

## Analysis of Current Provincial Leaders

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China has experienced a large-scale turnover in its national leadership, as demonstrated by the recently held 16th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and 10th National People's Congress (NPC). Less noted, but equally significant, is the rapid change of political elites at the level of provincial leadership. These two national institutions' equivalents at the provincial level have also selected their top leaders during the past few months.

An analysis of the elite change at the provincial level not only sheds valuable light on the relationship between the central and provincial governments, but also provides clues about the characteristics of future top national leaders. China's provincial-level administrations enjoy more autonomy to advance their local economic interests today than at any other time in the past half century. The dynamic interaction between the need for national integration and the demand for regional autonomy has emerged as a central issue in Chinese politics. Furthermore, provincial leadership posts have become major stepping-stones to positions of national leadership during the past decade. For example, the percentage of 16th Politburo members with previous experience as top provincial leaders (deputy party secretaries, vice governors, or above) rose sharply over the last decade: from 55 percent in 1992 to 68 percent in 1997, and again to 83 percent by 2002.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, understanding the provincial leaders' biographical backgrounds, tenure in office, political socialization, career patterns, and rate of reshuffling is essential to the study of Chinese politics. This study focuses on the 412 current top provincial leaders, a cluster of elites that includes all current provincial party secretaries, governors (or mayors of provincial-level administrations in the cities), deputy provincial party secretaries, and vice governors or vice mayors. These people are the most important political leaders at the provincial level in present-day China. Data for this study are based principally on official Chinese information that has recently become available to the public on the Internet.<sup>2</sup>

I have constructed a database on the biographies of these 412 top provincial leaders. Each biography includes 76 entries, which are indexed into eight major categories for analytical purposes. These categories are: 1) basic biographical information, 2) status of membership and position, 3) promotion patterns, 4) regional background, 5) reshuffling experience, 6) work experience, 7) educational background, and 8) political association and networks. This report focuses on the first three categories.

## Status and Tenure of Current Provincial Leaders

Table 1 shows the regional and political affiliations of the 412 top provincial leaders. Several observations can be made about these leaders. First, with the exceptions of Hebei Governor Ji Yunshi and Zhejiang Governor Lu Zushan, all governors concurrently serve as deputy provincial party secretaries in their own provinces. This arrangement indicates that the post of provincial party secretary is the “number one” position in every province. Through such an arrangement, the Chinese authorities have attempted to consolidate what they call the “leadership function of the ruling party.”<sup>3</sup> The reason that Ji and Lu are not deputy provincial party secretaries is probably that they were named governor after the appointment of the provincial party committees of their respective provinces. They will most likely be appointed as deputy provincial party secretaries at the next meeting of their provincial party committees.

Second, in only three provinces—Jiangxi, Sichuan, and Xinjiang—are there two leaders who concurrently hold the posts of both vice governor or governor and deputy provincial party secretary. The Chinese authorities have adopted a system of bifurcation between these two important provincial leadership bodies. In every province, the number of party officials is less than that of their counterparts in the provincial government, and the deputy provincial party secretaries are usually ranked higher than vice governors.

Third, the number of top provincial leaders varies from province to province. The average number of leaders is 13. It is unclear why some provinces are allocated more provincial leadership seats than others are. For example, Tibet has 20 seats and Shandong has 16 seats. These two provinces also have the largest number of alternate memberships on the 16th Central Committee of the CCP.<sup>4</sup>

Table 2 shows the number of current provincial leaders on the 16th Central Committee. Six top provincial leaders currently serve on the Politburo, comprising 25 percent of the total number of members on the 16th Politburo. They are the party secretaries of Beijing (Liu Qi), Shanghai (Chen Liangyu), Tianjin (Zhang Lichang), Hubei (Yu Zhengshen), Guangdong (Zhang Dejiang), and Xinjiang (Wang Lequan).

A total of 57 current provincial leaders serve as full members of the Central Committee. Prior to the 16th Party Congress, all 62 provincial party secretaries and governors (or governors-designate) secured full memberships on the Central Committee, although some were quickly promoted to the central government or transferred to another province. Jiangsu Party Secretary Li Yuanchao, Jiangsu Governor Liang Baohua, and Henan Governor Li Chengyu are the only top provincial leaders who are alternate members of the 16th Central Committee. Three governors—Shandong Governor Han Yuqun, Hunan Governor Zhou Bohua, and Guangxi Governor Lu Bing—are not even alternate members of the 16th Central Committee.

Table 3 shows the tenure of the current holders of the 412 top provincial leadership posts. Almost 90 percent of the top provincial leaders were appointed after

1997 and are serving their first terms. About 50 percent of them were appointed in either 2002 or 2003. This pattern demonstrates the fluidity of China's provincial leadership. The main reason why the CCP has been able to stay in power for over a half century, especially during the past two decades, is perhaps the fluidity of elite transformation in the country. In a move initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s, the CCP has made a concerted effort to recruit "new blood," especially people from different social and occupational backgrounds, into the party leadership. Ever since the 12th Party Congress in 1982, the share of new members on the respective Central Committees has consistently exceeded 50 percent.<sup>5</sup>

On the 16th Central Committee, 107 full members (54 percent) are first-timers. Furthermore, 113 alternate members of the 16th Central Committee (72 percent) are new to that body. The combined number of newcomers in both categories accounts for 62 percent of the entire Central Committee. Only about 10 percent of the full members of the 16th Central Committee have been part of the committee for over 10 years; the other 90 percent are fairly new. The same trend is occurring in the provincial-level leadership. These newly appointed leaders are individuals who have become prominent politicians at the national and provincial level within the last decade.

An even more remarkable elite turnover occurred on the 16th Politburo and its Standing Committee. Among the 25 full and alternate members appointed to the Politburo in fall 2002, 15 (60 percent) were first-timers. An additional six members entered the Politburo in 1997. This indicates that 84 percent of the 16th Politburo members have served on this crucial decision-making body for at most only a few years. With the exception of Hu Jintao, the other eight members of the Standing Committee are likewise relatively new. This fluidity of membership in the highest decision-making body in the country will probably contribute to coalition-building and political negotiation among individual leaders and their factions. The rapid turnover of top provincial leaders confirms that this trend will likely continue in the future.

## Basic Biographical Information

The central authorities have recently made concerted efforts to recruit non-CCP elites into high-ranking offices. We can infer that at least 21 vice governors are not members of the Chinese Communist Party, although available information on this matter is incomplete. Among the 412 top provincial leaders, 40 are female (9.7 percent), although none of these women currently serves as a full party secretary or full governor. As for ethnic nationalities, 361 of the leaders (87.6 percent) are Han Chinese. Most minority leaders occupy the posts of deputy party secretary or vice governor. In Xinjiang, seven of the 14 top provincial leaders are minorities (Uighur or Kazakh). Similarly, in Tibet 10 of the 20 top provincial leaders are Tibetans.

Table 4 shows the age distribution of the 316 top provincial leaders for whom age information is available. The two oldest leaders are Basang, a 66-year-old Tibetan woman, and Raidi, a 65-year-old Tibetan man, both of whom serve as deputy party

secretaries of Tibet. The two youngest leaders are 35-year-old Vice Mayor of Beijing Lu Hao and 39-year-old Vice Mayor of Shanghai Tang Dejie. These two rising stars are currently in charge of foreign trade for and the economic restructuring of China's two most important cities.

Most of the top provincial leaders are in their 50s. According to recent information released by the official Chinese media, the average age of full provincial party secretaries is 57.9 years old.<sup>6</sup> The average age of governors and vice governors is 51.6 years old, about 3.3 years younger than the average age before the reshuffling of leadership in 2002.<sup>7</sup>

## Promotion Patterns and Correlation between Birthplace and Workplace

One of the central issues in Chinese politics during the Reform Era has been the dynamic relationship between the central and provincial administrations. The central government has continually tried to maintain effective control over the provincial governments by curtailing various forms of localism. Some of the political tactics the central government has applied to curtail localism are the reshuffling of provincial leaders and the appointment of outsiders as provincial chiefs.<sup>8</sup>

However, this study shows that a large number of top provincial leaders have been promoted within the same province, often the same province in which they were born. Table 5 shows the promotion patterns with respect to leaders' most recent previous posts for the 325 top provincial leaders for whom this information is available. A majority of them, 265 leaders (81.5 percent), were promoted from the same province in which they previously worked. The split between provincial chiefs (full party secretaries and governors) and deputy provincial leaders (deputy party secretaries and vice governors) shows that more provincial chiefs were transferred from different provinces than were their deputies, although chiefs promoted from the same province continue to occupy the majority (61.3 percent).

Table 6 shows the correlation between birthplace and workplace for the top provincial leaders. Almost half of the deputy provincial leaders (49.4 percent) serve in their native provinces. The share of provincial chiefs who serve in their birthplaces is smaller, but still accounts for 29 percent.

Interestingly, this correlation between birthplace and workplace conflicts with the norms and regulations outlined by the CCP Organization Department. In 1999, the Organization Department of the CCP issued the "Regulation of Cadre Exchange," which specifies the following three rules: 1) county and municipal top leaders should not be selected from the same region; 2) those who head a county or city for more than 10 years should be transferred to another place; and 3) provincial leaders should be transferred more frequently to another province or to the central government.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the head of the public security bureau (*gonganju*) of a provincial government is to be transferred to

a different province after having worked in one province for a few years.<sup>10</sup> The implementation of this regulation has varied from region to region. The CCP Committee of Guangdong, for example, recently reinforced the rule that county chiefs in the province cannot be selected from the same county.<sup>11</sup>

Although the regulation does not specify restrictions on provincial leaders who work in their native provinces, in recent years pressure to restrict the selection of provincial chiefs from the same province has been applied. For example, in 2002 only two provincial party secretaries served in the province in which they were born (as compared to three in 2001, four in 2000, six in 1999, seven in 1998, and nine in 1997).<sup>12</sup> A study of 62 provincial party secretaries and governors in 2002 showed that only 17.7 percent of them served in the province in which they were born. But, current analysis reveals that the share has now increased to 29 percent. A total of 18 current provincial chiefs serve in their native provinces: Wen Shizhen (Liaoning party secretary), Yang Zhengwu (Hunan party secretary), Li Yuanchao (Jiangsu party secretary), Zhang Zhongwei (Sichuan governor), Legqog (Tibet governor), Jia Zhibang (Shaanxi governor), Zhao Leji (Qinghai governor), Ma Qizhi (Ningxia governor), Lu Zushan (Zhejiang governor), Huang Huahua (Guangdong governor), Luo Qingquan (Hubei governor), Wang Hongju (Chongqing mayor), Liang Baohua (Jiangsu governor), Wang Qishan (Beijing mayor), Zhang Zuoji (Heilongjiang governor), Yang Jing (Neimenggu governor), Zhou Bohua (Hunan governor), and Lu Bing (Guangxi governor). A majority of these provincial chiefs were appointed in 2003.

As part of a new pattern in the appointment of provincial leaders, a majority of deputy provincial party secretaries and vice governors work in the provinces in which they were born, but full provincial party secretaries (designated the “number one” official in provincial leadership) are likely to be “outsiders.” They are transferred from other provinces or from the central government. A common practice is that many current top provincial leaders typically serve in their native provinces at the level of grassroots leadership, are promoted to the posts of vice governor, deputy party secretary, or governor, and are subsequently transferred to another province to become party secretary. Many are first transferred to a different province to serve in a deputy position for a few months and then promoted to the post of party secretary. This new pattern may explain why 38 current provincial chiefs (61.3 percent) were promoted from the same province—many of them had been in the province for only a few months.

The selection of local officials for leadership positions in their native areas is an important trend in the formation of provincial and municipal leadership in China during the Reform Era. This trend challenges the “law of avoidance” by which mandarins were prohibited from serving in their native provinces and counties, both a policy characteristic of traditional China for centuries and a practice that continued during the Mao era. The evidence presented in this study demonstrates that researchers in China studies will need to pay more attention to this trend and its political implications in the future.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For detailed discussion of the growing importance of provincial leaders during the past decade, see Cheng Li, “A Landslide Victory for Provincial Leaders,” *China Leadership Monitor* 5 (winter 2003), and Cheng Li and Lynn White, “The Sixteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: Hu Gets What?” *Asian Survey* 43, no. 4 (July/August 2003).

<sup>2</sup> The complete list of the names of current provincial leaders, a total of 412, is available at <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/zhuanti/221988.htm>. For approximately 300 of these 412 leaders, biographical information is included on the web site. Additional information was derived from other Internet sources through an online search. Some other web sites—for example, the web site of China’s 31 provincial people’s congresses, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/09/content\\_695442.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/09/content_695442.htm)—are often checked for more information and/or verification.

<sup>3</sup> The new norm is that the provincial party secretary concurrently holds the post of head of the provincial people’s congress. At present, all provinces fall into this pattern except in the cases of the party secretary of Tibet and those provincial party secretaries who are also members of the Politburo. See [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2002-02/20/content\\_476046.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2002-02/20/content_476046.htm).

<sup>4</sup> The other provinces that have a greater number of alternate seats on the 16th Central Committee are Guangdong, Guangxi, and Xinjiang. See Li and White, “The Sixteenth Central Committee: Hu Gets What?”

<sup>5</sup> Cheng Li and Lynn White, “The Fifteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: Full-Fledged Technocratic Leadership with Partial Control by Jiang Zemin,” *Asian Survey* 38, no. 3 (March 1998): 242.

<sup>6</sup> Cited from <http://chinesenewsnet.com>, November 24, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.xinhaunewsnet.com>, April 13, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> For more discussion on this subject, see Zhiyue Bo, *Chinese Provincial Leaders: Economic Performance and Political Mobility since 1949* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> *Liaowang* (Outlook), June 7, 1999, 15–16.

<sup>10</sup> *Shijie ribao*, November 4, 1999, sec. A, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Shijie ribao*, November 8, 2001, sec. A, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Cheng Li, “Zhongguo shengji lingdao de xinggou: Guojiazhenghe yu difangzizhu” (Formation of China’s provincial leaders: National integration and regional autonomy), *Zhongguo shehui kexue pinglun* (Chinese social sciences review) 1, no. 2 (fall 2002): 313–26.

Table 1  
Number of Top Provincial Leaders by Province  
(as of May 2003)

	Number of top provincial leaders			
	Party officials*	Government heads**	Concurrent members***	Total
Beijing	7	9	- 1	15
Tianjin	6	8	- 1	13
Hebei	5	8	- 0	13
Shanxi	6	8	- 1	13
Neimenggu	5	8	- 1	12
Liaoning	6	9	- 1	14
Jilin	6	8	- 1	13
Heilongjiang	6	8	- 1	13
Shanghai	6	9	- 1	14
Jiangsu	5	9	- 1	13
Shandong	7	10	- 1	16
Zhejiang	5	6	- 0	11
Anhui	5	8	- 1	12
Fujian	5	8	- 1	12
Henan	5	8	- 1	12
Hubei	6	8	- 1	13
Hunan	5	7	- 1	11
Jiangxi	6	8	- 2	12
Guangdong	7	9	- 1	15
Guangxi	7	9	- 1	15
Hainan	4	7	- 1	10
Sichuan	6	9	- 2	13
Chongqing	6	9	- 1	14
Guizhou	5	9	- 1	13
Yunnan	6	8	- 1	13
Xizang (Tibet)	8	13	- 1	20
Shaanxi	6	9	- 1	14
Gansu	6	8	- 1	13
Qinghai	5	8	- 1	12

Ningxia	6	9	- 1	14
Xinjiang	7	9	- 2	14
Total	181	263	- 32	412

**Notes:**

\* The category “party officials” refers to provincial party secretaries and deputy provincial party secretaries.

\*\* The category “government heads” refers to governors and vice governors (including mayors and vice mayors of province-level cities).

\*\*\* The category “concurrent members” refers to those who hold posts in both categories (e.g., a governor who also serves as deputy provincial party secretary).

Table 2  
Membership on the 16th Central Committee  
of Top Provincial Leaders

	Number	Percentage of total
Politburo member (N = 24)	6	25.0
Full member (N = 198)	57	28.8
Alternate member (N = 158)	56	35.4

Table 3  
Tenure in Current Post of Top Provincial Leaders

Year appointed to current post	Number of leaders	Percentage of total
Before 1990	1	0.2
1993	3	0.7
1994	6	1.4
1995	3	0.7
1996	16	3.9
1997	13	3.2
1998	50	12.1
1999	14	3.4
2000	20	4.9
2001	77	18.7
2002	81	19.7
2003	128	31.1
Total	412	100.0

**Table 4**  
**Age Distribution of Top Provincial Leaders**

Birth year (age)	Number of leaders	Percentage of total
1937 (66)	1	0.3
1938 (65)	2	0.6
1939 (64)	3	1.0
1940 (63)	4	1.3
1941 (62)	8	2.5
1942 (61)	11	3.5
1943 (60)	9	2.8
1944 (59)	18	5.7
1945 (58)	39	12.3
1946 (57)	31	9.8
1947 (56)	21	6.6
1948 (55)	20	6.3
1949 (54)	15	4.7
1950 (53)	19	6.0
1951 (52)	11	3.5
1952 (51)	24	7.6
1953 (50)	22	7.0
1954 (49)	16	5.1
1955 (48)	13	4.1
1956 (47)	11	3.5
1957 (46)	7	2.2
1958 (45)	1	0.3
1959 (44)	2	0.6
1960 (43)	1	0.3
1961 (42)	2	0.6
1962 (41)	2	0.6
1963 (40)	1	0.3
1964 (39)	1	0.3
1965 (38)	0	0.0
1966 (37)	0	0.0
1967 (36)	0	0.0
1968 (35)	1	0.3
Total	316	99.7

**Table 5**  
**Promotion Pattern of Top Provincial Leaders**

	Provincial chiefs (N = 62)		Deputy provincial leaders (N = 263)		Total (N = 325)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
From same province	38	61.3	227	86.3	265	81.5
From another province	14	22.6	22	8.4	36	11.1
From central government	10	16.1	14	5.3	24	7.4
Total	62	100.0	263	100.0	325	100.0

**Table 6**  
**Correlation between Birthplace and Workplace**  
**of Top Provincial Leaders**

	Provincial chiefs (N = 62)		Deputy provincial leaders (N = 237)		Total (N = 299)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
From same province	18	29.0	117	49.4	135	45.2
From nearby province	9	14.5	37	15.6	46	15.4
From distant province	35	56.5	83	35.0	118	39.4
Total	62	100.0	237	100.0	299	100.0