

## China Policy Institute

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### Discussion Paper 7

## CHINA'S PROVINCIAL PARTY SECRETARIES: ROLES, POWERS AND CONSTRAINTS

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May 2006

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## CHINA'S PROVINCIAL PARTY SECRETARIES: ROLES, POWERS AND CONSTRAINTS

Qingshan Tan

The most powerful person in Chinese provinces is the provincial Party secretary (PPS). PPSs are appointed at the very highest level of the Communist Party of China (CPC), usually by the CPC Secretary General, in consultation with the Politburo Standing Committee, in Beijing. They are entrusted with the supervision of the provincial governments, and preside over huge provincial resources and economic development. In short, they are the *de facto* ruler of Chinese provinces, which are comparable in size to many medium-sized countries.

And yet the elasticity of PPS power makes it difficult to define the exact role a Party secretary plays in a given province. Although China has a unitary political system with power flowing from the centre, provinces can act autonomously and independently. Unlike a federal system in which power-sharing is defined formally by the constitution, the Chinese political system is much more informally decentralized—provinces enjoy considerable degrees of autonomy, especially in the area of economic and social development. The central government depends on provinces for policy implementation and for local initiatives. PPSs serve as the key link between the CPC elite in Beijing and various government organizations in the country. This linkage ensures the implementation of Party will and of Party policies. PPSs represent the interests of the CPC and are the vehicle whose role it is to protect and realise Party interests at the provincial level. Meanwhile, the centre also relies on PPSs for feedback on political, social and economic issues in the provinces.

The PPS is institutionally the most powerful political figure in a province. The PPS's power of control includes agenda-setting for the provincial Party standing committee and making key provincial personnel appointments within the Party and the government. He is also empowered to interpret as well as to initiate investigations into provincial officials' wrongdoings. In the provincial policymaking process, a PPS often presides over Party standing committee meetings to make final decisions, and oversees the preparation of the provincial budget.

However in reality, holding office in the Chinese political system does not necessarily exert power; the extent of power wielded is dependent on how the person in office exercises it. A PPS with a forceful personality can exercise far more power than what the office bestows. PPSs can also tap political capital from other informal channels. Most importantly, they can rely on their government experience to enhance their status and power. Unlike previous provincial leaders whose revolutionary experiences were the prerequisite to promotion, most PPSs nowadays are promoted from administrative posts; a number of PPSs came up from the Communist Youth League or worked their way up through the Party ladder. Their career paths, the *xitong* that each has grown out from, as well as their connections to the centre and to the Party secretary general, are also important sources of power.

An important new development is the tendency to exert Party control over provincial legislatures by electing PPSs to head provincial People's Congress (PPC). This stems from the competitive relationships between the PPSs and provincial governors. The need for economic growth and management pushes governors to the centre stage of provincial development. This poses a threat to PPSs as they face

the inevitable question of who should get the credit and how they are viewed by the public. The situation is further complicated by the emphasis on rule of law, as promoted by Qiao Shi when he took over the helm of National People's Congress in 1992. As a result, provincial legislatures have become more assertive in their oversight of personnel and government work. In the eyes of some independently minded provincial government officials, rule of law means that government officials are primarily answerable to the PPC, not the PPS.

Moves towards the rule of law and the PPS's stress on political control have become two fundamental and conflicting approaches to governing the provinces. This is a cause for concern for the centre in that it tends to undermine the authority and control of PPSs and can intensify competition for power in provincial politics. Against this background, the centre wants to reinforce the power of the PPS. But in this process, it cannot go against the Party's advocacy of the rule of law. The centre still wants to formalize or institutionalize the functions of the PPC in order to reduce the abuse of administrative power, raise government efficiency and combat corruption. To solve this dilemma, the centre made an effort to recentralize the power of PPSs by requiring the election of PPSs to chair PPC Standing Committees at the 10<sup>th</sup> PPC meetings in 2004. Placing PPSs as the head of the PPC represents central efforts at empowering PPSs and reining in independent-minded PPCs.

At the same time, the central government is considering ways of overseeing the performance of PPSs and constraining their possible abuse of power. One way is to emphasize the mobility and transferability of PPSs to prevent them from becoming provincial barons. Another is to strengthen the supervising power of the Provincial Party Commission of Discipline Inspection (PCDI). The function of the PCDI was designed to act as a watchdog against corrupt and undisciplined provincial Party and government officials. Whether the all-powerful PPSs can be checked by the PCDI, however, depends not so much on new regulations but on effective enforcement. Well intentioned regulations will not have any teeth unless the Party leadership is serious about enforcement. Enforcement mechanisms created and funded by the Party are necessary to effectively curb abuse of power. It is also necessary for the Party to go beyond the Party monitoring system to allow external checks of Party officials. The Party inspection system needs to be integrated into the overall state anti-corruption and graft system to ensure that no one is above the law. Party officials, including PPSs, are equal to any other government officials, in law.

## **CHINA'S PROVINCIAL PARTY SECRETARIES: ROLES, POWERS AND CONSTRAINTS**

Qingshan Tan\*

The most powerful person in Chinese provinces is the provincial Party secretary (PPS), a figure who is surrounded by a pervasive mythology; the elasticity of a PPS's power challenges anyone to define his precise role in a given province. Economic reform has to a certain degree weakened the power of the PPS as provincial governors and provincial people's congresses (PPCs) have gained economic and legislative power. The decline of the PPS poses a challenge to the control of the centre over the provinces, thus leading the central government to adopt a strategic measure to have PPSs adopt the title of chairman of the PPC standing committee in recent years. Where do PPSs derive their power from? How do they exercise their power? To and for whom are they primarily answerable and responsible? How do they handle their relations with provincial governors? This study seeks to examine the role of the powers and constraints in provincial politics and to assess the implications of the recent recentralization of the PPS's power in provincial politics.

### **Provinces in Comparative Perspective**

Chinese provinces vary in size and importance in geopolitical terms. Large provinces can be as large as medium-sized countries. In terms of population, provinces such as Shandong, with a population of 91.8 million, and Henan (97.2 million) can be ranked among the top ten countries in the world. Key provinces command enormous human and natural resources and play a large role in contributing to the national economy (Table 1). Guangdong, Jiangsu and Shandong account for more than one-third of national GDP while eight coastal provinces are responsible for 63.8 per cent of total GDP. Guangdong, for example, accounted for more than one third of total state foreign trade in 2004. Eight coastal provinces accounted for more than 80 per cent of total foreign trade in 2004.<sup>1</sup>

Though China has a unitary political system with power flowing from the centre, provinces can act quite autonomously and independently. Unlike a federal system in which power-sharing is defined formally under the constitution, the Chinese system is much more informally decentralized—provinces enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy, especially in the area of economic and social development, while the central government depends on the provinces for policy implementation and for local initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> *China Statistical Yearbook*, 2005, (Beijing, China Statistical Publisher, 2005), Section 18-10.

Table 1. **Provincial Indicators, 2004**

Province	GDP* (in billion yuan)	% of National GDP Total	Population (in millions)	GDP per capita (in yuan)	Index of per capita GDP
<b>China</b>	<b>13687.59</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1299.88</b>	<b>10561</b>	<b>100</b>
Beijing	428.33	3.13	14.93	37058	351
Tianjin	293.19	2.14	10.24	31550	299
Hebei	876.88	6.41	68.09	12918	122
Shanxi	304.24	2.22	33.35	9150	87
Inner Mongolia	271.21	1.98	23.84	11305	107
Liaoning	687.27	5.02	42.17	16297	154
Jilin	295.82	2.16	27.09	10932	104
Heilongjiang	530.30	3.87	38.17	13897	132
Shanghai	745.03	5.44	17.42	55307	524
Jiangsu	1540.32	11.25	74.33	20705	196
Zhejiang	1124.30	8.21	47.20	23942	227
Anhui	481.27	3.52	64.61	7768	74
Fujian	605.31	4.42	35.11	17218	163
Jiangxi	349.55	2.55	42.84	8189	78
Shandong	1549.07	11.32	91.80	16925	160
Henan	881.51	6.44	97.17	9470	90
Hubei	630.99	4.61	60.16	10500	99
Hunan	561.23	4.10	66.98	9117	86
Guangdong	1603.95	11.72	83.04	19707	187
Guangxi	332.01	2.43	48.89	7196	68
Hainan	76.94	0.56	8.18	9450	89
Chongqing	266.54	1.95	31.22	9608	91
Sichuan	655.60	4.79	87.25	8113	77
Guizhou	159.19	1.16	39.04	4215	40
Yunnan	295.95	2.16	44.15	6733	64
Tibet	21.15	0.15	2.74	7779	74
Shaanxi	288.35	2.11	37.05	7757	73
Gansu	155.89	1.14	26.19	5970	57
Qinghai	46.57	0.34	5.39	8606	81
Ningxia	46.04	0.34	5.88	7880	75
Xinjiang	220.02	1.61	19.63	11199	106

Sources: Author's calculations based on *China Statistical Yearbook, 2005*, (Beijing, China Statistical Publishing House, 2005), various pages.

Note: Gross provincial GDP may not add up to the national total.

Provincial Party secretaries are the most powerful person in China's provinces, not only because they are appointed by the top leadership in Beijing, but also because they control provincial governments and preside over huge provincial resources and economic development.<sup>2</sup> Due to the central government's emphasis on economic development, provincial economic performance was an important indicator for the promotion of government officials in the past. Several notable figures, such

<sup>2</sup> For another study of provincial Party secretaries, see David S.G. Goodman, "The Provincial First Party Secretary in the People's Republic of China, 1949-78: A Profile," *British Journal of Political Science* 10, n. 1 (January 1980), pp. 39-74.

as Wu Guanzheng and Li Changchun, were promoted to the post of provincial Party secretary based on their performance in implementing economic reforms in Hubei and Liaoning respectively.

For a comparative perspective, five provinces are selected here to highlight the size of provinces in the Chinese political economy. Table 2 compares Henan, Guangdong, Shandong, Sichuan and Jiangsu with five western countries. It demonstrates the enormous size of these five provinces in terms of population. Before Chongqing was made a municipality under the State Council in 1997, Sichuan had a population of over 100 million. Now Henan is the province with the highest population, close to 100 million. Three provinces have a population larger than Germany, while the combined population of Henan, Shandong, Sichuan, Guangdong and Jiangsu is greater than any country in the world except China and India.

Table 2: **Provincial Size in Comparative Perspective**

<b>Population 2002 (millions)</b>			
Henan	96.1	Germany	82.3
Shandong	90.8	France	59.2
Sichuan	86.7	Britain	58.8
Guangdong	78.6	Italy	57.9
Jiangsu	73.8	Canada	31.1

Sources: Compiled from *World Development Indicators*, 03, The World Bank, Washington D.C., 2003, various pages; *China Statistical Yearbook, 2002*, Beijing, China Statistical Publishing House, 2003, various pages.

### **Primary Functions of Provincial Party Secretaries**

Provincial Party secretaries are selected and appointed at the very top level of the Communist Party of China (CPC), usually by the CPC Secretary General, in consultation with the Politburo Standing Committee, and sometimes with input from members of the Politburo members and the CPC Central Committee.<sup>3</sup> According to the norms of the CPC, PPSs are automatically guaranteed a seat on the CPC Central Committee. The central appointment and membership of the CPC ensure that PPSs adopt a central orientation in carrying out their official duties.

Provincial Party secretaries serve as the key link between the CPC elite in Beijing and various government organizations in the country. The CPC has over 68 million members. To communicate effectively with members outside Beijing, the CPC has to rely on provincial Party chiefs. This linkage is aimed at ensuring the realization of Party will and implementation of Party policies. PPSs represent the interests of the CPC and are the vehicle to protecting and realizing Party interests at the provincial level.

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<sup>3</sup> For studies on CCP personnel control, see, John P Burns, ed., *The Chinese Communist Party's Nomenklatura System: A Documentary Study of Party Control of Leadership Selection* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1986); Melanie Manion, "The Cadre Management System, Post Mao: The Appointment, Promotion, Transfer, and Removal of Party and State Leaders," *China Quarterly* 102, no. June (1985).

PPSs are expected to faithfully implement Party decisions and policies in their respective provinces. This is possible only when they are fully informed of or familiar with decisions and policies, and when they are part of the collective decision-making process. PPSs thus have to defend and explain central decisions to provincial officials and the population at large regardless of the popularity of the decision and their own views on the issue. The policy against Falun Gong is an example. When the decision to crack down on Falun Gong organizations was issued, many provincial leaders were surprised by the fervid rhetoric and forcefulness of the decision. They were divided on the issue; but while provincial governors were more concerned about the possible fallout on the economy, PPSs were more preoccupied with taking the correct political line and implementing the central decision.<sup>4</sup>

Implementation of central policies by PPSs is by no means automatic, especially when there is an important Party line shift and major policy changes are initiated. In a time of uncertainty, PPSs tend to remain on the sidelines to gauge which direction the wind is blowing. This is best exemplified in the case of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms during the late 1970s. Many provincial Party secretaries, especially in interior provinces, acted slowly and adopted wait-and-see attitudes when it came to implementing reform policies in their own provinces.<sup>5</sup> It was not until the early 1980s that most of the indecisive PPSs began to jump onto the bandwagon of reform. What made them adopt such attitudes? Ideology, policy differences, opportunism and lessons from the Cultural Revolution may all have contributed to their hesitancy and lack of confidence.

Communication between PPSs and the centre is a two-way street; the centre demands the compliance of PPSs on central policies while relying on them for feedback on political, social and economic issues in the provinces. Thus, identification of issues, writing reports and policy suggestions constitute another important aspect of the functions of a PPS. A case study which best demonstrates the importance of provincial feedback is the land contract signed in 1978 by 18 peasants in Xiaogang Village, Fengyang county in Anhui, a highly risky act.<sup>6</sup> Eventually such contracts broke the backbone of the commune system and ushered in a new era of reform. After Anhui Party Secretary Wan Li reported the contractual practice to Beijing, the centre adopted his policy recommendation and extended the responsibility system to the rest of the country.<sup>7</sup>

The other important function of PPSs is the supervision of provincial government officials performing routine administrative duties. PPSs do not necessarily administer; they rely on provincial governors and bureaucrats. But it is important for PPSs to supervise and retain control of the provincial government. The

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<sup>4</sup> Author's conversation with a top provincial official, summer 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Shirk, "Playing to the Provinces - Deng Xiaoping's Political Strategy of Economic Reform," in *The Chinese and their future: Beijing, Taipei, and Hong Kong*, Zhiling Lin and Thomas W. Robinson, (editors), Washington, D.C. AEI Press, 1994, pp.23-57.

<sup>6</sup> During my interview with Yan Junchang, the original production team leader, he, showed me a copy of the contract at the village exhibition hall. I was told the original contract bearing the signatures of the 18 household heads is now kept at the Chinese Revolutionary History Museum in Beijing. A photocopy can be found in Zhongguo dang'anguan, *Zhongguo gongchandang bashinian* (Eighty years of the Chinese Communist Party), Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe, 2002, p. 1488.

<sup>7</sup> Zhang Guangyou, *Lianchan chengbao zerenzhi de youlai yu fazhan* (The origin and evolution of the output-linked contract responsibility system), Henan: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1983. For Wan Li's role in Anhui, see also David Zweig, "Context and content in policy implementation: household contracts and decollectivization, 1977-1983," in David M. Lampton, ed., *Policy Implementation in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

supervisory power of the PPS is elusive to define, depending on the relationship of the PPS with the governor. Supervision means that a PPS must see to the implementation of central policies by various provincial governments and Party agencies. It also means that a PPS needs to play the dual role of a coordinator and power broker. Often turf wars between bureaucratic agencies and provincial Party departments require PPSs to intervene and coordinate. Power brokering is an art that PPSs have to master.

### **Provincial Party Secretary's Power of Control**

Though PPSs do not necessarily govern on a daily basis, in reality a PPS is the most important and powerful person in a province. PPSs have the vested authority to set the agenda, control personnel matters, and make key decisions.<sup>8</sup>

The provincial government handles most of the tasks listed in its agenda. But it is the provincial Party standing committee headed by a PPS that defines its tasks and sets the priorities for the provincial government to follow. Usually, PPSs determine the agenda and calls for Party standing committee meetings. Although other standing committee members, such as the governor, can request for a specific issue to be included in the meeting agenda, it is the prerogative of the PPS to accept or reject this. When a PPS is in disagreement over personnel issues, other standing committee members are generally reluctant to challenge the boss as personnel matters come under the jurisdiction of the PPS.

Personnel is perhaps the most important power that the PPS exerts. Not only does a PPS select candidates to fill key provincial positions within the Party and the government, but he also has to be consulted on key personnel matters concerning top provincial posts and promotions to central posts. Although in principle personnel decisions concerning provincial level appointments are made at a higher level, PPSs often play a key role in selecting candidates for the post of governor. Intra-provincial promotion to governorship is not possible without the blessing of a PPS, for the centre often relies on the PPS for recommending provincial candidates.

In a typical situation, the centre will dispatch an assessment team from the Party Personnel Department (PPD) to the prospective province to assess the suitability of candidates recommended by the PPS. During this review process, the PPS is in the best position to pitch for the candidates. Barring any discovery of serious flaws in the candidates, the PPD team rarely overrides the PPS. In cities and provinces such as Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangdong, Anhui, Hunan, Jiangxi, Guangxi and Yunnan, an incumbent or a former PPS often plays an important role in recommending suitable candidates for top provincial appointments.

In the case of promotions from the centre or through inter-provincial transfers and exchanges, PPSs are likely to be consulted, but are less influential. This is especially the case in provinces such as Shandong, Sichuan, Zhejiang, Hubei, Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Hebei, where the central government often appoints PPSs from other provinces or from the centre, due to their geopolitical importance.

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<sup>8</sup> For a specific case study, see, Peter Moody, "Policy and Power: The Career of T'ao Chu, 1956-66," *China Quarterly* 54, no. April-June (1973).



Another important aspect of the PPS's line of authority is his power of investigation. The PPS is authorised to promote as well as censure wayward provincial officials. In today's China, with corruption running rampant, even top officials can be subjected to investigation. However, the power of interpreting the seriousness of the offence rests with the PPS to whom the investigation arm, the Provincial Party Disciplinary Committee, reports its findings.

Corruption, extra-marital affairs, accepting bribes and negligence of duty can be interpreted as an ethical issue or as a serious criminal offence in China. It often depends on the attitudes of PPSs towards alleged officials. A case in point is the former governor of Jiangxi, Ni Xiance, who failed to show due respect to the female Party secretary, Wan Shaofen, and whose bold working style often clashed with the conservative secretary. Policy differences and personality clashes created a very tense working relationship between the two top leaders. Eventually, the power balance tilted in favour of Wan who accused Ni of corruption (this involved an extra-marital affair with a government employee) and he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment.<sup>9</sup>

PPSs are also the key decision-makers in provincial governance, despite the fact that they do not necessarily manage day-to-day affairs. For important policies, social and economic development projects within a province, a PPS often presides over Party standing committee meetings to make final decisions. When a governor makes a state of the province address or provincial working report to the PPC, it has to be discussed and approved by the Party standing committee before it can be delivered. The government budget report is the most important part of a governor's job. A governor prepares the budget and submits it to the PPS and the Party standing committee for scrutiny before handing it to the PPC for a nominal approval.

The involvement of PPSs in budget preparation and project development is advantageous as they have better and direct communication and connection with the centre, and can thus better articulate provincial interests than governors. They are also in a stronger bargaining position for central policy preference and financial support if they are willing to use political capital (communication channels, contacts and connections in the centre) to their advantage. The rise in influence of Shanghai in 1993 could be attributed to the efforts of a group of top local officials that included two Party secretaries, Rui Xinwen and Jiang Zemin, and the mayor, Zhu Rongji. They used their political capital to persuade the centre to open up Shanghai with preferential policies and financial support.<sup>10</sup>

The central government encourages healthy competition among provinces in the area of economic development. PPSs of high performing provinces are rewarded with promotion. Provincial competition, however, also leads to redundant parallel projects, such as airports, economic development zones, grandiose city face-lifts, etc, which have resulted in tremendous waste and inefficiency.<sup>11</sup> In an attempt to exert fiscal macro-control, the central government often imposes tough budget constraint on the public finance of provinces.<sup>12</sup> Provincial Party secretaries are expected to

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<sup>9</sup> *People's Daily*, May 29, 1987.

<sup>10</sup> Qingshan Tan, "State, Institution Creation, and Emerging Stock Markets in China," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3, September 2004, pp. 373-394.

<sup>11</sup> A good example is the two big international airports built within 80 miles of each other in Guangzhou and Zhuhai, despite the fact there are two international airports in nearby Hong Kong and Macau.

<sup>12</sup> Yasheng Huang, *Inflation and Investment Control in China: The Political Economy of Central-Local Relations During the Reform Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

achieve high economic growth and create jobs while maintaining good public finance. PPSs cannot count on the central government to help solve provincial budget deficits.

### Sources of Provincial Party Power

In the Chinese political system, it has been widely noted that holding office does not necessarily mean exerting power; the extent of power wielded is dependent on how the person in office exercises it. In other words, a PPS with a forceful personality can exercise far more power than what the office bestows. A less assertive PPS, on the other hand, will find his line of authority greatly curtailed. Apart from the personality factor, there are several political resources from which PPSs can draw to enhance the status and power of their office.

A prerequisite for promotion to the post of PPS is government experience. For example, governorship has become a springboard to PPS office. In recent years, a greater number of PPSs have been promoted from the post of provincial governor. Of the current 31 PPSs, 14 have served as governor (45.2%), compared to 10 promoted from deputy provincial secretaries (32.3%), and two from the central Party office (6.4%). There have been a number of centre-to-provincial transfers; five ministers took up PPS positions, one of whom is a member of the Politburo (Table 3).

Table 3. **Provincial Party Secretary Career Path**

From Former Position	To Present PPS	
	No. of Persons	Percentage (%)
<b>Minister/Vice Minister</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>16.1</b>
<b>Vice Secretary</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>32.3</b>
<b>Governor</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>45.2</b>
<b>Central Party Office</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6.4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Compiled by author, March 1, 2006.

The number of governors being promoted to PPS is remarkable compared to the relatively stagnant career of governors, for whom in the past there was very little upward mobility.<sup>13</sup> This emphasis on government experience rather than Party or military background reflects a shift in Party orientation to effective governance and economic development.<sup>14</sup> Technocratic PPSs have better administrative and technical skills needed to grapple with the breadth of governmental and economic issues.

The career path of PPSs is a good indicator of their power status. Generally speaking, PPSs have either Party or administrative experience in working through various levels of government posts. In the past, the Party path accounted for the majority of provincial Party secretaries.<sup>15</sup> Table 4 shows that 18 PPSs (about 58% of the total) had bureaucratic and administrative backgrounds; two had both Party and

<sup>13</sup> See Bo Zhiyue, *Chinese Provincial Leaders: Economic Performance and Political Mobility since 1949*, M.E. Sharpe, 2002, p.94-97.

<sup>14</sup> This finding differs from a previous study that concluded that the enduring basis of political power lay in the central bureaucracy, the army and the regions. See David M. Lampton, *Paths to Power: Elite Mobility in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor: Center of Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> David S.G. Goodman, "The Provincial First Party Secretary in the People's Republic of China, 1949-78: A Profile," *British Journal of Political Science* 10, n. 1 (January 1980), pp. 39-74.

government experience; four had political roots in the Communist Youth League, and 10 had worked most of their life for the Party.

It is hard to say which career path is more likely to explain the success of PPSs in the provinces. An intervening variable is whether a PPS is promoted from within the province or appointed by the centre from outside. This is a subtle issue, for the centre would normally appoint someone from outside, if no suitable candidates can be found within the province. This puts the new PPS in good standing to bargain policy preferences and financial resources with the centre.<sup>16</sup>

Table 4: **Appointments of Provincial Party Secretaries by the Centre**

Province	PPSs	Inter-provincial appointment	Intra-provincial promotion	Appointment From Centre	Career Path
Beijing	刘淇 Liu Qi		X		Government
Tianjin	张立昌 Zhang Lichang		X		Government
Hebei	白克明 Bai Keming			X	Government
Shanxi	张宝顺 Zhang Baoshun		X		Youth League/ Government
Inner Mongolia	储波 Chu Bo	X			Government
Liaoning	李克强 Li Keqiang	X		X	Youth League/ Government
Jilin	王云坤 Wang Yunkun		X		Government
Heilongjiang	钱运录 Qian Yunlu	X			Youth League/ Government
Shanghai	陈良宇 Chen Liangyu		X		Government
Jiangsu	李源潮 Li Yuanchao			X	Youth League
Zhejiang	习近平 Xi Jinping	X			Government
Anhui	郭金龙 Guo Jinlong	X			Party
Fujian	卢展工 Lu Zhongong		X		Government
Province	PPSs	Inter-provincial	Intra-provincial	Appointment From Centre	Career Path

<sup>16</sup> For a study of central-provincial bargaining, see James Tong, "Fiscal Reform, Elite Turnover and Central-Provincial Relations in Post-Mao China," *The Australian Journal Of Chinese Affairs* 22 (1989).

		appointment	promotion		
Jiangxi	孟建柱Meng Jianzhu	X			Party
Shandong	张高丽Zhang Gaoli	X			Party/government
Henan	徐光春Xu Guangchun			X	Party/government
Hubei	俞正声Yu Zhengsheng			X	Government
Hunan	张春贤Zhang Chunxian			X	Government
Guangdong	张德江Zhang Dejiang	X			Party
Guangxi	曹伯纯 Cao Bochun	X			Party
Hainan	汪啸风 Wang Xiaofeng	X			Government
Chongqing	汪洋Wang Yang			X	Government
Sichuan	张学忠Zhang Xuezhong			X	Party
Guizhou	石宗源Shi Zongyuan			X	Government
Yunnan	白恩培Bai Enpei	X			Government
Tibet	张庆黎 Zhang Qingli	X			Party
Shaanxi	李建国Li Jianguo	X			Party
Gansu	苏荣Su Rong	X			Party
Qinghai	赵乐际Zhao Leji		X		Government
Ningxia	陈建国 Chen Jianguo	X			Party
Xinjiang	王乐泉Wang Lequan	X			Party

Source: compiled by author from various sources, March 3, 2006.

Preferential treatment that a PPS receives from the centre could be his "imperial edict" (*shangfang baojian*). Provincial officials tend to look up to the new PPS as having a central mandate to govern in the province. When Meng Jianzhu was

promoted to Jiangxi's PPS from Shanghai, it was said that he brought with him 30 billion yuan as his mandate to govern. This and his association with Jiang Zemin immediately boosted his status in Jiangxi. None of the previously indigenous PPSs in Jiangxi enjoyed the popularity that Meng did. Huang Zhendong, who was appointed Chongqing Party chief by the centre, also went to the municipality with heavy central funding in hand.<sup>17</sup>

PPS status and mobility are also associated with their connection to the centre and to the Party secretary general. There is no question that with each turnover of CPC leadership PPSs who have connections with the new leadership through work, school and *xitong*<sup>18</sup> are promoted to the centre and new PPSs are selected to take office in provinces. In the so-called second generation leadership, Deng Xiaoping promoted Sichuan and Anhui PPSs Zhao Ziyang and Wan Li to be national leaders.

The "third generation" leadership under Jiang Zemin consisted of a great number of national leaders and PPSs with bureaucratic backgrounds; most notable were Zeng Qinghong, Li Changchun, Huang Ju and Jia Qinglin. Likewise for the "fourth generation" led by Hu Jintao, national leaders and PPSs promoted from the Communist Youth League *xitong* made the ranks. They include Minister of Culture Sun Jiazheng; Minister of Civil Affairs Li Xueju; Jiangsu PPS Li Yuanchao; former Fujian PPS Song Defu; Liaoning PPS Li Keqiang; Heilongjiang PPS Qian Yunlu, and Xinjiang PPS Wang Lequan, to name just a few (see also Table 2).

The PPS's relationship with the centre is a complex one: PPSs have the responsibility of looking after central interests in the province on the one hand and defending local interests on the other. PPSs who are appointed from outside the province or from the centre are more likely to give priority to central interests, while PPSs who are promoted from within the province are more likely to argue and bargain with the centre for local interests. For many years, Shanghai shouldered a large fiscal burden of contributing a greater share to central revenue.<sup>19</sup> When Xie Fei became Guangdong's PPS, he vigorously defended provincial interests, often at the expense of central priorities.<sup>20</sup> Due to his relationship with Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin could not place his own protégé in Guangdong until Xie Fei was "promoted" to take up office in Beijing in 1998.

In order to prevent PPSs from becoming provincial "barons," greater emphasis is being placed on the transferability and mobility of PPSs. If we examine today's PPS list, very few have been promoted from within their provinces. Inter-provincial and centre-to-provincial transfer and promotion has become quite common. Table 4 shows that inter-provincial promotions and transfers accounted for

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<sup>17</sup> Author's interviews with officials from Jiangxi and Chongqing.

<sup>18</sup> *Xitong* generally refers to connected government organizations in a given jurisdiction. For a study on the matrix of government, see, Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution through Reform*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> In fact, prior to reform, Shanghai accounted for one-sixth of central revenues. Due to this huge contribution, Shanghai had been spared from the earlier reform experiment that other coastal cities were subjected to.

<sup>20</sup> Guangdong under Xie Fei showed great reluctance in increasing its contribution to central revenues, even if the original "fixed sum subsidy scheme" negotiated with the centre clearly favoured Guangdong after its economic takeoff. See J.H. Chung, "Beijing confronting the provinces: the 1994 tax-sharing reform and its implications for central-provincial relations in China," *China Information* 9, no. 2/3, 1994, pp. 1-23; M. Oksenberg and J. Tong, "The evolution of central-provincial fiscal relations in China, 1971-1984: the formal system," *The China Quarterly* 125, (March) 1991, 1-32.

16 PPSs; nine were appointed from the centre while only six were promoted from within the same province.<sup>21</sup>

### **Recentralizing Provincial Politics**

An important new development in recent Chinese politics is the tendency to exert Party control over provincial legislatures by appointing PPSs to top PPC posts. Most of the PPSs who were appointed before the last round of PPC conferences have taken over the presidency of PPC standing committees. The only exceptions are those PPS who have Politburo portfolios and those presiding in the so-called autonomous regions. According to the latest count, out of 31 provinces and national cities, PPSs of 24 provinces have taken up the presidency of PPCs. This is an interesting development with potentially far reaching significance. In recent years, with the emphasis on economic development, top provincial leaders have been at loggerheads over whether politics or economics should take precedence.<sup>22</sup> PPSs are responsible for overall political and social stability while government officials and bureaucrats tend to be more concerned with economic development.

The PPSs' relationship with governors has become quite competitive as the latter begin to play an increasingly important role in managing provincial economies. The need for economic growth and management has pushed governors to the centre stage of provincial development. Governors are often in the spotlight of provincial media and have become household names.

This poses a threat to PPSs as they face the inevitable question of who should get the credit and how they appear in the eyes of the public. The competitive or even adversarial relationship between PPSs and governors is not welcomed by the centre, for it may create an impression that development takes priority over Party leadership and that technocrats and the bureaucratic elite are favoured.

The PPS's relationship with the provincial legislature has not always been good. The relationship between the Party and government is complicated by the emphasis on rule of law promoted by Qiao Shi when he took over the helm of National People's Congress in 1993.<sup>23</sup> Provincial legislatures have become more assertive in their oversight of personnel and government work. Both the National People's Congress and local congresses sought to establish the rule of law. In the eyes of some independently minded provincial government officials, rule of law means that government officials are primarily answerable to the PPC, not the PPS. In fact, several events affirm the growing power and independence of the PPC. Legislative assertiveness led to the rejection of the bankruptcy law in the early 1990s and several high profile PPS nominations for governorship in the late 1990s.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Of the six PPSs, Beijing, Shanxi, and Fujian PPSs were originally from the Centre.

<sup>22</sup> Zeng Qinghong's "talk politics" (讲政治) and the "three represents" (三个代表) all point to the existence of such tensions.

<sup>23</sup> For an insightful discussion of the subject of rule of law, see Zheng Yongnian, "From rule by law to rule of law: a realistic view of China's legal development," EAI working paper, no. 1, 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Murray Scot Tanner, "The erosion of Communist Party control over law-making in China," *China Quarterly*, no. 138 (June), pp. 281-403.

Legislative orientation towards rule of law and the PPS's stress on political control are two fundamental and conflicting approaches to governing the provinces. If the PPS cannot find a way to restrain or influence the local legislature, it is quite possible that he will have difficulty imposing their will and policy priorities in the province. This tendency obviously is a cause for concern for the centre in that it gradually undermines the authority and control of PPSs and can intensify competition for power in provincial politics.

Against this background, the centre wants to restore the power of the PPS. But to do so it cannot go against the Party's advocacy of the rule of law. The centre still wants to formalize or institutionalize the functions of the PPC in order to place checks on the abuse of administrative power, raise government efficiency and combat corruption.

Table 5. **Exceptions Where Top Party Leaders Are Not Office Bearers of the Legislature**

<b>Provinces where PPSs are also Politburo members*</b>	<b>Provinces where PPS is an interim</b>
<b>Beijing</b>	<b>Xizang (Tibet)</b>
<b>Tiangjin</b>	
<b>Shanghai</b>	
<b>Guangdong</b>	
<b>Hubei</b>	
<b>Xinjiang</b>	

Notes: \*All Politburo members do not take up PPC chairmanship.

To solve this dilemma, the centre made an effort to recentralize the power of PPSs by requiring the election of PPSs to chair PPC standing committees at the 10<sup>th</sup> PPC meetings in 2004. This represents efforts to boost the power of PPSs and to rein in independent-minded-leaning PPCs. A total of 24 provincial PPSs have now been appointed PPC heads. Apart from Tibet, only the directly controlled municipalities did not have this arrangement (Table 5).

### **Defining the Power of Provincial Party Secretaries**

The myth of PPS power is largely attributed to the semi-secret working style of PPSs. As the top power-holder in a province, a PPS does not administer or manage provincial work on a daily basis. Instead, provincial governors are the chief executive officer. The myth is also partially due to the elasticity of PPS power since the office is less clearly defined than that of governor. The power of the office often depends on the person who takes up the office: his or her political connections to the centre, personality and other appointments.

Since the beginning of 2003, the central government has made a strategic move to recentralize provincial power by letting PPSs assume the presidency of the PPC standing committee. This new approach to provincial politics leaves no doubt that PPSs will regain the control of provincial power weakened by economic reform. As the head of the PPC, PPSs now can control the agenda of the PPC and wield greater influence in getting the Party's nomination approved by the PPC.

This empowerment of PPSs may represent central efforts at institutionalizing the power of PPSs. The office of PPS has not been clearly defined or formalized in an institutional sense. As the president of the PPC, PPSs are subject to regularized routine agenda and PPC rules and norms. PPSs' exercise of power needs to be more transparent and predictable in presiding over PPC meetings.

To what extent does this empowerment of PPSs depict a national picture of recentralization? Since Jiang Zemin, the centre has made repeated efforts at increasing the power of the centre, a marked step away from Deng and Hu's policy of decentralization. As a result, the centre places greater emphasis on regaining Party control over administration. The CPC retreated from control over enterprises, local organizations and universities in the 1980s but it has since done a U-turn. In higher education, for example, it is the Party secretary, not the president, of a university who exercises ultimate power. The empowerment of PPSs represents the continuation of the CPC's intention to rein in the centrifugal force of provincial politics and recentralize power in China.

Empowering provincial Party secretaries over provincial legislatures may enable the Party to exert considerable control over provincial governments, which in recent years have exhibited a tendency to break away from the central government. This recentralization through the provincial Party secretary, however, may not bide well for provincial development. In China's history, there have been cases of the central government moving to strengthen its control over provinces, only to find itself losing local initiatives. It then had to reverse its policy through decentralization

At the same time, the central government is considering ways to oversee the performance of PPSs and constrain possible PPS abuse of power.<sup>25</sup> One deliberation is to strengthen the supervising power of the Provincial Party Commission of Discipline Inspection (PCDI). The PCDI was designed to act as a watchdog against corrupt and undisciplined provincial Party and government officials.

In practice however, since PCDI personnel matters are controlled by PPSs, its oversight power is limited by its inability to discipline its bosses. As a solution to the problem, the central authority is looking into streamlining the work and personnel functions of PCDIs by directly appointing heads of provincial Party disciplinary committees from the centre, thus removing the power to appoint PPSs from PCDIs. The centre hopes that this will make PCDIs answerable to the centre rather than to PPSs and to hold PPSs more accountable.

Whether the all-powerful PPSs can be checked by PCDIs depends not so much on new regulations—though they are important—but rather on effective enforcement of the regulations. Well-intentioned regulations will not have any teeth unless the Party leadership is serious about enforcement. Enforcement mechanisms created and funded by the Party are necessary to effectively deter abuse of power.

It is also necessary for the Party to go beyond the Party monitoring system to allow external checks on Party officials. The Party inspection system needs to be integrated into the overall state anti-corruption and graft system to ensure that no

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<sup>25</sup> The author is grateful to Professor Yongnian Zheng for raising this point. We agree that the CPC is trying to find ways to check the abuse of power within the Party while enhancing a sense of responsibility for Party and government officials.



one is above the law. The centre will also have to work hard at erasing the impression that Party officials can only be disciplined by the Party and that Party regulations stand outside state law. Party officials, including PPSs, are equal to any other government officials under the law.

### **Conclusion**

Provincial Party secretaries are the de facto ruler in Chinese provinces. Not only do they control vast provincial resources, they also represent the centre in their exercise of power. They serve as a communication linkage between the central authority and local administration. Their primary responsibilities are to carry out Party policies and supervise provincial governments. PPSs' power of control includes agenda-setting, personnel appointments and recommendations, investigation and policy making. Unlike previous provincial leaders whose revolutionary experiences were the prerequisite to promotion, most PPSs nowadays are promoted from administrative posts; a number of PPSs come from the Communist Youth League or worked their way up through the Party ladder.

A recentralization of PPS power has taken place in the provinces where PPSs concurrently take up the helm of provincial legislatures. This move reflects Party efforts to reassert control over provincial lawmaking bodies to ensure the will of the Party is reflected in local legislation. At the same time, the Party has also implemented new and stronger disciplinary measures to make PPSs more accountable. Greater emphasis has been placed on the mobility and transferability of PPSs to prevent them from turning into provincial barons. In spite of checks and balances, the elasticity of PPS power remains a challenge for anyone to define.