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Party Adaptation Strategies for Provincial Standing Committees in Post-Mao China

Coping with Crisis without Political Reform

ABSTRACT

The Chinese Communist Party has been surprisingly successful in carrying out its plans in the face of various challenges in the post-Mao era. Compared to their central counterparts, the operating patterns of local institutions in tackling such difficulties have been less examined. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring the party's management of provincial standing committees (PSCs). As the highest level of local collective leadership, the PSC essentially sets the agenda for the province. Using a new database of PSC members from 1980 to 2016, this study provides a systematic illustration of the historical composition of provincial collective leadership. Instead of making drastic changes, the party has subtly shifted the roles of provincial leaders: it has redefined the role of the vice party secretary, adjusted the number of posts in the provincial government, and raised the level of professionalism.

KEYWORDS: Chinese politics; provincial standing committee; historical descriptions; elite database; local elite structure

INTRODUCTION

To cope with external and internal socioeconomic changes, the Chinese government has made many administrative and institutional reforms since the late 1970s. It has downsized departments, streamlined staff, transformed functions, and restructured the relationships between government and business enterprises, between government and social organizations, and between

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the central and local governments. The ongoing institutional revitalization for economic development has been well documented in numerous articles on the Chinese governance system (Lan 2000; Wang 2010; Yang 2007). However, China is a party-state system, where the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) holds absolute authority over the government and monopolizes all major policy decision-making processes.

Like all other state organizations in the communist system of China, the State Council, the executive branch of the state, is merely an administrative and bureaucratic instrument for party dictatorship (Guo 2001). The roles and responsibilities of the State Council are entirely determined by the party leadership. The CCP exerts control over these governmental institutions by appointing the party members to most of the major government positions through *nomenklatura* (Burns 1994; Chan 2004). At every layer of government, including the State Council at the central level, the head of the government is always second in rank in the party committee at the equivalent level and must obey the top leader of that committee. Thus, government institutions are primarily managed and controlled by the party leadership. Careful investigation of the party's institutions and decision-making mechanisms is necessary for a better understanding of the logic and processes of the post-Mao reforms.

Numerous studies have explained how the CCP leadership has adapted its ruling ideology to align with its new values since the reform era. Examples include Deng Xiaoping's program of reform and opening-up and Jiang Zemin's co-optation of private entrepreneurs (Dickson 2008; Shambaugh 2009; Shirk 1993). There are also many articles on how the CCP leadership applied these ideological adaptations to its highest decision-making bodies, such as the Politburo Standing Committee, the Politburo, and the Central Committee (Bo 2004; Goodman 1981; Lee 2016; Li and White 1998, 2003; Miller 2013; Teiwe 2001; Zang 1993). However, scholarship has failed to examine the lower rungs of the hierarchy, which are closer to actual policy implementation. Furthermore, it tends to cover only the brief periods when the National Congress is convened every five years. The historical trends of the institutional changes throughout the reform period have not been examined in a systematic way.

There are also many studies of the central-local relationships that examine how local leadership has responded to the center's directives, such as those regarding economic development, political arrangements, and social stability (Cheung 1998; Chung 1995; Huang 1999; Landry 2008; Li and Zhou 2005; Oi 1999; Qian and Weingast 1997; Sheng 2005; Xu 2011). When

describing the tensions between the central and local authorities, this line of the literature tends to consider the local leadership as a single entity led by one or two influential leaders, such as the local party secretary and the head of the local government. This tendency may ignore local political dynamics, especially those created by the collective decision-making process among local leaders. It is well documented that policymaking at the local level is not always dominated by the supreme leaders of the locality but often based on consensus among the collective leadership (Baum 1992; Shirk 1993).

This paper is the first to attempt an extensive description of the institutional structures of the highest level of local collective leadership: the provincial standing committee (PSC).¹ Introducing a new database that records the historical composition of PSCs from 1980 to 2016, this paper examines how the CCP leadership has adjusted the functions of its local political institutions to overcome the challenges that emerged throughout the post-Mao era. The CCP's provincial leadership resembles its central leadership (i.e., the Central Committee and the Politburo Standing Committee). The provincial party committee establishes a leadership group called the PSC, in which a group of high-ranking people in the party and government organizations make a variety of important decisions for the province.

The CCP central leadership maintains absolute dictatorship over its provincial party institutions under the rule of "democratic centralism," one of the core organizational concepts of Marxism-Leninism (as embodied in the CCP's Constitution). In democratic centralism, which espouses "freedom of discussion and unity of action," the decisions made by the highest authority through democratic procedures have absolute power over all members of the party. The relationship between the Central Committee and the Politburo Standing Committee in the CCP central leadership well illustrates the concept. According to the Constitution, the Central Committee is the highest decision-making body of the CCP. For practical and organizational purposes, the Central Committee "democratically" elects the Politburo Standing Committee, and decision-making authority is "centralized" in the latter. Once a decision is made by this democratically elected highest organ of authority, it is irreversible and binding on all the lower-ranking institutions. Party organizations at each administrative level are formed in accordance

1. China specialists will be aware that "PSC" is commonly used to abbreviate the top-level Politburo Standing Committee. It is used here for provincial standing committee.

with democratic centralism and are obliged to execute the decisions and the resolutions of the higher-ranking party organizations.

The centralized and unitary decision-making principle of the CCP, which grants dictatorial authority to the central leadership, has never been compromised, despite the many extensive administrative reforms and decentralizing policies in government organizations of the post-Mao era. The economic and fiscal decentralization of the 1980s gave local governments some autonomy in economic matters. Many expected that further delegations to the provincial leadership would be granted along with the decentralization efforts for economic development. However, at the same time, there were fears of a political collapse due to the weakened central authority. Thus, no profound political reform for local political autonomy, or especially for subnational leadership, has ever been implemented. Maintaining tight control on personnel management systems, the CCP central leadership has successfully motivated high-ranking local cadres to comply with the center's directives throughout the reform period (Huang and Sheng 2009; Sheng 2005). Even in the mid-1980s, in the heyday of economic decentralization, local autonomy was limited by the direct intervention of the central authority, which always had the power to overrule local decisions.

Furthermore, the decentralization efforts tapered off in the 1990s and the 2000s, and many economic, financial, and administrative recentralization policies were introduced (Huang 2008; Shih 2008). Scholarly assessments of the post-Mao central-local relationship, such as the "market-preserving federalism" of Qian and Weingast (1997) or the "reciprocal accountability" of Shirk (1993)—theories that emphasized local ability to retain autonomy against interference by the center—turned out to be unsupported. During the recentralization process, greater numbers of high-ranking provincial officials were sent from the center (Huang 1999; Teiwes 2001). No political defiance from local leadership was tolerated the central leadership, either formally or informally. Local leaders who attempted to oppose the center's directives (e.g., Ye Xuanping, then governor of Guangdong) were forced to retire and replaced by party members in favor of the center (Cai and Treisman 2006).

The dominance of the central leadership over local affairs does not mean that the central-local relationship is always antagonistic (Goodman 1994). Tightening central control over local leaders is critical for the regime to ensure political stability against the possibility of local defiance (Blanchard

and Shleifer 2001; Cai and Treisman 2006). At the same time, deepening decentralization helps local leadership become more efficient and responsive (Oates 1999; Qian and Weingast 1997; Riker 1964). Thus, a fundamental challenge for the center is finding a balance between central control and local autonomy (Chung 2016; Landry 2008). Many scholars in China studies find that the center's primary tool here is strategic assignment of loyalists to the provincial leadership, the highest level of local administrations. Appointing officials who are loyal to the center to the provincial leadership may influence economic development (Xu 2011), inflation rates (Huang 1999), fiscal transfers (Bo 2002), public goods provision (Persson and Zhuravskaya 2016), and crisis management (Bulman and Jaros 2020), among other things. But while existing studies focus on whether a local leader's individual characteristics (e.g., whether they are loyal to the center) affect local policy outcomes, there has been little scholarly attention to how the central leadership manages the formal composition of local political institutions.

Formally, the Chinese political regime remains intact, because the authority of local political institutions is based on the center's grant. Contrary to outsiders' expectations, this authoritarian system has been surprisingly adaptive in the face of many challenging tasks, including peaceful leadership succession, administrative remodeling, responding to widespread unrest, international integration, and recovery from economic crises (Heilmann and Perry 2011). By swiftly reconfiguring the formal composition of local political institutions, the CCP central leadership has been able to systematically perform its plans and resolutions. The decisions on appointments, responsibilities, and designations of PSCs are primarily made by the central leadership. By adjusting the membership of these committees, the CCP central leadership has been able to mobilize local political institutions to execute the center's policies and plans.

In the post-Mao era, the CCP central leadership has imposed its directives and priorities on provincial leadership not by drastic changes but by subtly shifting the roles of PSC members. Unlike their central-government counterparts, which have been continuously merged and disaggregated throughout the post-Mao era, the provincial institutions have adopted just three major strategies to change the party-state relationship in the face of various internal and external challenges. First, the provincial leadership has been adjusted in keeping with the evolution of the CCP's political institutions. Since the reform and opening-up policy of 1978, the party had been

consistently under pressure to remodel its inefficient and outdated leadership system for the new reform era. In the process of remodeling, the number of vice party secretaries was reduced, as the CCP gradually professionalized the provincial leadership. The CCP also emphasized the role of specific PSC positions by jointly assigning the positions to the vice party secretaries.

Second, the number of officials from the provincial government, such as vice governors, in the PSC indicates whether the central leadership is focusing on civilian controls or internal party management. In particular, the CCP has tended to assign more vice governors to the PSC when the party required a quantitative expansion of the economy. Third, when the central leadership wanted to emphasize the professional role of a particular department, the person in charge of that department would be designated a possible member of the PSC.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I explore the general characteristics of the PSC, such as rules and regulations, and membership and eligibility. Then the official guidelines for appointment and retirement of the committee members, along with their formal and informal responsibilities, are considered. We then look at the historical trends in PSC composition, in three categories: institutional changes for vice party secretaries, the number of vice governors from the provincial government in PSCs, and the inclusion of new categories of officials as committee members. At the end we consider the broader implications for the governance of provincial subordinates by the current CCP central leadership.

THE STANDING MEMBERS OF THE PROVINCIAL-LEVEL PARTY COMMITTEE

The PSC is an elected subcommittee meant to handle day-to-day provincial affairs when its parent organization, the provincial party committee, is not in session. In theory, the provincial party committee is the highest authority in the province. The PSC must regularly report to the provincial party committee, which supervises and evaluates its work reports (Constitution, Article 27). However, in practice, the PSC has the highest *de facto* decision-making authority, according to democratic centralism, which says that the decisions of a democratically elected authority have unchallengeable power

over all members. The decisions of the PSC are carried out effectively without a review process and may even occasionally overturn resolutions previously made by the provincial party committee.

In principle, the standing members of the provincial party committee (SMPCs) are first “democratically” elected by the provincial party committee during the plenary session, and later, the results are reported to the party’s Central Committee for approval. However, in practice, the appointments of the SMPCs are essentially predetermined by the “centralized” decisions of the Politburo Standing Committee (the highest authority of the CCP) through the central Organization Department. Article 13 of the Constitution and Article 8 of the Regulations Governing Local Party Committees (CCP 2016, hereafter the Regulations) state that when the plenary of the corresponding party committee is not in session, the next-highest party organization has the authority to appoint, transfer, and dismiss SMPCs at will. Moreover, according to the inner-party (党内) regulations promulgated by the central Organization Department, SMPCs are “centrally managed cadres,” meaning that the personnel management of SMPCs is under the direct control of the central Organization Department (CCP 1990, 2008). It is reported that at least one deputy director of the central Organization Department is dispatched to the plenary session of each province to supervise and manage the nomination of SMPCs (Cai 2014).

As shown in Table 1, the SMPCs are chosen from top-ranking leaders of provincial-level organizations. Historically, the number of SMPCs ranges between 10 and 15, although it varies across times and regions. It was not until 2016 that the central leadership first designated an exact number for the SMPCs, which is now between 11 and 13 for a provincial-level committee (Regulations, Article 8). There are three main types of SMPCs: the party secretary (PS), vice party secretaries (VPSs), and ordinary members (OMs). The PS, the provincial party chief, is ranked first. Of the multiple VPSs, the governor, is the first-ranked VPS, and second in the committee. An executive VPS, also called a full-time VPS after 2006, is ranked third, followed by the rest of the VPSs. The remaining members are OMs. Most are the department heads of important party or government organizations in the province. Among the OMs, there are permanent positions whose officeholders always have seats in the committee. According to the Regulations, the committee can also appoint additional members when necessary, with

TABLE 1. Standing Members of Provincial Party Committees (as of 2016)

<i>Type</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Provincial position</i>	<i>Chinese</i>
Party secretary	PS	Party secretary	省委书记
Vice party secretary	GOV	Governor	省长
	VPS	Vice party secretary	省委副书记
Fixed ordinary standing committee member	EGOV	Executive vice governor	常务副省长
	DIC	Secretary of Discipline and Inspection Commission	省纪委书记
	PLC	Secretary of Political and Legal Affairs Commission	省委政法委书记
	OR	Director of Organization Department	省委组织部部长
	PR	Director of Propaganda Department	省委宣传部部长
	SG	Secretary-general	省委秘书长
	CPS	Secretary of provincial capital	省会城市书记
	SPS	Secretary of sub-provincial municipality	副省级城市书记
	MR	Military representative (political commissar or commander)	省军区政委或司令员
	UF	Director of United Front Department	省委统战部部长
	VGOV	Vice governor	常务副省长
Possible ordinary standing committee member	FTU	Chairman of Federation of Trade Unions	省总工会主席
	EDU	Secretary of Education Commission	省委教育工委书记
	SEC	Director of Public Security Department	省公安厅厅长
	MEM	Secretary of main economic municipality	经济主体城市市委书记

the approval of the party's Central Committee, although the portfolio of the additional members has frequently changed over time (CCP 2012a).

The ranking among the OMs is not stringently institutionalized, and the ranks are not determined by the office they hold. Outsiders can only guess these ranks from the order of precedence at committee meetings. It is more challenging to identify the exact hierarchy of the provincial leadership than that of its central counterpart because the provincial meetings are less exposed to public media. It is reported that the ranks of the OMs are generally determined by seniority in the committee. The members who became SMPCs earlier tend to occupy higher ranks. If multiple members become SMPCs at the same time, which frequently occurs, the one who was promoted to the sub-provincial level first has a higher position at the committee meetings (Chu 2014).

Although seniority is the dominant rule of ranking, there are a few other considerations. While it is not strictly imposed, the secretary of the Discipline and Inspection Commission (DIC) is historically ranked fourth in many provinces. Moreover, members who were directly transferred from central departments have a higher rank than those promoted internally. And although an order of precedence exists, the nominal ranks of OMs do not necessarily reflect their actual authority. Regardless of their rank, members can have a significant influence on issues related to their professional expertise (Chu 2015).

The PSC exercises the functions and powers of the provincial party committee. According to the Constitution (Article 27), the PSC is formed to manage day-to-day provincial works. These are defined in Article 7 of the Regulations. Besides convening the plenary session of the provincial party committee, the PSC should carry out the directives of the party's Central Committee and the resolutions of the provincial party committee on virtually every aspect of provincial affairs.

Specifically, the PSC is responsible for the province's economic and social development, propaganda and ideological controls, inner-party organizational and disciplinary works, social and political unification, law enforcement, and cadre personnel management. A detailed list of the activities managed by the PSC can be found in the Report on the Work of the Provincial Standing Committee, which is an annual mandatory work report to its parent organization. In these reports, the standing committee of each province addresses a multitude of subjects, including economic policies

(investment management, land acquisition, real estate, urban planning, taxation, etc.), social programs (inequality alleviation, pension and healthcare building, education and culture spending, etc.), and political decisions (the selection, appointment, training, promotion, and demotion of lower-ranking officials).

Regarding decision-making processes, the SMPCs must collectively fulfill the committee's responsibilities, while individual members have independent roles (Constitution, Article 10). First, collective decisions should be made through democratic procedures. The decision-making process is subject to rules specified in the Regulations. Second, the PSC is required to handle provincial affairs based on the proper division of work. In its meetings, members have their own domain of work and are required to actively lead discussions on their assigned responsibilities. SMPCs are not allowed to intervene in one another's domains.

However, the actual operating mechanisms in the SMPC meetings are still black-boxed. The methods used to secure the equal rights of the lower-ranking attendees on decisions remain obscure, especially in the absence of veto power or balance check against the higher-ranking leaders in the committee. In fact, the 1996 Provisional Regulation grants disproportionate authority to the provincial PS, the highest-ranking member in the committee (CCP 1996). According to Article 12, one of the SMPCs' responsibilities is to assist the PS. The PS can also call a special meeting whenever necessary (Article 25). Although such a meeting is meant to improve the agility and flexibility of provincial leadership in the face of an emergency, the power tends to be overused and increasingly over-represent the authority of the PS. Therefore, in 2016, the Regulations were revised to include a new clause in Article 25: the decisions of a PS-led special meeting are not allowed to replace those of the provincial party committee.

COMPOSITION OF SMPCS: MAJOR SHIFTS IN PROVINCIAL LEADERSHIP

Figure 1 shows the number of SMPCs from 1980 to 2016. The average was 13. There was only one PS and one governor in each province throughout this period. The numbers of VPSs and OMs varied in the post-Mao era. The number of VPSs per province was between seven and eight from 1980 to 1982, and between three and five from 1983 to 2006. After 2007, the

FIGURE 1. Composition of Standing Members of the Provincial Party Committee, 1980–2016.

NOTE: See Table 1 for abbreviations.

number remained at two (one governor and one full-time VPS). The number of OM per province was between seven and eight from 1980 to 2006. While the number of VPSs decreased to two in 2007, the average number of OM increased to 10, maintaining the total number of standing members.

Institutional Changes for Vice Party Secretaries

There have been two major institutional changes in the composition of SMPCs, first in 1982 and then in 2007 (Figure 1). The first, in the early post-Mao era, made drastic changes in VPS institutions. The second made more subtle changes, such as reducing the number of VPSs and jointly assigning some SMPC positions to two VPSs.

First, at the 12th National Congress in 1982, the CCP leadership made extensive reforms in provincial-level institutions. Along with a massive turn-over of provincial leaders, provincial personnel and administrative bodies were reformed to streamline the provincial party and government organizations (Forster 1984). After the CCP leadership reduced the number of standing members and abolished the previous personnel management system, provincial party leaders were categorized into five ranks: first-rank secretary, second-rank secretary, third-rank secretary, secretary, and vice secretary. In Article 27 of the 1982 Constitution, the central leadership inserted a statement that local standing committees consist of a PS, VPSs, and OMs. In 1985, the central leadership specified the number of provincial VPSs: Article 10 of the Provincial Decisions on Several Issues on Local Party Committees (CCP 1985) says that it must be between three and five.

Second, in 2004, the fourth plenary session of the 16th National Congress ratified the reduction of the VPSs to effectively realize “collective leadership” by assigning more responsibilities to the OMs (CCP 2004). To follow up, the Central Committee distributed a regulation in 2006 reducing the number of both SMPCs and VPSs (CCP 2006). Since April 2006, each province has gradually adopted the “one PS and two VPSs” system, as its next provincial Party Congress convened. By 2008, all provincial-level party committees used the two-VPSs system except Xizang and Xinjiang, which were allowed to retain four VPSs in view of the idiosyncratic characteristics of these two autonomous regions (Jing 2014).

In 2006, the central leadership changed the title of executive VPS to full-time VPS. This position is mainly responsible for inner-party affairs, such as improving the organization’s coherence, ideological and political education for cadres, and supervision and oversight of the provincial party school (Li 2014). But before 2006, PSCs were allowed to have four or five VPSs. The VPSs could hold other positions in the provincial party or government organizations, subject to the policy priorities of the province. Figure 2 outlines the jobs that the VPSs jointly held. Note that the figure also incorporates the transition periods when transferring between two positions (a promotion usually requires overlap between two positions while the person of interest gradually transfers from one position to the next). Occasionally, an SMPC may temporarily hold the previous post for hand-over purposes, even after the announcement of the promotion or transfer of the cadre.

FIGURE 2. Vice Party Secretary Joint Appointments (Proportions).

NOTE: See Table 1 for abbreviations. The ETC category includes all the possible ordinary standing committee positions in Table 1.

Historically, vice governors held the largest share of the VPS double appointments. It is crucial for the SMPs to work closely with the provincial government, because the PSC determines many social and economic matters, as well as internal party affairs. In order for the party leaders to exert influence on government departments, many PSCs gave the vice governor VPS membership. Notably, in the early 1990s, after Deng emphasized the facilitation of economic development to cope with pervasive conservatism, PSCs focused on building the “socialist market economy,” which required rapid growth of the private economy of the region (Naughton 2007). To this end, increasing numbers of vice governors (mainly in charge of economic affairs) were appointed VPSs, with greater authority in decision-making processes. The same strategy was used in the late 1990s to stabilize China’s overheated economy. After the rapid economic growth of the early 1990s, the central government directed the provincial leadership to curb indiscreet investments in local economies (Huang 1999).

The number of vice governors jointly holding VPS membership started to decrease in the early 2000s (Figure 3). At the 16th National Congress in 2002, the new Hu Jintao–Wen Jiabao administration introduced the vision of “harmonious society,” which focused more on the improvement of social stability than on economic expansion. Moreover, the CCP leadership began

FIGURE 3. Vice Party Secretary Joint Appointments (Vice Governor versus Discipline and Inspection Commission).

NOTE: See Table 1 for abbreviations.

to place greater emphasis on inner-party discipline to counter rampant corruption (He 2003). As a result, the provincial leadership reduced the number of vice governors and the number of vice governors who were also jointly VPSs.

Instead, there was a hike in the number of DIC secretaries (Figure 3). The DIC secretary had the second-largest number of joint VPS appointments, with 17% of the total share. The DIC was established in 1978 at the 11th National Congress. Yet it was not until 2002 that the DIC became one of the most pivotal institutions to enforce inner-party rules and regulations and fight internal corruption and misconduct. During the Hu–Wen administration, the DIC secretary’s duties grew with its anticorruption role (Manion 2004). To this end, the secretary required multifaceted collaborations with different organizations, such as the Political and Legal Affairs Commission

(PLC) and the Public Security Department. As the CCP leadership gradually placed greater emphasis on “fighting and preventing corruption,” the VPS naturally began to control and manage the DIC secretary (Gong 2008). Furthermore, when the number of VPSs fell to two after 2006, the DIC secretary maintained the highest rank among the OMs. According to a party document, the DIC secretary would be qualified for the top leadership in the PSC (CCP 2009). In most provinces, the DIC secretary was the fourth-highest-ranking member among the SMPCs, following the PS, the governor, and the executive VPS (Chu 2015).

The full-time VPS (FVPS) position was first established in 2006, and the party announced in early 2007 that the main task of the FVPS was to assist the PS in party organization and to help with the PS’s assigned responsibilities (CCP 2007). At first, the FVPS generally did not jointly hold other standing committee positions. Instead, the FVPS was given insignificant positions in provincial party schools, the provincial administrative institute, provincial leading small groups, or temporary cooperative offices (Li 2013). However, there were growing concerns that the role of the FVPS was becoming opaque. Without *de facto* authority in party functions, the FVPS was merely a nominal position. Despite requests for clarification, the CCP leadership left the responsibility of the FVPS vague, noting that different regions have different characteristics (Qian 2011). In early 2008, PSCs began to assign secondary positions to the FVPS. In 2009, six FVPSs had additional posts in their PSC, and this number increased to 12 in 2012.

However, the post-2007 rationale for the joint appointments differed from the pre-2007 rationale. After 2007, rather than allocating VPSs to positions to expedite policy processes, PSCs commonly gave FVPSs temporary managerial positions for administrations under transformation. For example, the largest share of the post-2007 VPS double appointments was the secretary of the PLC, which underwent reforms in 2010 (Figure 4). In 2010, the central Organization Department reversed its 2003 decision and dictated that provincial PLC secretaries must not jointly hold the post of director of the provincial Public Security Department, which enforced the implementation of PLC policies (Jia 2015). Subsequently, the number of FVPS–PLC joint appointments peaked at nine in 2012. In 2014, the CCP leadership further downgraded the authority of the PLC by separating the institution’s influence from the provincial People’s Courts (Song and Zuo

FIGURE 4. Vice Party Secretary Joint Appointments, before and after 2007

NOTE: See Table 1 for abbreviations.

2014). During the PLC reforms from 2010 to 2014, the provincial leadership assigned FVPSs to transitional PLCs to minimize transitional costs and facilitate the adaptation of the new system.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES FOR ORDINARY STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Unlike the VPS management institution, which at least experienced a radical change in the early post-Mao period, the number of OMs remained relatively stable throughout the post-Mao period. The proportion of OMs in PSCs is shown in Figure 5. If the ETC and Unknown categories are excluded, the proportions of the various assignments are steady from 1980 to 2016. The ETC category includes additional committee members, whose type varies across times and regions. When the SMPC’s profession is unidentifiable because of data limitations, the SMPC is categorized as Unknown (roughly 3% of all observations). Generally, old cadres in the 1980s are in the Unknown category due to lack of information on their careers. Occasionally, in the 1980s, SMPCs in autonomous regions

FIGURE 5. Proportion of Ordinary Members in the Standing Members of Provincial Party Committees, 1980 to 2016.

NOTE: See Table 1 for abbreviations.

(especially Xizang and Xinjiang) had PSC membership without holding any office. Leaders of this category were added to the Unknown group.

Figure 6 shows the trends in the number of each fixed position in the committee by years. Aside from DIC, military representative (MR), and vice governor (VGOV)—these three are drawn with bolder lines—the numbers increased over time as the positions gradually became institutionalized. It was not until the 14th National Congress, in 1992, that the positions were selected on the basis of individual work domains. For example, in the 1980s, not all directors of the Organization or Propaganda Departments held positions in PSCs. Only 70–80% of the current fixed committee positions had committee membership before 1992. Department heads of diverse party organizations were able to join the PSC, as indicated by the great size of the ETC category before 1992.

FIGURE 6. Trends in Fixed Standing Committee Positions, 1980 to 2016.

NOTE: See Table 1 for abbreviations.

The institutional changes in the committee positions can be vividly observed only after considering the VPS joint assignments. Rather than drastically switching titles and responsibilities, the CCP leadership was able to administer the committee institutions by granting positions (e.g., DIC and vice governor) to VPSs. Without such joint appointments, the occurrence of DIC plummeted between 2002 and 2007 because the DIC positions were also jointly appointed as VPSs. In the right-hand graph, the trend in the DIC position looks similar to that of other committee positions. Military representative frequency was higher than that of other positions in the early 1980s, as shown in the graph on the left, but the rate decreased significantly after the central leadership reformed the cadre management system in 1983. The military representative maintained relatively higher numbers than other positions throughout the period because members with military positions enjoyed significant independence from the civilian leadership. The military representative position has never been jointly held by VPSs or other standing committee members, and vice versa.

Vice governors in PSCs. The executive vice governor (i.e., the first-ranked vice governor) has a permanent position in the PSC. A second-rank or third-rank vice governor is also eligible to become an SMPC. Thus, the total number of vice governors is generally larger than other committee positions (Figure 6). In China, the governor supervises the provincial government at large, and

vice governors operate in independent work domains in the government. Each vice governor leads a specific domain of the government departments. Overall, the executive vice governor is in charge of the core areas, including reform management, construction, finance, and taxation. Other provincial affairs led by vice governors include political legal affairs, commerce and trade, technology and education, agriculture and rural development, transportation, ethnicity and religions, and government secretariats (Su 2016).

China is a party-state system, in which the party governs all other governmental and societal institutions. Thus, a larger numbers of vice governors in PSCs implies that the provincial leadership puts greater emphasis on civilian controls through its government than on internal party management. The vice governor exerts control over the economic strategy of the PSC. The trend in vice governors suggests that the number of vice governors in PSCs is highly correlated with the party's emphasis on economic development. When the party needed rapid economic growth, the number of vice governors in the committees increased. And when the central leadership streamlined local organizations to achieve local economic stability, the number was accordingly reduced.

Figure 7 describes the CCP's vice governor control over the PSCs. The red line indicates the average number of vice governors per province, including joint appointments of vice governors to VPS or other committee positions, while the blue line excludes joint appointments. The grey bars indicate the difference between the former and the latter. In the early 1980s, during the recovery from the destructive Cultural Revolution, the party and government organizations became redundant and overstaffed. Abolished ministries and agencies were restored, while many expelled and disgraced cadres were rehabilitated. During that period, the provincial leadership was also unorganized. A systematic leadership selection institution did not exist (Christensen, Dong, and Martin 2008).

In 1982, the Deng-led CCP started to downsize and streamline the bloated and overlapping party and government organizations to implement the economic reform and opening-up. Accordingly, the average number of vice governors in PSCs was sharply reduced, from 2.5 in 1982 to 1.4 in 1983, then averaging 1.3 until 1988. In 1987, the 13th National Congress, led by the Zhao Ziyang administration, realized that the party's excessive interference in government affairs greatly hindered economic reforms. The CCP leadership initiated a new round of institutional changes to minimize the party's

FIGURE 7. Trend in Vice Governors with and without Joint Appointments

influence. As a result, the average number of vice governors fell to 0.8 in 1989. After two rounds of administrative reform, the number of vice governors averaged 1.2 between 1983 and 1992. Also, the average number of joint appointments of vice governors during the same period was relatively small; in other words, the vice governor positions became full-time and professionalized.

In the aftermath of the Tiananmen incident of 1989, when the CCP leadership began to slow down the marketization process, the 13th National Congress's proposal on the separation of the party from the government was reversed (Fewsmith 2008). Amid the widespread conservatism in economic reform from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, the number of vice governors did not exceed 1.2 in 1991. The trend changed after Deng's Southern Inspection Tour in 1992. With Deng's support for further economic reforms, the 14th National Congress resolved to accelerate reforms of the state-business relationship. Rather than merely downsizing government agencies, the CCP

leadership profoundly transformed the functions of the government by decoupling state-owned enterprises from the direct control of the government. To this end, in the following year the provincial leadership recruited many vice governors to PSC positions. As a result, each province had about two vice governors in its standing committee.

In 1997, to strengthen the macro-controls of the central leadership over local economies, the Jiang-Zhu administration further streamlined the central bureaucracy by reducing the number of ministries by half and increasing the number of bureaus, which were under the direct administration of the central government (Yang 2007). Between 1997 and 2002, the total number of vice governors remained at 1.8. However, the composition of vice governors was detached from the previous pattern. Joint appointments of vice governors to other positions noticeably increased during the period of the 15th National Congress (1997–2002). During that period, almost half of the vice governors in PSCs jointly held various VPS or OM positions.

The average number of vice governors decreased from 1.8 in 2002 to 1.1 in 2003 after the new administration led by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao launched an administrative reform to improve the center's hierarchical control on local governments. The 2003 institutional reform was primarily intended to enhance bureaucratic coherence between the central and local governments, rather than to downscale oversized governments. The emphasis on central regulatory bodies' supervision of local financial and industrial institutions, along with the increasing mobilization of the regional representatives of the central bureaus, led the CCP to exercise greater control over self-indulgent local governments (Wang 2010). Thus the number of vice governors fell to 1.2 during the 16th National Congress (2002–2007).

To cope with the economic recession induced by the 2007 global financial crisis, the Chinese governments implemented expansionary fiscal and monetary policies. The central government provided over 4 trillion yuan (US\$ 565 billion) of direct grants and interest-rate subsidies, while the provincial governments also initiated their own stimulus packages. To mitigate the impact of the global crisis and to operate the huge fiscal packages, the provincial leadership had to assign more vice governors to the PSCs. Their number rose to 1.8 per province in 2007 and remained stable throughout the 17th National Congress (2007–2012).

Professionalism in the PSCs. The Regulations allow the provincial Party Congress to recruit additional committee members, with the permission of the Central Committee. The Regulations list the possible committee positions, and the list varies over time. Historically, the positions on the list include the director of the United Front Department (UF), the director of the Federation of Trade Unions (FTU), the secretary of Education Commission (EDU), the director of public security (SEC), the secretary of the Agricultural and Industrial Committee (AIC), and the party secretary of the main economic municipality. In addition to these positions, the Regulations allow the provincial leadership some autonomy to select SMPCs.

The appointment of these additional committee members has been one of the key strategies used by the central authorities to enhance the professionalism of provincial leadership. Depending on the Central Committee's decisions, the possible committee positions are correspondingly modified. Figure 8 illustrates the possible positions from 1980 to 2016. The additional committee members constituted a relatively high proportion (over 40%) of the PSC in the 1980s because the provincial leadership was not fully professionalized according to individual bureaucratic specialties.

Of the possible committee positions, the UF, whose official purpose is to unite different political and social groups, is the most common, with 15% of the total additional members and 61% of the total possible members. From 2002, when the Hu–Wen administration introduced the “socialist harmonious society,” which stressed overall societal balance and harmony, the UF made an increasing number of appearances in PSCs, though it was not required to do so. Figure 9 shows the trends in possible committee positions from 1980 to 2016. The UF appeared in the PSC in 12 provinces in 2003, and 21 provinces in 2007. Since 2012, nearly every one of the 29 provinces has established a PSC position for the UF. Yet, it was not until 2016 that the central leadership promulgated the Provisional Regulations Governing United Front Work, of which Article 9 mandates that the UF at each level is generally entitled to standing committee membership in the corresponding party committee (CCP 2015).

The FTU is also one of the most commonly chosen positions in the PSC. The provincial Federation of Trade Unions is a regional branch of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the sole trade union in China. The FTU has been frequently selected as an SMPC, especially during the Hu–Wen administration. The logic is analogous to that of the UF. Under the slogan

FIGURE 8. Composition of Possible Standing Committee Positions, 1980–2016

NOTE: See Table 1 for abbreviations.

of the “socialist harmonious society,” the FTU has served to mitigate social and economic unrest by protecting workers’ rights (Bai 2011). In the 14th and 15th National Congresses (1992–2002), only four provinces (Beijing, Neimenggu, Liaoning, and Hubei) had an SMPC position for the FTU. This number more than doubled, to 10, during the 16th and 17th National Congresses (2002–2012) and then dropped to four at the 18th National Congress in 2012.

Other committee positions, such as AIC, SEC, EDU, have been used (at 7%, 6%, and 5%, respectively), although they flourished at different times. The AIC became active in the early 1980s after the Chinese leadership implemented extensive reforms in the agricultural and rural areas. Roughly 10 provinces had an AIC in their standing committee between 1980 and 1985; during the 13th National Congress in 1987, only five did (Jilin, Heilongjiang, Jiangxi, Guizhou, and Xizang). After the 14th National Congress in 1992, and the completion of a series of reforms of agricultural products and township and village enterprises, the AIC virtually disappeared (Powell 1992).

The SEC is generally appointed jointly with the PLC. Nevertheless, a few provinces assigned their SEC to the PSC without PLC membership. As the PLC and SEC institutions had undergone restructuring during the 17th National Congress (2007–2012), the number of SECs fell to nearly zero.

FIGURE 9. Trends in Possible Standing Committee Positions, 1980–2016

NOTE: See Table 1 for abbreviations.

Appointments of the EDU remained stable throughout the post-Mao era. Annually, three or four provinces chose an EDU, mostly the education-centered metro cities such as Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai. Beijing nearly always had an EDU (30 counts), while Tianjin and Shanghai did 14 times and eight times, respectively. Lastly, the party secretary of the main economic municipality (in provinces) or district (in directly administered municipalities) has also been popular throughout the period.

The ETC category of the additional members (Figure 8) contains various positions. First, the number of ETC positions has substantially decreased since 2002. Since 2002, most of the ETC positions have been occupied by representatives of self-established special departments of the provinces. Each provincial committee is allowed to set up its organization, with the permission of the Central Committee. As specified in the Regulations, a person in charge of a special department can also be selected to join the PSC.

Examples include the secretary of the “Two-Oriented Society” Experimental District of Hunan Province, the director of the Public Works Department of Hainan Province, the secretary of the Ningdong Energy and Chemical Industry Base Commission of Ningxia Province, and the commanders of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps.

Second, the pre-1992 PSCs consisted of provincial leaders from diverse party and government organizations. Before the 14th National Congress (in 1992), the CCP leadership’s reform of local party committees led different provinces to assign different positions to the SMPs according to their needs. The two most common positions were the secretary of the Ethnic Affairs Commission and the secretary of the Science, Technology, and Industry Commission. The former made a total of 30 appearances in PSCs in the post-Mao era, especially in Sichuan (12 counts) until 2000, and in Yunnan (7 counts) until 1998.

CONCLUSION

Some researchers in Chinese politics have analyzed the composition of central decision-making bodies, such as the Central Committee and its leadership group, the Politburo Standing Committee, to understand the party’s processes of reform and adaptation in the post-Mao era. Although the gradual emphasis on decentralization during the reform period has enhanced the importance of local political leadership, little attention has been paid to the CCP’s management of local political institutions. One possible reason could be the massive volume of the data: it takes enormous time and effort to collect the data on all the PSC members in the post-Mao era. This paper describes the historical composition of PSCs during the reform period and identifies the three main strategies the CCP used to adapt the provincial leadership to the center’s goals. The CCP leadership has shifted the roles of VPSs by jointly assigning a position to strengthen position-related tasks. The increasing number of PSC members from the provincial government, such as vice governors, suggests that the CCP has put emphasis on the provincial leadership’s role in dealing with economic affairs. Lastly, there was a clear trend of professionalism in PSCs in the post-Mao era.

Since 2007, there has been no substantial change in the formal composition of the PSC. The overall numbers of members remain the same, and

VPSs' joint appointments have not changed significantly. The number of vice governors in PSCs has been stable, even in the face of several financial challenges since 2007. Moreover, the appointments of the possible committee members have not noticeably deviated from the previous patterns. Even under Xi Jinping's leadership, which is often criticized by many scholars for its attempt to revive the personalistic ruling system (Miller 2013; Shirk 2018), no substantial change has been observed in the formal institutions of the PSCs.

This stability indicates that under Xi's leadership the CCP has used different strategies to manage provincial leadership. To align the interests of the provincial leadership and the center, Xi may be choosing to emphasize party loyalty and ideological coherence instead of modifying formal institutions (Chen 2018; Gore 2016). The recent reshuffling of provincial leaders shows Xi's intention to select those who have already proven their loyalty to him (Chen 2016; Li 2014). Xi's close confidants and followers have been appointed the top leaders of provinces. For example, Chen Min'er, a close ally when Xi served as the governor of Fujian, was appointed PS of Chongqing in 2017. Li Qiang, Xi's personal secretary when he was in Shanghai, became PS of Liaoning in 2018. Instead of modifying the structure of the PSCs, Xi's leadership has primarily altered the characteristics of PSC members, for example by selecting members based on their political connections and career background. Understanding Xi's strategies for managing the highest-level local decision-making bodies is a promising direction for future research.

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