to the fact that recommendation votes have started to exert an influence on the selection process.[36] Critics of the process contend that many localities overly emphasize the importance of recommendation votes, leading some cadres to perform their daily work with an eye towards attracting more votes. As a result, they have become "afraid to criticize people, offend people and lose votes," while those cadres who are "conscientious and responsible in their work" and "can stick to principles" are at a disadvantage under the current system.[37] It is worth noting that the analysts are criticizing existing practices rather than expressing opposition to hypothetical scenarios, although the sensitivity of the issue does not allow them to name specific cadres or locations. Indeed, concerns about the excessive importance attached to votes led the Party centre to revise the statutory language regarding democratic recommendation in 2014.[38] Instead of being "one

33 CCP Central Committee's Central Discipline Inspection Commission and Organization. 2010. "Jianjue shazhu yongren shang buzhengzhifeng – guanyu shier qi weigui weiji yongren dianxing anjian de tongbao" (Firmly stop unhealthy tendencies in personnel management – circular regarding twelve typical cases of violating personnel rules and disciplines), http://gz.ahxf.gov.cn/Article/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=9216. Accessed 16 July 2014.

34 CCP Organization Department of Heilongjiang Province. 2009. "Circular on Li Weiqun's vote-soliciting activities during recommendation for reserve cadres," 22 October, http://zzb.bjtu.edu.cn/xxzl/4936.htm. Accessed July 16 2014.

35 The CCP's OD and disciplinary agencies send inspection teams to supervise leadership changeovers across the country. These teams are responsible for spotting and reporting any irregular activity during the changeover process. Interview, deputy director of OD at the county level.

36 For example, see CCP Organizational Department in Guangan Prefecture, Sichuan Province 2012; Huang 2004.

37 Xu, Zhibin 2008, 30.

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

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the most important bases" for deciding candidates, the results of recommendation are now defined as "important references" for selecting cadres.[39]

To sum up, despite significant institutional barriers to the expansion of Party members' participation, the introduction of democratic recommendation has brought new dynamics into the personnel system. The loopholes and inconsistencies in the formal institution may allow the core Party leaders to retain control over the appointment decision, but in most cases the voting process does serve as a firewall to block the nomination of highly unpopular candidates. The core leadership is also more likely to defer to the results of recommendation when it is divided. For ambitious cadres, it has become part of their office-seeking strategy to win the approval of colleagues during their everyday work and to solicit votes prior to the recommendation meeting. Combined with the ongoing complaints about the "undue influence" of recommendation votes in the CCP's internal policy discussions, the evidence suggests that recommendation is much more than a legitimation procedure that rubber-stamps the decisions of core Party leaders.

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

## Managed Contestation in Intra-party Elections

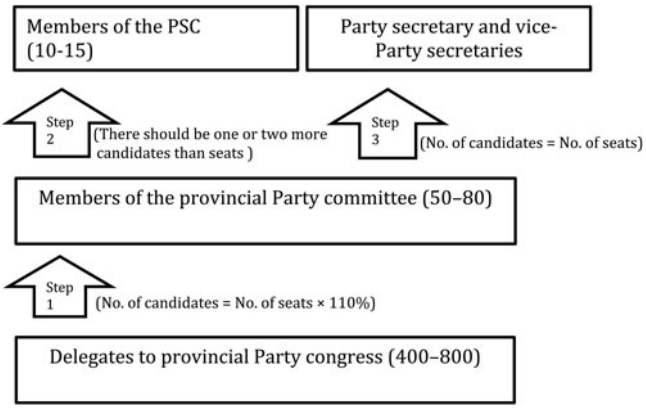
Similar to democratic recommendation, elections are hailed by the CCP as an important institution for promoting intra-party democracy. According to the CCP's Constitution, "(t)he Party's leading bodies at all levels are elected except for the representative organs dispatched by them and the leading Party members' groups in non-Party organizations."[40] Throughout most of the CCP's history, intra-party elections were merely ritualistic proceedings designed to legitimize the personnel decisions made by higher-level Party leaders. However, with the idea of intra-party democracy gaining popularity amongst CCP leaders and the introduction of semi-competitive elections in the 1980s, the role of intra-party elections in the political system was no longer negligible. This section will first

39 CCP Central Committee. 2014. "Regulations on the selection and appointment of Party and government leading cadres."

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

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 3: **Semi-competitive Election Process at Provincial Party Congresses**




delineate the electoral institutions that select the Party's leadership groups and then describe how the Party organizations use informal practices and formal rules to minimize the constraints imposed by semi-competitive elections. Despite these formal and informal obstacles, I will show that limited contestation still manages to complicate the core Party leaders' personnel authority by creating electoral uncertainties. For the convenience of discussion, I use the election of leadership groups at the provincial level – members of the CCP provincial standing committee (PSC) – to illustrate the dynamics of the electoral system.

### *Election of PSC members at provincial Party congresses*

According to the CCP's Constitution, members of the PSC – the top provincial decision-making body, composed of 10–15 members – should be elected at the provincial Party congress once in every five years. To be precise, the PSC is selected through a bottom-up, progressive electoral process that contains three tiers (Figure 3). At the lowest level, Party organizations in various sub-provincial work units hold Party conferences to elect their delegates to the provincial Party congress. These work units represent a wide range of organized interests at the sub-provincial level recognized by the party-state. The total number of delegates may range from 400 to 800.[41] The second-tier election takes place at the provincial Party congress, where the delegates elect the members of the provincial Party committee. Party regulations suggest that the size of the provincial Party committee should vary between 50 and 80 members.[42] At the top level, immediately after the conclusion of the provincial Party congress, the newly elected provincial Party committee holds a plenum to elect the PSC. It then elects the provincial Party

41 CCP Central Committee. 1994. "Regulations governing CCP organization of local elections," Article 9.
42 Central Organization Department. 1995. "Provincial regulations on several specific questions regarding the Party's local congress at various levels," Article 6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

secretary and deputy Party secretaries, all of whom must be chosen from among the newly elected PSC members.

During Mao's reign, intra-party electoral procedures played a negligible role in the political process. These elections were conducted with the number of candidates equal to the number of seats. The lack of electoral competition meant that the candidate nominated for a post only needed to receive a majority vote to be elected, a foregone conclusion under normal circumstances. Moreover, frequent political campaigns and turmoil made it impossible to observe routine democratic procedures.[43]

With the passing of Mao, the CCP moved quickly to restore Party members' democratic rights to prevent the excessive concentration of power that characterized the Mao era. In 1980, the Party adopted a decision on "Several principles on political life in the Party" that, among other things, called for an improvement to the electoral procedure for leadership selection. Most importantly, the document endorsed, for the first time, the idea of the *cha'e* 差额 election, that is, an election in which there are more candidates than seats.[44] At the 13th National Party Congress held in 1987, the Party Constitution was amended to make the *cha'e* method mandatory in intra-party elections.

The plan to introduce electoral contestation was later fleshed out in specialized Party regulations. In 1990, the Central Committee promulgated the "Provisional regulations governing grassroots CCP organizing elections," which were formalized in January 1994 as the "Regulations governing CCP organization of local elections." The regulations applied the *cha'e* method to the election of local Party committees and their standing committees.[45] More importantly, the regulations clarified the degree of contestation in local Party elections by specifying the ratio of candidates to seats. When congressional delegates elect the local Party committee, the number of candidates should exceed the size of the committee by 10 per cent.[46] In the next step, when the local Party committee elects its standing committee, there should be one or two more candidates than seats (Figure 3).[47]

Admittedly, the amount of electoral competition guaranteed by formal institutions is minimal. First of all, the level of electoral contestation mandated by the regulations is extremely low: there should only be 10 per cent more candidates than seats for a local Party committee election; similarly, in the election for the standing committee, all but two candidates will be safely elected onto the 10 to 15-member body. Moreover, the regulations exempt the posts of Party secretary and deputy secretary, the most powerful Party posts, from electoral contestation.[48] Apart from these restrictive measures, the regulations are extremely

43 Lin 2011.
44 Niu 1999, 32; Lin 2011, 546.
45 CCP Central Committee. 1994. "Regulations governing CCP organization of local elections," Article 4.
46 Ibid., Article 17.
47 Ibid., Article 20.
48 Ibid., Article 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

vague with respect to how candidates are nominated. Although all nominees are required to go through the democratic recommendation procedure, organizational vetting and deliberation, as required when promoting individuals to leadership posts, the loosely worded regulations grant the core Party leaders sufficient discretion to control nominations one level below.

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

Subjecting candidates to semi-competitive elections not only adds a veneer of democracy to China's one-party rule but also forces Party committees at all levels to be more prudent in the selection of candidates. More careful scrutiny of the quality of candidates might help to prevent the selection of highly unpopular or corrupt officials, reduce state–society tensions and improve the status of the CCP as an organization.[49] However, the CCP wants to have its cake and eat it too: that is, it wants to enjoy all the benefits associated with electoral procedure without relinquishing the authority to control the selection of leaders at lower levels. Therefore, months before the opening of the provincial Party congress, the OD at the central level works in tandem with its provincial counterparts to prepare a personnel plan to be realized at the congress. The plan slates specific individuals to be elected to the PSC; it also matches each of these individuals with a specific post traditionally held by a PSC member (provincial Party secretary, governor, head of the provincial OD, etc.).[50]

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

One mechanism to control electoral contestation is the nomination of sure losers by the Party committee to compete with the designated candidates. Known as "partner candidates" (*pei xuan ren* 陪选人), these designated losers are usually not well known and have little in the way of diverse career experience. Placing these weak candidates on the ballot is supposed to guarantee the election of the more well-known, senior candidates.[51] In some localities, the delegates are explicitly informed of the identities of the partner candidates to avoid any confusion.[52] After losing the election as planned, the partner candidates can expect a reward of some kind: "You have sacrificed yourself for the Party organization. The next time a good position becomes vacant, you will be

49 Fewsmith 2006; Manion 2008.
50 An 1994.
51 Lin 2011, 550.
52 Interview, former deputy mayor.

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picked."[53] Some local Party committees use the low proportion of votes received by the partner candidates as an indicator of their organizational success. That the *People's Daily*, the CCP's principle mouthpiece, published an article denouncing the designation of partner candidates in local elections demonstrates the widespread, regularized nature of this practice.[54]

In case the nomination of weak rivals is insufficient to ensure the desired outcome, the OD also resorts to informal campaigning on behalf of the designated candidates.[55] In preparation for the Party congress, the organizers of the congress often conduct opinion polls among the delegates to assess the challenges faced by the designated candidates. Based on this valuable information, the organizers will make use of multiple strategies to influence the views of individual voters. For example, at the preparatory meeting for the Party congress, the provincial Party secretary will make speeches to exhort the voters to "realize the intent of the Party organization"[56] or the OD will also contact individual voters to change their preferences and vote for the designated candidates. In the final analysis, these informal measures are taken because the main provincial leaders face strong top-down pressure to ensure that the designated candidates are elected; otherwise, "the Party congress is a failure. The Party secretary will be regarded as lacking the ability to coordinate and will lose the trust of higher-level leaders."[57]

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

Towards this end, I identified 855 cases of new PSC members taking office between 1997 and 2012.[58] Figure 4 presents how these cases are distributed over the interval between two adjacent Party congresses. In this graph, the tick

53 Interview with an OD official at provincial level, Chongqing, 15 March 2014.
54 "Xuanju qiemo gao peixuan" (Be sure not to nominate partner candidates during elections), *People's Daily*, 2 February 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-02/02/c_122644253.htm. Assessed 16 July 2014.
55 Wu 2000.
56 Interview with a provincial official, Fujian, 12 February 2014.
57 Interview, former deputy mayor.
58 This dataset only includes the cases for which the month of taking office can be identified from the official CVs. Without this information, we cannot tell whether the new PSC member came into office by

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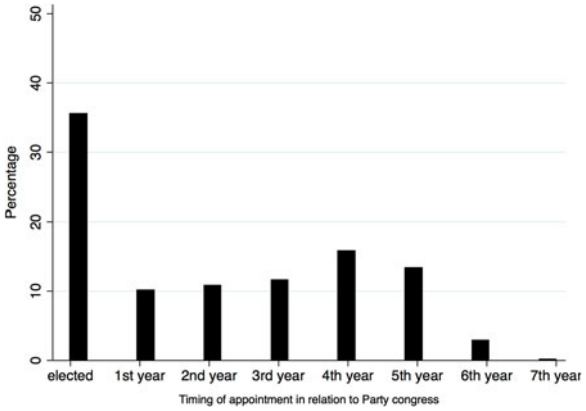
Figure 4: **The Distribution of PSC Appointments between Two Party Congresses, 1997–2012 (n = 855)**




*Sources:*
Author's dataset. Available upon request.

"elected" on the X-axis indicates cases where PSC members gained office through election; "1st year" indicates the cases in which a PSC member was appointed during the 12-month interval after the Party congress; "2nd year" indicates the 12 months after that, and so forth.[59] As shown in the figure, only about 35 per cent of new PSC appointments came via congressional election. Recess appointments account for the rest of the 855 cases, which were more or less evenly distributed between the recess periods. On this evidence alone, it can be concluded that recess appointment is by no means just an emergency measure tailored for unpredictable contingencies. The large proportion of such appointments significantly erodes the substantive meaning of congressional election and the limited degree of contestation thereby introduced.

Further inquiry reveals that recess appointment is mainly employed as a mechanism to facilitate the cross-provincial transfer of officials. The 855 PSC appointments were made through 547 promotions from within the province and 308 transfers across provinces. As shown in Figure 5, over 95 per cent of the 308 transfers were conducted through recess appointment, while the equivalent number is less than 50 per cent for promotions within the same province. In other

*footnote continued*

recess appointment or congressional election. The availability of this information seems to be random, so the results are not driven by any systematic difference between the selected and missing cases.

59 Before the 2001–2002 national changeover period, some provinces did not strictly implement the Party Constitution's provision that provincial Party congresses should be held once every five years. Some congresses were not held until the sixth or seventh year after the previous congress. This explains why a small portion of PSC members were appointed in the sixth or seventh year.

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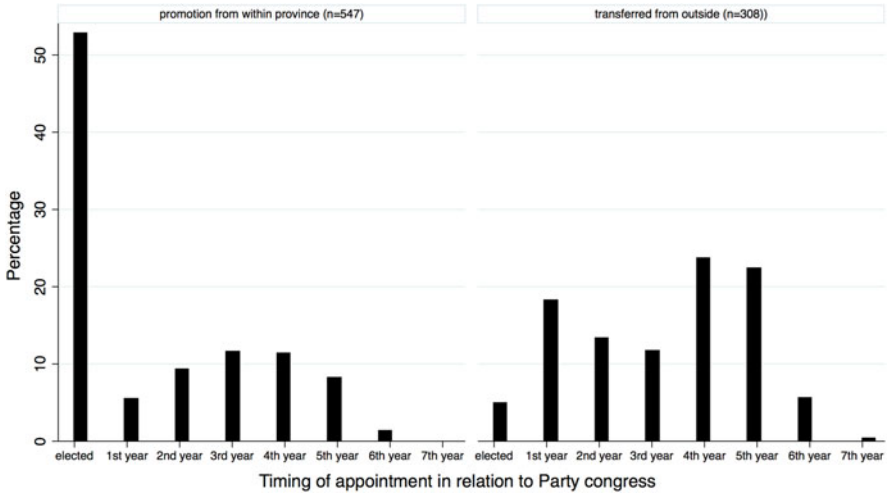
Figure 5: **Distribution of PSC Appointments between Two Party Congresses, 1997–2012 (n = 855)**




*Sources:*

Author's dataset. Available upon request.

words, the five-year changeover cycle does have some relevance for the locally promoted cadres as the majority of them came to office at the Party congress. For the transferred cadres, however, the election cycle is largely meaningless.

One of the reasons most transfers were completed through recess appointment is that the rotated candidates are then better prepared for the next congressional election. Because these cadres are outsiders without any support base in the province, fielding them in the semi-competitive elections carries significant risks. Lack of familiarity and the sentiment of localism may very well lead the delegates to vote against the outsiders. "In local elections," according to Li Cheng, "people are highly likely to choose a native candidate to be their local leader if the other candidates' qualifications are roughly equal."[60] Recess appointment not only bypasses the electoral procedure but also gives the outsiders time to build a local constituency for the upcoming election. During the period leading up to the next Party congress, the outsider will be given opportunities to build a reputation of competence as well as a network of local support. The outsider's status as a PSC incumbent with some working experience in the province makes it easier for the organizers to conduct informal campaigning for him and secure his election. Interviews with local OD officials confirmed the importance of transferring officials well before the congress when the most critical positions in the Party committee were filled:

60 Li 2004, 52.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> More than a year before [the changeover], we will reshuffle the Party secretary, head of government, head of OD and head of disciplinary commission. These people will not be replaced at the changeover election. This is because they have to be transferred into positions first and take stock of the surroundings. They have to get the situation under control, otherwise problems will occur at the changeover … Those positions that go through turnovers at changeover election are not what we consider core positions, *because there are many uncertainties at the changeover.*[61]

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

### *Electoral uncertainties at provincial Party congresses*

Since the adoption of the *cha'e* method in the 1980s, "democratic accidents" (*minzhu shigu* 民主事故), a sarcastic term used by political insiders to describe the electoral defeats of designated candidates, have occurred from time to time. Owing to the extreme sensitivity of election results, the Chinese authorities do not publicize systematic data about the candidates and the votes they receive.[62] Fortunately, sources such as the Chinese press, Western publications and internet blogs have revealed a number of cases in which designated candidates for the PSC suffered unexpected electoral defeats. These cases offer a tantalizing glimpse of how the centre's personnel plans may be thwarted by the electoral processes that the Party itself has created.

For example, one of the earliest and most high-profile victims of *cha'e* elections was Chen Yuan 陈元, the son of Chen Yun 陈云 who was one of China's most influential leaders during the 1980s.[63] Chen Yuan's prominent family background ensured his rapid ascent to high-level positions in the municipality of Beijing. Prior to Beijing's 6th Party congress in 1987, the central OD had slated Chen to be the deputy Party secretary of Beijing. To get this job, Chen first needed to be elected to Beijing's Party committee. At the congress, 750 delegates were given the task of choosing, by secret ballot, 50 people to serve on Beijing's Party committee from a list of 55 candidates. Unexpectedly, Chen was among the five people who lost. The electoral loss dealt a heavy blow to Chen's political ambition. The rest of Chen's career was mainly spent in the state-owned banking sector.

Table 1 provides a summary of eight cases, identified through various sources, where designated candidates have suffered electoral defeats. It must be stressed

61 Interview with OD official at the provincial level, Chongqing, 15 March 2014. Emphasis added by author.

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

63 The account of Chen's electoral loss is based on He, Pin, and Gao 1996, 179–189.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1: **Electoral Defeats of Designated PSC Candidates**

| Centrally designated candidate | Timing of the election | Provincial Party congress | Election lost | Slated post | Career background of candidate | Candidate elected instead |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chen Yuan 陈元 | December 1997 | Beijing's 6th Party congress | Provincial Party committee | Deputy Party secretary | Outsider | Unknown |
| Song Ruixiang 宋瑞祥 | May 1988 | Qinghai's 7th Party congress | Provincial Party committee | Governor | Outsider | Unknown |
| Liu Hongren 刘洪仁 | November 1993 | Shandong's 6th Party congress | PSC | Unknown | Localist | Han Yuqun 韩寓群 |
| Hou Wujie 侯伍杰 | 1995 | Shanxi's PSC special election | PSC | Head of propaganda department | Localist | Unknown |
| Wang Hanmin 王汉民 | October 2001 | Guangxi's 8th Party congress | PSC | Unknown | Outsider | Li Jinzao 李金早 |
| Jiang Xiaoyu 蒋效愚 | May 2002 | Beijing's 9th Party congress | PSC | Head of propaganda department | Localist | Sun Zhengcai 孙政才 |
| Bao Kexin 包克辛 | April 2007 | Guizhou's 10th Party congress | Provincial Party committee | Deputy governor | Outsider | Shen Yiqin 谌贻琴 |
| Bayinchaolu 巴音朝鲁 | May 2012 | Jilin's 10th Party congress | PSC | Deputy Party secretary | Outsider | Zhuang Yan 庄严 |

*Sources:*

For the Chen Yuan case, see He, Pin, and Gao 1996, 179–189; for the Song Ruixiang, Jiang Xiaoyu and Bao Kexin cases, see blog.sina.com.cn 2013; for the Liu Hongren case, see blog.sina.com.cn 2014; for the Hou Wujie case, see news.sohu.com 2006; for the Wang Hanmin case, see blog.163.com 2009; for the Bayinchaolu case, see www.eeo.com.cn 2013.

*Notes:*

Admittedly, the authenticity of information provided by internet blogs is more questionable than in the case of print media. This concern can be somewhat eased by the fact that I only collect information from the largest blog space providers in China, such as sina.com and 163.com. Whenever possible, I corroborate this information with the published CVs of the officials involved as well as official press coverage of the Party congresses.

that these cases have been selected based on the availability of information rather than a rigorous sampling procedure. With this caveat in mind, three important facts can still be learned from the table. First, the phenomenon of intra-party elections thwarting "the intent of the organization" seems to have persisted since the introduction of *cha'e* elections in 1987: two of these cases occurred in the 1980s, another two in the 1990s and four in the 2000s. Thus, although the Party has adopted a variety of measures to avoid unexpected electoral results, they cannot guarantee that the designated candidates are elected.

Second, candidates for the PSC faced two electoral roadblocks: in three cases, the candidates failed to get elected to the provincial Party committee, and in the remaining five cases, they lost in the PSC election. Third, five out of the eight unsuccessful candidates were rotated officials who had worked for an average of four years in the province when the election took place. This is consistent with the observation that "democratic accidents" are typically an expression of local cadres' distrust of outsiders. The electoral defeat of a designated candidate, especially someone transferred from another province, causes a serious disruption to the centre's overall personnel plans and creates a significant workload for the OD in order to cope with the aftermath.[64] Because the CCP looks at personnel affairs across the country as if they were a game of chess (*quan guo yi pan qi* 全国一盘棋), during which one wrong move will endanger the entire game, unexpected results must be avoided at all costs. As one local OD official explained:

> These rotated officials constitute a giant chessboard in our city. The same thing is true on the national level. For example, if there are 1,000 (rotated) officials, we must make sure that they get elected so that 1,000 positions are filled. If one loses the election and another person that comes from nowhere gets elected, then we have one redundant person. If all the posts in the leadership groups are already occupied, then there is nothing we can do, and the entire chess game is disrupted … so we have to ensure that rotated officials get elected. *This is one of the things that we have to guarantee when we supervise the changeover.*[65]

## Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has examined two critical components of the CCP's ongoing reform of its personnel management system. Ostensibly, both democratic recommendation and semi-competitive elections were introduced to enhance Party members' stake and participation in the political process. On a more practical level, these measures were designed to break up the core Party leaders' monopoly over personnel decisions, which has led to corruption and social tension. This study has identified several key factors in the implementation stage that impede meaningful

64 In October 2001, for example, Li Jinzao was unexpectedly elected to the PSC of Guangxi province at the expense of an incumbent PSC member, Wang Hanmin. The provincial OD was utterly unprepared for the election of Li, who was at that point serving as the number two leader (the mayor) of Guilin city. The CCP's organizational procedures have it that only the number one leader (the Party secretary) of an important city may enter the PSC. To resolve the personnel chaos in the wake of Li's election and show a united front, the Party secretary of Guilin city had to be transferred to lead the provincial department, vacating his post for Li to fill.

65 Interview with an OD official at the provincial level, Chongqing, 15 March 2014. Emphasis added by author.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

participation by the Party's rank and file. In the case of democratic recommendation, the ambiguous status assigned to recommendation votes, coupled with their secret nature, allows the will of core Party leaders to supersede the voting results. For Party congressional elections, competitiveness can be dampened by informal practices that skew the playing field in favour of candidates designated by higher-level Party leaders. In both cases, the substantive meaning of participatory institutions is compromised by the frequent rotation of officials across administrative boundaries.

However, the presence of these impediments does not mean that IPD procedures are merely political smokescreens with zero impact on the selection process. The evidence gathered by this research suggests that the votes received during the recommendation stage can have some influence on the appointment decisions. Candidates who are unpopular with their colleagues will face an uphill battle to survive the recommendation and electoral processes. Sensing the importance of these new institutions, ambitious cadres have begun to adjust their everyday behaviour, and campaign secretly to attract more votes. For the core Party leaders, the exercise of their *nomenklatura* authority is placed under increasing institutional constraints. To ensure that their preferred candidates are appointed, the Party leaders have to micro-manage every step of a prolonged selection process and coordinate the decisions of numerous political actors. In trying to control personnel appointments, they may have to massage recommendation results and even commit electoral fraud, actions that violate Party discipline and that could be used by political opponents in the future. Considering the scarcity of political resources and the risks involved, it is not clear that the core Party leaders will always want to exercise unlimited control over cadre selection.

If allowed to develop their full potential, the IPD institutions will have far-reaching implications for the resilience of the one-party regime in China. First, IPD institutions improve the regime's legitimacy by cloaking the personnel system with rules, steps and procedures. To the extent that cadres and the general public view personnel decisions as the result of a wide range of impersonal and impartial factors beyond any individual's control, the distribution of political opportunities is less likely to breed resentment and discontent. Second, opening up the selection process to more players forces Party leaders to gather more information about the candidates and thereby increases the chances of unpopular candidates being weeded out and high-quality leaders promoted. Third, the IPD procedures give ambitious cadres the motivation to invest themselves in the existing institutions instead of pursuing offices outside of officially sanctioned channels. Previously, upward mobility was restricted to those who were well-connected to the core Party leaders. The IPD institutions provide a corridor to promotion for a wider group of cadres who will solicit the support of "the enfranchised" as an alternative path to political success. Finally, as the recommendation example demonstrates, IPD could provide an institutional mechanism that allows rival factions to reach compromises over personnel decisions. This observation is consistent with Svolik's insight that formal institutions

contribute to authoritarian stability by facilitating more transparent, credible power-sharing.[66]

Despite these potential benefits, intra-party democracy can only operate within the straitjacket of the Party's hierarchical control. Thus, when the CCP leadership observed that recommendation votes had become sufficiently important to "hijack" the selection process in certain localities, it released a new personnel regulation in 2014 to downplay the salience of votes and stress the principle that "the Party controls the cadres" (*dang guan ganbu* 党管干部).[67] Such regressive moves, however, do not diminish the value of studying IPD measures. The swings of the political pendulum lay bare the different views held by CCP leaders about the direction of reform. Intra-party democracy was closely identified with the Hu–Wen administration, creating the impression that those who favoured "more competitive elections within the political establishment … [controlled] the platform and agenda of the CCP."[68] The Party's new leader Xi Jinping 习近平, by contrast, has emphasized centralized control at the expense of broader participation. The expansion and contraction of democratic procedures reflects the balance of power between the conservative and liberal forces within the Party, and raises the question of what explains the political cycle. However, even at its height, intra-party democracy is unlikely to consolidate rule-bound competition for Party offices and extend participation to other strata of society, as some scholars have hoped.

**摘要:** 自二十世纪九十年代初以来, 中国共产党引入了一系列措施, 让更多的党员参与到干部选拔工作中来。中共希望以"党内民主"的措施来纠正因人事权过分集中而导致的用人腐败和官民关系紧张。这些党内民主的程序能否有效限制党委主要领导的用人权, 并将广大党员干部的参与制度化? 基于文档研究、访谈和量化数据, 本文考察了党内民主改革的两个组成部分: 作为干部提拔必经程序的民主推荐以及党代会期间的半竞争性选举。研究发现, 由于正式制度本身的缺陷、制度以外的非正规操作以及官员的频繁异地调动, 自下而上的党员参与受到了阻碍。同时, 这些改革措施也改变了党委书记行使任命权和党员干部追求晋升的方式。党内民主的贯彻执行可能让一党执政更加稳固, 而党内民主的兴衰起伏也反映了中共高层内部对于政治改革方向的分歧。

**关键词:** 干部选拔; 党委主要领导人; 党内民主; 民主推荐; 党代会选举。

66 Svolik 2012.

67 News.163.com. 2014. "Zhongzubu xiangjie dangzheng lingdao ganbu xuanba renyong gongzuo tiaoli" (Central Organization Department explains the new selection and promotion regulations in detail), 17 January, http://news.163.com/14/0117/06/9IP8SJVG00014JB6_all.html. Accessed 18 January 2015.

68 Li 2009, 1.

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## Appendix

### *The formal process of selecting CCP officials*

According to CCP regulations, there are four basic steps in the selection of a cadre for a promotion: democratic recommendation, organizational vetting, deliberation and decision. First, the OD of the next level up decides on the pool of candidates to be vetted for the post. This decision should be made through extensive consultation with a wide range of officials and colleagues at different levels. Next, the OD will dispatch a vetting team to gather information about the candidates put forward via the recommendation procedure. To do this,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001587 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the vetting team may hold private meetings with relevant individuals, conduct a survey of opinions about the candidates or interview the candidates. The vetting team will report the results to the OD, which will in turn report to the Party committee one level up. Third, before the names are presented to the higher-level Party committee, the list of candidates must be vetted through a process of deliberation. Deliberation involves the leaders of the Party committee, the legislature and the government apparatus. Finally, the higher-level Party committee holds collective discussions to decide whether a candidate should be promoted to the post. The CCP Constitution delegates the day-to-day duties of the Party committee to a smaller standing committee; therefore, the appointment is in fact decided during the standing committee's meetings. At these meetings, a leader from the OD introduces the candidate in light of the information gathered from the first three stages. The standing committee members will then deliberate before holding a simple majority vote to decide on the promotion.