



# Where the Party Rules: Party-Based Authoritarianism and the Reach of the Chinese State

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Where the Party Rules: Party-Based Authoritarianism  
and the Reach of the Chinese State

A dissertation presented  
by  
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to  
The Department of Government

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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Where the Party Rules: Party-Based Authoritarianism  
and the Reach of the Chinese State

Abstract

In a large number of non-democratic countries, the power of the government rests upon the effective organization of a ruling party. Today, China stands out as a successful party-based authoritarian regime. In contrast to conventional approaches, which emphasize the role of authoritarian parties in controlling elite conflict and electoral-legislative processes, this dissertation demonstrates that the party makes the regime strong at the local level. Thanks to the party, the Chinese government has a strong grip of local societies across its large realm.

Since China has “crimson areas”, where the party is more present, and “pink areas”, where the party is less present, the Chinese case is ideally suited for a subnational comparative analysis of party-based authoritarianism. Subnational analysis, with its strong focus on geography, demonstrates that the party is doing much more than distributing patronage, and that as a result the state is most resilient, best at extracting taxes, and most effective at implementing policy in places



with high party saturation.

Historical analysis identifies contingencies of pre-1949 warfare, especially the anti-colonial struggle against Japanese occupation, as a crucial determinant for contemporary geographic patterns of party strength. The historical part of the dissertation also points to the governance techniques of differentiated governance, inherited from the imperial past, which allows China's rulers to live with the uneven reach of the party state and turn it to their advantage, instead of evening it out at all cost. Overall, this dissertation offers a new account of Chinese governance. Conceptualizing the Chinese regime as a party-based authoritarian regime directs our attention to the institutions that allow the government to achieve formidable reach throughout its territory and throughout society.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Party-Based

## Authoritarianism in China

Since Mao's death in 1976, China has experienced an astounding degree of political order and stability throughout its vast territory, inhabited by a culturally diverse population. Under favorable conditions of national unity, internal peace and a functioning state apparatus, most of China's 1.4 billion citizens have found ways to dramatically improve their lives - in the absence of democracy. Hundreds of millions have escaped poverty and many are thriving, not only in terms of economic living standards. The rest of the world has reaped plentiful benefits from political stability in East Asia. Consumers in Western countries and in the developing South are profiting from trade with China. The absence of anarchical violence has saved the world much distress. It is hard to envision the counterfactual of a chaotic China, but the world would not be the same place if China were an impoverished nation caught up in civilian violence. How has a country, whose territory is roughly equal to the United States, but whose diverse population is five times larger, maintained stability, while many countries in the world, and much smaller ones, struggle with anarchy and

violence? What makes the Chinese authoritarian regime so effective in governing and exercising authority throughout its realm? This dissertation suggests that the grassroots organization of the single party, formed in the crucible of Japan's occupation, is a key factor to explain China's regime resilience.

The Chinese case also suggests new ways of thinking about single parties in the context of other authoritarian regimes, whose persistence raises similar questions. Like China, most of the remaining authoritarian regimes have single parties, but the literature has given scant attention to their role in projecting authority beyond the centers of power. Chapter 2 will develop the comparative potential further with examples from around the globe. But first, this introduction provides an overview of the argument and focuses mainly on the Chinese case to describe the party's role in local governance. The chapter moves from the micro-level of the party, that is, its rank-and-file members, to the macro-level, suggesting that a map of party membership density captures crucial aspects of governance in the People's Republic. This bottom-up portrait of the party, beginning with the grassroots, contrasts with the more common top-down descriptions, beginning with the Politbureau. This portrait provides the intuition for a new approach to the single party, which is the core contribution of this dissertation. The introduction will end with a chapter overview, moving in reverse chronological order from contemporary politics to governance reforms at the beginning of the 18th Century.

## **1.1 The Grassroots Origins of Effective Authoritarian Rule**

Authoritarian regime parties –such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), United Russia and United Malays National Organization– are effective tools of dictators around the globe to govern and maintain control over modernizing societies. Compared to other arrangements, such as military

dictatorship and personalistic rule, single-party regimes prove to be the most effective institutional schemes for mitigating democratization pressures (Geddes, 1999). But how do parties contribute to effective authoritarian rule? And what are the origins of effective regime parties? The first question calls for a study of the mechanics of contemporary autocratic governance. The second question takes us back to history. The case of China, the focus of this dissertation, promises to change the way we think about authoritarian regime parties and their role in preventing authoritarian collapse.

Uncovering the sources of Chinese state strength is important in order to understand how 20% of the world population is governed today. Since political scientists have gained much insight by making comparisons within Europe, a continent which is home to about 10% of the world population, we should expect at least as much mileage from subnational comparisons within China. In addition, China is not as irrelevant for comparative studies as some political scientists might have us believe, when they classify the country in a residual category comprising the “almost disappeared” species of “unambiguously nondemocratic regime[s]” (Schedler, 2010). Instead, like the majority of authoritarian countries today, China is a party-based authoritarian regime<sup>1</sup> Studying party-based authoritarian regimes as a group makes sense, since a growing consensus among political scientists has identified strong parties as a crucial ingredient for authoritarian regime survival (Geddes, 1999; Levitsky and Way, 2010). Yet it is not clear how parties bolster authoritarian regimes, nor how some parties have grown stronger than others. These questions have taken on new urgency after ideologies lost some of their force and an instrumental logic seems to have taken center stage. The case of China and the CCP can help to elucidate the power mechanics of one-party systems. To be sure, China is not a typical one-party regime, since its party may be an unusually sophisticated organization. Yet precisely because the CCP today stands out as one of the world’s most effec-

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<sup>1</sup>Encompassing authoritarian and competitive authoritarian regimes, as long as their rule is supported by a single, or at least a dominant, party.

tive, non-democratic parties, the case of China promises to shine a bright light on the resilience of party-based authoritarianism regimes.

This dissertation goes beyond the conventional wisdom in the literature on authoritarian regimes, according to which regime parties function as patronage-distribution devices (Magaloni, 2006), facilitate political deals at the elite level (Svolik, 2012), and serve as democratic concessions (Gandhi, 2008). Moving from the elite to the grassroots level, the dissertation sees the CCP as a sharp authoritarian tool to penetrate the vast and uneven spatial expanse of China’s realm. Effective regime parties help rulers elicit accurate information about society beyond the centers of power. I found ample anecdotal evidence that the CCP fulfills such a role. For example, an internal paper by the Department of Public Security highlights the unique value of information from local party cells –as opposed to information from the local government apparatus– for suppressing local protests (Zhou, 2000, p.157). For systematic evidence, we can take advantage of the fact that the CCP is unevenly present throughout its territory. China’s “crimson provinces” with high party membership density look very different from “pink provinces” where the party is less present:

- In crimson areas, local governments extract more taxes. Party members help local governments overcome asymmetric information problems that plague other tax systems at the grassroots level. They also coerce and convince fellow citizens to pay their dues –even if at the same time party members themselves have the privilege of being more lightly taxed.
- In crimson areas, local governments are more effective at monitoring the implementation of the One Child Policy. While bureaucrats tend to be able to achieve the goal of reducing the number of births, it is much harder to avoid the severe side-effect of gendered abortions, which is much more successfully achieved in crimson localities.

- During the great turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, when Mao Zedong called on citizens to attack the institutions of the party state, formal party hierarchies ceased to function. Nevertheless, there is direct evidence that party membership networks continued to affect developments on the ground and facilitated the return of order. Therefore, as preliminary statistical analysis confirms, there was less chaos in “crimson” areas.
- According to preliminary evidence, a decade after the Communist victory of 1949, areas with the most combatant party members -to be found in the areas most violently contested between the CCP and the Japanese Imperial Army- made attempts to resist communization policies, thereby alleviating the severity of the Great Leap Forward famine.

In short, the dissertation presents evidence on the party’s role in the information architecture of the authoritarian state, with implications for state capacity and resilience.

Moving back the causal chain, as indicated by the arrows in figure 1.1, the next goal is to find out why the party is so much more present in some areas of its realm than in others. Why can the party not turn all of China “crimson”? As my analysis shows, regional patterns of CCP membership still reflect contingencies of the Second Sino-Japanese War from seven decades ago. Today, formerly Japanese-occupied areas are still “crimson”. This is partly because the Japanese occupiers and the Communist Party shared a similar strategic interest in governing certain localities. But another important factor is that Japanese occupation jump-started the party, by giving the Communist Party respite from government persecution and by mobilizing citizens on patriotic (or xenophobic) anti-Japanese grounds. Since Japan occupied only some parts of the Chinese territory, we can isolate the lasting effect of the Second Sino-Japanese War on membership patterns today. Applying formal models of economic growth and convergence to the dynamics of local party membership, an analysis of the half-life of history finds that the effect of Japanese occupation on party strength

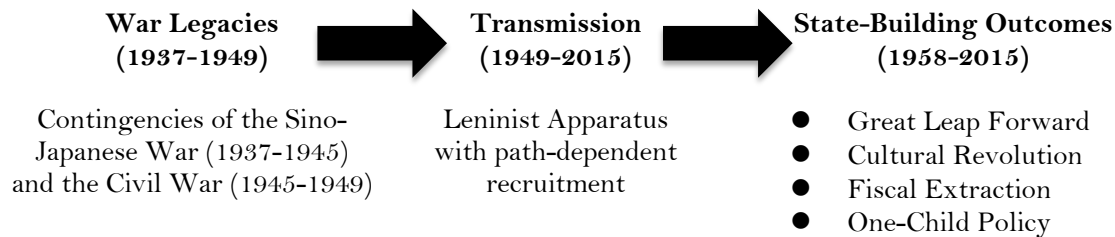


Figure 1.1: Party Strength: Historical Causes, Transmission, Contemporary Effects

disappears over time, but only at a very slow rate.

More tentatively, the dissertation argues that different types of recruits self-selected into party membership during this period, depending on the locality where they joined the party. Members recruited in the party's safe havens tended to be more opportunistic than members recruited in dangerous proximity to the Japanese occupiers. To identify safe havens and embattled areas, I rely on fine-grained cartographic information, which I found in Japanese archives, as well as in party organization histories. My claim is that two decades later, the more opportunistic recruits readily complied with Mao's communization policies, even as their disastrous consequences became increasingly clear. While overall the CCP failed to stop the Great Leap Famine, in the areas which had experienced the most intense anti-Japanese struggle, local CCP leaders attempted to resist the central policy and thereby dampened its impact. With the aid of fine-grained mortality statistics, I find fewer famine deaths in formerly embattled areas, even after controlling for socio-economic differences.

To explain why the Chinese Communist Party does not do more to even out its reach throughout the Chinese realm, the last chapter goes further back in history, arguing that governance techniques inherited from the imperial past continue to inform Chinese statecraft. Imperial era techniques, perfected over centuries, remain uniquely suited for a central authority to govern a large and diverse continent in an autocratic fashion and therefore contribute to regime resilience. Whereas many

states see uniform control and nationwide standardization as top priorities, China’s administrators are unusual in making conscious and explicit choices of how to deploy power resources and enforce authority selectively. Imperial-era documents provide deep insight into the strategic calculus of Chinese state building. I discovered an almost forgotten standardized coding system by which the court assessed local government challenges, e.g. designating “busy places” or “difficult population”—providing rich material for quantifying how the Chinese imperial court 300 years ago assessed governance challenges in its own territory and testing the implications for personnel deployment. China’s personnel policy evidences similar principles in formulating priorities today. Therefore it is valuable to research imperial-era governance techniques, tapping into the underexplored potential of working at the intersection of imperial history and contemporary politics.

## 1.2 From Field Observations to a Theory of the Party

This dissertation has its empirical roots in China’s second-tier cities and hinterland counties. First inspecting politics on-site, talking to elites and citizens, I extensively used the investigative mode of political science before turning to the powerful tools of statistical inference and to the formal logic of models. Moving between localities, whether as a field researcher or a business person, one is bound to encounter the uneven reach<sup>2</sup> of the Chinese state. When I first visited the four counties in Shandong that served as my key research sites, I was struck by how each of these local governments had its own interpretation of a policy called *New Socialist Countryside Construction* 社會主義新農村建設. Since this policy created visible outcomes, including bricks-and-mortar structures, the differences caught the eye. In one county, the government was content to experiment with garbage collection and provide the villagers with fresh paint - choosing a dark-yellowish color, apparently

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<sup>2</sup>I owe the “reach of the state” metaphor to a book title by Vivienne Shue (Shue, 1988).

in an attempt to maximize its lifetime. In another county, driven by an ambitious, prefectural party secretary parachuted in from Beijing, the government took a more activist stance, deployed Great Leap Forward rhetoric reminiscent of Maoist times, bulldozed villages and asked villagers to buy newly built apartments, whose price was unaffordable to most locals and whose location and layout had obvious disadvantages. Yet another county had employed researchers from the urban planning department of one of China's leading universities to conduct surveys and select a village, whose villagers would most welcome -or least opposed- resettlement programs.<sup>3</sup> Finally, another county avoided implementation altogether, setting up one fake construction site to show to upper-level cadres (and one foreign Ph.D. student) eager to see *New Socialist Countryside Construction*. Although this particular policy was too multi-faceted to be easily amenable to comparison (Looney, 2012), it motivated the question of my research: What makes the state strong, maybe even strong-armed, in some places, but more soft-spoken in others?

Nothing in the political science literature had prepared me to look for an answer related to party organization at the grassroots. Informed by Lily Tsai's work (Tsai, 2007), I expected local societies to play a decisive role in shaping local state-society relations, with homegrown societal organizations giving locals better bargaining positions in some places than in others. Yet it became clear to me that local society was "facing"<sup>4</sup> very different local manifestations of the Chinese state. Moreover, what struck me was the varying nature of local party presence, to which scholars have paid only minimal attention.<sup>5</sup> More generally, compared to scholarship from the middle of last century (Schurmann, 1966; Barnett, 1967), researchers today pay little attention to the party and

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<sup>3</sup>This is reminiscent of the selection of new nuclear sites in Japan (Aldrich, 2008).

<sup>4</sup>I am not subscribing to the state-society dichotomy and do not participate in the tug of war between state and society. As will become clear in the course of the dissertation, grassroots party organization is not unambiguously part of the state. But it is much more "state" than, say, solidary groups or Daoist secret societies.

<sup>5</sup>The CCP appears as an explanatory variable in Dali Yang's analysis of agrarian radicalism. But he goes on, after just a couple of paragraphs, to conflate party presence with distance from Beijing, partly because at the time he did not have access to good data on CCP membership (Yang, 1996).



its grassroots, as distinct from the state.<sup>6</sup> As this dissertation will demonstrate, it is a fruitful enterprise to explore the variation in the party's presence across the country and its varying impact on the lives of ordinary people.

Like scholars, practitioners also do not talk very much about variation in the reach of the Chinese state, albeit for different reasons. In conversation with local officials, I occasionally noticed their genuine surprise when I told them about the different ways in which other nearby counties implemented recent directives. But all in all the differences are too enormous to go unnoticed by practitioners. Instead, many Chinese officials are uncomfortable discussing the fundamental heterogeneity of the Chinese state, and prefer to hold up the myth of a uniform state. In my first dozen interviews in China, a most frequent expression was Cha-Bu-Duo 差不多: There is almost no difference! Question to the fiscal department: "Is your county more or less effective than your neighboring counties at mobilizing fees for public projects?" Answer: "Cha-Bu-Duo." Question to the general office: "Which county in this prefecture is the strictest enforcer of the one-child-policy?" Answer: "Cha-Bu-Duo." Question to the history office: "During the Cultural Revolution, was your county hit as much as the neighboring counties?" Answer: "Cha-bu-duo". Acknowledging the uneven presence of party members is particularly unwelcome and goes against the propaganda message of China's homogeneity. Asking about differences in the administrative setup is an unwelcome form of splittism: "Has the foreigner come to doubt the unity of China?" With enhanced questioning techniques, one can advance beyond the Cha-Bu-Duo response: Why has party membership grown so quickly in your county, compared to all the other counties in Shandong? One is then confronted with answers related to leadership, historical and contemporary. The perceptions of local cadres could be summarized as a call to "bring the leader back in", the

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<sup>6</sup>With notable exceptions including the work of Bruce Dickson (Dickson, 2000, 2014) and journalistic investigations (McGregor, 2010; Asahi Shimbun Beijing Office, 2012).

relevant leader in this case being the series of party secretaries that happened to run the locality over time.<sup>7</sup> Other answers, including by Chinese academics, have a flavor of reverse modernization theory: Instead of political development creating a tendency toward political pluralism at odds with the authoritarian state, the authoritarian state may be at its best in most developed places.

A subnational-comparative approach to state strength offers opportunities, but also has its limitations. Whether carried out as field research, or as data analysis, subnational analysis can tell us some things about Chinese state strength, but not others. First, subnational analysis reaches its limits when the subnational observations are too similar to each other and leave little room for comparison. Fortunately, China is diverse enough and thus a lack of variation does not pose a problem. The effect of corruption, nationalism or Confucian culture could all potentially be studied at a subnational level. Second, specific to the study of the state, a more serious problem arises because the state is not so easily disaggregated into its component parts. Something is missing if we conceptualize Chinese state strength as the “product” of local government strengths. A more precise analytical breakdown of state strength to the county level might be written as

$$State\ Strength = \prod_0^{2,900} strength\ in\ county\ dx \times strength\ at\ center \quad (1.1)$$

Factoring in the strength of the state as it is observed in each of China’s roughly 2,900 county-level jurisdictions, the first multiplier integrates strength across the realm. The second multiplier captures strength at the center. The equation expresses the fact that Chinese state strength is a combination of strength out in the realm and strength at the center. If local governments had a good grip on society, but elite conflict was rocking the boat, one would not consider the Chinese

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<sup>7</sup>The similar phrase “bringing the statesman back in” comes from an international relations scholar (Byman and Pollack, 2001). Work by Kyle A. Jaros (Jaros, 2014) shows that leadership can fruitfully be analyzed to explain important local policy outcomes.

state to be strong. Inversely, if politics at the core of the state in Zhongnanhai were orderly, but if the realm was in chaos, this would also not be a strong state. Just as order at the center promotes order at the local level, so also does order at the local level promote order at the center. This dissertation explores the first multiplier and follows a subnational comparative method by asking why the Chinese state is stronger in some places than in others.

### **1.3 Micro-Level: Rank-and-File Party Members as the CCP's Power Base**

The power of the Chinese government rests upon a well-organized, nationwide party network. Western eyes, accustomed to the sight of crumbling Communist parties in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe two decades ago, tend to see the CCP as an anachronistic leftover from the past. Systemic corruption among its leaders further contributes to the impression that the party is doomed to what Lü Xiaobo calls “organizational involution” (Lü, 2000). If Chinese citizens themselves perceive the party as thoroughly corrupt, so the argument goes, the CCP’s legitimacy and with it the regime’s authority will evaporate before long. As David Shambaugh demonstrates, views of the party as an outdated component of an ossified Leninist system are misleading. While the party undergoes decay and atrophy in some areas, it is also reinventing and adapting itself in others (Shambaugh, 2008). Corruption is bound to occur where so much power is concentrated in the hands of a few local officials. In a setting where classic Communist ideology is largely passé, the vested interests that come with privileges are part of the glue that holds the regime together, even if at the same time they undermine the party’s remaining legitimacy. Moreover, 75% of all party members are non-elite rank and file party members, with fewer opportunities to sell privileges (Walder, 2004).

At the end of the day, the CCP remains an indispensable instrument of the regime (McGregor, 2010). Its members are a formidable source of regime strength.

The lifeblood of the party are its 87 million members (as of 2014). This corresponds to “only” 6% of the population,<sup>8</sup> but translates into a substantial presence of the party in society. Three reasons stand out: First, multiple party memberships in the same household are rare. In rural areas, the likelihood that in a household with at least one party member there is another party member is smaller than 10%.<sup>9</sup> As a result of such dispersion, 23% of all rural households include at least one party member, even if the household is narrowly defined as a living community of four people on average. Second, members are dispersed through various strata of society. Party cells exist in villages, urban residential communities, companies, government agencies and schools. In each of these settings, over the last 20 or 30 years, party cells have developed increasingly specialized goals, functions and operating procedures, keeping up with the challenges of a quickly differentiating society.<sup>10</sup> Organizers make sure that the party is present where it matters most. Recently, tailor-made forms of party organizations have been set up within NGOs of a certain size.<sup>11</sup> Third, tweaking a Leninist apparatus to serve a post-Communist government, membership in the party functions as an effective screening device to identify politically loyal citizens, who are put to work in the interest of the elite. The remainder of the section describes the organizational methods that help the CCP to secure its dominant presence in society.

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<sup>8</sup>For comparison: In 1989, before the cataclysm, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had 19 million members (Gill, 1994, table 5.1), which corresponded to 6.6% of the population, a comparable saturation rate.

<sup>9</sup>My calculation is based on data from the *China Household Income Project*, distributed by ICPSR.

<sup>10</sup>Compare standard handbooks for party leaders at the grassroots level from 1990 to those from 2010 (CCP Tianjin, 2003; Ma, 1990).

<sup>11</sup>Conversation with a journalist specializing on NGOs in Shanghai on August 29, 2012.

### 1.3.1 The Party as Screening Device

For the ruling elites, one important function of the party is to serve as a screening device: Who is ready to be coopted? In order to defend the system, it is vital to distinguish between "pliable" and "less reliable" types of people, especially among young men. The way for ruling elites to elicit this information is to design a "strategic game" that reveals otherwise hidden characteristics. Confronting someone with the choice to enter the party or not is just such a game. For Chinese, just as for many people from former Communist countries, especially more educated ones, this moment of choice is a memorable one that they recount to intimate friends for the rest of their lives. Many would recount this confrontation to more intimate friends for the rest of their lives.

Nowadays, the choice may be less ideological. To the extent that ideology does continue to play a role for some party members, it is nationalist sentiments, not Communist ideals, that motivate people. Many ordinary Chinese are convinced that joining the party is all about privileges, as countless variations of anti-party curses suggest. Comparing corrupt party members to insatiable termites eating up the trees all around them is one of the less vulgar metaphors. Even the party members themselves often downplay their ideological commitment. On the Internet, one blogger asked: "Question to party members: Were you sincere when you took your party oath?" We cannot verify whether the respondents were actually party members, but the answers are similar to those I heard in countless conversations, and give me confidence that people curse the party not only during encounters with foreigners:

“- If there are no benefits, who would join the party?

- It's all about career and Renminbi. Conscience falls flat on the face. (literally: Conscience turns into a dung-eating dog.)

...

- Basically, everyone is currying favors. When in a factory there is downsizing and someone is a party member, then it's no longer about economies of scale, but it's all about scale without economies.
- At the time of taking the oath, I was sincere. But now, actually,...sigh...
- Yes, generally that's how everyone puts it. Sincere... haha, I refuse to believe.
- It was just a task to be completed." (Col CCP 5<sup>12</sup>)

Blog entries such as these indicate that, in many social settings including universities, party membership is not a source of pride. In Chinese universities, especially elite universities with high proportions of party members, we often hear students downplaying the political significance of party membership: "The academically most outstanding students are offered party membership and naturally do not refuse it." It would be naive to think of party membership among students as nothing more than an academic prize. The undeniable fact is that some outstanding students are not party members. Some students refuse or even revoke party membership. More typically, students are never offered party membership, if their critical mindset is known to their educators. What joining the party signifies is readiness to compromise with the state. Precisely if there is little inner commitment to the party, let alone to ideas of Communism, the act of joining the party reveals that a person agrees to be co-opted, joining the party for material benefits, better career prospects, or at least to continue a harmonious relationship with one's superior. The new recruit will have to be at least outwardly loyal to the party-state, submitting to party discipline.

The procedure for joining the party has become increasingly elaborate and standardized. During the Cultural Revolution, shortcuts existed to quickly admit new party members without fulfilling the minimum procedural requirements, as stipulated by the party constitution. When the political

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<sup>12</sup>References to primary material, such as this one, are explained in the first part of the bibliography.

winds turned and party leaders sought to purge the most troublesome rebels, quick admittance to the party was denounced as “flying over the ocean”. To protect the hierarchical integrity of the party, formally correct admittance procedures were emphasized. Since then, with each edition of work manuals for basic-level party cadres, the description of how a person is to join the party becomes lengthier and more specific. According to the constitution of the CCP, a person becomes a party member after submitting an application letter; two full party members must support the application, guaranteeing the political integrity of the applicant. Nowadays, the application usually is preceded by two stages. First, a person enters a category called “activist with ambition to join the party.” At that stage, two party members are designated to instruct the person about the orthodox party line and the activist is required to participate in training programs at the local party school. Second, the person turns into a “party development target,” during which stage he comes under even closer scrutiny. A recent manual lists as many as 17 stages, some with as many as seven sub-stages, replete with red-tape, forms to be filled out, and reporting up and down the hierarchy; the process takes several years (Zhang, Li and Qi, 2010).

The most intimidating step in the process of joining the party is an interview with a group of party members, including cadres from the organization department. Reading the minutes of such interrogations (Col CCP 1), one has the impression of a not-so-subtle form of hazing, where the aspiring member is slowly pushed into a corner to be humiliated. After the unpleasant experience of political interrogation, the process of joining the party concludes more ceremoniously, when the new party member is sworn in at a highly ritualized meeting, most of the time along with others. After several speeches, the new party members take a solemn loyalty oath before the party flag, the central stage prop of this event. The party leaders read out the oath, sentence by sentence and the new party members repeat in chorus. When the time comes to insert the individual’s name into the

oath formula, at least when there are not too many participants, the chorus stops and each person says his own name, going from left to right. The ceremony ends as it began, with the national anthem. The twin purpose of the meeting is to make tangible the political elite status associated with party membership, as well as to stand as a friendly reminder that the mutual deal between the party and the individual requires first and foremost the public display of political loyalty from the new party member. The power of the party is built on the political loyalty of its members.

### 1.3.2 The Party as Disciplining Device

By joining the party, a person submits to a host of disciplining devices. The formal escalation ladder, prescribed in article ten of “CCP Regulations on Disciplinary Actions” 中國共產黨紀律處分條例, progresses from warning, to revoking a party member’s legal immunity and, in the worst case, to expulsion. In ordinary circumstances, very few people are expelled from the party. During 2010 only 0.04% exited the party for reasons other than death. Even this tiny number is an over-estimate, because it also includes people who left the party out of their own volition.<sup>13</sup> Only in times of great political upheaval, the threat of expulsion becomes a more tangible possibility. In 1989, the year of the Tian’anmen Massacre, 0.4% exited the party under irregular circumstances (CCP Organization Department, 2011, p.208). The concern of most party members is not expulsion.

For the everyday-disciplining of the membership, to make sure that party members show up to the weekly party cell meetings, that they actively participate in party projects, and that they do not post inappropriate messages on the Internet, a reprimand from the party secretary is the most tangible threat. If a party member is invited “to drink a cup of tea with the party secretary,” this

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<sup>13</sup>There are no regular procedures for leaving the party. Some achieve it by leaving the country and stopping to pay their dues. It remains a mystery whether Falun-Gong-sponsored exit schemes work. One such scheme was a telephone campaign: “Press 1 if you wish to exit the CCP. Press 2 if you wish to exit the Communist Youth League. Press 3 if you wish to exit the Young Pioneers.” - conversation with a former party member in Shanghai in mid-August, 2012.



is usually a euphemism for receiving a small yet dreaded reprimand. It may involve an entry into one's record, as well as public shaming.

Probably the most effective disciplining device of all, which has survived the last 30 years of reform, is a thought report. Aspiring party members have to write such reports. Seven months into one's party membership, another report is due. Later on, special occasions such as a political campaign or a trip to the United States involve reporting requirements<sup>14</sup>. If a thought report is required after some misstep, it becomes a self-criticism reminiscent of the kind prevalent during the Cultural Revolution. Under certain circumstances, a party member becomes subject to a democratic evaluation, an occasion at which members of the same party cell -consisting of between less than 10 to a couple of dozen members- must evaluate the person. Evaluations include achievements at the workplace, political loyalty, level of altruism, and even intimate questions of personal lifestyle (Col CCP 2). There are not only sticks, but also carrots. If one's relation with the party is going well, it may be a pleasure to receive the party secretary's visit on occasions such as the death of one's relative or one's birthday, sometimes with a nice gift as well.<sup>15</sup>

### **1.3.3 The Party as Mobilizing Device**

Party members also serve as a dependable workforce to carry out concrete projects on the ground. During the outbreak of the SARS pandemic in 2002/2003, the government stipulated severe domestic travel restrictions. It is doubtful whether enforcement would have been as effective as it was without a party campaign taking place in the background. Similarly, the Beijing Olympics of 2008 prompted another highly visible campaign that impressed international visitors, and where party organizations played a formidable role to mobilize individuals as volunteers. This kind of

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<sup>14</sup>Conversation with a party member, beginning of August, 2012

<sup>15</sup>In some places, this is called the "indispensable visits on six occasions policy".

party-organized civic activism is by no means limited to extraordinary events, but is an everyday occurrence. In the summer of 2012, on Sundays, an impressive army of volunteers, old and young, flooded the streets of major cities, helping with traffic control at busy intersections. They were sacrificing two hours of their Sunday spare time, suffering from heat and dust. Their flashy uniforms praised the altruist virtues of the model soldier Lei Feng. The volunteers were (oftentimes new) party members mobilized by their party cells.<sup>16</sup> This campaign may or may not improve traffic. It certainly is a bonding experience and socializes party members into a habit of calling their fellow citizens to order. One nationwide campaign asked party member volunteers to “sacrifice their precious blood” in a blood donation drive.

Campaigns including ideological propaganda movements, as well as practical campaigns such as in the health sector, belong to the standard repertoire of Chinese political culture and are critically important for the regime’s longevity: “Mao’s techniques of mass mobilization, born in revolutionary struggle, but adapted to the tasks of post-revolutionary rule, lie at the heart of Chinese exceptionalism” (Perry, 2007, p.5 f.). The party is indispensable for campaign-style governance: It is party members who first advertise new mass movements, for example, by writing propaganda slogans on walls or hanging up red banners. “Enthusiastic” party members create the initial momentum needed to get campaigns off the ground. Only through its members can the party achieve the minimum level of coordination necessary for mass mobilization to function properly and fulfill its purpose. Party cells engage in a broad spectrum of more or less political activities. The minutes of a party cell meeting at an institution of higher education give a flavor of the range of possibilities. To generate ideas for the party cell’s new activities, members were asked to brainstorm and made the following suggestions:

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<sup>16</sup>Conversation with a volunteer in Harbin on August 26, 2012

**Ma:** Let's support the school promoting the new energy saving base, encourage some outstanding students to participate in the construction and development of the base.

**Ceng:** In Xi'an, some citizens and students were recently taken advantage of by people with ulterior motives, they took to the streets and demonstrated. We should start a campaign, explaining to students that unorganized and illegal demonstrations hurt them, the government and the nation and that they should love their country.

**Chen:** We should link up with the other party cells of this school for some common activities, progressing all together.

**Wang:** Even if supermarkets are no longer allowed to give out plastic bags for free, many people, when they go shopping, still buy plastic bags, not thinking of the environmental damage. We should go and investigate the problem.

**Ma:** To make everyone more familiar with the party's thought, line and policy, we can distribute red propaganda flyers, so that everyone understands better "red thinking".

**Zhang:** The situation in the quiet study room is terrible. Many students put their bags down in the early morning and block up all the space, let's investigate!

**Liu:** For everyone to fully grasp emotionally what the party's thought, line and policy is, we can organize a tour to the nearby East Big Village and listen to people 80 years and older, reporting about the situation around the time of liberation, and how things have changed over time.

**Shi:** Our Institute for Astronomy has a Astronomical Science Popularization Team, we can build on our school's specialty and help popularize astronomy, offering courses and giving lectures.

**Yang:** These days in many places throughout the country many people blindly join in

demonstrations, with a very negative effect. We can go around the school collecting signatures, appealing to everyone's patriotism and make everyone understand the damage that comes with such blindness.

**Jiang:** Close to our school, there is the tomb of the patriotic anti-Japanese military leader Zhang Lingfu, we can organize everyone to go visit the tomb, to promote everyone's patriotic sentiment.

**Su:** Our school is located at the foot of the Qinling mountains, minerals are abundant around here. We can go investigate the national resources.

**Bai:** Our party cell meetings are missing some dynamism, everyone must be more animated, we can organize a few discussion sessions, debating each other, hopefully this can have an impact on our thinking, like a spark." (Col CCP 3)

This varied collection of ideas reflects the multiple purposes that the party serves. Even the most civic-minded proposal to educate people to share their seats may have a bitter after-taste, since all of these activities are to be undertaken as party campaigns, with the long shadow of the party-state looming large. Ranging from more innocent initiatives for promoting environmental awareness to more aggressive suggestions for containing citizen protest, the party is successfully channeling people's idealism to serve public purposes, as defined by CCP leaders.

The nationwide network of party cells is a formidable instrument in the hand of the government to sway public opinion and to deliberately dominate public discourse. Regularly trained in reciting the orthodox party line on issues ranging from local history to international affairs, the party members' united voice has an excellent chance of prevailing over less coordinated opinions. Moreover, the organization department regularly encourages party members to make themselves familiar with the latest technology to amplify the organization's voice. In the early 1990s, party members learned

the use of audio-visual technology (CCP Organization Department, 1994). Today, the emphasis is on the Internet. Certain party cells -presumably those with technically more savvy members- in recent years were ordered to become active on Boke, a most popular Chinese blog. The minutes of a party cell meeting illustrate how effortless such an operation is for the party (Col CCP 3):

“This party cell has assigned responsibility for the blog Boke to Comrade Zhang, everyone else supports his work. Mr. Zhang told everyone the new Boke password, and strongly encouraged contributions of articles. Strict regulations: During the first two weeks of our new user profile, everyone must contribute six articles; afterwards, everyone has to write one article a week. That way we will gradually perfect our blog and help build the party’s encirclement of the bloggosphere.”

The resulting, quite impressive blog is still online.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, at the outset of 2010, a party general branch<sup>18</sup> of an educational institution started a bloggosphere movement, announcing in its internal work plan that at the end of 2010 “the blogs of all professors belonging to the CCP will be investigated and compared” (Col CCP 4). Even if the general public denounces bloggers who follow party instructions as “fifty cent faction”, the great number of well-organized party members at the grassroots have a good chance to make the party’s voice heard in public shouting contests on the Internet. The most effective censors are the ones who not only silence critique, but who manage to make people speak out in favor of the government, using “human wave tactics”. Flooding the Internet with government-supportive information is an effective way of controlling public opinion (Roberts, 2014). The party apparatus facilitates just that.

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<sup>17</sup><http://nwpu2011.blog.163.com>, last checked July 2014.

<sup>18</sup>Party general branches are on the same hierarchical level, but more important than party cells.

## 1.4 Macro-Level: A Political Map of China

Mainland China does not have liberal “blue states” and conservative “red states”. All its provinces are controlled by the CCP and in that sense they are all dark red.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, without competitive multi-party elections, there are no electoral results to rely on as a clue to individual political preference. Nevertheless, instead of voting patterns, party membership statistics provide valuable information for drawing up a political map of China. As long as we guard against too literal an analogy between voting patterns in a multi-party democracy and membership statistics in a single-party system, we can use membership statistics to distinguish geographical areas where the party’s grip is stronger from other areas where the party has less of an effective presence. Party membership may be an indicator of political loyalty at the individual micro-level, as well as the community macro-level. It certainly is a good indicator of the reach of the Chinese state.

Until recently, party membership statistics have been made available only in a selective and scattered way.<sup>20</sup> In 2011 I came across an originally highly classified compendium of party statistics, compiled by the notoriously opaque CCP Organization Department. The collection includes panel data recording provincial-level membership for 11 points in time between 1956 and 2010, mostly corresponding to the years when the plenum of the Party Congress was convened.<sup>21</sup> The data shows distinct and enduring patterns of party presence. This empirical evidence undermines the carefully engineered propaganda message, according to which the party is equally popular, equally strong and equally present throughout the country’s vast national territory. There are no blue states and

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<sup>19</sup>In the US, the color red stands for the conservative Republican party, whereas in Europe it stands for left parties. Since the CCP is conservative as well as left, the color red is befitting by both of these definitions.

<sup>20</sup>Material on CCP Organization, compiled on all hierarchical levels of the state, often do contain membership statistics. Up until now, scholarship was handicapped by the difficulty of putting together a complete set of data (Yang, 1996).

<sup>21</sup>The statistical material was available in China’s National Library for a short while in 2011. Now the Fairbank Center library at Harvard University owns a copy. It includes a wealth of information beyond the total number of party members (CCP Organization Department, 2011).

red states in China, but some provinces are redder than others.

As this dissertation will demonstrate, local governments in “crimson jurisdictions” with high party saturation are more resilient during times of turmoil, they are more effective tax collectors and they achieve much better results in the domain of China’s one-child policy. Local governments in “pink provinces”, with a smaller proportion of party members in the population, are less resilient, less effective at collecting taxes and struggle with the unintended consequences of the one-child policy. Resonating with Barbara Geddes’ previously cited finding that single-parties make authoritarian regimes particularly resilient, the dissertation shows that the Chinese state is strongest in localities with a high proportion of party members. To the extent that China’s strength is not merely a matter of elite politics in Beijing, but is built on a strong regional base, regime strength originates with the party membership throughout the country.

#### **1.4.1 Crimson Regions Versus Pink Regions**

The density of party networks, that is, the sheer numerical presence of party members per capita, provides clues about state-society relations in local communities. Each additional party member makes the organization more influential; individual membership aggregates into CCP organizational strength. In communities where many individuals have made a pact with the party, the party tends to be stronger than in localities where party members are few and far between. The micro-political mechanics of party membership, as described in the previous section, translate into powerful instruments of macro-political control. Comparing two Chinese villages, especially if they are similar in other important socio-economic dimensions, a larger number of party members in one village indicates that the CCP’s organizational apparatus has more access compared to the other village. Ever since its foundation, the party has meticulously recorded membership statistics

as a basis for decision-making. For example, during the Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War, the number of party members in a village could be used as an indicator to gauge how much logistical support could be expected; membership statistics were vital for military planning.

Party membership is also meaningful at higher levels of aggregation, such as the county and even the province. The three micro-dimensions of membership as a screening device, as a tool of social control and as a mobilization machine apply across different levels of analysis. Individuals with CCP affiliation tend to be politically more pliable and ready to behave loyally in return for privileges. Similarly, a greater presence of party members marks communities where the hold of the party is stronger. The more party members there are in a community, the more people can be mobilized during campaigns and the higher the chances that campaigns reach their goal. The denser the party's membership network, the greater is the degree of social control that the party exercises over this community at large. Just as voting patterns provide a key to the political geography of a multi-party system, so also do membership statistics reveal patterns of the single party's regional strength in an authoritarian system.

Party membership statistics share an important shortcoming with voting patterns: The terms of the pact with the party may not be entirely universal across all of China, just as voting decisions can be differently motivated in different places and thus do not mean the same thing. On the one hand, if one looks at Chinese local party histories, local speeches and local party schools, one is struck by the efforts to standardize the political culture of the party.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, both duties and privileges of party members still differ considerably. Informal rules, such as conditions for joining the party and codes of public conduct for party members, vary from place to place.

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<sup>22</sup>The bookshelves of a party school in Harbin have absolutely no local flavor, they might as well belong to a party school anywhere else in China. The local newspaper archive is tucked away in dusty storage, poisonous fungus makes it unpleasant to use.



| Crimson Provinces |          |          |                              | Red Provinces |              |          |                              | Pink Provinces |           |          |                              |
|-------------------|----------|----------|------------------------------|---------------|--------------|----------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------|------------------------------|
|                   | Province | Members* | Compared to National Average |               | Province     | Members* | Compared to National Average |                | Province  | Members* | Compared to National Average |
| 1                 | Beijing  | 878      | +50%                         | 11            | Zhejiang     | 607      | +3%                          | 22             | Sichuan   | 534      | -9%                          |
| 2                 | Tianjin  | 788      | +34%                         | 12            | Xinjiang     | 605      | +3%                          | 23             | Anhui     | 530      | -10%                         |
| 3                 | Shanghai | 761      | +30%                         | 13            | Qinghai      | 602      | +3%                          | 24             | Hainan    | 516      | -12%                         |
| 4                 | Liaoning | 728      | +24%                         | 14            | Jiangsu      | 597      | +2%                          | 25             | Henan     | 514      | -12%                         |
| 5                 | Tibet    | 696      | +18%                         | 15            | Ningxia      | 593      | +1%                          | 26             | Fujian    | 494      | -16%                         |
| 6                 | Shandong | 634      | +8%                          | 16            | Gansu        | 590      | +1%                          | 27             | Yunnan    | 488      | -17%                         |
| 7                 | Sha'anxi | 633      | +8%                          | 17            | Inner Mong.  | 560      | -5%                          | 28             | Guangxi   | 456      | -22%                         |
| 8                 | Shanxi   | 627      | +7%                          | 18            | Jilin        | 558      | -5%                          | 29             | Jiangxi   | 446      | -24%                         |
| 9                 | Hebei    | 625      | +6%                          | 19            | Heilongjiang | 554      | -5%                          | 30             | Guizhou   | 435      | -26%                         |
| 10                | Hubei    | 624      | +6%                          | 20            | Hunan        | 548      | -7%                          | 31             | Guangdong | 428      | -27%                         |
|                   |          |          |                              | 21            | Chongqing    | 548      | -7%                          |                |           |          |                              |

\*per 10,000 citizens.

Note on the Cutoff points: Provinces divided into three quantiles, crimson being the top, red the middle and pink the bottom quantile.

Sources: Official party statistics (CCP Organization Department, 2011) and population data from *China Data Online*.

Table 1.1: Ranking by Reach of the Party (2010): How Red are China's Provinces?

Anecdotal evidence suggests that party members grow more daring the further they are from Beijing and the richer they are (Yan, 2009). These differences are a potentially complicating factor when comparing regional political colors. While a full assessment of the precise content of party membership in various localities is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that in areas with large minority populations, even the formal rules are adjusted to local conditions. For instance, ethnic politics override standard operating principles of the party. Handbooks for basic level cadres say that religious believers must not be admitted into the CCP, but places with large minority populations are officially sanctioned exceptions (Zhang, Li and Qi, 2010). On a provincial scale, the most important deviation from the “normal” content of party membership concerns provinces with large minority populations, such as Tibet, Qinghai and Xinjiang; for comparative purposes, statistics from these places must be taken with a grain of salt.

Similarly, non-membership might not mean the same thing everywhere. Membership statistics tell us nothing about the intensity with which party members hold onto their political identity; they tell us even less about the degree of hostility from non-party members. Tibet comes to mind as an example where even if the density of party networks is high, there are also unusual counter-forces pushing back against the party. Party membership reflects the party’s absolute strength, not its relative strength compared to other important forces in society. Both the differing content of party identification and the intensity with which people hold partisan beliefs are familiar problems when interpreting electoral outcomes in democracies. All in all, just as with voting patterns, membership data are a reasonable proxy for party strength, capturing important aspects of cross-regional variation in political cultures.

### 1.4.2 Merits of Party Strength as a Political Indicator

Under the circumstances of a one-party state, in the absence of voting patterns, party strength is a good approximation for capturing the political forces across geographic areas in a nation. The choice of becoming a party member is public and generally irreversible, as party members in their oath specifically promise to dedicate their entire life to the party and as there are no regular procedures for leaving the party. Moreover, the individual knows that there will be direct and personal consequences from joining the party, including privileges as well as loyalty obligations. Much is at stake, with tangible consequences for the individual's everyday life, which is why the membership choice is carefully considered. Even if the choice is not ideologically honest, it certainly is not cheap talk, precisely because of its public, irreversible and immediately consequential nature. In that sense, party membership sends a stronger informational signal than an electoral choice.

Party network density in a given jurisdiction results from “demand” from citizens and “supply” from the party. CCP organization departments, perfectly aware of the vital role that CCP members play in the governance of China, are not only closely tracking, but also minutely planning the number and socio-economic composition of the party membership in their jurisdictions. Yearly updated membership development plans, drawn up at all levels of government, indicate strategic goals and tactical measures for party member recruitment. In a top-down fashion, membership application forms, each carrying a unique serial number, are allocated all the hierarchical way down from Beijing to individual work units.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, network density is the result of demand for membership as well as supply of membership opportunities from the party. The party is more actively encouraging in some places than in others, possibly even granting greater privileges in places, where it needs to counterbalance lingering ethnic tension and to contain secessionist ambitions. The local

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<sup>23</sup>CCP Organization Department of Jingzhou City: Circular on changing the paper format to A4. April 16, 2012.

governments in Tibet and other Western provinces receive large fiscal subsidies from the center, which provide financial maneuvering space to hand out “pork”. Therefore, party membership is an excellent indicator for the closeness of party-societal relations, as a result of party strategy and popular preferences.

The density of party networks is by no means fully under the strategic control of party planners and social engineering. First, one would be hard-pressed to explain the variation in party membership from jurisdiction to jurisdiction purely based on political strategy. Especially at the level of counties, urban communities and villages, it is hard to think of a reason why planners would want to cultivate such variation. At the provincial level, party strategy might account for unusually many members in some places, such as Beijing, Shanghai and Tibet, but it cannot account for many cases. Second, during its membership drive in the 50s, when the party tried to equalize membership between the North and the South, places with a quick expansion of party membership subsequently had major party rectification campaigns:<sup>24</sup> It appears that overly eager admission of new party members had attracted insufficiently politically loyal people. Third, to secure good party discipline, party organizers do not make their planning choices blindly, but investigate local party-society relations beforehand. Usually at the end of each year, counties hand up all membership application forms from that year, containing important information to gauge the political quality of the candidates in that year. Based on this information, at the beginning of the subsequent year, prefectures decide how many new party members to recruit. It seems that counties with a better pool of potential new party members receive a higher quota. In short, there is a close link between the eagerness of people to join the party and the ambition of party planners to attract new members. Planners face strategic tradeoffs between quality and quantity. In a place where

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<sup>24</sup>In the run-up to the 8th Party Congress in 1956, Shanghai’s party grew by 50%, but then shrunk the following year, despite active recruitment of new members (Mei and Qiu, 2001, p.306).

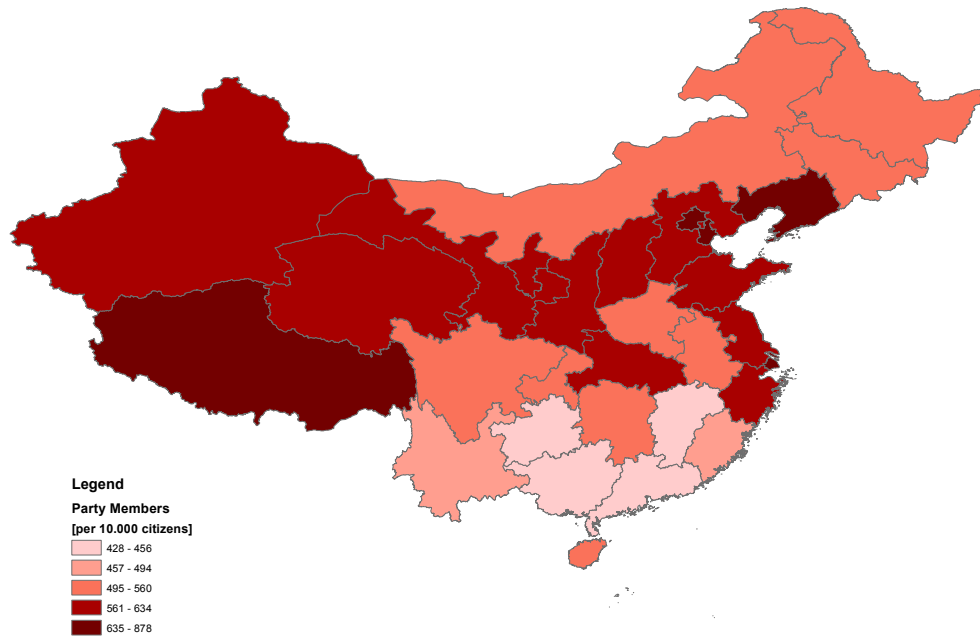


Figure 1.2: China's Crimson Provinces, China's Pink Provinces (2010)

the party is desperate to attract new members, the CCP is likely to require less loyalty and service from its new members. Conversely, in a place where the party is flooded with people interested in joining the party, the hurdle for joining will be higher. The more party members the organization department plans to attract, the less politically loyal the resulting pool will become. The yearly quota reflects both the importance, which the organization department attaches to recruit new party members (even at the price of new members' political quality), as well as the organization department's confidence that sufficiently loyal people can be identified in a jurisdiction.

### 1.4.3 Interpreting the New Political Map of China

Anecdotal evidence suggests a great variety in party-societal relations and political culture across China. Wealthy environments with a strong foreign presence are often said to be more politically liberal; government-critical demonstrations seem to occur more frequently in some provincial capi-

tals than in others, yet this difference does not simply follow the coastal-versus-hinterland divide.<sup>25</sup> Party membership statistics allow one to categorize provinces more systematically into crimson, red and pink provinces. In 2010, there were 616 party members per 10,000 citizens nationwide. The provincial average of 578 party members per 10,000 citizens is slightly below the national average, because almost 5 million party members are affiliated with the center, and not with any province in particular.<sup>26</sup> At the provincial level, the standard error is plus/minus 18% around that mean. Figure 1 is a ranking of all 31 provincial-level jurisdictions of China by party membership. The eight provinces with high party penetration (above the 75% quantile) have 52% more party members per 10,000 citizens than the eight provinces with low party penetration. In democratic systems, margins of victory above 5% are quite formidable, and in the political arithmetics of a Leninist party-state, double digit differences in party penetration point to significant differences in the degree of control by the party over society.

Even if formal rules apply equally to party units across the country, and even if central leaders have been pursuing standardization, regional differences persist and are just as striking as the similarities. Beijing and Shanghai, the political and the economic centers of the country, stand out for unusually high membership. The politically troublesome province of Tibet stands out as well - are leaders engineering party networks as a counter-force to separatist tendencies? If we focus on the pink provinces, there seems to be some truth to the idea that the party's hold decreases with increasing distance from Beijing (Yang, 1996, p.141). But distance explains only part of the variation and is not a satisfying answer, as one would want to know why distance would matter at all. For now, it is enough to note that the CCP is a uniform institution only in a superficial

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<sup>25</sup>This is my impression from eighteen months of field research.

<sup>26</sup>This includes party members in central state organs (2 million people), employed in the financial system (1 million people), working for railroad or aviation companies (1 million people) or serving in a newly formed State Capital Committee (1 million people).

sense. Party strength varies considerably across space. For subnational studies of the Chinese polity, this regional variation is fundamentally important, both as an outcome variable and as an explanatory variable. This chapter begins to explore how some places have become “crimson provinces” and others “pink provinces”. As we will see, despite efforts to even out the power base, pre-1949 historical legacies are still recognizable in the regional patterns of party membership.

## 1.5 Chapter Outline

After this introduction, a comparative theory chapter argues that single parties may be conducive to the survival of authoritarian regimes around the globe today, because they allow states to reach the grassroots level. The remainder of the dissertation explores this hypothesis through the Chinese case. The dissertation proceeds in reverse chronological order, first illuminating the effects (part 1, chapters 3 to 6) and then the origins (part 2, chapters 7 to 9) of local party presence. Along the way, the dissertation revisits crucial historical episodes, key policy arenas and the arsenal of governance techniques in modern Chinese state-building (see table 1.2). Each chapter not only covers a different time period, but also a different domain of state-building in a party state. The chapters deal with the one-child policy, rural fiscal extraction, averting collapse during the Cultural Revolution, crisis management during the Great Leap Famine, party organization building, member recruitment during wartime and proto-modern personnel policy of the late imperial era. Taken together, the dissertation portrays how state-making and state-remaking have resulted in the structures of one of the world’s most resilient party-based authoritarian states.

| Chapter | Topic               | Claim                                                                       | Method and Evidence                           |
|---------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1       | Introduction        | Party member density is key to China's political map                        | descriptive                                   |
| 2       | Theory              | Effects and origins of strong party visible at the grassroots               | literature, deductive argument                |
| 3       | One-child policy    | Party members are essential for smooth policy implementation                | Multi-tasking model, fine-grained census data |
| 4       | Fiscal extraction   | Party members enjoy tax privileges, yet are helping extraction              | CHIP data                                     |
| 5       | Cultural Revolution | Party members contained the turmoil                                         | primary material, data                        |
| 6       | Great Leap Forward  | Party members prevented an even worse outcome                               | famine data, GIS techniques                   |
| 7       | Persistence         | Membership Patterns are extremely persistent                                | convergence model, original membership data   |
| 8       | Pre-1949 Warfare    | Japanese occupation as the key determinant for 1949 membership patterns     | maps, recruitment data                        |
| 9       | Qing                | Chinese governance techniques enable the state to cope with an uneven reach | archival material                             |
| 10      | Conclusion          |                                                                             |                                               |

Table 1.2: Road Map of the Dissertation

### 1.5.1 Governance Effects of Strong Party Grassroots

Chapters 3 to chapter 6 show that party membership patterns go a long way in explaining important governance outcomes. The most robust finding of this dissertation is that in the contemporary People's Republic of China, the degree of party saturation leads to fundamentally different governance outcomes at the local level. This result might not hold true for all policy areas, especially not for routine enforcement in public goods provision achieved by the bureaucracy alone - but it does hold for areas where it is most difficult and most important for the Chinese regime to deploy its authority.

Chapter 3 studies the ambitious one-child policy, which has shown the extraordinary effectiveness of the Chinese party state as a policy enforcer. Based on a modified version of a standard game-theoretical model, it clarifies the distinct functions of the party versus the bureaucracy. Thanks



to newly available, unusually fine-grained census data, it is possible to quantify empirically the distinct impact of bureaucracy and party on the effectiveness of one-child policy implementation. While the presence of government officials was enough to reduce surplus births, only the presence of party members could contain the detrimental, unintended side-effect of uneven sex ratios at birth. Crimson localities are better at avoiding sex-selective abortions. This illustrates that state strength is not always a result of institutional arrangements at the top-level political center, but in this case is a result of local government effectiveness, achieved by the symbiosis between party and bureaucracy at that grassroots level. In places where the regime party is more present, we see a better-informed government and a more effective implementation of the one-child policy.

While the one-child policy is a distinctively Chinese policy, the following chapter 4 studies a universally used measure of state strength, namely fiscal extractive capacity. Complementing the well-established notion that parties function as expensive rent-distributing machines, the chapter is a reminder that in the case of the world's more successful parties, one must also look at the mirror image of rent distribution, namely revenue collection: The party gives, but the party also takes away. Parties are costly, but strong parties provide fiscal gains that more than offset such costs. The case of the CCP demonstrates that the provision of patronage can be compatible with a more constructive role of a regime party. In exchange for material benefits to its members, the party not only gets political loyalty, but increased extractive capacity. Places with greater party presence have significantly higher rates of fiscal extraction, even if party members themselves are more lightly treated. In crimson areas, the government extracts more taxes than in pink areas, because party networks help to overcome asymmetric information problems usually associated with tax collection in rural areas. At the same time, party members enjoy significant tax breaks. On balance, the party pays off: A simulation shows that making the party smaller would save some

resources, since the state would have to give out fewer privileges; but the loss of tax revenues exceeds this gain.

Recognizing that one can best assess the defensive capacity of a regime when it is under stress, the dissertation goes on to demonstrate how a strong local party presence mitigated the impact of crises. Chapter 5 studies the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), an era which took the People's Republic of China to the brink of anarchy. These extreme conditions, posing an existential threat to the party state, allow us to discover the forces of resilience and the role played by the party organization. The chapter provides a thick description of how the party informally continued to function in crisis mode when its hierarchy had collapsed. Arguably, the crisis offers clues as to how political order could be maintained in any future crisis. Overall, China's crimson provinces experienced less turmoil than China's pink provinces. Chapter 6 studies patterns of the Great Leap Famine in 1960, arguing that places with a party apparatus most directly born out of the anti-Japanese struggle were also places that suffered less from the famine disaster.

### **1.5.2 Historical Origins of Strong Party Grassroots**

The next three chapters move further back in time to the period preceding the Communist takeover of 1949. The strong link that ties governance outcomes in the present to events of the past is the Leninist party apparatus. Chapter 7, while identifying a recent trend for the party to grow fastest in urban areas, points out that party patterns today are best explained by party patterns in the past: There is great persistence in the geographic shape of the CCP's power base. To understand why the party has more of an organizational infrastructure in some areas of China, but not in others, one cannot avoid historical investigations. A formal model of party membership growth describes the membership dynamics and allows an empirical test, which demonstrates that legacies

of the past do disappear, but only very slowly. Thus, if we want to explain the reach of the state in 2015, we must be able to explain party membership patterns in 1949.

Chapter 8 takes on this task. War contingencies are key, especially contingencies during the formative period of the party, namely the time between 1937 and 1945 when large parts of China were under Japanese occupation. Battle fronts in 1937 continue to matter for the enforcement of the one-child policy 70 years later. Even today, the party tends to have a more sizable local presence in places previously occupied by Japan.

Finally, chapter 9 asks why the central government does not exert greater efforts to even out its reach throughout the realm. If all that is needed are more party cells and more party members, it is not clear why we do not see more efforts at homogenization. As an analysis of governance techniques in the Qing dynasty suggests, not a lack of ability, but a rational calculus may be at the heart of persisting unevenness. Imperial records allow us to reconstruct in minute detail the strategic calculus of personnel planners in Beijing; given the great secrecy of the Personnel Department today, it would be impossible to achieve a similarly complete understanding on governance strategies under the CCP. The proto-modern state-builder Emperor Yongzheng (1722-1735) epitomizes Chinese rulers' ability to engage in "differentiated governance", employing a procedure that allows the state to deploy power resources sparingly and strategically throughout the realm. Arguably, then as now state builders in China, rather than evening out their reach, master the art of coping with an uneven reach.

Even if each chapter is self-contained, ultimately the goal of the dissertation is to bridge the different historical layers to provide a comprehensive view on the sources of Chinese state strength. By analyzing the spatial patterns of Chinese state strength, the dissertation illuminates the sources of the People's Republic's longevity. It draws attention to governance techniques inherited from

the imperial past, to the organizational power base inherited from the revolutionary wars, and to a variety of tactics to foster resilience, extractive capacity and implementation effectiveness of China's party state. From the perspective of authoritarian rulers, China is an ideal-typical case that demonstrates what a party can do for an authoritarian regime.

## Chapter 2

# Toward a Theory of Authoritarian Regime Parties

Political parties are the best hope of survival for authoritarian leaders in modern societies (Huntington, 1970). As socio-economic development puts increasing strains on non-democratic systems and as episodes of economic downturn can quickly bring regimes to the brink of demise, authoritarian leaders have a better chance of survival if they rely on a party apparatus rather than on personalistic arrangements or military cliques (Geddes, 1999).<sup>1</sup> Having recognized that parties make such a big difference for authoritarian durability, the literature on authoritarian parties is now among the most vibrant fields of political science inquiry. This literature has pinpointed two

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<sup>1</sup>Writing in the early 1960s and comparing the early post-colonial experiences of 83 developing countries, Fred van der Mechten found that coups were most likely in countries without effective parties and in democracies. Party-based authoritarian systems experienced by far fewer coups. Within this group, two-party systems were less stable than one-party dominant systems; one-party dominant systems were less stable than one-party systems; and proletarian party systems were the most stable of all (von der Mehden, 1964, p.65). This last assertion has withstood the test of time, since the same regimes, which van der Mechten had listed in this category, are still in place after 50 years: Communist China, North Korea and North Vietnam (*ibid.*, p.56). Van der Mechten classified Cuba and Laos with “states that have no parties or in which parties do not play effective governmental roles” (*ibid.*, p.54). An understandable (Cuba) or indisputable (Laos) choice at the time, later developments in the two countries further confirm Mehden’s point.

important questions: First, how exactly do authoritarian parties contribute to regime durability; and second, what makes authoritarian parties strong to begin with. To both questions, tentative answers are emerging. This dissertation seeks to contribute to these ongoing efforts by introducing into the debate the case of the People's Republic of China. But before delving deep into the case of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), I develop in this chapter elements for a new theory of authoritarian regime parties, which could plausibly apply to many other undemocratic governments as well.

The first question, which my theory addresses, asks how exactly effective parties help regime durability. The existing literature revolves around three central ideas, as the following section spells out in more detail. Each of these ideas captures important aspects of contemporary regime parties. But the focus is too narrow and the emerging literature on authoritarian parties misses key aspects of what authoritarian parties are, what they do and how they make regimes strong.

- According to conventional views, authoritarian parties moderate elite conflict. In fact, regime parties operate not only at the centers of power, but also at the periphery. Often the distinct strength of parties is precisely their deep penetration of society and their nationwide projection of authority based on their local presence.
- According to conventional views, authoritarian parties dispense patronage. In fact, regime parties do many other things as well, and the “ability” to manage patronage provision may not be their distinctive strength. Patronage systems are costly, prone to malfunctioning and tend to break down in times of economic downturn. In the long run corruption undermines regime legitimacy, whereas the stronger kinds of regime parties play a genuinely constructive role in state-building.

- According to conventional views, authoritarian parties are essentially democratic institutions in an authoritarian setting, functioning as input institutions, as liberal concessions and as tools to control electoral and legislative processes. Most parties do display democratic features, but authoritarian regime parties are notable for their fundamentally authoritarian functions. Membership recruitment provides a signal of loyalty, party hierarchies exercise tight control within the party and around it, and party members are at the heart of top-down mobilization of society, especially in times of crisis.

This dissertation intervenes in the literature to redirect attention from the center to the grassroots, from patronage systems to a broader set of functions, and from a democratic to an authoritarian interpretation of parties.

The second question asks where effective parties come from in the first place. Research on the origins of strong regime parties has been underway for decades, but has taken on greater urgency since the recognition that strong regime parties stand between authoritarian durability and democratic transition. My dissertation moves the debate forward on several fronts.

- There is an emerging consensus that strong parties are born of violent, revolutionary struggle. But the existing, cross-national comparisons have serious limitations. The dissertation provides a subnational test of whether in China the violent legacy of the anti-Japanese struggle has a measurable effect on party strength at the local level. It turns out that the party tends to be stronger in places occupied by Japanese forces during the wartime period.
- The Chinese case also allows us to address empirically a question that has been discussed theoretically, but has barely been addressed empirically, namely, whether the effect of violent, revolutionary struggle gradually disappears over time, and if it does disappear, how fast.

- The availability of governance techniques influences what party leaders can achieve with their organization. While regimes can learn governance techniques from other countries, importing foreign institutions is fraught with difficulties.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, inventing new governance techniques is a possibility, but the ease with which it can be done depends on historical legacies. In a context where party leaders have at their disposition a rich set of organizational technologies, they will be able to build stronger parties. In the Chinese case, the toolbox of organizers is particularly well-equipped, containing Dengist, Maoist, and Leninist tools, as well as governance techniques inherited from the imperial and Republican era.

The Chinese example is an almost paradigmatic case of a regime party that is strong thanks to a particular legacy of revolutionary struggle. The case illuminates the transmission mechanism through which a cause in the distant (at least from the perspective of a mainstream political scientist) past affects an outcome in the present.

By and large, this dissertation addresses the two questions separately. Partly, this is for practical reasons of presenting the material. One question calls for an investigation of the present functioning of authoritarian regimes, but the other pulls us toward the past, with the foundational moment of many parties situated in the early 20th century or even earlier. Partly, analytical considerations require a separate analysis. Analyzing the micro-mechanics by which regime parties contribute to authoritarian regime durability amounts to specifying in detail key causal pathways that connect effective regime parties to regime durability, with authoritarian *party strength being the explanatory or independent variable*. By contrast, when probing into the origins of strong parties, authoritarian *party strength appears as the response or dependent variable*. In other words, the dissertation moves

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<sup>2</sup>Peter Hall and David Soskice have studied this problem in their analysis of the varieties of capitalism. Common knowledge, informal rules and path dependencies impede a wholesale import of foreign institutions (Hall and Soskice, 2001).



back the causal channel by first explaining regime durability with strong regime parties and then explaining strong regime parties as a result of historical causes. Nevertheless, one must keep in mind that there is added-value in considering both questions simultaneously, as recent work by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way demonstrates: Ideologically-driven conflict makes authoritarian parties strong, and it is precisely this same ideological endowment that provides a non-material mechanism by which strong parties sustain authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way, 2012). It makes sense to deal with the two research questions separately, but as parts of the same project.

This chapter identifies current frontiers in the research on authoritarian parties and then moves into theoretically less well charted territory. Building on the existing literature, the chapter's purpose is to prepare the ground for testable hypotheses. This means developing a paradigm that can be translated into falsifiable hypotheses, to be successively presented in the empirical chapters. The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. The following section 2.1 reviews the literature and points out that existing research on regime parties is too narrowly focussed on a small set of functions. Correcting what could be called a democratic bias in the research on authoritarian parties, section 2.2 calls for an analytical move away from centers of power and claims that parties make the state strong at the grassroots level. Turning the characterization of parties as patronage distribution machines on its head, the section argues that strong parties also help the state with fiscal extraction and policy implementation. Section 2.3 revisits findings about the origins of strong parties. The case of China not only provides unique possibilities for testing, at a subnational level, existing hypotheses on the historical origins of strong parties. It also suggests institutional dynamics of gradually disappearing historical legacies. The section introduces the important, yet often overlooked, role of inherited governance techniques available to leaders as an institutional legacy of the past. An explanation of the CCP's effectiveness can only be satisfactory

if it takes into account institutional legacies going back as far as the imperial area. Section 2.4 provides an overview of the universe of cases to which the theory of regime parties applies. Taken together, the amendments suggested in this chapter help the theory of authoritarian parties to sit more comfortably with authoritarian realities. The amendments bridge the gap between the literature on authoritarian parties and the case of China.

## **2.1 The Literature on the Functions of Regime Parties**

What makes regime parties so useful to authoritarian rulers and how exactly do regime parties contribute to regime durability? Famously arguing that traditional modes of governance are inappropriate to preserve political order in modernizing societies, Samuel Huntington suggested that political parties may be able to live up to the challenges of political modernity and preserve political order not only in democracies, but also under authoritarian conditions (Huntington, 2006 (1968)). Since the collapse of many authoritarian regimes at the end of the 20th century, specifying the link between effective regime parties and authoritarian regime durability has been high on the research agenda of comparative politics. While Huntington is notable for his broad vision of political parties, research three decades later has taken a more narrow view of their functions. Highlighting parties' ability to defuse elite conflict and to distribute patronage, the predominant approach in the literature now studies two related functions of authoritarian parties, namely a "bargaining function" and a "mobilizing function", both revolving around the exchange of material benefits for political loyalty (Magaloni and Kricheli, 2010). One may question whether regime parties are really as uniquely effective at fulfilling these functions. But the main problem with existing arguments is that they overlook key aspects of authoritarian governance. The existing arguments are not wrong, but incomplete. As the Chinese and other cases of authoritarian regimes remind us, the literature

on authoritarian parties lost sight of a whole range of important political functions that regime parties fulfill.

### **2.1.1 Regime Parties as Mediators of Elite Conflict**

In the quest for understanding the function of regime parties, analysts have directed much of their attention to the centers of power. This is curious, because it is precisely at the pinnacle of authoritarian power that even highly institutionalized single-party regimes look most similar to personalistic regimes. The recent surge of interest in the functions of authoritarian parties began with an influential article published by Barbara Geddes in 1999, empirically vindicating Huntington's earlier conjecture and presenting evidence that the survival of authoritarian regimes depends on the type of regime, with single-party regimes being the most durable type (Geddes, 1999). The article gave new impetus to research on what makes party regimes so different from other types of regime and of why parties are so uniquely helpful for regime durability. Geddes' article also set a trend by directing scholars' attention to the role of parties in improving elite cohesion and avoiding political defection.

By now, there is a growing consensus among political scientists that regime parties contribute to authoritarian durability by helping to defuse elite conflict. Jason Brownlee summarizes the gist of this research when he writes: "In a context where elite differences appear irresolvable, parties mediate conflict and facilitate mutually acceptable solutions. They do so by generating political influence that reduces individual insecurity and assuages fears of prolonged disadvantage." (Brownlee, 2007, p.12) In a similar vein, Beatriz Magaloni describes the dictator's dilemma, as he tries to commit himself for the long term to sharing the fruits of power with the members of his elite coalition. Political parties institutionalize power-sharing agreements, thereby helping

dictators to overcome severe commitment problems (Magaloni, 2008). In short, political parties are said to transform conflict among authoritarian elites in a way that leads to cooperation rather than defection.

To be sure, while the focus on elites unifies much of the research on authoritarian parties, some important debates remain unresolved. There is doubt whether effective parties cause elite cohesion or vice versa. In Dan Slater's arguments about authoritarian durability, elite cohesion is a central variable, yet the party is not a cause, but rather a result of elite cohesion (Slater, 2010). Moreover, questions arise as to whether authoritarian parties alone contribute to regime durability, or whether parties are better seen in conjunction with other regime characteristics, such as legislative assemblies and elections (Brancati, 2014). This harks back to the "functionalist challenge", asking "why autocrats frequently use parties instead of using other institutional structures that could serve similar functions." (Magaloni and Kricheli, 2010, p.125). In search for an answer, Milan Svolik argues that party institutions are superior to other kind of institutions, because party nomenklatura systems are most effective at enforcing term limits and other power-sharing arrangements (Svolik, 2012). When Charles Boix and Milan Svolik translate the logic of elite-unifying institutions into a formal model of the "foundations of limited authoritarian government", they highlight that at the end of the day, it is only a threat of rebellion that can enforce limits on the authoritarian ruler (Boix and Svolik, 2013). Since elite factions would seek to maximize their threat potential and mobilize citizens outside the elite in the event of a rebellion, at least implicitly ordinary citizens play a role in the argument. Overall, the unifying thread running through this research is that elite conflicts take center stage to explain the durability of single-party systems.

The prominent attention given to the role of regime parties in alleviating elite conflict is warranted to the extent that elite fractionalization - a split between "hard liners" and "soft liners" - is

a frequent factor contributing to regime breakdown (O'Donnell, 1982). As a paradigmatic example, in 1986 the Marcos regime in the Philippines fell after large segments of the civilian and military elites had allied against the dictator, who had not thought it necessary to invest into creating an effective party (Brownlee, 2007, chapter 6). The overall record of single parties to ward off elite splits is mixed. Analyzing 227 elections in competitive authoritarian regimes, Ora Reuter and Jennifer Gandhi report that in 19% of the cases they find the most serious form of elite defection, namely, a member of the hegemonic party running against the regime's official candidate (Reuter and Gandhi, 2011). The singular focus on the centers of power raises concerns, however, because it resembles the proverbial search for a lost key under the lamp post. In tumultuous political crises, elite divisions are among the most visible aspects of day-to-day political developments. To make short-term predictions about stability and chaos, diplomats usually report on elite conflict as the most proximate predictor for outcomes of the crisis. Similarly, for the sake of weaving together consistent narratives of convoluted crises, journalists personalize conflicts as personal competition between individual leaders. Surely one should not ignore the area under the lamp post. But what if elite conflicts are a symptom of more fundamental difficulties of the ruling elite to sustain its control over society, that is, if defectors are in fact leaving a sinking ship? After all, if a hegemonic party has steadfast control over society, who among the elites would place his bets against it? Too exclusive a focus on parties as mediators of elite conflict distracts attention from a much wider range of functions that parties fulfill.

### **Elite Conflict in China**

China has served as an exemplary case to illustrate formal models of authoritarian durability based on a strong regime party as guardian for institutional norms (Svolik, 2012). Yet the Chinese case

also demonstrates that the salience of elite conflicts, as well as the ability of party institutions to contain them, can change abruptly. The dramatic events accompanying the democracy movement of 1989 revealed the delicate and tenuous nature of elite cohesion. Within months, disagreement between conservatives and liberals inside the Standing Committee of the Politburo escalated. At the end of the day, it was the authority not of institutions, but of one individual, namely party elder Deng Xiaoping, which determined the course of action and unified the CCP's top leadership - much in the fashion of a personalistic regime (Zhang, 2001, esp. p.355 ff.). If Deng Xiaoping is sometimes held up as a champion of institutionalization, we should not forget that he was the paramount ruler without holding formal office, an extreme manifestation of the observation that China remains under "rule by men and not by law" (Pye, 1988, p.135 f.). As long as the party's supreme power is vested in a small group of leaders, despite advances in institutionalization, much depends on the ability of these individuals to reach compromise. Despite strong incentives for accommodation, political brinkmanship and personal idiosyncrasies of one leader can threaten the strategic equilibrium holding the regime together.

To be sure, institutions of the CCP have helped to mitigate the type of elite conflict that would typically accompany leadership successions. The 2002 power transition from Jiang Zemin's third generation of leaders to Hu Jintao's fourth generation was remarkably smooth. As Andrew Nathan and others have argued, this was the result of "norm-bound succession politics", reflecting the gradual institutionalization of the CCP (Nathan, 2003). This interpretation corresponds to broader historical narratives of political developments in the People's Republic of China. After the official end of the Cultural Revolution, under Deng Xiaoping's lead, the empowerment of institutional procedures over the role of personal influences became an official goal of the CCP (CCP, 1981). Spending time in exile during the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping had "time to ponder"

ways to achieve lasting political order, with conclusions that were more complex than simply a call for institutionalization (Vogel, 2011). Even when ostensibly working toward an ideal of institutionalization, such as introducing a retirement norm for party officials (Manion, 1993), factional and personalistic considerations were always a part of Deng's tactics. Striving for institutionalization, Deng Xiaoping nevertheless claimed an exception for himself and held onto his position above the institutions.<sup>3</sup> At a second look, even the exemplary smoothness of the 2002 transition turns out to be deceptive, as it might have "had more to do with the powerful legacy of patriarch Deng Xiaoping than it did with institutionalization" (Gilley, 2003, p.20).

Moreover, the 2002 transition was exceptional. Heated factional power struggles determined all three preceding power transitions, as well as the following power transition from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping, which turned the year 2013 into "one of the most dramatic years in recent Chinese politics" and demonstrated the "limits of institutionalization" (Fewsmith, 2013). A group around the powerful and popular princeling Bo Xilai had tried to challenge Xi Jinping's faction (Asahi Shimbun Beijing Office, 2012). Bo Xilai's faction lost out, and purges in the guise of an anti-corruption campaign soon rocked the country. Putting into perspective the assertion that the stakes for the leaders involved in competition are more moderate than in the past, the outcome of the power struggle still retains the character of winner-takes-all payoffs. While Xi Jinping is quickly centralizing power in his own hands, Bo Xilai's supporters are persecuted on corruption charges. Bo Xilai was sentenced to life-imprisonment, his wife received a suspended death sentence and other supporters are imprisoned awaiting trial, most prominent among them former top leader Zhou Yongkang. In short, internal power struggles among the elite continue to characterize the regime, despite the existence of a single-party. Keeping in mind that most internal disagreements

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<sup>3</sup>Conversation with Ezra Vogel, July 2014.

remain hidden from the eyes of outside observers, the track record of volatility makes it doubtful whether even a strong regime party like the CCP immunizes the leadership against conflict and defection. There is always the risk that one faction, using unconventional tactics, will threaten the stable, strategic equilibrium; even in the absence of major economic turmoil, this risk materialized in 2012.

### **Elite Conflict Elsewhere**

Historically, the record of authoritarian parties in alleviating elite conflict is mixed, in other countries as well. Even regimes that yesterday appeared as compelling examples of elite conflict-defusing parties, must be re-evaluated today. Take, for example, the United Malays National Organization and the National Democratic Party of Egypt. Based on careful analysis, Jason Brownlee found that the two parties were able to defuse elite conflict and to solidify their countries' regimes, as they "curbed elites' incentives to exit the regimes or push for change from outside" (Brownlee, 2007, chapter 4). In both cases, however, recent political developments weaken this line of argument. The problem is not so much the fact that the party in Malaysia is losing power and that there was a revolution in Egypt, since it is inherently difficult accurately to predict regime survival. What is problematic is that in both cases the regime party unraveled in precisely the way the theory would least predict, namely with elite defection.

The volatility of party-based elite cohesion is a constant threat not only for the Chinese regime. In Malaysia, the regime party continues in power, but finds itself in a markedly more precarious situation than ten years ago. Over the last decade, the opposition party *Pakatan Rakyat* has risen quickly and has turned into a political force to be reckoned with. The ruling party still holds a majority, but no longer the super-majority of the past. At this point the opposition party is in charge



of several state governments. What is remarkable is the degree to which the political competition in Malaysia has evolved out of an intra-party elite conflict. In the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis in 1998, at a time when the regime was most in need of elite cohesion, a sharp conflict tore apart the ruling *United Malays National Organization*, led to the defection of Vice Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and laid the foundation stone for the opposition party (Ufen, 2009). Today, Anwar Ibrahim has become the figurehead of the growing opposition party. The substantive influence of the opposition party can be traced back to the 1998 elite split. The erosion of the Malaysian regime began with an internal conflict within a party that is considered to be among the strongest in Southeast Asia (Slater, 2010, p.8).

The Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak fell in 2011. The authoritarian regime's National Democratic Party of Egypt survived him only by a few months and was dissolved later the same year, despite its previous strength. When the Arab Spring struck Cairo in 2011, the regime party was in unusually bad shape. Since the 2005 elections, the party had experienced unprecedented infighting, as competing factions were vying for influence, in view of Hosni Mubarak's impending succession (Collombier, 2007). In light of these developments, it seems more than questionable whether a strong regime party is a reliable shield against elite defection. Just as with the *United Malays National Organization*, intra-party elite conflict turned out to be the Achilles heel of the National Democratic Party of Egypt. These two examples are enough to raise doubts: Is it really the immunity against elite defection that makes regime parties so useful to authoritarian leaders?

### **2.1.2 Parties as Patronage Distribution Machines**

Research on the contribution of political parties to authoritarian regime durability also revolves around a second theme, namely the distribution of patronage. To survive in office, authoritarian

regimes must juggle the material interests of their population. At the macro-level, compelling models describe how authoritarian durability and democratic transition result from the nature of distributive conflicts over political power and economic resources, with democracy and dictatorship appearing as alternative distributive arrangements (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006). Studying dictatorial regimes ranging from the Roman Empire to the *apartheid* system in South Africa, Ronald Wintrobe explains the particular institutional setups that dictators adopt as the solution to an essentially distributive problem (Wintrobe, 1998). Following in this tradition, authors explain the value of regime parties to authoritarian regimes as part of an institutional solution to managerial micro-level problems that arise with the distribution of resources to large numbers of people beyond the elite's inner circles.

Most authoritarian regimes engage in redistributive schemes, many on an extraordinary scale. Even in rentier states, which can distribute without first extracting resources, distributing rents is not a trivial task, since it requires dealing with more or less covetous citizens. To understand the political stakes of distributive schemes in developing countries, one must put the volume of the transactions in relation to the resources available to ordinary citizens. Equatorial Guinea is an extreme example. Thanks to natural resource revenues, even after money is syphoned off into private accounts of the ruling clan (United States Senate, 2004), the regime still has at its disposition USD 7,000 per citizen per year in the government budget, which is an extraordinary amount of money in a country where 75% of the population live off less than USD 2 a day (IMF, 2003). In short, even when the resources at their command are extraordinary, especially compared to general income levels, it is not a trivial task for authoritarian rulers to manage the material appetites of their citizens in a way that strengthens their hold on power.

One way to distribute resources is through impersonal schemes. Dissecting agricultural policies

in post-colonial Africa, Robert Bates shows how coercive and sophisticated schemes, such as price controls, have redistributed resources from rural to urban areas, to ward off discontent among the urban middle class, whose rebellion would have been most threatening to the regime (Bates, 1981). Alternatively, in a neo-patrimonial fashion, authoritarian regimes provide material resources in exchange for a personal pledge of loyalty to the regime. Given the size of modern nation states and the impossibility for the ruler to cultivate personal relationships with his subjects, such a strategy requires a sophisticated organization of personalized relationships; regime parties can perform the function of such a patrimonial network. In Iraq under Saddam Hussein, we could observe a neo-patrimonial attempt by the dictator to personally hand out privileges to his subjects “like a mayor”, even when at the end of the day Saddam Hussein did recognize the need to administer privileges through the Ba’ath Party, delegating decisions to investigation committees and to the ordinary party-state apparatus (Faust, 2012, pp. 138-141). Looking for regime parties that are not systematically involved in neo-patrimonial practices, one might think that the best candidates are the most deviant and fervently ideological cases, such as Germany’s Nazi party. But even there, research on the party at the district level has discovered that local party officers were also “dispensers of patronage” (Connelly, 1996). While parties are not the only channel through which regimes distribute privileges, all regime parties seem to be involved in neo-patrimonial practices.

Political parties are adept at carrying out the allocation of resources in a way that stabilizes the authoritarian regime. On the one hand, they provide privileges to foster ongoing support from members of the elite coalition. On the other hand, they keep in check the price tag of these privileges for ordinary citizens, to prevent popular rebellion. This kind of redistribution creates vested interests in the regime. Most scholars of this phenomenon describe how parties function in conjunction with elections as vote buying machines. In Beatriz Magaloni’s view, the ruling

*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* stood at the center of Mexico's patrimonial politics before the democratic transition (Magaloni, 2006). Lisa Blaydes, while confirming that Mubarak's *National Democratic Party* took part in Egypt's political corruption, reminds us that personal patronage networks played a key role as well (Blaydes, 2011). Arguments like the ones by Magaloni and Blaydes presume elections and do not directly apply to political systems where elections do not play a significant role. For such systems, Milan Svolik argues that parties facilitate patronage distribution to party members. By distributing according to the seniority principle, authoritarian parties create incentives for party members to provide enduring support for the regime (Svolik, 2012, ch.6). The function of parties as mediators of elite conflict and as distributors of patronage overlap. Both functions revolve around material resources, with the elite approach highlighting the problem of authoritarian leaders to commit to future transfers, and with the patronage approach highlighting the organizational problem of dispensing patronage. As the authors observe, parties are only one of several institutional arrangements to achieve the same goal.

### **Limits of the Patronage Approach**

Regime parties around the world deploy substantial material resources to buy support and co-opt potential dissenters. Certainly in China, the privileges of party membership have taken on new importance since the system has moved beyond its erstwhile Communist ideology (Dickson and Rublee, 2000). What is questionable, however, is whether money buys stability; whether patronage systems put the regime on a good footing; whether parties rather than, say lineages, are particularly good at administering neo-patrimonial networks – in short, whether the role of authoritarian parties in the realm of patronage provision really is their most important contribution to regime durability. The opposite argument carries much weight, especially in the case of China. The omnipresence of

patronage networks and privileges threatens to bring about the CCP's "organizational involution" (Lü, 2000). The Chinese regime has been aware of this threat for a long time and has been taking measures to curb corruption - some scholars say effective ones (Yang, 2004). Rather than a strength, the more a political system depends on patronage to hold together, the more unstable it may actually be.

Other authors have questioned the effectiveness of patronage as a source of regime durability (Slater, 2010; Levitsky and Way, 2012). Competitive authoritarian systems often disintegrate when economic downturn coincides with general elections, suggesting that patronage networks fail to sustain the regime precisely when the regime most needs them, namely, in times of (even mild) economic turmoil (Reuter and Gandhi, 2011). Taking a second look at the formal theory of patronage-based elite cohesion, one cannot be overly surprised. The game theoretical model by Carles Boix and Milan Svolik, while providing a compelling rationale for the existence of parties, at the same time points to the fragility of these very arrangements. As the authors themselves emphasize, the resulting elite cohesion hinges on the continued existence of a "credible threat of a rebellion by the dictator's allies" (Boix and Svolik, 2013).

Last but not least, patronage-based systems are prone to failure when the rulers run out of fiscal resources. Distributing patronage is one thing, raising resources another. Dan Slater draws attention to the lack of sustainability of systems built on patronage alone. To achieve sustainability, regimes need good reason for people to contribute: Provision pacts are doomed, protection pacts are resilient (Slater, 2010, p.17). Authoritarian regimes must come up with a strategy for extracting resources in order to balance their budgets and avoid bankruptcy. Few regimes have the luxury of easy access to plentiful state coffers, except for affluent rentier states, which comfortably live off of natural resource revenues. For most, the task of extracting money seems incomparably

harder than the task of spending money. Like patronage distribution, fiscal extraction creates sharp distributional conflicts over the question of who will foot the polity's bill. Moreover, over-distributing patronage beyond what the recipient would be content with will not create opposition, whereas over-extracting beyond what the contributor finds tolerable may unleash rebellion. If the party were only to solve the easy problem of patronage distribution, the task of solving the hard problem of fiscal extraction would fall to the state. Under such a division of labor, the party would be giving and the state would be taking away. It is curious that the relatively easy task of distributing patronage is cited as the main contribution of the party to the durability of authoritarian regimes, whereas the hard task of extracting resources is not even discussed in the context of the party's contribution to regime durability. Empirically, it might well be true that some parties spend money without raising it. But that would raise serious doubts about the contribution of such parties to authoritarian durability. Put provocatively: Is it such a noteworthy contribution to stability for a party to distribute resources that have been raised by others?

### **2.1.3 Authoritarian Parties through the Democratic Lens**

The literature on parties, from its inception, has made conscious efforts to include within its purview both democratic parties and authoritarian parties. As a result, the label "party" assembles an astounding variety of institutions. In his foundational work on political parties, Maurice Duverger, whose own biography transitioned from fascist to communist affiliations and later from totalitarian to democratic sympathies (Bergès, 2011), aims for a general theory of parties, analyzing pluralistic parties alongside dictatorial ones (Duverger, 1958 (1951)). The notable volume on political parties and political development by Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner includes political parties from around the world, avoids the imposition of scope conditions and opens up debate among scholars

working on different types of political systems, in a conscious effort to arrive at more generalizable conclusions (LaPalombara and Weiner, 1966).

Similarly, Chinese analysts study the CCP with reference to both authoritarian and democratic parties. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union served as a (contested) model for effective party building until its dissolution, at which point the CCP pivoted to learn useful lessons from its cousin's failure (Shambaugh, 2008). Since the demise of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, political scientists in China have been looking for more positive examples that might suggest ways to improve the CCP, analyzing both single parties and pluralistic parties (Shandong University, 2012). Similarly, the leaders of *United Russia*, in initiatives such as "world experience project," are incorporating lessons from parties in Western democracies (Roberts, 2012, p.157).

Scholars have approached the question primarily by studying competitive authoritarian states, where regime parties are mainly involved in electoral and legislative processes (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p.63). Few authors address head-on the role of parties beyond the competitive politics realm (Svolik, 2012). The less competitive a regime, the less relevant the party's role in electoral and legislative processes is to explaining authoritarian regime durability: When there are no elections and no parliament worth mentioning, regime parties are not a "democratic concession", as often described (Gandhi, 2008).

The problem with a universalistic perspective on parties is that the authoritarian nature of authoritarian parties becomes an afterthought. The literature on democratic parties, borrowing from and building upon research on American politics, is so developed that it is tempting to begin by exploring those aspects of authoritarian parties that look most like the democratic prototype. Since most authoritarian parties operate under conditions of hybrid regimes, studying the democratic aspects of authoritarian parties is a meaningful pursuit. However, the more authoritarian a regime

is, the more the democratic approach leaves out. Jennifer Gandhi's research on authoritarian parties conceptualizes parties as "partisan institutions" and "concessions" designed to provide renewed legitimacy and function in an essentially democratic fashion (Gandhi, 2008). In their review article on authoritarian parties, Beatriz Magaloni and Ruth Kricheli see single parties as one of several "pseudo-democratic institutions to appease potential elite challengers and enhance their longevity" (Magaloni and Kricheli, 2010, p.126) Similarly, Carles Boix and Milan Svoblik study parties as instruments to sustain effective "authoritarian power-sharing" (Boix and Svoblik, 2013). Dawns Brancati summarizes current research efforts as studies of "democratic authoritarianism", particularly concerned with the "mechanisms by which authoritarian states arguably use nominally democratic institutions in order to maintain power" (Brancati, 2014, p.314). It is unfortunate that theories of authoritarian parties turn into theories of pseudo-democratic parties. Authoritarian parties are seldom analyzed on their own terms.

Where do Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party, the Leninist parties of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe or the Nazi party in Hitler's Germany fit? We need to keep in mind the undemocratic-types of parties, those that are by no stretch of the imagination concessions, but sharp dictatorial instruments. Parties are often associated with civic virtues, but there are also parties that stifle civic debate, block political participation and prevent public accountability. Yet parties are at the heart of politics not only in liberal democracies, but also in authoritarian systems. Parties can be instruments that give citizens a voice, but they can also be instruments of authoritarian control. By and large, authoritarian ruling parties are not democratic concessions in an authoritarian context, but powerful instruments in the hands of authoritarian rulers. What both aspects of the authoritarian party and the liberal party have in common is that they create order, but they do so in very different ways. The theory of party-based authoritarianism presented in this chapter breaks



with the prevailing democratic bias, addressing the question of how parties stabilize authoritarian rule and make authoritarian government effective.

It is rare to find ideal-type authoritarian parties: Ruthlessly cruel, centrally commanded, completely unaccountable and made to enrich the leader, such as the *Partido Democrático de Guinea Equatorial*. Yet all authoritarian regime parties display some authoritarian characteristics. Opposition parties and opposition movements under authoritarian systems may display authoritarian characteristics because they may have a natural tendency to take on some tactics and strategies of their oppressors.<sup>4</sup> In hybrid regimes, the democratic aspects of the regime party are only part of the picture; for a complete picture one has to take into account the authoritarian aspects as well.

The CCP is not a democratic concession, but an indispensable instrument of China's authoritarian regime and at the core of the current leadership's governing strategy. The democratic lens has misled researchers to spend an extraordinary amount of energy studying intra-party democracy, or rather, the potential for intra-party democracy of a party that at the present time does not remotely resemble a democratically ordered institution. Without denying occasional and surprising experiments with democratic procedures, such as when certain positions in Guizhou province were filled through party-internal relatively competitive elections (Wang, 2010, p.106), studying the CCP as a pseudo-democratic institution is misleading. The party is not even the primary input institution through which the state learns about and takes into account popular sentiment. The most well-known input institution, with a long historical pedigree, is the petitioning system.<sup>5</sup> Petition offices collect complaints from older citizens. Local People's Congresses come closer to representing the interests of certain economic groups. Internet surveillance also provides leaders

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<sup>4</sup>Carma Hinton's multi-faceted and thoroughly researched documentary film on the 1989 Tian'anmen protests in Beijing makes this politically uncomfortable observation (Hinton, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>The best description of the petitioning reality is Zhao Liang's documentary film 上访 *Petition*

with information, as do “democratic appraisal meetings” where citizens evaluate their local leaders (Edin, 2003).

## 2.2 A New Approach to Regime Parties

### 2.2.1 Authoritarian Parties through the Authoritarian Lens

A gulf separates the ideal-type democratic system from the ideal-type authoritarian system. Yet in reality, instead of discovering these ideal-types, we observe hybrid regime types (Diamond, 2002). Because of the hybrid nature of many contemporary regimes, it is much to the credit of the literature on political parties that it deals with an institution that is at the heart of both democratic and authoritarian systems. Why then does this dissertation treat authoritarian parties separately, deviating from much of the existing scholarship? What is the value-added of focusing on authoritarian regime parties, without including democratic parties? Studying authoritarian parties equipped with concepts and intuitions about democratic parties is enlightening, but it also obscures important aspects that are distinctive for authoritarian parties. By considering only regime parties, this dissertation reverses the prevailing tendency to study authoritarian parties through the democratic lens. To do that, I try to look at parties from the perspective of the authoritarian ruler. It seems plausible that some of the distinctively autocratic functions of a regime party can also be discovered in hybrid and imperfectly democratic regimes, although these functions might be most apparent in the authoritarian context.

The inquiry begins with a new analytical distinction between authoritarian *regime* parties on the one hand and authoritarian *opposition* parties on the other. The following theory deals with *authoritarian regime parties*. For a political party to fall within the scope of this research agenda,

it must fulfill three criteria:

1. The party must exist within an authoritarian regime setting. For the definition and classification of regimes as authoritarian, this dissertation follows the *Polity IV Project* (Marshall, Gurr and Jaggers, 2014): What the authors call “autocracy” or “anocracy”, I call “authoritarian”.<sup>6</sup> According to the database, in 2013 there were 70 authoritarian regimes.
2. The party must stand firmly on the side of the regime. When I use the term “authoritarian party”, it refers only to parties that share the preferences and work in the interest of the regime. The theory does not deal with authoritarian opposition parties. Such opposition parties have a dual nature. On the one hand, they are unwelcome democratic concessions existing in opposition to the ruler, but on the other hand, they may well make the regime more resilient, because they allow the leaders to strike deals and thereby appease the opposition (Gandhi, 2008).
3. The party must be the most politically significant party within a regime front. This means that by definition in any authoritarian regime, there could be at most one authoritarian regime party. Many authoritarian regimes work through a multi-party regime front. In North Korea, the regime front consists of three or four parties, depending on how one counts. The minor parties have a fascinating history going back to the founding of the regime, but have experienced *Gleichschaltung*, that is, they have lost their independence as a result of a coerced synchronization of socio-political institutions to achieve totalitarian control. By now, as far as one can tell from outside, the only significant party in North Korea is the *Korean Worker’s Party*, which would count as the authoritarian regime party. In Ethiopia, we find almost one dozen ethnic-based parties that belong to the regime front. Yet four of these

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<sup>6</sup>These are all regimes with a Polity IV score below six.

parties have joined together and are now sub-parties forming a super-party, the *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front*, which would be the organization counting as the authoritarian regime party (Hess, 2005).

As the overview in section 2.4 will show in detail, by the above definition, there are currently about 50 authoritarian regime parties. Despite their relatively small number, these parties are of utmost consequence for the political life of a large share of the world's population, since they stand between authoritarian durability and democratic transition. This dissertation questions the uses and origins of authoritarian regime parties, investigating two related questions: How do regime parties contribute to authoritarian regime durability and what makes a regime party effective in the first place?

In the search for institutional characteristics of authoritarian regime parties that contribute to regime durability, it is essential to make a clear distinction between regime durability and party strength. Without such a distinction, the argument would risk becoming tautological: In a context where the party and the state are closely intertwined, explaining ill-defined state strength as the result of ill-defined party strength would be circular and do little to improve our substantive understanding of the origins of regime durability. Regime resilience is defined as the ability of the ruling elite to survive in power even when faced with exogenous shocks, including economic downturns, global waves of democratization and the rise of a middle class.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to much of the existing literature, party strength does not refer to characteristics at the elite level, but is defined as an effectively organized and active rank-and-file membership network. The dissertation argues that a strong party, with its grassroots presence as well as its ability to engage in constructive state-building tasks, will help the regime elite to survive in times of crisis. The dangers of tautology

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<sup>7</sup>Whether the rise of the middle class is an exogenous shock is more contestable, since regimes could potentially decide to prevent the rise of a middle class in the first place.

are a natural consequence of our search for proximate reasons of regime durability. Since the proximate reasons leave something to be explained, this dissertation then goes on to investigate the historical origins of party strength in the late 1930s and 1940s. Combining historical with proximate contemporary reasons for regime durability, my central claim is that the legacy of anti-foreign mobilization and the maintenance of an active party network have resulted in the long survival of the Chinese regime, and potentially of other regimes as well.

### **2.2.2 A Regime Party's Role Beyond the Power Center**

It is at the grassroots level where party regimes and personalistic regimes look most distinctive, as local cadres in party-states tend to be tightly constrained by institutional regulations. Certainly in a Leninist-type party-state like China, institutions tend to be more constraining as one moves down the party hierarchy. The theory of authoritarian regime parties presented in this chapter differs from conventional approaches, because it takes the analysis from the center of power all the way to the periphery. In this account, party regimes are strong, not primarily because they prevent elite splits, but because they are highly effective in achieving the territorial reach of the state.

A distinctive characteristic of political parties is their territorial expansion. Sending out their organizational tentacles from the centers of power to the periphery, regime parties typically make strong efforts to achieve country-wide coverage. If successful, authoritarian parties penetrate society throughout their realm, developing intimate familiarity with all the important sectors of society. At an ideal point of saturation,<sup>8</sup> party organs provide a tool to reach into every nook and cranny of society. These particular institutional arrangements are not primarily designed to mediate elite conflict, say, in a succession crises. One might say, however, that the ability of a regime party to

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<sup>8</sup>This ideal point certainly is not 100%. Different authoritarian regimes take a different stance as to whether their party should be an elite organization or a mass organization. Most authoritarian parties aim for attracting about 10% of the population into the party.

effectively mediate elite conflict depends on its success in achieving territorial control first: Any potential group of contenders for power needs to take into account the territorial expanse of the party machine. What a leader gets in return for competing within the party and abiding by the party rules, rather than attacking the regime party from outside, is a nationwide party support network. The greater the regime party's territorial reach, the higher the price for attacking the party from outside. If a party loses its ability to dominate the entirety of the national territory and is no longer able to hold the country together, it also loses legitimacy, signals weakness, creates expectations of party decline and makes defection more attractive. In short, one cannot ignore the territorial nature of the party, which allows it to project authority to the grassroots level. A party regime's distinctive comparative advantage over a personalistic regime is that a party apparatus can achieve a presence throughout the entire realm, thanks to organization.

The political power that resides in a countrywide organization becomes apparent during election times, even under authoritarian rule. Despite significant democratic concessions, in Tanzania the regime party *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* has consistently been able to win elections with an astoundingly big margin. One study of a local community in rural central Tanzania analyzes "nation-building from the hinterlands" and describes the micro-mechanics of the ruling party's success: Local party organizations are extremely effective at mobilizing rural citizens, making sure that party apparel like "t-shirts, hats, kangas, and scarves circulate widely"; not only as a form of vote-buying, but also, and at least as importantly, as a way to achieve a powerful propaganda effect, testifying to the potency of the party. (Phillips, 2009, ch.5) While Phillips observed the crucially important presidential elections of 2005, it is even more remarkable how vigorously and how successfully the party fights for leadership positions at the grassroots level during seemingly less consequential neighborhood, hamlet and village council elections. (Chaligha, 2008, pp. 57-68).

For now, the opposition forces have a hard time projecting power beyond the confines of Dar es Salaam. It is *Chama Cha Mapinduzi's* effective penetration of local communities that until now has sustained its power monopoly.

The presence of the party beyond the center down to the grassroots level is just as crucial to sustain regime power at ordinary times, when there are no elections. In the 1990s, Russia under Yeltsin was a notable example of a regime that ran the country without a regime party. While top leaders sought to convince Yeltsin of the necessity of establishing a regime party, he consistently steered away from close entanglement with parties (Colton, 2008, esp. p. 408). The lack of a regime party aggravated the difficulty of integrating the Russian polity. The central challenge for Russia in the 1990s was to hold the state together, since strong centrifugal forces were tearing the country apart, so that “the center lost an effective governing presence in many Russian provinces” (Stoner-Weiss, 2006). Although it is impossible to know the counterfactual had Yeltsin’s Russia had a regime party, the contrast to Putin’s Russia is remarkable. While Putin’s government has adopted a whole new set of oppressive governance tactics, the country-wide deployment of *United Russia* as a regime party has also made an important difference. Analyzing how Putin systematically constructed his party of power, Thomas Remington attests that *United Russia* now serves as the “premier political institution linking executive and legislative branches, and central government with government in the regions” (Remington, 2013, p.46 f.). The regime party’s organizational presence is found to be an integrative force all the way down to the local grassroots level (Roberts, 2012, ch.5 ). A telling statistical indicator reflects the role of the regime party in integrating the Russian polity: Under Yeltsin, most local leaders won elections as independent candidates, and only a tiny percentage of them, fewer than 5%, were affiliated with a party. By contrast, in local elections under Putin, almost 20% of local leaders won elections as candidates of a party, normally

*United Russia* (Ross, 2009, p.156). Under Yeltsin local politics were almost disconnected from national politics; under Putin local politics are increasingly drawn into national politics.

Historical evidence suggests that in times of crisis, the regime party's territorial reach and its penetration of society is essential for authoritarian rulers to remain in office and to be treated lightly even after leaving office. The fall of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines demonstrates that in the absence of a party organization, a dictator can retain support in a limited home base, but lacking a robust organizational apparatus can hardly achieve countrywide support (Brownlee, 2007, ch.4). Comparing Indonesia and Iran, two populous, oil-rich, Muslim countries, Benjamin Smith explains why Suharto's regime survived through 1998, whereas the Shah's monarchy was overthrown in 1979. He traces the different outcomes to Suharto investing the windfall gains from the 1973/1974 oil boom into a "new program of central investment in local political institutions, which tied them closely both to late development and to the *Golkar* party apparatus", whereas the Shah kept these windfall oil revenues in urban industrial projects (Smith, 2007, p.122). *Golkar*, although unevenly powerful in different parts of the country, nevertheless achieved a remarkable presence down to the grassroots level. Even after Suharto finally resigned in 1998, the *Golkar* party remained a significant political force and in the elections of 2014 was still able to gain 15% of the vote. The remarkable survival of the *Golkar* party into Indonesia's democratic age might explain why new governments were hesitant to prosecute Suharto and his family members on corruption charges. The strong presence of a regime party at the grassroots level might not only contribute to regime durability, but also help the regime party to survive well into the democratic era. Arguably, the regimes in Cuba, Malaysia, Mozambique and Vietnam were able to hold onto power because their regime parties were "cohesive mass organizations" (Levitsky and Way, 2012, p.869).

Historically, political crises in China have displayed important territorial dimensions. The fate



of the country's last dynasty was sealed when in late 1911 one province after the other declared independence from the imperial court, thereby quickly reducing the territorial reach of the central government. During the democracy movement of 1989, the eyes of the outside world were glued to events in Tian'anmen Square. Although shaken by the protests unfolding just outside the leadership compound, Chinese leaders were particularly disconcerted by the fact that protests were spinning out of control in many provincial capitals and even beyond.<sup>9</sup> Observing the leadership transition crisis of 2012, one is struck by how regionally-based Bo Xilai's bid for power was. His efforts to put together a coalition at the elite level were accompanied by a popular mass movement in the one provincial-level city of Chongqing. Yet at the end of the day, even in the era of mass media and Internet, elite factions like the one of media-savvy Bo Xilai found it hard to compete with the official party line at the grassroots level and could scarcely build a nationwide base. More than in other countries, losing control over territory in China would quickly undermine regime legitimacy and lead to expectations of regime decline. The Chinese party-state cannot allow any area of its territory to slip away from government control.

In China, the reach of the party is greater than the reach of the state. The organizational hierarchy of state organs ends at the township level, whereas the organizational hierarchy of the party reaches further down to the village level. The state organs have offices in townships and, if need be, make visits to villages. By contrast, the party has a permanent presence in the majority of villages. The empirical chapters will test the *hypothesis that local party organization contributes to regime durability* by leveraging the unevenness of the party's presence. What difference does it make if the party is present in any given locality? If the party's territorial power matters, we

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<sup>9</sup>Anecdotal accounts suggest that the number of protesters and victims might have been higher outside Beijing than inside Beijing. In the absence of reliable information, it is impossible to verify this suspicion. Police reports that have been smuggled out of the country clearly indicate that the conventional focus on Beijing does not do justice to the nationwide nature of the movement (Zhang, 2001).

would expect the regime to be more resilient, stronger and more effective in places where the party is most present.

### **2.2.3 Rethinking Regime Parties as Pillars of the State**

The second theory about the contribution of authoritarian parties to regime durability pinpoints their role in patronage distribution, regime parties appearing as the mechanism to buy support from a large network of supporters in a neo-patrimonial fashion (see subsection 2.1.2). The patronage approach operates both at the local level and at the elite level, complementing arguments about party-based elite cohesion. By subordinating themselves to regime parties, authoritarian leaders are able to credibly commit to providing the ruling coalition with patronage well into the future. Yet states built on corruption alone are not strong states and regimes built on patronage alone are not resilient regimes. Strong regime parties do more than distribute patronage. From a fiscal perspective, a weak authoritarian party is an organization of costly-to-entertain acolytes, whereas a strong authoritarian party contributes to fiscal extraction. A weak party is a fiscal burden, but a strong party is a fiscal asset. The strongest parties help the state with key tasks that the state bureaucracy alone could not implement.

Effective parties help regimes to fulfill core functions of a state, including fiscal extraction and policy implementation. All authoritarian parties distribute material resources as part of their ruling tactics. But *strong* authoritarian parties, apart from costing money, also extract resources and more generally contribute to policy implementation. To draw attention to these largely neglected activities of regime parties, which could more properly be called the parties' contribution to state-building, I extend an argument by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. The authors argue that beyond patronage, revolutionary struggle has endowed some regime parties with an ideological legacy that

helps to sustain their rule (Levitsky and Way, 2012). At the center of their argument are non-material sources of power. This dissertation explores the large field of party functions that lie in between non-material functions and patronage provision functions of the regime party. The structure of regime parties continues to provide a tangible base for policy implementation. Three empirical chapters of this dissertation are devoted to an analysis of how the organizational base translates into tangible power at the grassroots level. Strong regime parties empower the state by contributing to policy enforcement. Seeming indispensability of a regime party for the functioning of the state gives that party legitimacy because the aura of indispensability lends credibility to the claim that in the absence of the party, not much would be left of the state either.

Occasionally, parties engage in police functions. In Mali during the early years of post-colonial rule, party committees had their own police detachment controlling the traffic at urban checkpoints (Zolberg, 1966, p.95). More typically, the party uses civilian tactics, ranging from propaganda to the provision of actionable information which can then be shared with the police forces. Sheena Greitens suggests that authoritarian leaders face tradeoffs between information-based versus violence-based organizational structures of their security apparatus (Greitens, 2013). Rather than engaging in violent oppression, information collection falls more properly in the ambit of party activities. To the extent that parties do take on policing functions, they tend to be more benign and publicly acceptable. For example, during the SARS epidemic in China, CCP members were manning checkpoints to enforce quarantine rules.

Thanks to their carefully maintained institutional design, strong regime parties have privileged access to information, affording them a distinct, built-in advantage over other state organs. This is an important theoretical point because it suggests a new answer to what Beatriz Magaloni and Ruth Kricheli have termed the “functionalist challenge” to the theory of authoritarian parties (Magaloni

and Kricheli, 2010, p.125). As argued above, parties are probably not the most efficient instrument, and certainly not the only possible instrument, through which a regime can dispense patronage to loyalists. By contrast, I argue that parties are a uniquely efficient apparatus to gain access to fine-grained information of the kind needed for regimes to sustain political control and operate an effective government.

Party networks also serve well for extracting resources. At a minimum, almost all parties collect membership fees. In the Chinese case, the revenue from membership fees is a comparatively inconsequential amount of money, used for party training programs and for assisting party members in financial difficulty; it is far from enough to cover the party's operating budget (Suwa, 2004). More importantly, the party supports tax collection, as chapter 4 will demonstrate. The case of China resonates well with Martin Shefter's claim that parties with a legacy of externally mobilizing non-state resources will continue to have a different relationship to money today (Shefter, 1994). The CCP certainly knew well how to raise resources for its anti-Japanese and its revolutionary struggles (DeVido, 1995). The party has not unlearned that experience. Many of the stronger parties have found ways to raise money independently of the state. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front and its sub-parties not only spend money on patronage, but also raise money by collecting membership fees and by running their own businesses, including transportation, printing, breweries and fertilizer companies (Hess, 2005, p.6).<sup>10</sup> Witnessing the everyday functioning of Tanzania's ruling party *Chama Cha Mapinduzi*, Kristin Phillips has observed how the party distributes campaign gifts during "harvest season", but also how the regime party engages in everyday fundraising activities throughout the country, complementing the contribution of wealthy, urban citizens. For example, the party membership card functions as a widely recognized form

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<sup>10</sup>From today's perspective, these businesses have nothing to do with the state. At their historical origin, they were state monopolies, but through "privatization" ended up as a property of the party.

of identification and people with business outside the village often find it worthwhile to pay the membership fee, mainly for the sake of having a reputable ID card. Another activity consists in renting out the local party branch offices to government officials on business in the village, as well as to the occasional foreign anthropologist (Phillips, 2009, ch.5). In short, parties around the world engage in fundraising, which is the often neglected mirror-image of patronage provision.

Regime parties re-enforce state power, picking up where the state bureaucracy has reached its limits. In East Germany, members of the *Socialist Unity Party* lent their practical support to the state for policy implementation, especially when it came to the more unpopular and more ambitious policies. Party members' onerous duties included the task to "rally their colleagues in support of party and state policy" (Port, 2007, p.126). Moreover, since policy implementation was often premised on the illusionary assumption that there would be volunteers from the masses, party members had to stand in (ibid). In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the *Korean Workers' Party* spearheaded the mobilization of the general population for the successful economic development drives of the 1950s and 1960s (Kim, 2009, ch. 4). Mass movements, wave after wave, were sustained by life-summary meetings 生活總和 (ibid., p.325). In times of crisis even more depends on the ability of the party to roll up its sleeves and get to work. Shortly after independence, in the absence of a functioning civil service, the *Parti Démocratique de Guinée* and Mali's *Union Soudanaise*, albeit themselves quite limited in their bureaucratic effectiveness, "emerged by default as almost the sole instrument of rule [...] responsible for many services normally considered to be within the sphere of administration" (Zolberg, 1966, pp.93-105). In the domestic governance crisis resulting from the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and the Gulf War (1990-1991), Iraq's *Ba'ath Party* took on "many duties at the battle and at the home fronts to assist the military and state institutions" (Faust, 2012, p.310). In light of these diverse activities, one must reconsider the

literature's narrow focus on patronage provision.

#### **2.2.4 An Information Perspective on Authoritarian Parties**

To parsimoniously summarize the advantage of party networks over other institutions of the authoritarian state, such as the bureaucracy, the military or the secret police, one may point to their indispensable function in the information architecture of the authoritarian state. Arguably, regime parties are at the core of authoritarian governance, because they provide their regime with a unique type of information advantage. Leninist-style information processing not only helps to keep the ruling elite in power, but –far from being a pseudo-democratic input mechanism– preserves the authoritarian nature of a regime. The more effectively organized and the more present the party is throughout society, the better the information available to the authoritarian leadership. The party provides information internally on its own members and externally on ordinary citizens.

##### **Information on the core constituency: Party as screening device.**

Authoritarian rulers have a lot to gain from knowing who among the population is most committed. Proper management of a regime party creates a group of people that the leadership knows are politically loyal and reliable. However, in authoritarian settings ordinary people have strong incentives to misrepresent their true beliefs. The party functions as a screening device; the process of joining the party resembles a classic screening game (Mas-Colell, Whinston and Green, 1995, section 13.D). The entrance procedure of many regime parties is designed in such a way that individuals of a loyal type join, whereas individuals of an antagonistic type do not want to join. Depending on the precise arrangement and circumstances, individuals of the loyal type may include both true believers and opportunists, but they do not include those who are less willing to

bend. In the *German Democratic Republic*, it appears that true believers were so hard to find that the party was willing to accept people as long as they were opportunistic enough to support the regime.<sup>11</sup> Reinforcing this potentially very effective screening mechanism, admissions procedures usually also include more direct background checks to establish a prospective member's loyalty. Since the screening mechanisms are standardized across the national territory, it allows the central leadership a vision of its territory and an idea of less loyal communities. In Nazi Germany, even when party membership was most in demand, some areas apparently had a hard time fulfilling the recruitment target of 10% of the population joining the party, as Hitler had stipulated (Lingg, 1939, p.163). Only parties of a more dysfunctional type would recruit indiscriminately. In Ghana after independence, almost the entire adult population signed up to the *Convention People's Party*, following the president's motto that one "cannot talk loudly of building a one-party state and yet drive away persons who would want to join the party and help to realize that objective" (Zolberg, 1966, 96). This did not end well for the president, whose unpopularity led to his overthrow in 1966.

When things are going extremely well for the regime party, it becomes harder to use party recruitment as an effective screening device. In Germany, the Nazi party's organization department found it challenging to ward off opportunists, meticulously distinguishing between party members who had joined before Hitler's takeover and those who had joined later (NSDAP Reichsorganisationsamt, 1935, p.22). Detailed regulations for party membership admission (Lingg, 1939) were based on the principle that the party was a giant apparatus for selecting leaders (*Führungsauslese*) (NSDAP, 1939, p.3). As a result, one's membership ID number, indicative of the date of entry, came to serve as a metric of political loyalty. Members with membership numbers below 100,000 were considered the most reliable "old guard" because they had joined the party before the party's

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<sup>11</sup>This is a finding of Mark Allinson's analysis of the official party training program (Allinson, 2013).

ascent to power (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 1983-1992, vol.1, no.10443). A more or less “general” recruitment stop was proclaimed, then partly lifted. But only in November 1944, months before Germany’s defeat, did Joseph Goebbels think that it might be possible to fully “open the gates of the party” to new members, since the regime party was then in a situation when “once again the kinds of people we will be able to recruit may have all kinds of reasons to join the party, but not opportunistic ones” (Fröhlich, 1996, part II, vol.14, p.158). Goebbels planned another recruitment stop as soon as Germany had won the war, expecting another onslaught of “knights of opportunity”.

Vis-à-vis its members, the party functions as a monitoring device. Members of regime parties submit to “voluntary iron discipline”, as China’s former president Liu Shaoqi once formulated it in a famous speech on the principles of party organization (Liu, 1950, p.3). Regime parties have a fine-grained arsenal of punishments to maintain party discipline. Party members dread being rebuked by a higher-ranking cadre, knowing that a critical entry in their file will stay with them to the grave. Specialized agencies, such as the Discipline Inspection Commission in China, prosecute party members outside the ordinary legal system, with even fewer procedural protections, as we witness in the current “anti-corruption” campaign. As I will illustrate in greater empirical detail, party members can be deployed to achieve practical state goals, including implementation of vital policies. The membership networks of an authoritarian party provide the regime’s leaders with a loyal workforce on the ground that can be quickly mobilized and flexibly deployed, especially in times of crisis. Studying the party as a screening device departs from existing approaches by taking into account the great value for the regime in identifying individuals whose political preferences and personality type render them particularly useful instruments for the authoritarian regime.



## Information acquisition from society at large

The party is also the vehicle for reaching beyond the confines of its membership into the broader society, monitoring and mobilizing ordinary citizens. In its most intimate circle, the party disciplines its members and their family members, for whose behavior the party member can be held accountable as well. As mass organizations, parties deeply penetrate society, reaching all across the territory and accessing diverse strata of society - in the Chinese jargon “taking root among the people”. During land reform, Chinese cadres learned to collect detailed information on the distribution of power and resources, as well as on personal networks in local communities.<sup>12</sup> The degree of detail known to the revolutionary organizers is remarkable (Luo, 2013). Today, a key goal of party organization departments is to achieve saturation, which is not omnipresence but a “sufficient” presence throughout society. The recruitment of white-collar intelligentsia by Leninist parties as well as the opening-up of the CCP to capitalists were driven by concerns of legitimacy and participation, but also had the effect of tapping into segments of society with access to important kinds of information. The CCP has developed specialized instructions for cadres leading different types of party cells, fine-tuning organizational practices to the realities of rural communities, urban settings, university campuses and government agencies.<sup>13</sup> Chinese leaders have arguably turned civil society into an asset serving regime resilience (Perry, 2014), thanks to being an “attentive authoritarian regime” (Perry, 2012*b*). One important way for the party-state to stay up-to-date when it comes to civil society is to systematically organize party members to join society (CCP Organization Department, 2007, p.113.f). Another initiative targets migrant workers, making it easier for

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<sup>12</sup>Prefectural archives that I visited in Shandong have extraordinarily detailed socio-political data, often village by village.

<sup>13</sup>The central government carefully tailors its guidelines for local party leaders, depending on the social environment in which they work (CCP, 2001). Similarly, in their annual reports, subordinate party organizations, like Shandong’s Party Committee, report separately on party construction in education, industry, rural areas, urban neighborhoods and government administration (CCP Shandong, 2004-2013).

party members to transfer their personnel file between home town and temporary workplace. In short, the CCP pursues an explicit strategy of penetrating sectors of society and enhancing access to information.

Thanks to this deep penetration of society, parties often have access to extraordinary information and are the eyes and ears of the regime. In his meticulous study of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party, Aaron Faust describes a very well-informed party that kept accurate records on communities and individuals around the country, especially its own members; Faust concludes: "That information about so many aspects of Iraqi state, society, and personal life are included in the Ba'ath Party's archive is just one piece of evidence proving that the party constituted the unifying thread within the totalitarian system that Hussein used to control Iraq." (Faust, 2012, p.10). Collecting accurate information poses dilemmas. Relying on denunciation often backfires, sowing discord, proving unreliable and threatening leaders. This led the Nazi Party to abandon its erstwhile strategy and declare that "denouncers will be smacked in the face!" (Gerth, 1940, p.540). From the perspective of the regime, denunciations have to occur quietly and flow straight to the centers of power. China's current party purge, masquerading as an anti-corruption drive, can rely on denunciation thanks to a standardized system of public criticism that sidelines government agencies and centralizes the information in the hands of the CCP's Disciplinary Inspection Commission.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in Communist East Germany, experience with the powerful apparatus of the State Security shows that the party was not safe from investigation by and criticism from the agents. It also shows that a security apparatus could collect a lot of information like "like a spider in the web"<sup>15</sup>,

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<sup>14</sup>The standardized procedure is known as "12388 Process", after the telephone hotline for that purpose. Nowadays, denunciations can be transmitted via the internet on specialized homepages 舉報網站, set up by the Disciplinary Inspection Commission. After leading the visitor to the right jurisdiction or government branch, the website has a prominently placed button marked: "I want to denounce!" 「我要舉報」 <http://www.12388.gov.cn/>, last checked August 2014.

<sup>15</sup>The last head of State Security, Erich Mielke, is said to have used this expression.

yet fail to correctly interpret the massive built-up of popular resentment that led to the fall of the regime. Party structures allow rulers to mobilize communities and implement policies; conversely, by mobilizing communities and implementing policies, otherwise elusive parties develop a tangible presence in local communities throughout the realm. The degree to which ordinary citizens readily participate in party-led campaigns generates information on where citizens stand politically. The mobilization in typical regime parties is top-down; movements are initiated based on instructions from above.

The advantage that the CCP has over the government is not one of creating *more* information in terms of sheer quantity. Instead, the party's advantage lies in its access to a *special kind* of information, one that is both hard to gather and indispensable for maintaining political control. The CCP specializes in soft information about changing popular sentiments and shifting political moods. It puts current events into local context, both in terms of socio-economic conditions and a comprehensive case history. Local party leaders are trained to conduct comprehensive evaluations, as opposed to the more compartmentalized approach of ordinary bureaucrats. To make this characterization more concrete, take the example of popular protests. I rely here on material from China's Ministry of Public Security, namely an internally published analysis of "mass incidents", which include rural protests, worker strikes and political demonstrations (Zhou, 2000). After emphasizing the role of information in managing popular protest, the analysis suggests a division of labor between party apparatus and government agencies when collecting information. When the local Office of Public Security first learns about a mass incident, it has to assemble a case file. This file includes hard facts on the time of the mass incident, the number of participants, the slogans that were shouted, all of which should be collected from the local police department. However, for the softer and less well-defined kinds of evaluative information, the Office of Public Security turns

to the party branch closest to the incident to elicit information on “grassroots party strength” 「基層黨組織的力量」 and the local party’s “basic attitude toward the incident” 「對事件基本態度」. (Zhou, 2000, p.157) No matter how many detailed facts are collected on an incident, it is clear that the strategy for dealing with the incident hinges on the quality of this more evaluative and softer information coming from the party. The local party organization and the information it provides greatly improve the state’s ability to deal with turmoil, even when public security organs are also very interested in monitoring the political mood of the citizenry<sup>16</sup> One reason is that the visit of public security agents is more intimidating and antagonizing than the more cheerful and familiar conversations with a civilian party member. In short, effective regime parties may not have *more* information than the government, but they have the *hardest-to-get* and the *most actionable* kinds of information.

## 2.3 Historical Origins of Authoritarian Party Strength

Why are authoritarian parties so much stronger in some places than in others? While factors such as socio-economic structure and electoral institutions determine the size and shape of democratic parties, in the case of authoritarian parties the existing scholarship indicates that the historical circumstances of party creation provide the most promising clues to understanding authoritarian party strength. For better or worse, the foundational moment endows the authoritarian party with an institutional legacy from which it usually cannot break free. This section first provides an overview of existing explanations for authoritarian party strength. It then goes on to suggest how the Chinese case can help to improve extant theories by offering a more tangible causal pathway, and

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<sup>16</sup>The Ministry of State Security routinely and openly sends its agents to visit and interview citizens, especially ahead of sensitive events and significant anniversaries, to learn about the quickly changing attitudes among the people.

by taking the idea of authoritarian party strength to the subnational level for theory-testing. In the Chinese case, Japanese occupation during World War II, although not the only factor determining party strength, goes a long way in explaining why even today the CCP remains so much stronger in some areas of the country than others.

### **2.3.1 War Made the State, Liberation War Made the Party**

According to a well-known paradigm of the state-building literature, the emergence of Western European nation states -and probably the emergence of many other states as well- is closely linked to geopolitical competition, summarized by Charles Tilly's pithy dictum: "War made the state, and the state made war." (Tilly, 1975, p.42) Authoritarian parties have more in common with the violent origins of nation states than with the peaceful origins of ideal-typical democratic parties. Democratic parties tend to arise from peaceful electoral and parliamentary processes (Duverger, 1958 (1951)), but authoritarian parties are "usually the product of a national or revolutionary struggle": "[T]he more intense and prolonged the struggle for power and the deeper its ideological commitment, the greater the political stability of the one-party system which is subsequently created" (Huntington, 2006 (1968, p.424 f.)). In short, revolutionary and anti-colonial wars make strong parties.

The recognition that violent struggles make strong parties has a totalitarian pedigree. In his insightful study of unitary parties, comparing the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, the Kemalist party in Turkey, the fascist party in Italy, Salazar's party in Portugal and the National-Socialist party in Germany, the Romanian right-wing intellectual Mihail Manoilescu observes that "too easy a success constitutes a disadvantage for a revolutionary party."<sup>17</sup> This organizational challenge

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<sup>17</sup>My translation of (Manoilescu, 1937, p.161)

resonated with Social-Darwinist ideology, imagining leadership and membership recruitment as a natural selection of the fittest. At the first party congress after his power seizure, Hitler declared: “What has been imposed on us in the past, partly by the strength of our adversary, from now on must be replaced by our own will.”<sup>18</sup> While in reality the adversaries that the Nazi party faced seem minor compared to the enemies faced by other emerging parties, the idea that enemies help to make a regime party strong resonates with other authoritarian rulers as well.

The characterization of Leninist parties as combat parties points to violence as their essential constituent. The Chinese revolutionary leader most concerned with the party as an organization, Liu Shaoqi, saw that the very roughness of the revolutionary drive had toughened the party (Liu, 1980). Leninist parties are made for struggle and struggle is their *raison d'être* (Selznick, 1952, ch. 1). Kenneth Jowitt draws attention to the importance and the difficulty for Leninist parties of sustaining a “combat ethos” during peacetime, long after the violent revolutionary struggles are over. (Jowitt, 1992, p.122 and p.314). Not only revolutionary Leninist parties, but also “counter-revolutionary” parties, find it vital to maintain a combat ethos. Malaysia’s party remains strong as a result of an elite protection pact against the perceived threat from ethnic Chinese citizens (Slater, 2010).

What is the nature of the foundational confrontation most conducive to a strong party, able to sustain an authoritarian regime even in the 21st century? Besides arguing that single parties are particularly strong if they emerged “in the early and early-to middle phases of modernization,” Samuel Huntington also claims that “the strength of a one-party system depends upon the duration and intensity of the struggle to acquire power or to consolidate power after taking over the government.” (Huntington, 1970, p.12 and p.14) Huntington’s idea was vague in that he did not

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<sup>18</sup>Translated from a French translation.(Manoïlescu, 1937, p.163, fn. 1)

specify what kind of struggle was conducive to strong one-party states. Different authors have taken Huntington's idea in different directions. In the Southeast Asian context, Dan Slater argues that particularly threatening kinds of contentious politics led elites to conclude "protection pacts" fostering elite cohesion. Thanks to elite cohesion, a strong party, a strong state and a strong military emerge. Slater cites Malaysia and Singapore as cases where societal elites faced intractable and threatening forms of contentious politics, so that they stood together and consented to such protection pacts (Slater, 2010). If Slater is right, party strength, state capacity and military cohesion are the result of historical experience as well as an ongoing perception of an endemic and unmanageable threat. The path to strong party-states is decidedly counter-revolutionary.

By contrast, other authors find that there is a revolutionary path to an effective party and a durable state. Asking why some Communist regimes survived the end of the Cold War, Elizabeth Perry observes that all surviving Communist regimes share "a legacy of nationalistic rural revolution" (Perry, 2007, p.22 fn.98). Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way offer a well-specified measure for "sustained, violent, and ideationally driven struggle", which is distinct from struggle where participants are "recruited primarily via the distribution of selective material benefits." (Levitsky and Way, 2012, note 29). Theoretically appealing and empirically convincing in each of the four country cases presented in their paper, as the authors themselves recognize, the evidence is not yet conclusive and therefore the case is not yet closed. There are cases that contradict the theory. In the Kenyan case, presented in the article, the origins of the regime party were relatively peaceful and as a result, the regime party broke down. By comparison, the case of Tanzania is disconcerting, since the origins of its ruling party were even more peaceful, but against theoretical expectations the regime is even more stable than Kenya's. Moreover, the peacefulness with which the nation's founding father achieved independence and the stability of the country since then are at the core

of propaganda messages, which continue to successfully garner support for the regime party during election campaigns today (Phillips, 2009, ch.5).

### 2.3.2 Japanese Occupation Kick-Started the CCP

Is it true that a legacy of national rural revolution has made some Communist regimes resilient while others collapsed during the early 1990s? Was it legacies of national rural revolution that have helped Communist regimes survive other challenges to their survival as well? Cross-country analyses, both of the qualitative and of the quantitative type, must necessarily run into difficulty testing this idea. A probably insurmountable problem for quantitative analysis is the small number of surviving Communist regimes: Elizabeth Perry in her above-mentioned remark counts five cases.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the observations are not independent of each other: the CCP and the Korean Workers' Party share a common history of fighting the Japanese alongside each other in Manchukuo, and the *Lao People's Revolutionary Party* has long been dominated by the Communist Party of Vietnam.

A cross-country, qualitative analysis would run into difficulties as well and would have to wrestle with the fact that under the unifying label of "national rural revolutions" lie drastically different historical pathways. The set of surviving authoritarian regimes (compare table 2.1), and even the smaller set of surviving Communist regimes is much more heterogenous than one might think at first glance. The idea that Communist regime parties are resilient if they came to power by a nationalist rural revolution fits most comfortably with the case of China, although the CCP's political predominance and its institutional integrity have been overshadowed twice by episodes of Mao Zedong's personalistic leadership.<sup>20</sup> In Cuba, it is already much harder to make the same argument. Historically, the party was not in such a prominent leadership position. Initially propagating ideas

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<sup>19</sup>For the regression analysis, one would have to include cases both of the five surviving and the larger number of perished Communist regimes.

<sup>20</sup>Namely during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and during the early Cultural Revolution (1966-1971).



of socialist revolution, when push came to shove during the armed revolution between 1953 and 1958, the Communist Party took a backseat. In the first decade after the takeover, Fidel Castro was in charge. Only in the second half of the 1970s, after a new constitution had been adopted following “Castro’s Leninist conversion” (Jowitt, 1992, p.vii), did the Communist Party emerge as a force to be reckoned with (Griffiths, 1988). Thus in Cuba, it is much harder to trace the regime’s durability to its participation in violent, revolutionary struggles. In North Korea, the struggles of the now predominant Korean Workers’ Party are not quite in line with the hypothesis either, since much of the rural struggles took place outside the country’s national territory in neighboring China, and because the party seems to have deferred to the sultanistic leadership of Kim Il-Sung and his descendants (Armstrong, 2003). In the case of Laos, given the unmistakably Vietnamese roots of the *Lao People’s Revolutionary Party* and the enduring domination of the party by Vietnam, the national character of the revolution is very much in doubt. To be sure, none of these cases directly contradicts the idea that a legacy of nationalistic rural revolution bolsters Communist regimes, but this legacy has been transmitted to the present through different channels, taking on different ideological and institutional forms.

The Chinese case has the potential to allow more thorough testing of the hypothesis that national rural revolutions serve to strengthen parties. Moving from a cross-country comparative mode to a sub-national comparative mode could be a way to overcome both quantitative and qualitative problems and test the intuition that national rural revolution makes a Communist regime strong. Such a move hinges on the assumption that regime strength is not primarily located at the center of power, since a sub-national analysis can only explain party strength at the grassroots level. In addition, the Chinese case allows us to address questions about institutional persistence. If it is true that a legacy of violent, revolutionary struggle is at the origin of strong regime parties, then

we must ask whether such legacies will wither away, remain present or grow even stronger over time. It would appear that some legacies are more persistent than others. In the long run, class-struggle ideology does not serve a regime well, not only because revolutionary parties in power have an interest in domestic stability, but also because successful communists are not supposed to perpetuate class struggle, but to win and thereby end class-struggle. By contrast, ideologies based on a foreign enemy or an clearly circumscribed domestic “other”, as in the case of the Chinese in Malaysia and white people in Zimbabwe, may serve a regime well. In the case of the CCP, a metaphor from physics best reflects the dynamics by which certain institutional effects of the anti-Japanese legacy disappear. Chapter 6 identifies the half-life of history. The anti-Japanese legacy disappears, but at a very slow rate.

Japanese occupation may not be the only factor shaping regional patterns of party membership. However, preliminary evidence suggests that not all past crises and not all past confrontations continue to strengthen the party today. After a thorough scholarly debate, today we recognize that the rise of the Communist party had to do with nationalist mobilization against the Japanese, as well as with communist mobilization against landlords (Pepper, 2004). Yet interestingly, as my geographical analysis later in this dissertation will show, the CCP is losing strength in its former base areas, where it once mobilized people more on communist grounds than on nationalist grounds.<sup>21</sup> Although tentative, this finding highlights the idea that an outside enemy does much more to sustain party strength than a domestic class enemy, because a ruling party interested in stability has good reason to play down and abandon class struggle. Moreover, confrontations at the foundational moment seem to have a much more enduring effect than confrontations later on. The sharp confrontations of the Cultural Revolution, directed against the CCP party apparatus, led to a

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<sup>21</sup>See chapter 6. Thanks to Carles Boix, who suggested analytically separating the Japanese occupation effect with the base area effect.

major effort at institutionalizing elite conflict, but they had a surprisingly modest impact on regional party strength. Although the Cultural Revolution had a much more destructive effect on the party-state, after the end of the turmoil, regional patterns of party strength by and large returned to the status quo ante. The dissertation identifies one additional factor that competes with the history effect and the Japanese occupation, namely conscious and explicit efforts at political engineering, which are carried out by the CCP Organization Department to adjust the party apparatus to the challenges of the time. The following section describes how China's time-honored technique of differentiated governance may guide party-building tactics even today.

### **2.3.3 Governance Techniques Inherited from the Past**

The persistence of regionally uneven patterns of CCP membership poses a puzzle that motivates the last empirical chapter of this dissertation: Why does the Chinese regime, and in particular the powerful Organization Department, not do more to even out party saturation throughout the national territory? Not only is convergence very slow, it is also very imperfect, indicating that the government builds up its party unevenly. A structural-functional argument may go some way to justify the uneven strategy of the government. A better explanation, as chapter 8 will suggest, may be found in the refined governance technique of “differentiated governance”, deeply rooted in Chinese statecraft.

When authoritarian state builders set up or re-organize their regime parties, the outcome will be shaped by the collection of governance techniques available to them. How can we incorporate political techniques as a variable into political science models? Economists routinely and explicitly take into account the availability of technology to explain a large variety of outcomes, for example in growth models (Barro and Sala-i Martin, 1995). By contrast, in the political science literature the

availability of political techniques, both to the ruler and to the ruled, makes only scattered appearances. Studying the successes and failures of popular protest, some approaches take into account the availability of technologies, more conventionally referred to as protest repertoires (Tilly, 1986), including in the Chinese context (Perry, 1992). In Thomas Ertman's arguments on European state formation, the changing availability of governance techniques to state-builders at different times in history plays an important role: early statebuilders had no choice but to rely on relatively backward governance techniques, leaving them with a "sticky" legacy of patrimonialism (Ertman, 1997, summarized on pp.25-28). This section argues that in order to explain the strength of authoritarian parties, the availability of governance techniques might play a central role. Herbert Kitschelt has made some advances in this direction, arguing that internally mobilized parties, which at the time of their formation had access to material resources of the state, are more prone to corruption than externally mobilized parties (Shefter, 1994). Too often, the technical capacity of a party organization is no more than an epiphenomenal side-product. The availability of organizational methods mastered by the principals and/or the agents of an organization and often inherited from the past -in short governance techniques- determines party strength.

Chinese leaders have a particularly abundant organizational repertoire at their disposition. Market economic coordination mechanisms co-exist alongside the organizational weapon (Selznick, 1952) of the Leninist party apparatus, which has survived the "Leninist mass-extinction" (Jowitt, 1992) of the 1990s. Far from being incompatible with a Capitalist market economy, the party organization provided a tool to sustain the market economy, for instance by controlling inflation (Huang, 1996). The nomenklatura system is one of the clearest indications, since it still remains a key for the regime to exercise political authority (Chan, 2004). Leninist features are most easily recognizable as a distinct governance technique because in its relentless proselytizing efforts the

*Comintern* codified and standardized Leninism in quasi-canonical form. Other governance techniques are less easily recognizable, yet at least as important. At the heart of Chinese politics one also finds governance techniques inherited from a Maoist tradition, such as guerilla-style policy enforcement (Perry, 2011), or the *criticism and self-criticism meetings* now deployed in Xi Jinping's anti-corruption purge.

Governance techniques of the imperial period are also part of the CCP's organizational repertoire. Apparent parallels between the imperial and the contemporary period are fascinating to observers. To what extent such parallels are superficial appearances or deep continuities is a more contestable question. The political scientist Lucian Pye refers to Chinese, North Korean and Vietnamese political cultures as "Confucian Leninism", in which the revolutionary cadre is more similar to an imperial official than he would like to admit (Pye, 1988, esp. pp.30-35). Elsewhere, the CCP has been called an "organizational emperor" (Zheng, 2010). Others have pointed out that Chinese parties, including both the CCP and the Guomindang, inherited subversive elements of China's secret society culture (Yu, 1966). As for more visible manifestations of continuity, the petitioning system stands out as a steadfast, uninterrupted tradition. Other traditions were first swept aside by revolution and revived later on. For example, the contemporary civil service exam stands in the tradition of the imperial civil service examination, which was abolished in 1905 (Feng, 1995). The divide between party and state resembles the divide between Manchu rulers and Han officials; both CCP and the Manchu are conquest organizations; both are founded on principles that are foreign to the "Confucian official".<sup>22</sup> And both then slowly adjusted to the practical habits and necessities of Chinese bureaucracy. Writing about China's ongoing "constitutional project," historians Pierre Étienne-Will and Philip Kuhn discovered continuities at a deeper level.

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<sup>22</sup>For the relationship between Manchu rulers and Han officials, see the definitive work by Mark Elliott (Elliott, 2001).

Chinese rulers have always been aware of the great diversity of their empire. Rather than try to standardize their polity at any cost, Chinese governments have treated different areas of their territory differently. Deng Xiaoping's idea of ruling Hong Kong based on the principle of "one country, two systems" has grown out of this tradition, as has the designation of special economic zones, experimental counties and model communities (Heilmann, 2011). To untangle the operating principles of this differentiated governance, chapter 8 analyzes the personnel policy under the Qing, the last imperial dynasty. Aware of the diversity of its realm, the Qing court classified local government positions throughout the country and used different types of procedures to select personnel to different types of counties. One result was that the empire deployed its best talent to places which were both strategically important and home to a difficult-to-handle population. When today the CCP builds up more of a party presence in some places than in others, it follows the same principles.

The technique of differentiated governance is a distinctive, but not entirely unique, characteristic of the Chinese state. Compared to China, bureaucracies of nation-states like France put a much greater emphasis on relentless standardization under centralized control. Western empires, including the British Empire, recognized the advantage of ruling different parts of their overseas territory differently. Within the national territory of Senegal, Catherine Boone found much variation in the way local governments function (Boone, 2003), leading her to the more general observation that it might well be best for governments to forego the advantages of standardization (Boone, 2012). Alisha Holland investigates how law is applied differently in different places, noting that governments have good reasons to practice forbearance in some places, but not others (Holland, 2015), reminiscent of the Chinese approach to law enforcement (Wang, 2015). China does stand out for the explicit, formalized, and self-conscious deployment of differentiated governance by the

country's central authority. From a Chinese perspective, the Western governmental preference to have standardization for its own sake, might appear quite inefficient. Western nations deploy much greater efforts at standardization, to make their countries legible to the central authorities (Scott, 1998).

Is it just a coincidence that the CCP uses the technique of differentiated governance as its imperial predecessors did? The answer is no. This isomorphism is a result of two effects. First, as long as the Chinese state is run on authoritarian principles, its leaders face similar problems and therefore come up with similar solutions. In the area of personnel selection, the problem is to select capable as well as loyal officials, with the accompanying tradeoffs. More generally, as long as power flows from a center to the grassroots, the government will face similar tradeoffs when deciding where to deploy its power resources. In other words, governance techniques from the imperial era remain uniquely suited for a central authority to govern over a large and diverse continent in an autocratic fashion. Second, there is more or less conscious imitation. To be sure, after their takeover, the revolutionaries of 1911, as well as the Communist revolutionaries of 1949, disowned the imperial past. But while some traditional governance techniques, like the petitioning system, were carried on without much interruption, other governance techniques, like a civil examination system, have been re-invented. Checking the archival records, it becomes clear that the tradition of classifying local positions was never discontinued for long; it has remained part of the deeply-engrained standard operating procedures of the Chinese state. It is a telling fact that the in-house publisher of the CCP's organization department publishes work on the imperial *Board of Personnel* (An, Zuozhang, 2011).

### 2.3.4 Governance Techniques of the 21st Century

Strong regime parties not only leverage traditional governance techniques that have served rulers well in the past, but also innovate with a view to potential challenges of the future. Recently, political scientists have drawn attention to one challenge in particular: globalization threatens authoritarian rule. International factors played a pre-eminent role in regime transitions after the end of the Cold War. (Huntington, 1991). Through comparative analysis, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way have isolated two factors in particular, which often determine regime outcome. First, international leverage makes it more unlikely for a regime to remain a stable authoritarian system. Second, and more relevant here, democracy usually will emerge if and only if a country has strong Western linkages, as demonstrated by patterns of democratization in Mexico and Taiwan (Levitsky and Way, 2010). If that is so, what measures, if any, does the Chinese regime party take to neutralize the effect of strong Western linkages?

The most innovative and daring party building initiative of the CCP consists in globalizing its network and setting up party branches abroad. There are many precedents for such initiatives. Occasionally, even liberal parties in democratic states set up fully integrated foreign branches, as the Europe branch of Germany's *Freie Demokratische Partei* exemplifies.<sup>23</sup> In China's own history, the *Tong Meng Hui* 同盟會 as the organizational protagonist of the 1911 Revolution, which overthrew China's imperial government, was founded in Japan, mainly by Chinese students studying abroad (Yu, 1966, ch.2). Compared to democratic parties, Leninist parties for ideological reasons had a much more fundamentally international outlook, proselytizing through the *Comintern* and in the case of China through bilateral cooperation, involving organizations such as trade unions. China's government today is reinventing a tradition of building a party organization with global reach.

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<sup>23</sup>see "Bundessatzung der Freien Demokratischen Partei" [Federal Statutes of the Free Democratic Party], May 4th, 2013 version.



Maybe the most impressive success of a regime party in creating an organization that allows a group of its citizens to engage in unusually close international linkages, while at the same time greatly reducing much foreign political influences, comes from North Korea. After the turmoil of World War II, a large group of Koreans found themselves in Japan. Some returned to Korea, but 600,000 ethnic Koreans decided to take up residence in Japan, about half of whom registered as North Koreans and the other half as South Koreans. In close collaboration with the North Korean government, the North Koreans founded a *General Association of Korean Residents in Japan* 朝鮮総連 ちょうせんそうれん, which today still has 200,000 members. These Korean residents were discriminated against and in some respects excluded from normal Japanese society, even creating their own schools and university, but at the end of the day still lived amidst Japanese society, thus necessarily establishing intimate socio-economic linkages (Pak, 2008; Kim, 2004a; Ryang, 1997). Despite these linkages, the organization has remained a steadfast supporter of the North Korean regime. The association has remained part of the North Korean Regime front and in the 2009 election was assigned six seats on North Korea's *Supreme People's Assembly*.<sup>24</sup> If a social engineer seeks to understand how to maintain loyalty to an authoritarian regime in the presence of high linkages, there are lessons to be learned from the *General Association of Korean Residents in Japan*.

In China, the party organization department seeks to put the CCP in a position to counter potential political threats stemming from international linkages. One obstacle to overcome is the widespread perception that party membership might be incompatible with an international career. Many students believe that ambitions to study and work abroad would raise suspicions among party members. Moreover, vaguely familiar with Immigration and Nationality Act INA §212(a)(3)(D),

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<sup>24</sup>For election results, see [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2085\\_09.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2085_09.htm), last checked June 25, 2014.

they have the impression that Communist party membership reduces their options should they ever end up wanting to get an immigration visa, marry a U.S. citizen or get a job in the U.S.<sup>25</sup> The fact that party members are advised to deny their party membership vis-à-vis foreign authorities raises additional worries. Yet organization departments also make active efforts to recruit students whose careers seem to have international potential. CCP organizers actively seek out students in departments such as “foreign language departments”. In some universities, the organizers have a hard time fulfilling their recruitment quotas among students aiming for international careers.<sup>26</sup> In other places, party organizers make inroads. This can be seen from recruitment targets at universities.

At present, the CCP is innovating through experimental party cells 學習型黨組織, trying a variety of methods to access groups outside the traditional ambit of the party. The CCP apparatus is seeking to penetrating the Internet, targeting the “instant messaging masses” QQ群, even organizing digital party cells and permitting digital party branch membership 數字支部黨員. A related initiative seeks to access the most internationally linked individuals, in particular exchange students, either operating through primarily virtual party cells<sup>27</sup>, establishing underground party branches<sup>28</sup>, or choosing a mixed form.<sup>29</sup>

“Governance techniques” is a variable that functions similarly to the variable “levels of technology” in the economics literature. In economics, there is the production possibility frontier; in political science there should be a governance possibility frontier. The study of governance tech-

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<sup>25</sup>This has been a recurring topic in my conversations with Chinese students already in the US, as well as Chinese students interested in coming to the US.

<sup>26</sup>For example, at Minnan Normal University in 2011, the department of foreign languages could only recruit 77% of the target party members, whereas most other departments at the school overfulfilled their targets. 關於制定2012年發張黨員計劃數的通知 [Circular on the Party Membership Recruitment Plan for 2012], found at [http://zzb.mnnu.edu.cn/News\\_View.asp?NewsID=341](http://zzb.mnnu.edu.cn/News_View.asp?NewsID=341), last checked July 2014.

<sup>27</sup>Such an initiative is based at Hunan University, Foreign Language Institute and the School of International Education

<sup>28</sup>We find this in Britain at Manchester University.

<sup>29</sup>Nanjing Telecommunications University is trying out such a mixed approach.

niques takes us to human ingenuity in social engineering. Given the same structural conditions, the cultural availability of governance techniques and the personal inventiveness of party organizers can result in parties of very different effectiveness. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to develop systematic predictions of how governance techniques affect outcomes. The analysis is agnostic as to whether the cultural availability of governance techniques and the personal inventiveness of party organizers might be explained by deeper structural variables, say, pertaining to party history. Instead, taking a close look at governance techniques gives researchers a sense of the error term: What other factors, usually not contained in empirical analyses, might explain party strength? Any study of regime parties would miss an important aspect of reality if it were not aware of the organizational toolbox at the disposition of some authoritarian regimes, but not others. A study of the CCP's governance innovation is particularly relevant, because from the perspective of other authoritarian regime parties, the successful Chinese model of organizing and modernizing may appear worthy of emulation.

## **2.4 The Universe of Authoritarian Regime Parties**

This section provides an overview of regime parties around the world, to which the theory developed in this chapter might apply. Among these parties, some are strong regime parties, in the sense that they exhibit many of the characteristics that allow regime parties to contribute to regime durability: They are masters of territorial power, they assist in policy implementation and they effectively make use of authoritarian levers of control. Studying such strong regime parties affords insight into the micro-mechanics of how a regime party improves regime durability. Among the many regime parties around the world, there are others that have less of a territorial reach, play no significant role in policy implementation and are not effective instruments of dictatorial power. Weak parties are

also important for comparative analysis. By comparing strong versus weak regime parties, one can isolate what difference a strong party makes for a regime’s durability, and what difference the historical origins of a party make. If the goal were to test cross-nationally whether authoritarian parties contribute to regime strength, it would be misguided to consider only strong regimes.<sup>30</sup> But if the goal is to identify a causal channel and develop informed hypotheses on how authoritarian parties contribute to regime strength, one may focus on the subset of strong regimes that rely on an authoritarian party. At the same time, resilient regimes that have fallen can be particularly enlightening, because they demonstrate the limits of even a strong regime party. This section maps the terrain of authoritarian regime parties, describing the universe of cases and highlighting those cases that promise particularly relevant insights.

#### 2.4.1 The Contemporary Universe of Regime Parties

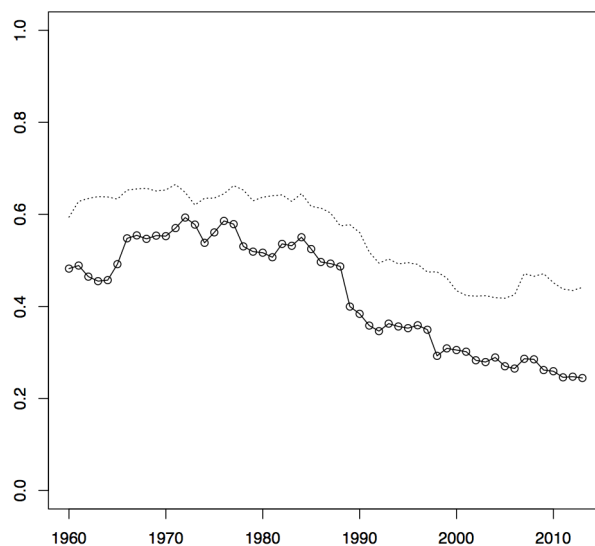
To specify the universe of authoritarian regime parties, I first identify authoritarian regimes, using the amended polity score (variable code name: “polity2”) of the *Polity IV Project* (Marshall, Gurr and Jaggers, 2014). A score of negative six and below indicates autocracies and a score of positive 6 and above indicates democracy. The rest in the middle are hybrid regimes.<sup>31</sup> A narrow definition of very authoritarian regimes would include only autocracies, but a broader definition of authoritarianism also encompasses hybrid regimes. According to my calculation<sup>32</sup>, in 2013 some 24% of the world’s population lived in the 20 remaining plain autocracies and altogether 44% lived in the 70 authoritarian regimes, using the broad definition. The number of people living under plain authoritarianism has declined more markedly than the number of people living under more

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<sup>30</sup> A correct approach selects a random sample of regimes and then studies how regime strength varies, depending on whether a regime relies on an authoritarian party or not.

<sup>31</sup> I use the common term “hybrid regimes”. The Polity IV Project refers to this group as “anocracies”.

<sup>32</sup> This calculation combines the Polity IV data with world population data from the World Bank and for Taiwan with data from the Republic of China.



Note: Line with circles are only starkly authoritarian regimes; dotted line includes hybrid regimes.

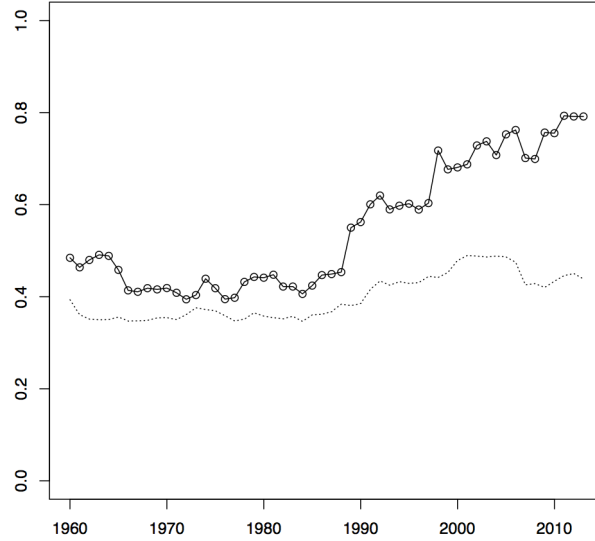
Figure 2.1: Share of the World's Population Living in Non-democracies

loosely defined authoritarian regimes (compare figure 2.1).

By my definition (see section 2.2.1) every regime can have at most one regime party. With 70 countries currently run by authoritarian regimes, there could be at most 70 regime parties. In reality the number of regime parties is closer to 50. In some countries, particularly monarchies, one finds no parties at all.<sup>33</sup> In other countries one finds multiple parties, but no regime parties.<sup>34</sup> A clear-cut case is Brunei. The monarchy allows strictly circumscribed activity of the opposition parties, but has never established its own regime party. Both the *Brunei National Solidarity Party* and the *Brunei People's Awareness Party* are officially registered opposition parties with few members and with little real significance, in part because the law prevents civil servants from joining any

<sup>33</sup>One count has identified *seven* authoritarian regimes without any parties, mostly Middle Eastern oil-rich monarchies: Bahrain, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Swaziland and the United Arab Emirates (Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland, 2010).

<sup>34</sup>According to my estimate, there are 16 regimes of this type. Table 2.1 lists the 25 most populous non-democratic regimes. Out of 24 regimes that have parties, 6 regimes (or 25%) do not have regime parties. Assuming that among the remaining 39 less populous regimes with parties (not counting the ones without parties) also 25% are lacking a regime party, then there would be 6 regimes without regime parties in populous countries and 9.75 regimes without regime parties in less populous countries.



Note: Line with circles are only starkly authoritarian regimes; dotted line includes hybrid regimes.

Figure 2.2: Chinese Citizens as a Share of People in Non-democracies

parties (Damit and bin, 2002, p.88 f.). Less clear-cut cases of authoritarian regimes with parties, but without regime parties, occur as well, particularly in the Middle East. In Iran and Morocco, we find parties, but the delimitation of the regime front and the definition of opposition is ambiguous. In Iran, parties compete with each other and are curiously disconnected from the *Supreme Leader* Ayatollah Khamenei. Yet at the same time, the leading Iranian parties are committed to the constitution and help to cement the authoritarian nature of the system. In Morocco, the main political parties support the constitutional monarchy, but that support is based on an understanding that the monarch continues to carry out his own vision of gradually democratizing the country. In the majority of authoritarian countries, there is a competition between a dominant regime party and more or less outspoken opposition parties.

It is clear that regime parties, of which there are at most 70, represent only a tiny subset of the 6,200 or more political parties existing at the present time.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, authoritarian regime

<sup>35</sup>This is the official count by researchers at the Central Committee of the CCP (Zhou, 2012).

parties are of great importance, because they are a strong bulwark against political pluralization, affecting 44% of the world population. Of these people, again 44% live in China. As the number of plain autocracies declines, China becomes a more important case: In 2013, of all people living under these kinds of autocracies, 79% were Chinese (compare figure 2.2). Table 2.1 lists the 25 most populous non-democratic countries, using the Polity IV score for 2013. These countries represent 89% of the world's population living under authoritarian regimes, providing a good overview of the contemporary universe of regime parties. Eighteen countries have regime parties; seven countries have no regime parties.

#### **2.4.2 The Universe of Historical Cases**

Regime parties tend to be opaque organizations. For the study of regime parties, historical cases can be more illuminating than contemporary cases. While they are in power, much remains hidden from the eye of the observer. After a regime party's fall, depending on historical circumstances, archives are opened and eyewitnesses begin talking. Regime parties usually leave a rich paper trail, even if not all deliberations are put down in writing, possibly in the anticipation of leaks. Sometimes international and domestic criminal courts begin untangling the mechanics of the party, meticulously documenting their findings in court files. Studies on the Nazi party in Germany have reconstructed the mechanics of the regime in unparalleled detail, as a side-product developing the contemporary historian's toolbox and providing much insight into what gaps to expect in the written documentation and in the oral testimonies (Scheurig, 1970). As in other cases, the confiscation of documents by the American military played an important role. Even as late as the 1980s, German historians travelled to archives in Washington, DC, to see copies of documents whose originals were not accessible to them at home (Conze et al., 2010, p.695).

| Country          | Party                                             | Origins                          |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| China            | Chinese Communist Party                           | anti-colonial, social revolution |
| Nigeria          | People's Democratic Party                         | established from above           |
| Bangladesh       | Bangladesh Awami League                           | anti-colonial*                   |
| Russia           | United Russia                                     | established from above           |
| Ethiopia         | Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front | social revolution                |
| Vietnam          | Communist Party of Vietnam                        | anti-colonial, social revolution |
| Egypt            | no regime party                                   |                                  |
| Iran             | no regime party                                   |                                  |
| Congo (Kinshasa) | People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy   | established from above           |
| Myanmar          | Union Solidarity and Development Association      | established from above           |
| Tanzania         | Chama Cha Mapinduzi                               | anti-colonial                    |
| Algeria          | no regime party                                   |                                  |
| Sudan            | National Congress Party                           | established from above           |
| Uganda           | National Resistance Movement                      | social revolution                |
| Iraq             | no regime party                                   |                                  |
| Morocco          | no regime party                                   |                                  |
| Venezuela        | United Socialist Party of Venezuela               | established from above           |
| Uzbekistan       | People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan**         | established from above           |
| Saudi Arabia     | no parties at all                                 |                                  |
| Mozambique       | Mozambique Liberation Front                       | anti-colonial                    |
| North Korea      | Korean Workers' Party                             | anti-colonial, social revolution |
| Yemen            | General People's Congress                         | established from above           |
| Syria            | Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party                       | anti-colonial                    |
| Madagascar       | no regime party                                   |                                  |
| Cameroon         | Cameroon's People's Democratic Movement           | established from above           |

This table covers 89% of all people living in non-democracies. Based on a combination of Polity IV and World Bank data.

\* More accurately: Bengali nationalism, directed against dominance by West Pakistan.

\*\* Communist successor party. In 1996, Uzbekistan's president left that party, making it harder to decide which among the multiple parties of the regime front is the most politically significant (Dagiev, 2014, ch.8).

Table 2.1: Regime Parties in the Most Populous Non-Democracies (sorted by population, 2013)



The toolbox used for investigating the Nazi party could 40 years later be directed to Germany's other authoritarian party, the *Socialist Unity Party*, running the Eastern part of Germany between the end of World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>36</sup> The potential of these sources to illuminate the mechanics of contemporary regimes is enormous. For example, based on an exceptionally comprehensive study of primary material from a variety of sources, Andrew Port presents a case study to explain the puzzling stability of the *German Democratic Republic*, also explicating the role of the regime party (Port, 2007). Across Eastern Europe, governments allow access to the files of former Communist regime parties, although to varying degrees. Outside Europe, a particularly well-documented case is Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party. The Hoover Institution, in an initially controversial move amidst the chaos of war, brought large amounts of valuable material from Baghdad to California (Montgomery, 2011). Aaron Faust has begun to unlock the potential of these documents to decipher the inner workings of Saddam Hussein's regime (Faust, 2012). In Taiwan, the government grants considerable access to information about the *Guomindang* party during its days as regime party, although access seems to have been better when the opposition party was in power between 2000 and 2008. All in all, around the globe, the third wave of democratization and more recently the jasmine revolutions have lifted the curtain on the inner workings of many regime parties.

Studying the durability of historical cases runs into difficulty, because there is a perception bias against thinking of a regime as resilient if it perished more or less spectacularly. Consider the example of Egypt. For a long time, scholars tended to agree that Mubarak's regime was among the most resilient in the world. Lisa Blaydes provided a careful analysis of the power mechanics at the heart of Egyptian regime durability (Blaydes, 2011). The only "problem" with her book is that

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<sup>36</sup>The literature on the *Socialist Unity Party* is abundant. In German, detailed studies look into the previously most secret micromechanics of authoritarian control at the grassroots level (Kupke, 2012).

it arrived in the bookstores in 2011, precisely at the time when the world saw the Egyptian party and Mubarak's regime collapse. No matter how well-founded her argument might be, it is hard to overcome the images we all have of Tahrir Square. Overnight, Egypt turned from a picture-book example of a stable dictatorship into a case of authoritarian breakdown. Scholars of the Middle East began to intone the familiar *mea culpa* of political scientists, whose country of expertise had just experienced a regime transition (Masoud, 2011). What was in demand then were explanations for regime breakdown, not explanations for regime durability. Objectively approaching the subject, one might still argue that Mubarak's regime was durable, yet faced an extraordinary challenge. Instead of going with the fashion, a more rational way of looking at Egypt may go against the grain and continue classifying Mubarak's regime as strong, since it survived the Third Wave of democratization, defied a number of socio-economic challenges and only fell when by coincidence a number of factors simultaneously put unusual strain on the regime. All we have learned is that facing the jasmine revolution, Egypt turned out to be less than perfectly resilient. The point is that after a long-serving regime that survived many perils suddenly becomes history, there is nothing wrong with investigating its erstwhile durability.<sup>37</sup>

Just as it is deceptively easy to think of fallen regimes as weak and surviving regimes as strong, it can also be misleading to interpret regime duration as a sign of regime strength. One must guard against post-hoc rationalization: If a regime fell, one says that the party was weak (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p.73). As Anna Grzymala-Busse points out, "duration alone is not the best measure of regime durability, since it tells us little about the stability of the regime, or its ability to meet and overcome potential crises." (Grzymala-Busse, 2011, p.13). The problem with such heuristics is that

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<sup>37</sup>Elizabeth Perry makes a comparable argument with respect to China. Even if the CCP were to fall in the near future, political scientists still would need to explain why the regime had been able to hang on for so long (Perry, 2011).

weak regimes might survive in the absence of a significant challenge. The *True Whig Party* ruled Liberia almost a hundred years from 1878 to 1980. Taking seriously the modernization theoretical notion of regime survival becoming more difficult over time, one might assign greater weight to survival at later times in history and therefore discount durability in an era of colonial rule.

To accurately determine regime strength is extremely difficult, if not impossible, at least if durability is defined as the ability of an authoritarian regime to survive hardships, such as economic shocks and social upheaval. Maybe the most practically promising approach could follow a methodology similar to that of Ora Reuter and Jennifer Gandhi. They begin by defining a “challenging moment”, namely an election, and then analyze the ability of regimes to survive this challenging moment (Reuter and Gandhi, 2011). In the spirit of this approach, one could measure durability as an error term: First one runs a regression that explains regime survival as a function of “challenges” that are known to favor regime collapse, such as economic conditions or rebellion in a neighboring country. If a regime survives despite many factors that would usually lead to regime collapse, the regime can be called “resilient”. Yet a fundamental problem remains: A strong authoritarian regime may not even have had an opportunity to prove its durability, simply because it was not faced with any formidable crisis. A young regime that has not faced the slightest challenge would necessarily count as weak, even if it would be able to master the most formidable challenges. In the case of China, we know that the regime has been resilient enough to survive the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Asian financial crisis and popular challenges from Hong Kong, to mention just some of the challenges. We also know that its economic planners have been successful in warding off deep economic crisis. But we do not know if post-Mao China is resilient enough to survive a sustained recession, precisely because it has only experienced one transient recession in 1989.<sup>38</sup> It

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<sup>38</sup>Economists define a recession as “a period of declining real incomes and rising unemployment” (Mankiw, 2007, p.739). According to Chinese statistics, 1989 was the only year with declining real income.

is hard to disprove those who say that China’s stability hinges on maintaining a GDP growth of at least 8% .<sup>39</sup> Strictly speaking, only when the Chinese regime falls will we know exactly how resilient it was.

## 2.5 Conclusion: What Makes Regime Parties Strong?

The case of the CCP does not sit well with the literature on authoritarian parties. Too often, the Chinese political system is perceived as belonging to the “almost disappeared” species of “unambiguously nondemocratic regime[s]” (Schedler, 2010) and therefore left out of analyses as a patently odd case. Theoretical arguments resonate insufficiently with the empirical reality in China, with rare exceptions (Svolik, 2012). Today almost half the world’s population living under dictatorship is Chinese. The neglect of such a large number of people severely undermines the generalizability of theories on authoritarian regimes. Fundamentally, this dissertation is motivated by the goal to reconcile our theories of authoritarian parties with the case of China. The theoretical interventions presented in this chapter bridge the gap that separates the Chinese case from the literature on authoritarian parties.

This is not merely a China problem. The China problem reflects more general flaws in the research on authoritarian parties. Efforts to explain the effectiveness of authoritarian parties have converged around a surprisingly limited number of aspects. There is a tendency to perceive authoritarian parties through a democratic lens, conceptualizing them as liberal concessions. In reality, most regime parties function as an effective instrument of authoritarian control. Moreover, the function of parties is often reduced to patronage dispensing machines. While this characterization

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<sup>39</sup>Wen Jiabao famously made the connection between growth and stability (see “Slowdown threatens stability, says PM”, *Financial Times*, November 3, 2008). Since then the seemingly arbitrary number of 8% has emerged in debates as a magic threshold, but is revised downward in light of new economic realities.

might be sufficient to understand the world's weakest regime parties, strong regime parties typically play a more constructive role, assisting the state with fiscal extraction, contributing to implementation; in short, empowering the state. Finally, investigations of regime durability focus on the top echelons of the authoritarian leadership, arguing that parties help to mediate elite conflict. One should not lose sight of the difficulty for a regime to achieve territorial reach at the grassroots level. Parties are uniquely well-equipped to solve the problem of sustaining control throughout a vast realm. In the case of China, these shortcomings in the literature seem more apparent than in other cases, alerting us to the fact that research has long glossed over similar characteristics of other regimes.

The dissertation seeks to unlock the potential of the China case for studying authoritarian parties. In some regards, the analysis of the CCP refines, but essentially confirms, existing theories about the historical origins of authoritarian party strength. In other regards, the case of the CCP is unsettling. Confronting the CCP, political scientists will have to rethink existing theories of how authoritarian parties help regime stability. In some countries, parties are best understood as liberal concessions, but in others parties are best understood as authoritarian instruments of control. In some countries, parties are merely patronage machines, but in others they have more constructive functions. In some countries, the main value of parties consists in fostering elite cohesion, but in other countries the value of parties lies in penetrating the territory at the grassroots level. With respect to each of these alternatives, most country cases are hybrids. Both because of its empirical and theoretical value, the Chinese case promises to change our understanding of authoritarian regime parties and their contribution to regime durability.

## Chapter 3

# The CCP as Co-Enforcer of the One-Child Policy

China's one-child policy was one of the most ambitious, successfully implemented government policies of the 20th century.<sup>1</sup> The stunning goal of Chinese family planning was to reduce fertility to about one birth per woman, down from five births per woman in the early seventies. Along with the military draft, family planning stands out as an extremely intrusive manifestation of state power. In China, the one-child policy not only had to deal with strong preferences for more than one child, but also with deeply-rooted expectations that every woman must give birth to a male inheritor of the family tradition, a goal that often puts tremendous pressure on couples to reproduce beyond the first, legitimate child. Exercising what Michael Foucault called bio-power (Foucault, 2004) over a diverse population of a billion people is a daunting enterprise. For political scientists, Chinese family planning is a fascinating phenomenon, where the party state has managed to extract compliance with a policy that –even if ultimately it may be in the common good– conflicts with

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<sup>1</sup>A modified version of the policy continues up until now.

citizens' individual preferences. Whether one approves of family planning or whether one objects to it, family planning has been a spectacular display of state power.

The case of the one-child policy helps to illuminate the role of the CCP's grassroots membership for policy enforcement. Given the high political priority of the one-child policy, it is unsurprising that the party state deploys its most powerful tools to ensure smooth implementation - and as this dissertation argues, the party's rank-and-file members are an essential part of the state's toolbox. In sync with the following chapters, this chapter provides evidence that the Leninist apparatus empowers the Chinese state throughout its realm. Moreover, the one-child policy provides an opportunity to investigate the separation of party and state. Far from being just a formality without substantial implications, the party and the government remain distinct institutions and the boundary is carefully engineered. This raises important puzzles about institution-building, known as the unresolved "functional challenge" in the literature on authoritarian parties (Magaloni and Kricheli, 2010): Why use the institution of the party, instead of deploying the state apparatus or any number of alternative arrangements? Game theory, in particular a modified version of the multi-tasking model, provides an excellent tool to formally study this aspect of Chinese Communist statecraft. Whereas the government is best at routine implementation whose success is readily observable, rank-and-file party members contribute to tasks with severe asymmetric information problems. A strong presence of the government is enough to reduce the number of "surplus" children, but the party is needed to reduce imbalances of sex ratios at birth.

The chapter consists of four parts. The following section develops a theory concerning the division of labor between party and state. Section 2 presents a formal model, which explains why for strategic reasons it is helpful to have two implementing agents instead of one integrated apparatus. The model has implications for the fundamentally different nature of state hierarchies

versus party hierarchies, in terms of their preferences, incentives and behavior. Section 3 introduces the case of China's one-child policy and spells out hypotheses about the party's and the state's effect on policy implementation. Section 4 tests these hypotheses empirically, using one province's census data on the effectiveness of the one-child policy, on the presence of party members and of bureaucrats. The data set in this chapter uses townships as its unit of analysis and thus is one bureaucratic level lower, and closer to the ground than most existing scholarship working with Chinese census data.

### **3.1 Why to employ local party organizations for policy implementation?**

The party, as an organization distinct from the state, helps with policy implementation, as scholars have noticed before for highly visible campaigns, such as the *Constructing a New Socialist Countryside* movement (Perry, 2011). This raises a set of puzzling, theoretical questions, with relevance far beyond the Chinese case. Why does the party bother with policy implementation, if classic scholarship, such as that of Franz Schurmann, points out that the party/state divide exists, precisely to prevent the party from getting bogged down in the nitty-gritty details of governing (Schurmann, 1966)? In the context of policy implementation, where does the added value of parties come from? What can party organizations do that government bureaucracies cannot do? When parties engage in administrative tasks, are they even distinguishable from the government? The less competitive a regime is and the closer it fits a totalitarian model, the more tempting it is to lump together the state, the party and the government, as if they were conceptually and functionally inseparable. This section lays out the building blocks and basic intuitions for theorizing about parties that are



active in the domain of policy implementation. The goal is to develop an analysis of the boundaries of the party and the shape of its responsibilities, to identify in which policy areas party presence makes a difference and for which aspects of the one-child policy party presence improves policy implementation.

This institutional puzzle is not only a China puzzle. The historical case of the Soviet Union exhibits close parallels, where the party selectively intervened in the policy implementation phase, especially in the economic domain. Instead of merely hovering over the formal institutions and leaving it to lower-level state bureaucracy to carry out its extremely detailed orders, as one might have expected from the formal statutes, in fact the Communist Party of the Soviet Union routinely took on implementation tasks, through its local organs (Hough, 1969, ch.8). This became especially apparent when the Soviet Union experienced times of crisis (Rutland, 1992). In East Asia, Taiwan's KMT party was visible as a policy implementor during campaigns, as well as the Korean ruling party under Park Chung-hee during the New Village Movement (Saemaul Movement) (Kim, 2004b). Not all political parties are equally effective as policy implementors, however. The *Imperial Rule Assistance Association* 大政翼賛会 set up in Japan during World War II failed to function as an implementor (Scalapino, 1953). Compared to other parties in authoritarian systems, at this point the CCP stands out as a mature and successful organization. Studying the CCP's role in the implementation of the one-child policy is illuminating not because it is representative of how parties operate, but because it is an important case for showing the potential of parties, a case which in a world of institutional diffusion other regimes may find inspirational.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>A critical account of China's attractiveness as a role model for non-Western countries is Gill and Huang (2006).

### 3.1.1 The Party/Bureaucracy Divide

The People's Republic of China is a party state. The party dominates the state by means of party committees. In jurisdictions from the central level down to the village level, the most powerful individual is the party secretary. Most importantly, the party has rank-and-file party members, who are very differently motivated from bureaucrats. Conceptualizing party members and local cadres as a group that should be distinguished from the state bureaucracy, this dissertation analyzes the Chinese state in its own terms.

Party committees are present not only in state agencies, including legislative, executive and judicial institutions, but also in key non-state institutions, such as companies and universities. The party and the state have a symbiotic relationship, but the party is by no means indistinguishable from the state. The boundaries of the party are well-defined and its formal organizational chains of command are insulated from governmental authorities. Innumerable volumes of *Material on the Organizational History of the CCP* list in minute detail which agencies and offices are within the ambit of the party. When we find party offices inside the government bureaucracy, it is well understood that these offices are placed within the party hierarchy and function as the eyes and ears of the party inside the government. Both the party and the government are self-contained hierarchies, each adheres to its distinct organizational culture. While the government functions in ways similar to bureaucracies around the world, the party continues to carry the characteristic imprints of a Leninist apparatus, including a nomenklatura system and its accompanying purges, more recently camouflaged as anti-corruption campaigns.

Early scholarship on the People's Republic of China paid great attention to the party and its relation to the government (Barnett, 1967). The secularization of Chinese politics away from Marxist and Maoist ideologies has led analysts to a neglect of the Leninist aspects of the state and of

the party's role in governance, as exemplified by the literature adopting the approach of fragmented authoritarianism, which makes no distinction between party and government and analyzes China as a secular bureaucracy, albeit with certain distinctly Chinese dynamics (Lieberthal, 1988). While the separation of party and government may not lead to much analytical gain at the central level of government, it is key for understanding local governance.

The distinction between party and government is far more than a bureaucratic subtlety. It is a fundamental and defining characteristic of local governance in China. While at the centers of power in Beijing the distinction between party and government becomes blurred, it is palpable at local levels of government. The governmental chain of command traditionally ends at the county level, although it has expanded down to the township level. As far as the government is concerned, jurisdictions below the township level are self-governing bodies. By contrast, the party's chain of command reaches down into the majority of villages, thanks to a tightly-knit network of party committees. At local levels of government, where both the party and the government are present, the two are easily distinguished. In many counties, the party headquarters and the government headquarters are in separate buildings. In Shandong and Hubei, color-coded door signs indicate whether a department or an office belongs to the party (typically red on white) or to the government (black on white). The precise visual clues may vary, but the responsibilities of the party and the government are always distinct. Invariably, tasks that are considered as strategically important for Communist regime survival, including the formulation of propaganda, the selection of leadership personnel and (flattering to the historian) the writing of 20th century history, all fall under the purview of the party. Only about 5% of all state agents work in party organizations, but they are the most powerful cadres.

Even though at the local level the distinction between party and government is palpable, the

analytically clean distinction is not without complications. Some state agents wear two hats, holding one position in the party apparatus and at the same time holding another position in the government bureaucracy. Moreover, there is a revolving door separating party organs and government agencies. An ideal-typical career pattern, as envisioned by the CCP Organization Department, involves alternate appointments in the party and in government. Since this vision comes close to the realities on the ground, in addition to the 5% of all state agents who work in the party bureaucracy, there would be another 5% of state agents who temporarily work in the government bureaucracy, but are in fact pursuing a party career. Taken together, these 10% of all officials are distinct from the rest: Their careers are directed by the CCP Organization Department, they circulate between appointments in different localities, they are locally the most powerful state agents and they are also more ambitious and possibly opportunistic types of people. By contrast, the other 90% of all state agents pursue pure government career paths. Their careers are directed by the Personnel Department, they usually stay in the same locality for a long time –often their hometown–, they are on average less powerful and they are also less ambitious and possibly more committed to their local community. Both groups are important and shape local governance. This is comparable to imperial China, where the magistrate and his subordinate officials possessed supreme authority, but local government was shaped also by the large number of local notables, clerks and runners: The strength of party cadres is in their position, the strength of bureaucrats is in their local knowledge and in their big numbers.

For terminological clarity, keeping in mind the analytical purposes of this chapter, we disaggregate the state as consisting of the party and the government. Other organizations, such as the judicial system and the military establishment are also part of the state, but this chapter ignores them, because they are less central to an understanding of local governments and policy enforce-

ment. The conceptual choice of placing the party squarely into the realm of the state is contestable. German authors of the 19th century have spilled much ink, grappling with the dual nature of political parties, which belong to society as much as they belong to the state (Jäger, 1973, p.13). Marxist theory conceptualizes the party as an agent of the proletariat. What continues to make parties such a uniquely powerful institution and such an intriguing object of analysis is precisely their dual nature, bridging state and society. Nevertheless, for the purposes of investigating the division of labor between party and government in the realm of policy implementation, it will be most useful to analyze the local party apparatus as an agency of the central state.

There is an astounding variation in party-government relations from one county to the next. During my field research, I came to read the physical distance from the party committee to the government as a rough indication for the degree of intimacy between the two organizations and the size of the party building as an proxy for its power. Even without visiting China's counties, official maps can be interpreted as providing information on party-government relations. In some counties, the two reside in one and the same building and officials of both organizations share their meals in the same canteen. In other places, the two organizations are not even neighbors; their offices are in different corners of the town. The relative fiscal endowment of the two organizations also varies drastically from county to county. In the case of Jinan, an unexceptional provincial capital, the party committee and the government have recently moved together into one huge building complex at the outskirts of the city. Inside this building complex, the distinction between party and government remains tangible, but the move has certainly transformed the everyday interaction and political relationship between the two, especially given difficult traffic in the city, as well as the tendency among Chinese bureaucrats to work out solutions face-to-face.

The competitive yet symbiotic relationship between party and government, is an insufficiently

understood hallmark of party states. A common simplification lumps together the party and the government, as if they were inseparably amalgamated in a unitary state. Scholars concerned with post-communist transitions in Eastern Europe often think that the two have become inseparable during the Communist era and observe how difficult it is to get the party out of the state, that is, to secure continuity in government while undercutting party dominance.<sup>3</sup> This simplification is problematic, since the balancing out of party and government might well be at the origin of party-based regime resilience. Moreover, as Shiping Zheng points out, the distinction between party and government is critical if we want to answer important questions about China's future: Would the fall of the party also mean the collapse of the state? Or has China been successful in state-building to the extent that political order would prevail even under a scenario where the party evaporates (Zheng, 1997)? Taking the distinction among party, state and government seriously, our analysis of the Chinese case will shed new light on a fundamental theoretical problem: Why do single parties penetrate the government apparatus without altogether merging it into the party?

### **3.1.2 Explaining the Party/Bureaucracy Divide**

In a structuralist-functional world, form follows function. The fundamental assumption, on which the argument is built, is that a party-based authoritarian regime shapes the responsibilities of the party in such a way as to optimize the reach of the state. Assuming that the presence of parties and their role in local governance is a result of strategic calculations made by the authoritarian regime, it then makes sense to ask why authoritarian regimes implement through parties. The division of labor between organs of government and organs of the party is a defining characteristic of the Chinese party state, just as the balance of power between the legislative, executive and judicature branches

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<sup>3</sup>Ganev makes this observation and in footnote 1 gives a review of literature suggesting the interwoven nature of the two during the Communist era (Ganev, 2001).

of government is the defining characteristic of most functioning democracies. Yet it has not yet been explained. The still most authoritative account on the party by Franz Schurmann suggests that the party would not meddle with ordinary policy implementation, because staying aloof gives the party more room to change its course and disclaim responsibility (Schurmann, 1966, p.111). Yet the party has been present in local-level policy implementation, if only for some select policies and measures. The fragmentalization of authority raises questions about functionality. Is fragmentalization useful or detrimental for the state and for regime resilience, compared to a totalitarian system? Why does it work? Why would authoritarian regimes fragment their authority? Why do authoritarian regimes not try harder to centralize their power and abolish contradictions? And why are parties so useful?

Divide-and-rule tactics provide one important motive for authoritarian regimes to fragment their authority. Without doubt, the separation of party and government increases the control of higher-level authorities over lower-level authorities. For example, when party and government agencies of a county are closely intertwined, this is bad news for the prefectural-level government, since it will be harder for the prefecture to play the two off against each other and thereby to exercise greater control over county affairs. The keener the competition between the two types of agencies, the more willing they are to denounce each other, thereby improving the information held by higher levels. Yet the divide-and-rule argument has a number of serious shortcomings. First, divide-and-rule tactics also work upside down, since contrary to the typical divide-and-rule situation, not only low-level authorities, but also mid- and high-level authorities are divided in the same way. Low-level authorities can and routinely do engage in venue shopping, seeking out the higher-level authority that is most sympathetic to their cause (Lieberthal, 1988). Second, government agencies are formally and informally subordinate under the party. By contrast, if the goal is to divide-and-

rule, the divided agents should be made as equally powerful as possible. Third, in most places there exist well-established habits of collusion between local party and bureaucrats, which are hard to overcome, say by appointments. Fourth, and more contestably, higher-level governments have generally good control over lower-level government. Chinese authorities do not usually face defiant, open and widespread insubordination; what they do face are the kinds of principal-agent problems that we also find in firms. After all, they can easily fire and replace local officials. Fifth, divide-and-rule tactics do not explain why an authoritarian regime would split up tasks between a party and a government, rather than between two separate government agencies. In short, divide and rule is not a good answer to the question of why the CCP is used in the realm of policy implementation.

Instead, the core of my theoretical argument is that authoritarian regimes not only create multiple agencies, but create agencies that are fundamentally different from each other. I emphasize different degrees of risk adversity, because it captures the key difference between bureaucratic career strategies versus rank-and-file members' incentives. The concept of risk adversity also makes the argument amenable to formal analysis using informational economics analysis. It is not easy for a state to cultivate agencies with different types of agents. Government agencies tend to be isomorphic: They may start out with a different organizational culture, but usually end up looking very similar to each other, because they operate in similar contexts and deal with similar challenges. The party allows the authoritarian ruler to break out of the isomorphism trap. Even at a time when ideological differences play a negligible role, bureaucrats' motivations are different from the motivations of rank-and-file party members and, arguably, even from motivations of bureaucrats in the select party hierarchy. As a result of self-selection, individuals who choose a party career as opposed to a government career also tend to be more ambitious and more willing to take risks. The steep hierarchy of the party promises quick advancement, but also comes with the risk of being



purged, including at the lowest levels. An authoritarian state finds it extremely useful to have such different agencies: The government will be assigned tasks that are best implemented by the most risk-averse individuals: Routine tasks with observable outcomes. By contrast, the party will specialize in thorny tasks with only indirectly observable outcomes. In short, authoritarian regimes have good reason to diversify their authority.

If the theory is right and if authoritarian states really do cultivate the differences between their governments and their parties, for the sake of more effective policy implementation, this has a number of observable implications. An empirical test could proceed in two steps. First, one would have to distinguish between policy measures that are better implemented by the risk-averse government bureaucracy, on the one hand, and policy measures that are better implemented by the less risk-averse party members. Based on the underlying assumptions of the model presented in the next section, the key is to identify policies where upper-level authorities receive fuzzy signals about the efforts undertaken by their agents.<sup>4</sup> From the agent's perspective, such policies are the riskiest ones, because there is a likelihood of unjustified punishments as well as unjustified bonuses. As the second step, one would compare the relative presence of party members and bureaucrats to the relative success in implementing the two kinds of policies.

### **3.1.3 The CCP as a Rationally Designed Institution?**

To explain party state institutions, this chapter presents a calculus undertaken by a rational leviathan. In other words, I assume that functionality can explain institutional structures. To be sure, there is no law of nature that institutional structures are necessarily in the best interest of a leviathan. Yet to explain the organizational setup of the Chinese party state and to under-

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<sup>4</sup>Observing successful implementation is not enough, because success could also be the result of "luck" for which the agent should not be rewarded.

stand the puzzling deployment of the CCP for on-the-ground policy implementation, rationality assumptions seem appropriate, partly because the crucible of Chinese history between the party's foundation in 1921 and today has forced CCP leaders to think hard about optimizing the party's institutional configuration.

Historical institutionalists have demonstrated that for historical reasons such as path dependency, irrational and dysfunctional institutions exists.<sup>5</sup> Just as it would be wrong to rule out the possibility of irrational institutions, it would also be wrong to rule out the possibility of rational institutions. Taking historical institutionalism seriously, we must study the historical origins of an institution in order to evaluate whether to expect rational designs.

Evolutionary arguments, as well as circumstantial arguments, justify this rational assumption. According to evolutionary argument, as a result of natural selection, only the fittest institutions survive. If the party has survived almost one century, its organization cannot be too dysfunctional. To be sure, historically many weak institutions have survived for very long periods of time, because of a lack of competing alternatives. Yet in the case of the CCP, there have been powerful alternatives. Most importantly, before the Communist takeover of 1949, the CCP had been in permanent, direct competition with the Chinese Nationalist Party KMT for almost three decades. Ideological differences between CCP and KMT might not have been altogether inconsequential, but the competition was first and foremost about smarter organization. The organization of the CCP was smart enough to emerge from an underdog position and displace the entrenched power of the ruling KMT. According to the more circumstantial argument, crises have made the party wise.

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) stands out as the most dangerous crisis of the CCP since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. During the crisis, the distinction among

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<sup>5</sup> "[P]olitical institutions are unfortunately not simply the product, in a mechanical fashion, of particular social 'needs' at particular moments." (Ziblatt, 2006*b*, preface)

party, army and government became a vital question of regime survival. Keeping these three pillars of state power was crucial in order to contain the spread of factional conflict across institutional boundaries. In the first few months of the Cultural Revolution, the command over *People's Liberation Army* forces and local militia was removed from the local party secretary. Similarly, the political commanding heights were separated from the apparatus for everyday administration. Whereas totalitarian visions of the 1950s and early 1960s mobilized everyone for a small set of tasks and thus did not allow a division of labor, the years of turmoil demonstrated the advantage of having a quasi-government, called *Production Headquarters* 生產指揮部, in charge of administering the mundane tasks of the state, while political battles paralyzed the quasi-party committee, called *Revolutionary Committee* 革命委員會. The crisis prompted earnest reflection about the party's role in the state. Deng Xiaoping's political vision, in particular his vision of the CCP, evolved greatly during his years in banishment (Vogel, 2011). After the end of the crisis, in 1981, the Central Committee passed the influential *Resolution on History*, deploring Mao's overbearing authority and calling for party reforms (CCP, 1981). Dengist reforms included a renewed emphasis on a consistent separation of party and government. At the time, some construed this as a move toward liberalization, but in hindsight, the new arrangements served to strengthen the supremacy of the Communist Party. The Cultural Revolution crisis and its aftermath saw Chinese leaders reflecting on party reform as a life-and-death issue.

The Cultural Revolution was not the last crisis to keep the party on its toes. The protest movement on Tian'anmen Square in 1989 spurred multi-faceted debates about ways to improve the hold of the CCP.<sup>6</sup> These debates took on even greater urgency when the Chinese leadership watched the spectacular collapse of its erstwhile role model, the Communist Party of the Soviet

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<sup>6</sup>Joseph Fewsmith has given a comprehensive analysis of post-Tian'anmen elite debates (Fewsmith, 2001).

Union. Jiang Zemin's *Three Represents* policy and the admission of capitalists as members of the CCP testify to the adaptability of the party (Dickson, 2003). Under the label of *party construction*, teachers at Party Schools and scholars at Schools of Marxism continue to grapple with a broad range of questions pertaining to the institutional development of the party. The extremely powerful Organization Department of the CCP sponsors much of this work, editing the journal *Party Construction Research* 黨建研究 and sponsoring conferences under mottos such as "Promote theoretical and practical innovation in party construction" 推進黨的建設理論創新和實現創新. The party's nagging self-doubt, which is nowhere more visible than in scientifically argued exhortation that the party can be self-confident (Wan, 2013), create an alert awareness of the need to innovate in order to counter the "risks" of a "transitional society" (Chen, 2010). Under these circumstances, rationality has a good chance to make itself heard in the party's continuous struggle for survival.

Drawing and redrawing the line between party and government has been a central concern for both the state's strategic thinkers and practitioners on the ground. Confronted with constantly evolving tasks, party and government have been readjusting their relationship. As the characterization of the Chinese regime as a form of fragmented authoritarianism highlights, the Chinese state by no means operates as a unitary, top-down hierarchy of the sort characteristic of an ideal-type totalitarian system. Instead, a central characteristic of the Chinese state is that different organizations, levels of government, bureaucratic departments and localities behave very differently, and often seem to work in contradiction to each other.<sup>7</sup> Arguably the most carefully engineered division in the organization of the Chinese state is the division of labor between the party and the state.

Therefore, it seems appropriate to analyze party organization not as an accidental by product of

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<sup>7</sup>Kenneth Lieberthal's term (Lieberthal, 1995) remains frequently used, even if related and attractive alternatives/complementary characterizations have emerged, such as "contentious authoritarianism" (Chen, 2012a), "decentralized authoritarianism" (Landry, 2008) and "adaptive governance" (Heilmann and Perry, 2011)

history, but as a rationally designed apparatus.

## 3.2 Formal Model of the Party/Bureaucracy Divide

Game theory provides a good guide as to why and under what circumstances it is advantageous for an authoritarian government to assign local implementation tasks to two distinct agencies, namely a party and a government, rather than setting up one all-encompassing agency. The literature on principal-agent problems provides a wide range of asymmetric information models. Most relevant to the analytical challenge at hand are multi-tasking models, where a principal seeks to incentivize an agent to perform well simultaneously on more than one task. While existing models provide a good starting point, major modifications to the standard models are needed to make them fruitful for the problem at hand. This section describes the intuition of the model, formally developed in the appendix starting on page 10.3, and the major takeaways.

The multi-tasking model is concerned with situations where a principal seeks to incentivize an agent to perform well on several tasks at the same time. The model used here is designed to illuminate the tradeoffs involved when a principal chooses whether to rely on one agent or on several distinct agents. Dividing up implementation tasks has costs, because it undermines efficiency. It is a standard result of economics that in a world of perfect information one agent is better than multiple agents, because one agent would internalize externalities, that is, the agent would take into account side-effects that good performance in one task might have on the fulfillment of other tasks. This chapter specifies conditions when it is advantageous to divide up multiple tasks among multiple agents. Thanks to the multi-task model, we know the extent to which the principal can incentivize his agents in a context of asymmetric information with interdependent tasks. The model does not consider multiple agents. With multiple agents, the tasks remain interdependent

and the principal continues to internalize the costs of both agents. Yet if information asymmetry and therefore uncertainty is greater with one task than the other, decoupling the tasks and dividing the tasks between one agent, who carries the risk, and another agent, who is not affected by the risk, can alleviate the overall costs of uncertainty. Or in short: Complexity comes at a cost. It is not always equivalent whether the principal gives complex incentives to one agent, or whether he gives more simple incentives to two agents.

The multi-task game captures well the tradeoffs that the Chinese central government faces. The model describes why central leaders would assign to the bureaucracy routine enforcement tasks with an outcome that is easily observed. By contrast, the party would be put in charge of more complex tasks, with outcomes that are not well-observable. The less complementarity there is between the tasks, the more likely the principal uses multiple agents. The more agents differ in their risk-taking behavior and the more the tasks differ in the quality of the signal, the more likely the principal uses multiple agents. Finally, and maybe most importantly, much depends on the type of noise, which makes it hard for the principal to evaluate the task. If mistakes in evaluating enforcement of task 1 are highly correlated to mistakes in evaluating enforcement of task 2, it is advantageous for the principal to separate the tasks. For otherwise the mistakes reinforce each other and the principal has to provide a lump-sum payment to compensate the agent for the uncertainty that comes from faulty bonuses and sanctions.

Arguably, the principal-agent problems in the realm of local government is particularly prone to encounter the kind of asymmetric information problem characterized by  $\sigma_{12} > 0$ . Take a situation where in a county both tasks have been fulfilled to the full satisfaction of provincial leaders. The greater the  $\sigma_{12}$ , the harder it is to tell whether this good result is due to outstanding government performance, or whether it is due to hidden characteristics of the local population. It could well

be that the local population is particularly easy to govern, welcoming of government intervention, unlikely to protest and generally supportive of the authorities. The multi-tasking model with correlated noise will be especially relevant if one thinks that good policy results have much to do with the local population, rather than with the local government alone.

Four crucial takeaways emerge from the formal model. The multi-task multi-agent model highlights four factors that influence whether the principal will employ only one set of agents, who are given control over both tasks and who are jointly rewarded for their performance on both tasks; or whether the principal will employ two sets of agents, who are each given control over only one task and who are each separately rewarded for their performance on that one task. The principal's choice will depend on the following factors:

1. Synergy effects. Is it easy to split the task between two different agents; or are there synergy effects between the two tasks?
2. Distinct tasks. Are the tasks very different, with the effort on one task more easily observed than on the other and thus with one task less risky for the implementing agent than the other?
3. Distinct agents. Are the two sets of agents similarly risk averse; or is one set of agents risk avoiding and the other set of agents risk accepting?
4. Does the observational noise muddle both signals received by the principal in the same direction; or is there a tendency that an overly negative assessment on one task is partly compensated by an overly positive assessment on the other task?

The first factor defines the scope conditions, suggesting that for some tasks, the logistics of setting up and maintaining two partially redundant systems -one run by the party, the other by the

government- is just prohibitively expensive. If there are two separate agents, there are potential losses, because coordination in the implementation process becomes costly. As we go on to focus on the advantages of separate agencies, we must keep in mind that these advantages only begin to matter if they outweigh lost synergies.

The second factor highlights that tasks must be different, one riskier than the other. If the principal does not receive a good signal as to whether the agent did his best or whether the agent shirked, then he might hand out unjustified rewards, which poses a risk for the agent. The third factor draws our attention to an essential characteristic distinguishing bureaucrats from party members: Their different attitude toward risk. The model also indicates that the gains for the principal to employ two separate agencies increases if the two agencies have very different corporate identities and attract different types of personnel. In other words, it is not so helpful to simply employ two largely identical “ministries”, one for each task. Instead, it is more promising to work through very different types of institutions, such as a party and a government, whose members react differently to incentives. This is particularly true when the two tasks are different from each other. The model indicates this potential gain from differentiation by distinguishing between an agent who is more risk averse than the other. More broadly, one would expect other agent characteristics to play a similar role. For example, if one organization attracts people with a longer time horizon than the other, the principal would gain from allocating those tasks to the organization, where the signal is more delayed and becomes visible only in the future. In real life, there may be a tendency for gains from having two separate agencies to increase, the more different they are. This is reminiscent of trade theory: There is more potential gain from international trade when the countries involved have very different comparative advantages.

Most importantly, the fourth factor demonstrates that organizational solutions depend on the



kind of asymmetric information. This result captures a typical and thorny problem of incentives in local governance. Higher level government agencies receive multiple signals reflecting the performance on multiple tasks. But these multiple signals are treacherous and of little help, because if in one jurisdiction there is a lot of noise in one area of local governance, there will probably be noise in other areas as well. In real life, there are many reasons for this correlation: The local government that cheats on one task is also more likely to cheat on other tasks. The local government that has a particularly easy-to-govern constituency will do well on many tasks, but should not be rewarded for a success that has little to do with its own efforts. The local government may by sheer luck have attracted a foreign investment project, which might be beneficial on many fronts at the same time: Creating jobs, reducing pollution compared to indigenous industries, helping local industries to claim the value chain and improving the skill set of the local citizens.<sup>8</sup> To be explicit: Having two agents does not improve the information that the principal has. But since agents are rewarded only for their own task, they do not have to bear the considerable risk of suffering compound losses across multiple tasks and thus do not have to be compensated for this substantial, additional risk.

### 3.3 The Case of China's One-Child Policy

What does the preceding theory imply about the division of labor between party and government in the realm of policy implementation? The one-child policy is an ideal case to test the theory, because the policy has had a high priority for over three decades and is so ambitious that the Chinese leviathan would fully deploy its resources in well-considered ways. Moreover, the one-child policy is a good case to work with, because there is both considerable scholarship and rich data. First, this section introduces the one-child policy, highlighting the twin goals of cutting birth rates

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<sup>8</sup>My rosy image of foreign investment projects comes from comparing them to indigenous investment projects.

while avoiding gender-selective abortion. Descriptive statistics provide a sense that -at least until 2013- the policy continued to have a formidable impact on the reality of rural life throughout China. Turning to the analytical task, the one-child policy is considered from an informational economics perspective, which leads us to a series of testable hypotheses.

### **3.3.1 The Twin Goal of Chinese Family Planning**

The term “one-child policy” is a short-hand to refer to a policy bundle, which consists of a set of regulations and measures related to family planning and whose severity varies over time and across space. The unevenness of policy implementation has been the subject of previous scholarly inquiry (Short and Zhai, 1998) and is not surprising if one takes a look at the complexity of local implementation, even in a single province like Shandong (Ge, 2009). From its beginnings in the 1970s, the goal of Chinese family planning has been to reduce population growth. To achieve this goal, in 1979 the government decided that henceforth couples could have no more than one child.<sup>9</sup> It quickly became clear that such a policy would have a major unintended consequence. Since Chinese couples are under great pressure to give birth to at least one son, the one-child policy triggered a wave of female infanticide in the 1980s and pre-natal sex selection, to make sure that the first and only child would be male. The increasing availability of ultrasound technology continuously aggravated the problem. Family planners had to deal with the side-effect by coming up with ways to improve China’s gender balance. Partly as a result of a worsening gender balance, in November 2013 the government decided to greatly relax the one-child policy. The one-child policy would now be more appropriately called a two-child policy.

There have always been exceptions from the one-child policy. Not all second children are directly

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<sup>9</sup>For a study explaining the origins of this astounding policy choice, see: (Greenhalgh, 2003).

in conflict with the official policy, since the Chinese state allows numerous formally sanctioned exceptions, including for minority populations. Yet even if not all second children are illegal, the nature of these exceptions reveals that the Chinese government chooses to retrench in the face of potential popular opposition to its policy. In other words, exceptions are best understood as compromises to accommodate societal pressure. For example, if we find that many women in Tibet legally give birth to more than one child, this deviation from the politically ideal one-child-per-woman indicates a trade-off: For the more important policy goal of political stability, the government is willing to sacrifice its one-child policy. The one-child policy conforms to the paradigm of differentiated governance: The state is stronger in some places than in others, reflected in its more or less full implementation of the one-child policy. Yet it is precisely the ability to enforce differentially and to flexibly implement a policy, which overall is the more formidable source of regime resilience.

For the following analysis, it is important to emphasize that the goal to reduce fertility competes with the goal to even out the gender balance. This tension is obvious not only to people who study macro-level statistics, who see that low fertility in most cases is accompanied by uneven sex ratios. It is also clear to local administrators. In an ideal world, modernization promotes both goals simultaneously, by changing people's preferences, so that they want fewer children and become more indifferent between raising a boy or a girl. In Shanghai, fertility preferences have declined and son preferences have weakened so much that low birth rates and balanced sex ratios go hand in hand. In the short run, for most of China, the goals conflict. If a family can have only one child, they want to make sure that the one child is a son. The more flexible the government is in allowing multiple sons, the less incentive for sex-selective abortions (or hidden daughters). Reversely, the more effective the prohibition on gender-selective abortions, the greater the incentive to give birth

to more children.

### 3.3.2 The Implementation Challenge in Numbers

#### Illegal Children

How successful is the one-child policy? It succeeded in its primary purpose of reducing population growth. China managed to reduce the country's fertility rate (births per woman) from the pre-Cultural Revolution high of 6.2 births in 1965 to a low of 1.51 births in 2000 and the current 1.7 births in 2012.<sup>10</sup> In order to understand variation of state strength across territory, one approach would be to calculate the fertility rate of lower-level jurisdictions. Unfortunately, the kind of data necessary to calculate fertility rates are only available at aggregated levels.<sup>11</sup> Instead, as a measure of success, the paper will use data on the number of non-first born children. As the name suggests, the one-child policy pursued the ideal of having each woman give birth to only one single child. Deviations from this policy ideal, can hence be interpreted as relative weakness of the state in some places compared to other places. Out of the 1.2 million children born in 2010, almost 38% were non-first-borns (Population Census Office, 2010, p.2024).

Not all non-first-borns are illegal. The government has stipulated a number of formally sanctioned exemptions. To descriptively assess the prevalence of illegal births, I will use data from the 2006 edition of the *China Health and Nutrition Survey*.<sup>12</sup> In that year, the survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of 9,788 adults in nine provinces. All in all, the married women under age 52 among the respondents had given birth to a total of 3,830 children throughout

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<sup>10</sup>This is according to the *World Development Indicators* assembled by the World Bank.

<sup>11</sup>What is missing is disaggregated information on the average number of births given by women in different age groups.

<sup>12</sup>The survey are collected and distributed online by the Carolina Population Center at the University of Carolina at Chapel Hill.

their lives.<sup>13</sup> Out of these, 36% were non-first-borns. Taking into account that ethnic minorities are exempt from family planning policies and that rural residents are allowed to have a second child if the first was a daughter, I find that 754 children, that is, 55% of the non-first-borns, were illegal. For all of China, this would imply about 250,000 illegal births per year. Since the majority of non-first-borns are illegal, the number of non-first-borns not only reflects that the government is deviating from its ideal point, but can also serve as a proxy to identify jurisdictions that have an enforcement problem.

### **The Sex Ratio at Birth Problem**

The sex ratio at birth in China had been an unremarkable 95 girls for every 100 boys until the late 1970s, then deteriorated dramatically, until reaching an alarming level of 87.9 girls born for every 100 boys born in 1989 (Zeng, Yi et al., 1993). This was the time when Amartya Sen deplored 50 million missing women in China alone (Sen, 1990) and the country's gender imbalance, including sex ratios at birth, became a hot topic of scholarly inquiry. Since then, the situation has not improved, quite to the contrary. The census conducted in the year 2000, showed a sex ratio at birth of 85.6 girls for every 100 boys.<sup>14</sup> If instead of the information from the full census, we prefer the answers by women in a 10% sample of the population, who in conjunction with the census were subjected to more detailed questioning, the sex ratio might have been even be lower, namely 83.4%. In the most recent census of 2010, sex ratios at birth hit a new record of 84.8%, or 82.5% according to the 10% sample. Apparently the availability of ever more advanced technology to identify an embryo's gender-most recently the option of sending a blood sample to Hong Kong early in the

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<sup>13</sup>With few exceptions, these births occurred after the beginning of the one-child policy in 1979.

<sup>14</sup>For the source of the data from the 2000 and from the 2010 census, see data section below. As is customary in population research, the gender ratio of the age cohort of children under age one stands in for the true sex ratio at birth.

pregnancy-<sup>15</sup> prevailed over the effects of education and urbanization. The severe gender imbalance goes a long way to explain why leaders at the 18th Party Congress in 2013 found it so urgent to liberalize family planning.

### **Missing Women, Marriage Markets, Revolution and War**

Missing baby girls may create severe social problems, because down the line, there will be leftover-men on the marriage market. Acknowledging the lack of conclusive evidence, authors point to a variety of social problems resulting from unbalanced sex ratios, arguing that there is a risk of higher crime rates and collective violence (Hesketh and Zhu, 2006). Historically, bandits and rebels could be understood as “frustrated bachelors” (Ownby, 2002, esp. pp.240-245). Some authors go as far as to suggest that at aggregate levels, “high-sex-ratio cultures predisposes nations to see some utility in interstate conflict”, predicting that China’s “bare branches” increase the likelihood of war. <sup>16</sup> Certainly, uneven sex ratios at birth have been of great concern to the Chinese leadership.

To assess the consequences of uneven sex ratios at birth, I investigated the first link in the causal chain, namely the link between uneven sex ratios at birth and male surplus on the marriage market.<sup>17</sup> Surprisingly, this link is very weak. Let us consider the children born in 1982. Their sex ratio at birth was 92.9%. In the year 2000, when this cohort turned 18 years old, women had begun to catch up, and the sex ratio was 96.0%. Even better, when this same cohort turned 28 years old, women had caught up and there were slightly more women than men. While it is well known that women at all ages are die-hards, compared to men, biology alone cannot explain this mismatch

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<sup>15</sup>There is no lack of advice on the Chinese Internet about how to determine an embryo’s gender.

<sup>16</sup>The statement is made in the last paragraph of a book, which for the most part argues a more moderate view on sex ratios and violence.(Hudson and den Boer, 2004, p.262)

<sup>17</sup>For the years 1982, 1990 and 2000, my calculations are based on data available from *China Data Center of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor*, either through their tool “China Data Online” (for 1982 and 1990) or through their tool “China Explorer II”. For the year 2010, I use official tabulations provided by China’s National Bureau of Statistics.(Population Census Office, 2010, p.265f.)

between uneven sex ratios at birth and fairly balanced marriage markets. It is clear that female births had been underreported and that the “missing” women existed. In fact, as the recorded cohort was growing up, instead of some share of the cohort dying, the cohort grew bigger. In the census of 1990, 573,523 women appeared out of nowhere and in the census of 2000 an additional 720,890 women suddenly emerged. In the first years of the one-child policy, hiding children must have been a common practice.

However, the bad news is that with the increasing availability of technologies to determine the embryo’s gender, many families opt for sex-selective abortions instead of hiding their children (Chu, 2001). It is too early for a thorough assessment. The problem is that while most hidden boys return to the statistics in the first ten years of their life, girls tend to return to the statistics throughout the two first decades of their life. Thus, it is too early to be certain whether girls born in 2000 will return. Yet there is a remarkable contrast between the two census figures. In the 2000 census, the cohort of children born ten years earlier grew by an astounding 13%. By contrast, in the 2010 census, the cohort of children born in 2000 grew by only 5%. This suggests that in the cohort born in the year 2000, fewer births were hidden and that the sex ratio of 84.9% in the 2000 cohort may not be a result of undercounting, but rather due to sex-selective abortions. If so, the imbalance could persist well into the marriage market.

### **3.3.3 The Informational Foundation of Family Planning**

Informational constraints are at the core of the difficulties that central authorities face when implementing the one-child policy. In order to explain the division of labor between party and government, my argument begins with the essential discovery that for the two aspects of the one-child policy, the informational constraints are of a very different nature. It is less informationally de-



Figure 3.1: Information Economics in Action on the Ground

manding, and therefore easier to enforce a policy that every woman would only have one child. It is more informationally demanding, and therefore harder to enforce a policy prohibiting the manipulation of the natural sex ratio.

In the case of Chinese grassroots implementation, the role of information is by no means just an analytical construct by theory builders. The struggles around information are tangible to the observer in the field, both in cities and in the countryside, thanks to a variety of public billboards 公开栏 (see figure 3.1). In villages, one usually finds such billboards close to the seat of the village committee, making transparent village finances 财务公开, minimum wage guarantee recipients 低保人员, disbursements of food subsidies 粮食直补发放 and the state of family planning 计划生育. One primary function of the billboard is to empower citizens by making them aware of their entitlements. In the case of the one-child policy, however, the publication of information empowers the state. It also invites denunciations, if villagers find incomplete or faulty information.



| 女方姓名<br>Woman's name | 出生年月<br>Birthday | 男方姓名<br>Man's name | 出生年月<br>Birthday | 結婚登記日期<br>Date of marriage | 計畫生育服務手冊發放日期<br>Date of handing over family planning service handbook |
|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| XXX                  | 1987-12-14       | XXX                | 1986-01-07       | 2008-07-22                 |                                                                       |
| XXX                  | 1986-07-23       | XXX                | 1983-08-16       | 2010-05-27                 | 2010-8-28                                                             |

| 懷孕日期<br>Beginning of Pregnancy | 流引產日期<br>Day of Abortion | 孕產結果<br>Pregnancy Result                | 生育情況<br>Birth Data |              |                   |                        |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------------|
|                                |                          |                                         | 日期<br>Date         | 性別<br>Gender | 孩次<br>Birth order | 是否合法<br>Legal/illegal  |
|                                | 2011-04-25               | < 12 周引產<br>induced birth<br>< 12 weeks | 2011-04-09         | 女 female     | 2                 | 外 outside<br>(illegal) |
| 2010-06-20                     |                          | 剖宮產 Cesarean                            | 2011-03-23         | 男 male       | 1                 | 內 inside<br>(legal)    |

Note: Columns that are empty for the two examples are left out. The two entries are not representative for the complete set of entries. Almost all pregnancies were legal.

Table 3.1: State Intrusion: Excerpts from the Billboard

The origin of the information posted epitomizes the role of grassroots party members. Superficially, it is not the party branch, but the village committee that prints out the documents posted on the billboard. The village committee is a self-governing body, neither belonging to the state bureaucracy nor to the party hierarchy. As in the context of other countries, one would not expect these village organs to exhibit much discipline. In fact, it is the party that instills the discipline. Local party members take the lead in collecting the information. While ordinary villagers are also encouraged to denounce illegal pregnancy, typically it is party members who transform the rumor into administratively useful information. It is also the party members who are held responsible for suppressing information in this critically important policy era.

Regarding the one illegal pregnancy posted on the billboard, what is striking is the missing and inconsistent information concerning the length of pregnancy before abortion. The billboard notes that the pregnancy lasted less than 12 weeks, but there is no date provided for the beginning of

pregnancy. Moreover, the advertised abortion date is 16 days later than the “birth date”, which might hint at an attempt to cover up for an abortion in the 14th week of pregnancy, which is later than desirable for the family planners.

For the parents involved, the costs of hiding a child are greater than the costs of hiding a sex-selective abortion. To hide an illegal birth from the authorities, citizens need to cover up not only the full nine-month duration of pregnancy, but also the birth itself and the existence of the unregistered child. Even when village and possibly township authorities collude with citizens in such a scheme, families with invisible children bear tremendous costs, not to speak of the ethical burden. Part of the problem is under-registration. When families have two baby girls and plan to try a third time for a boy, they may choose not to report the second baby girl. On a ferry from Shandong to Japan, I encountered such an unregistered second girl, who had lived a transient life on the run to escape the state’s attention, until at age 14 she finally decided to take the offer of a human trafficker and join a group of other women emigrating to Japan for illegal work, supposedly in a factory in Shikoku. Abortion, exclusion, infanticide and negligence of girls all contribute to China’s greatly imbalanced sex ratio. If my interview with one invisible child can be any guidance, it seems that only short-sighted parents, who do not fully realize or for some other reason greatly discount future costs, would ever choose to hide away their child. Schemes to recruit child slave laborers, including for work in mines in central China, function because despairing parents break down under the burden of illegal children and then decide to sell their child, trying to believe false promises of human traffickers.<sup>18</sup> Even if some parents decide to hide births, this is an enormously expensive strategy. By comparison, sex-selective abortions are easier to hide. The most widely used ultrasound technology allows one to identify the gender of the embryo just before the 20th week

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<sup>18</sup>Information from a diplomat with detailed knowledge on this issue, January 2007.

of pregnancy. Slightly more advanced technologies allow identification up to a month before that date. Even in the context of China's closely knit village communities, it is possible to hide an early pregnancy. In this context, at least in the case of Shandong, seasons seem to play an important role, as later empirical analysis will confirm.

Even more important than the costs of hiding is the fundamentally different nature of the kind of information needed to sanction illegal births, compared to the kind of information needed to sanction gender selection. At the aggregate level, the ratio of male births to female births makes it perfectly obvious that gender selection is occurring on a large scale. But at the individual and at the village level, it is much harder to tell who is practicing gender selection and who is naturally giving birth to sons rather than daughters: Is it suspicious if in a given year, a village reports the birth of eight girls and ten boys? Is it suspicious if a county reports the births of 8,500 girls and 10,000 boys? The closer to the ground, the less clear it is whether gender selection is occurring. This is very different from illegal births. As long as local authorities do not overlook children, they can and do determine for each birth whether is "inside" or "outside" the rules. In short, the signal which authorities receive about illegal births is deterministic and unambiguous, whereas the signal which the authorities receive about gender selection, is only probabilistic and noisy by nature.

Let me illustrate this fundamental point with the example of village no. 371702108200, located near Heze, a prefectural city in the less developed Southwestern corner of Shandong province. Outside the party office, a notice board gives details on the village's family planning situation, as is customary throughout rural China. The existence of this board shows that the one-child policy is not carried out in the dark by discreet bureaucrats, but invites the participation of ordinary citizens. The notice board includes intimate information about all local couples. For each birth, this list reports whether the child is legal or illegal, *inside* 内 the regulations or *outside* 外 of them.

Like all of Shandong province, the village seems to be in line with government policies when it comes to preventing illegal births. The only noteworthy incidence was the abortion of one illegal embryo before the 12th week of pregnancy.

Even with all this detailed information, it is hard to know whether the village is doing well in terms of preventing gender selection. Are there missing women? Out of 14 live births reported on the notice board, only five are girls. The sex ratio of 56 girls for 100 boys is far below the natural sex ratio at birth of 94 girls for every 100 boys. Should higher level authorities sanction this village for not preventing gender selection? The problem is that there is a good chance that the ostensibly artificial sex ratio is actually a natural outcome. If the likelihood for a girl is approximately 48.5%, according to the combinatorics of binomial processes, the likelihood that among 14 children there are five or fewer girls is 25%.<sup>19</sup> Even in this village, where the birth ratio is particularly skewed, there is a 1/4 chance that in fact the outcome was natural and any punishment therefore unjustified. Assume that over a long period of time, the villagers regularly perform sex selective abortions, so that the resulting birth ratio on average is 85 girls for every 100 boys. Assume further that higher-level authorities choose to punish villages only if they can be 95% sure that the sex ratio at birth systematically deviates from the natural sex ratio at birth. Then it would take 14 years until upper-level authorities could mete out a punishment. By contrast, illegal births can be confidently sanctioned immediately, down to the village and even down to the couple that gave birth to the child.

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<sup>19</sup>Use a binomial calculator, inputting values 0.485, 14, and 5.

### 3.3.4 Hypotheses on the Role of the Party in the Domain of Family Planning

If the theory is right, in a context of imperfect information and competing goals, as in the case of China's one-child policy, should lead to a division of labor between different agencies. In a utopian world of perfect information, task separation does not make a difference because the principal decides the tradeoff and gives instruction to his agents accordingly. Yet in the real world of bureaucracy, which is one of asymmetric information, the answer is not obvious. On the one hand, if a single agent is put in charge of both tasks, this one agent internalizes the tradeoffs involved and reaches some sort of an ideal point. Because of asymmetric information, the ideal point of the agent could be very different from the ideal point of the principal. On the other hand, having two agents work against each other might not be such a bad thing after all. Each agent would make efforts to achieve his own goal, without taking into account that his own efforts make it harder for the other agent to achieve his goals. It might therefore be better to employ half-hearted, foot-dragging bureaucrats. The multi-task multi-agent model developed in the section above is designed to answer such questions and is thus very appropriate for analyzing the case of China's one-child policy. It illuminates why China's leaders employ two distinct agencies with very different organizational cultures and very different types of employees to implement the one-child policy.

The hierarchy of the state bureaucracy officially ends at the township level and generally there are no bureaucrats permanently stationed in the villages. Most villages have enough party members to form a party cell.<sup>20</sup> These form the most powerful link of the state into the village. The village committee, on the other hand, is a self-governing body that has a somewhat more democratic quality to it, in the sense that it is more bottom-up, in theory representing the interests of farmers. In village governance, managing the conflict-prone relationship between party cell and village committee is a

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<sup>20</sup>To form a party cell, three party members are needed. Here I refer to administrative villages. Administrative villages can encompass several natural villages, many of which are lacking a party presence.

major concern of party organizers. (CCP Organization Department, 2006, p.84). In recent years, issues related to land use rights have been the most divisive issues, with the one-child policy being another important point of contention between party cell and village committee.

The multi-task multi-agent model suggests that division of labor is a particularly promising strategy, if the tasks are very different and if the agents are also very different. In the case of China's one-child policy and the Chinese party state, both conditions prevail. The informational structure of the enforcement problem is such that the principal finds it much easier to monitor whether lower-level agents were able to prevent surplus births than to monitor whether lower-level agents were able to prevent sex-selective abortions and absconded children. The individuals in the two agencies -party members versus government bureaucrats- are of a very different type. Individuals who self-select into the party are going after the greater payoffs, since the party hierarchy is much steeper, but at the same time they are the type of individuals who are prepared to take higher risks. Government bureaucrats have predictable careers and will only very rarely be able to serve in positions outside their original posting.

First, we will test the big, structural-functionalist assumption underlying the model. According to this structural-functionalist assumption, the separation of tasks between party and government, at the end of the day, works out very well. Or to put it in more exact language, the institutional structures are successfully designed so as to optimize implementation, from the leviathan's perspective. The government makes rational choices, which all in all improve the effectiveness of policy enforcement. It does not follow that implementation works perfectly, but it does follow that the presence of the state apparatus improves implementation. Thus, the presence of state agents will reduce the number of surplus children as well as the number of sex-selective abortions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>It's hard to say to what degree the sex ratio at birth reflects abortions or hiding of baby girls. The Western literature tends to argue that the uneven sex ration at birth is a result of sex-selective abortions. By contrast, the

*Hypothesis 1a: Not distinguishing between the party members and government bureaucrats, taken together, a greater presence of the party state makes enforcement more effective in terms of preventing surplus children.*

*Hypothesis 1b: Similarly, taken together, a greater presence of the party state makes enforcement more effective, in terms of preventing pre-natal sex selection.*

According to the model, the riskier task would be assigned to the less risk-averse agency. This implies that the informationally less demanding task of preventing illegal birth is assigned to the government and the informationally more demanding task of preventing pre-natal sex selection is assigned to the party. Higher-level bureaucracies would evaluate government officials based on the prevalence of illegal births in their district. By contrast, they would evaluate party members and local cadres based on their ability to prevent gender selection before birth.

*Hypothesis 2a: A greater presence of the party is associated with less pre-natal sex selection.*

*Hypothesis 2b: A greater presence of bureaucrats is associated with less surplus children.*

Since the two tasks are interdependent, each group is tempted to undermine the success of the other group. It becomes easier for bureaucrats to prevent citizens from having multiple children, if the last legal baby is a boy. Once a couple has a boy, the incentive to have additional children diminishes. As a result, local bureaucrats have an interest in tolerating or even encouraging the use of medical devices to identify the embryo's gender. Reversely, it becomes easier for party members to prevent sex selection if couples can have multiple children. If couples know that they can try again for a boy, they will be less eager to force their luck with the first or second child. Party

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Chinese literature emphasizes that many baby girls are hidden away. If the census data discussed above are any guide, the problem has shifted over time from hiding away female children to sex-selective abortions. Chu Junhong makes a compelling case that sex-selective abortions are an increasingly available option, despite all government prohibitions (Chu, 2001). I will follow Chu's interpretation. However, for the information-based argument, the absconding of children would even more clearly be a task for the party, rather than the government, because it is the ultimate form of uncertainty.

members thus have an interest to be more tolerant when it comes to sanctioning illegal children.

This leads to

*Hypothesis 3a (strong version): A greater presence of the party is associated with more surplus births.*

*Hypothesis 3b (strong version): A greater presence of government bureaucrats is associated with more pre-natal sex selection.*

These hypotheses are extremely stark. They ignore interactive effects between party and government. In particular, it is the task of party agencies to supervise the government. As a result, the presence of party members not only has the direct effect of increasing illegal births, but also indirectly affects the effectiveness of bureaucrats in reducing illegal birth. Conversely, so the presence of bureaucrats will also influence the effectiveness of party members. If the model is a good guide to reality, the interactive effects should not invalidate the result, but they do call for a more moderate version of hypotheses 3a and 3b. Instead of absolute effect of party members and bureaucrats, the moderate version of the hypotheses emphasize the relative importance of the party and the government in each of the two family planning tasks.

*Hypothesis 3a (moderate version): The presence of bureaucrats has a greater effect on reducing surplus births than the presence of the party.*

*Hypothesis 3b (moderate version): The presence of the party has a greater effect on reducing pre-natal gender selection than the presence of bureaucrats.*

### **3.4 Empirical Evidence from China's One-Child Policy**

Thanks to newly available, exceptionally fine-grained data, quantitative analysis succeeds in dissecting the party state, detecting in the data the division of labor between party and bureaucracy.



The presence of party members and the presence of bureaucrats each have a distinct effect on policy implementation. Manifestly, the party machine and the government apparatus are engaged in very different activities. The dissection of the party state becomes complex, especially since the data even allow us to analyze the differential effect of male versus female party members and bureaucrats. This complexity should not obscure a simple, yet critically important take-away: The presence of party members makes a big difference for the implementation of China's one-child policy.

### 3.4.1 Specification

In order to test the eight hypotheses formulated above, two distinct empirical models are needed, corresponding to the two distinct implementation tasks. The first model predicts the number of non-first-born children. The prevention of non-first born children is a routine task, which is relatively easy to monitor. This task is assigned to the government. The second model predicts the number of female children as a close proxy of gender-selective abortion. The prevention of gender selection is a difficult task that is hard to monitor. It is a paradigmatic example of the party stepping in to alleviate the unintended consequences of a highly intrusive policy.

Two ways of justifying non-first-borns: (1) the ultimate goal is reducing birth rates (2) the number of non-first-born children is a close approximation of the number of illegal children.

The dependent variable of the *first* model is the number of non-first-born children. How closely does the number of non-first-born children correspond to the number of illegal children? The standard of what exactly counts as an illegal baby changes, but the following definition seems to be the most typical: First-borns are never illegal. Second-borns are illegal if they are produced by Han Chinese urban mothers or by rural mothers whose first child is a boy. All subsequent births are illegal, except if to a non-Han Chinese mother. This definition approximates the situation in

Shandong province around the year 2000.

The specification of the *first* model includes demographic variables that could be associated with the likelihood of having illegal children, as well as with the presence of state agents. For example, there are size effects, since in more populous jurisdictions, there will be more births as well as more state agents. Unlike cities such as Shanghai, urban areas in Shandong typically have not passed the population transition. If urban citizens want multiple children, they are more likely in a position to afford potential sanctions. Moreover, the definition of what counts as “illegal” is stricter in urban areas than in rural areas, so that we will find more illegal births in urban areas. The specification also controls for the presence of ethnic minorities, migrants, female migrants, health care workers and female health care workers. Finally, since the number of births varies by season, the specification also includes monthly fixed effects.

The *second* model explains the number of female births, controlling for the number of male births born in the same jurisdiction during the same time period. If it was all about biology, there should be about 1.05 female births for every male baby. More importantly, the two variables should be closely correlated, almost perfectly co-linear. The residual should be perfectly random. Yet in China, as we will see, socio-economic variables greatly influence the number of baby girls born, even when comparing localities with the same number of baby boys. To make the results between the two implementation tasks as comparable as possible, the second specification uses precisely the same control variables as the first specification.

### 3.4.2 Data

China’s populations census provides extraordinary insight into the effectiveness of the one-child policy. Data from the most recent census in 2010 is only released selectively and at more aggregate

levels. Instead, all the data used in this analysis come from the 2000 census<sup>22</sup>, whose accuracy is widely acknowledged.<sup>23</sup> Initially it was precisely the information related to fertility and sex ratios, which was off-limits, but accessibility is no longer a serious problem. The data are available at an unusually fine-grained level, namely the township. Some observations are collected for the full census, other observations are collected only for a 10% sample.<sup>24</sup> For the analysis of non-first born children, we can work with the 2,482 township observations of the 10% sub-sample (almost 100 million people). To study gender imbalance, we even have the luxury of monthly data from the full census. For every township for every month between November 1999 and October 2000, we know the number and sex of newborn children, so that we can work with 12 monthly observations of 2,482 townships, that is, a total of 29,784 observations. For the variables used in the present analysis, there are no missing data.

The 10% sample counts the number of officials and party cadres. It does not count the number of party members, but the size of the cadre corps stands in as a proxy for the number of party members and the presence of the party on the ground. Out of China's 14 million state agents, 94% are bureaucrats and only 6% party cadres. Based on the census, it is not possible to ascertain how many of these state agents work at the township level, as opposed to higher levels of government. Dividing the number of state agents by the number of townships, there are 19 party cadres per township. Since many party cadres work at higher levels of government, the number of party cadres, which are actually posted in a typical township would be much smaller than 19. The point here is that at the heart of local power, there is a small elite, consisting of a handful of party officials. The

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<sup>22</sup>Available from China Data Center of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. The data are released in various formats. I used a tool called China Geo-Explorer II, which shows a data visualization on a map and then allows to extract the numerical data from the map.

<sup>23</sup>Two articles represent the scholarly consensus. Attesting to the high quality of the census, they also point to the political stakes: Lavelly (2001); Walfish (2000).

<sup>24</sup>The national sub-sample is 9.5%, but the sub-sample for Shandong is almost exactly 10% of the population.

|                           | unitary state<br>model | model separating party<br>versus government | party government<br>interaction model |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| state agents              | -8.3***                |                                             |                                       |
| party                     |                        | 54.5***                                     | -51.4***                              |
| bureaucrats               |                        | -10.4***                                    | -16.0***                              |
| party*bureaucrats         |                        |                                             | 508***                                |
| all births                | 0.06***                | 0.06***                                     | 0.06***                               |
| total population          | -0.36***               | -0.36***                                    | -0.38***                              |
| urban population          | 0.63***                | 0.71***                                     | 0.79***                               |
| ethnic minorities         | 2.49***                | 2.7***                                      | 2.8***                                |
| migrants                  | 11.0***                | 11.0***                                     | 10.8***                               |
| female migrants           | -9.6***                | -9.8***                                     | -9.5***                               |
| health care workers       | 32.3***                | 31.8**                                      | 27.6**                                |
| female health care worker | 11.3                   | 4.9                                         | 8.1                                   |

Note: All specification include intercepts and monthly fixed effects.

\*\*\* significance at 0.001, \*\* significance at 0.01, \* significance at 0.05, . significance at 0.1

Table 3.2: Determinants of Surplus Births: The Effectiveness of Party Versus Bureaucracy

table also indicates an extremely unbalanced sex ratio at birth, already discussed above. According to the census, for every 100 boys born between November 1st, 1999 and October 31st, 2000, there were only 85.6 girls.

### 3.4.3 Results

Table 3.2 presents factors that explain performance on the task to avoid non-first born children. In the unitary state model (column 2), which lumps together party cadres and bureaucrats, we see that more state agents mean fewer non-first-born children. Each additional state worker on average is associated with a decrease in the number of non-first-born children by 8.3, controlling for a number of demographic control variables and also controlling for seasonal effects. Overall, confirming hypothesis 1a, the party state is an effective implementor.

However, the picture changes once we disaggregate and consider separately the effect of party members and state officials. Whereas the presence of continues to be associated with fewer non-first-births, a greater presence of party members is associated with an increase in the number of

illegal births, a resounding confirmation that party and government each are in charge of very different aspects in implementing the one-child policy (hypothesis 2b and hypothesis 3a, strong version).

Yet with interactive effects the result becomes more complicated, as in the third specification, which is my preferred specification. The signs of the coefficients suggest that both party and government prevent illegal children, but that places where both the party and the government are big, there will be more illegal children. It is not clear what that means on balance, when the variables take on realistic values in an ordinary range. A simulation is needed to determine what implications the coefficients have when the independent variable are within an ordinary range of variables. Table 3.3 demonstrates how the number of illegal births changes under different scenarios. For these scenarios, I use the complete model with interactive effects. All of these scenarios are well within the ordinary range of variables. The comparison case is an average locality, where all independent variables take on their mean values and the month is January. Next, to the right of the value “Zero”, we see a scenario of a jurisdiction with more party members; specifically, the number of party members is increased by one standard deviation. In other words, the scenario is well within the range of “normal”-sized party machines. This decreases the number of non-first-born children by 10%. Increasing the size of government has a much more sizeable effect. An increase of the number of bureaucrats by one standard deviation cuts the number of non-first-born children by more than half. This confirms hypothesis 2b, but would support only the weak version of hypothesis 3a: Presence of party members does not lead to more surplus children, but it does not help nearly as much as the presence of bureaucrats.

As it turns out, success in the prevention of sex selection is the mirror image of the success in the prevention of non-first-born children. Each additional state agent on average is associated

| Number of<br>non-first births | Small-sized<br>party | Middle-sized<br>party | Large-sized<br>party |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Small-sized government        | +86%                 | +63%                  | +39%                 |
| Middle-sized government       | +10%                 | ZERO                  | -10%                 |
| Large-sized government        | -66%                 | -63%                  | -59%                 |

Note: Middle-sized refers to the sample mean, small-sized to the sample mean minus one standard deviation, large-sized to the sample mean plus one standard deviation.

Table 3.3: Simulation of Surplus Births: The Effectiveness of Party Versus Bureaucracy

|                           | unitary state<br>model | model separating party<br>versus government | party government<br>interaction model |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| state agents              | 3.6***                 |                                             |                                       |
| party                     |                        | 48.9***                                     | 76.8***                               |
| bureaucrats               |                        | 1.9**                                       | 3.5***                                |
| party*bureaucrats         |                        |                                             | -134***                               |
| male births               | 0.55***                | 0.55***                                     | 0.55***                               |
| total population          | 1.8***                 | 1.8***                                      | 1.8***                                |
| urban population          | 0.26***                | 0.32***                                     | 0.31***                               |
| ethnic minorities         | -1.43***               | -1.26**                                     | -1.3**                                |
| male migrants             | -0.96*                 | -0.95*                                      | -0.91.                                |
| female migrants           | -0.06                  | -0.18                                       | -0.22                                 |
| health care workers       | 11.2                   | 10.8                                        | 11.9.                                 |
| female health care worker | -39.8***               | -44.4***                                    | -45.2***                              |

Note: All specification include intercepts and monthly fixed effects.

\*\*\* significance at 0.001, \*\* significance at 0.01, \* significance at 0.05, . significance at 0.1

Table 3.4: Determinants of Female Births: The Effectiveness of Party Versus Bureaucracy

with three additional female children, confirming hypothesis 1b. Disaggregating the state, party members are the ones who prevent sex selection, whereas government officials are associated with more sex selection, confirming hypothesis 2a and 3b (strong version). This drastic assessment, as before, is put into perspective once we take into account interaction effects. Table 3.4, which is constructed in the same way as table 3.3, shows that this time, it is the party that for practically relevant values of the dependent variables makes a more important difference and reduces the imbalance of the gender ratio by increasing the number of baby girls, confirming hypothesis 2a, but advocating for the weak version of hypothesis 3b.

| Number of<br>female births | Small-sized<br>party | Middle-sized<br>party | Large-sized<br>party |
|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Small-sized government     | -4.5%                | -1.5%                 | +1.4%                |
| Middle-sized government    | -2.5%                | ZERO                  | +2.5%                |
| Large-sized government     | -0.5%                | +1.5%                 | +3.6%                |

Note: Middle-sized refers to the sample mean, small-sized to the sample mean minus one standard deviation, large-sized to the sample mean plus one standard deviation.

Table 3.5: Simulation of Female Births: The Effectiveness of Party Versus Bureaucracy

### 3.4.4 Is the Division of Labor in the Realm of Family Planning Gendered?

Another explanation for local variation in family planning outcomes might emphasize the role of gender. This is not as much an alternative explanation as it is a complementary explanation. A gendered division of labor might be overlaid over the party/bureaucracy division of labor. Chinese academics and officials play down the fact that the party and the government focus on different aspects of the one-child policy. By contrast, they emphasize the division of labor between male and female officials, with female party officials spearheading family planning policies. Similarly, Gail Hershatter discovers that in the 1980s, female survivors of the Great Leap Famine were the most eager activists promoting the one-child policy (Hershatter, 2011, pp.206-208). Yet as Great Leap Famine memories are fading and as women today have different concerns from the ones of the 1980s, is family policy implementation still female? Instead of faithfully carrying out the tasks assigned to them, women leaders might also feel sympathetic vis-à-vis women citizens, who want to rear multiple children or who are under pressure to live up to traditional family expectations to give birth to a son. Fundamentally, Hershatter may be right that women leaders are particularly sympathetic to the interests of women citizens. While in the 1980s, the best way to promote women meant to actively support the one-child policy, in the context of contemporary China, the best way to promote women might well be to quietly undermine the one-child policy. Precisely because they remain in charge today, female state agents might be in an excellent position to undermine the

|                           | model 4<br>non-first children<br>unitary state model | model 5<br>non-first children<br>party vs. gov. | model 9<br>female births<br>unitary state model | model 10<br>female births<br>party vs. gov. |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| party officials           | 8.9                                                  | -81.4***                                        | 66.1***                                         | 86.6***                                     |
| female party officials    | 226***                                               | 140*                                            | -135**                                          | -115**                                      |
| bureaucrats               | 12.5***                                              | 7.1*                                            | 25.7***                                         | 27.0***                                     |
| female bureaucrats        | -80***                                               | -80.4***                                        | -82.7***                                        | -82.5**                                     |
| party * bureaucrats       |                                                      | 506***                                          |                                                 | -115***                                     |
| all births                | 0.06***                                              | 0.06***                                         |                                                 |                                             |
| male births               |                                                      |                                                 | 0.55***                                         | 0.55***                                     |
| total population          | -0.37***                                             | -0.39***                                        | 1.7***                                          | 1.7***                                      |
| urban population          | 0.74***                                              | 0.81***                                         | 0.36***                                         | 0.34***                                     |
| ethnic minorities         | 3.2***                                               | 3.53***                                         | -0.52                                           | -0.56                                       |
| male migrants             | 11.2***                                              | 11.8***                                         | -0.41                                           | -0.39                                       |
| female migrants           | -10.5                                                | 0.72*                                           | -0.88.                                          | -0.91.                                      |
| health care workers       | 28.8**                                               | 22.9*                                           | 0.31                                            | 1.5                                         |
| female health care worker | 6.4                                                  | 12.2                                            | -31.4**                                         | -0.31**                                     |

Note: All specification include intercepts and monthly fixed effects.

\*\*\* significance at 0.001, \*\* significance at 0.01, \* significance at 0.05, . significance at 0.1

Table 3.6: Gendered Enforcement: Female Party Members and Female Bureaucrats

policy. Thus, it might be that the conventional wisdom about the role of women in family planning must be updated.

The data provide evidence that female party members are indeed undermining the one-child policy, rather than promoting it. The more female party members there are, the more non-first-born children are born and the more sex selection takes place, as shown in table 3.6. For government officials, the evidence is mixed. Depending on the specification, the sign of the coefficient changes. Whether or not female government officials appear to be helpful for the one-child policy or whether they are resistant to the policy depends on whether one isolates the interactive effects. It could be that female government officials just do not have much leeway in undermining the policy, given that they are officially put in charge and given that non-first-born children are relatively easy to be discovered. The task that is less easy to monitor, female government officials - just like female party officials - create more space for female citizens to carry out sex selective abortions.



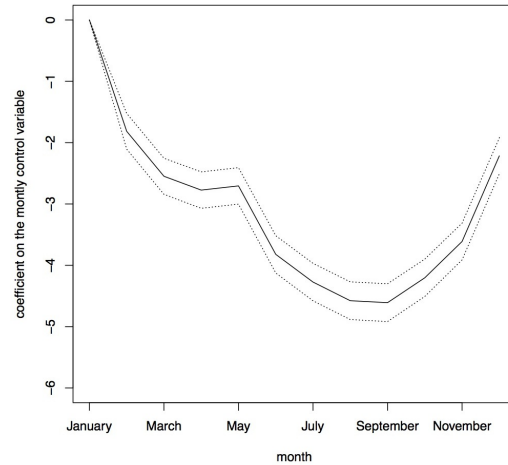


Figure 3.2: Seasonal Variation in State Strength

### 3.4.5 Seasonal Variation in State Strength

There are striking seasonal patterns in the frequency of female children compared to male children (compare figure 3.2). All specifications include monthly fixed effects; the month of January serves as comparison line. Compared to January, in all the other months, less female children are born. Most female children arrive in winter, between December and March. The fewest female children arrive in summer, between June and October. These findings already control for seasonal fluctuations in the overall number of births, which results from things like happy family reunions over the spring festival, as well as the other control variables. In other words, more girls are missing in the summer months than in the winter months. The differences are enormous, as a simulation based on the fitted interaction model 6 shows. Letting all variables take on their average value, the model suggests that there are 33% less girls in September compared to January. If it were always January, there would be 419.000 baby girls born in Shandong every year - by contrast, if it were always September, there would be 281.000 baby girls. What explains this enormous seasonal variation in the number of female births?

To interpret these seasonal regularities, we combine scholarly findings with facts about how people take advantage of the four seasons in the climatic context of Shandong. Missing baby girls can be explained either as the result of under-reporting or as the result of sex-selective abortions. It appears likely that sex-selective abortions have become the primary cause for missing girls (Chu, 2001). They also provide a plausible explanation for seasonal birth patterns. Abortions are carried out after an ultrasound B scan about five months before the due date. Only rarely do more sophisticated prenatal diagnostics allow earlier abortion. The girls missing between June and October have been aborted between January and May. A women during her early pregnancy has the choice to hide her pregnancy from her family and from the authorities. It is easier to hide a pregnancy during winter months, since women find it more natural to stay at home during the agricultural slack season, to justify extended periods of absence for family visits over the spring festival, and to wear more clothing to cover up a pregnancy. In combination, these factors make it easier for women to have an abortion during the winter months. It has even been suggested that women plan their pregnancy for the winter, so as to keep it secret. (White, 2000, p.179) Ostensibly, the state is stronger between December and March, because there are more female births during winter. Yet in reality, we must take into account the time lag of abortion. The state is more likely to overlook sex selective abortions during winter. “Seeing like a state” in this case means having a blurrier vision in winter, resulting in seasonal variation of state strength with surprisingly few baby girls born during the summer.

### **3.5 Conclusion: The CCP’s Vital Role in Policy Implementation**

The party plays a prominent role in policy implementation, distinct from the bureaucracy. To describe the separate domains of party activity and bureaucratic activity, and to explain why it

makes sense for state builders to maintain such separate domains, this chapter analyses the case of the one-child policy. Based on a game theoretical argument involving asymmetric information, the chapter finds that the party apparatus, consisting of agents who are less risk-averse, is used selectively for the state's most difficult and most vital tasks. Whereas information might play an important role, one additional reason for the different capabilities of party and government is the different characteristics of party members versus government officials. More risk-averse people would self-select into government positions and therefore be more appropriate agents for implementing routine tasks with little asymmetric information. In the case of the one-child policy, the theory implies that the government takes care of the first-order problem of preventing non-first births, whereas the party takes care of the second-order problem of preventing sex selection, which is the most serious, unintended side effects of the one-child policy. The party apparatus is a great source of strength of the Chinese state, precisely because it is used sparingly.

The one-child policy, because it is such an important and challenging policy to implement, reveals much about the bases of Chinese state strength. The government focuses on preventing surplus births and its agents are rewarded for performance on that routine task, which is relatively straightforward to observe. On the other hand, an unintended side-effect of the one-child policy is the unbalanced gender ratio at birth. This problem has taken on great urgency and proves much harder to solve. The party is put in charge of solving this problem, including through "thought work". The smaller risk aversion of CCP members, compared to bureaucrats, has consequences, both positive ones and negative ones, beyond the realm of one-child policy implementation. On the downside, the less risk averse party members may be more tempted by corruption than the more risk averse government officials. On the bright side, the less risk averse party cadres might be more enterprising, thereby fuelling economic dynamism. Officials in any other system -certainly in the

Russian bureaucracy- are of a more timid nature and less likely to take risks.

The following chapters will re-enforce and complement the findings from this chapter. The party is not only deployed to extract compliance, but also to extract resources in an information-poor environment. As chapters 5 and 6 will show, in times of crisis the separation between party and state takes on even greater urgency. We find that governance is differentiated not only across space, but also across agencies. At the core of Chinese statecraft lies the government's ability to distinguish between routine tasks on the one hand and priority tasks on the other. Similar to the imperial court designating difficult priority counties and dispatching its most capable officials to these localities, the current leadership also knows its priorities and dispatches its most powerful agency, the party apparatus, to take care of the most difficult priority tasks. Moreover, the party-government tension, which occurs while implementing the one-child policy, is more desirable from the viewpoint of the government than it might seem at first glance. Earlier, we saw that the unevenness of governance at first sight appeared as a weakness, but at closer look turned out to reflect the state's capacity to prioritize tasks. Similarly, the fact that party members and bureaucrats are working somewhat against each other reflects the fact that they have been assigned different tasks in a rational way.

If the analysis in this chapter is correct, the CCP plays an indispensable role in allowing the state difficult interventions into local communities, such as with the one-child policy. Concerning China's future if the CCP were displaced from power, this finding raises concerns: Would the Chinese state be sustainable if one day the CCP evaporated, leaving behind only the bureaucratic government structure? Unfortunately, much of the state-building that has taken place over the last 70 years was centered on the party. It is not clear whether China's bureaucracy could continue to function the way it does today independently of the party. Consciously or unconsciously, the

party has made itself indispensable for the operations of the Chinese state.<sup>25</sup> Comparing localities with differently-sized local party apparatuses and differently-sized government bureaucracies, this chapter demonstrates that much of the success of China's one-child policy depends on the party. Success of the one-child policy in its primary task, namely the reduction of birth rates, can be attributed to government officials. But progress on the secondary task of alleviating the unintended and potentially regime-destabilizing effect of uneven sex ratios at birth can be attributed primarily to party members. There has been state-building beyond the party, yet the party has made itself indispensable for managing the severe side-effects of a highly intrusive policy. For the most difficult tasks, the capacity of the Chinese state rests on the Leninist party. In that sense the Chinese state is not a secular bureaucracy, which could easily be transformed into a post-party apparatus, at least not while maintaining a firm reach across its territory.

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<sup>25</sup>Zheng Yongnian argues for separating party and state precisely in order to answer such questions. Zheng (2010)

## Chapter 4

# Distributing Perks Versus Extracting Resources: The CCP's Material Base

This chapter empirically assesses the conventional claim that grassroots party organizations mainly serve as distributors of patronage, comparing it to the claim of this dissertation that grassroots party organizations also serve an extractive function. According to the conventional view in the literature on authoritarian parties, the principle function of regime parties consists in distributing patronage (Boix and Svolik, 2013). Reminiscent of a pact with the devil, party members are said to be politically loyal in return for material benefits. Some authors challenge this view by drawing attention to non-material sources for political loyalty, beyond patronage (Levitsky and Way, 2010). By contrast, this chapter accepts the conventional assumption that material aspects go a long way toward understanding grassroots party behavior, but argues that strong parties are not merely acolytes consuming costly state privileges; they also contribute resources to the authoritarian project.

The evidence seeks to illuminate the *quid pro quo* of authoritarian parties at the grassroots level.

|                                    | Party members reaps<br>material benefit                                    | Party members reap<br>intangible benefits                               |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Party reaps<br>material benefits   | patronage in exchange for<br>support with extraction                       | support with extraction<br>historically motivated                       |
| Party reaps<br>intangible benefits | patronage in exchanges for<br>political loyalty<br>(Boix and Svolik, 2013) | political loyalty<br>historically motivated<br>(Levitsky and Way, 2010) |

Table 4.1: The Give-and-Take at the Grassroots

For the grassroots organizations of authoritarian parties to function well, citizens need to have good reasons to be loyal to the party and the party needs to have good reasons to maintain local-level grassroots organizations. A full description of the motivation for party members to join the party and of the motivation for party leaders to maintain grassroots organization is complex. Inertia and a-political, personal loyalties certainly play a role. Authoritarian parties reap political loyalty from their members, although the depth of loyalty only becomes fully observable in times of political crisis and although there is debate as to whether the CCP has moved into a post-ideological age or whether the current president, Xi Jinping, is resuscitating ideology. Reversely, some party members certainly gain immaterial satisfaction from being part of a larger cause. Yet the argument here draws attention to the fact that at the core of the relationship between the party and its members might be a very tangible exchange, as in table 4.1. While conventional approaches hold that the party provides material benefits for intangible political loyalty, and while alternative views emphasize that the relationship might be all about intangible benefits, this dissertation suggests that the party receives tangible advantages from its members. This chapter tests the hypothesis in the area of fiscal policies. It shows that the effectiveness of local party organization can be understood in a parsimonious way as a two-way exchange of material benefits: Party members gain privileges and the party gains access to local resources. Overall, the party state gains tangible and even material benefits from having a grassroots organization.

## 4.1 Local Party Organization as an Infrastructure of Power

To exercise power over the expanse of their territory, governments need an infrastructure to access ever more peripheral communities. But as rulers overcome the problems of distance, they discover the perils of proximity, as locals beleaguer the state and compromise state autonomy. This chapter argues that physical and human geography are essential to explain subnational variation in political control. Studying the uneven reach of Chinese county governments within their jurisdictions, one discovers that micro-variation of state extraction in rural China, including monetary and non-monetary levies, provides a rare window onto the geography of state power. Physical distance still obstructs power projection into extremely remote places, but physical proximity has become a greater constraint for the exercise of power. Local governments are pressured by their immediate neighborhood, at the expense of less fortunate citizens, who live at intermediate distances: still within the reach of the state, but already too far away to turn the state to their favor. The effect of organizational distance, which in China is mediated primarily through the CCP, is similarly dualistic: Party networks alleviate asymmetric information problems, which hamper rural taxation around the world; but party networks are sustained by patronage and therefore jeopardize state autonomy.

“Build roads, bridge distances!” is a universal battle cry of ambitious state-builders. As long as public goods provision is the rulers’ main goal, bridging distances is certainly the right thing to do. But if the rulers’ goal is also to consolidate power, is it really such an unfailingly good recipe for states to bridge physical and organizational distances to their population? To use the metaphor of the road: The same road that allows a state to provide for its citizens also allows a country’s rebels to access their state. The disappearance of distances empowers not only the state, but also its citizens. Reversely, one can ask: In a hypothetical world of highly mobile citizens, where would citizens settle



down, if instinctively they tend to settle in places so as to avoid taxes and *corvée* labor? To what extent taxation determines settlement patterns is an open question, but for now there is not even a good understanding of where low-taxation places would be. Anthropologist James Scott might recommend the mountainous periphery as a hide-out. Today, in many countries, it is questionable whether one could still hide from the state. Instead, a good alternative strategy has always been to move closer to the state and seek to avoid taxes and *corvée* labor by corrupting or in some other way influencing state agents. As distances shrink, thanks to modernizing transportation infrastructure, proximity is becoming a greater threat to a government's authority and the better option for citizens to keep their fortunes safe from the state.

This chapter revolves around problems of distance. In political science, as in other social sciences, distance is a variable that is often evoked, yet seldom systematically studied. The distance of a community from the political center is a fascinating variable because ordinary citizens themselves are acutely aware of the geographical place of their community within the larger polity; some citizens have implicit theories as to how their relative distance from government has practical consequences for their lives. This is unlike other social scientific variables, which lie far beyond the experiential horizon of ordinary citizens. The distance of a community from the political center is also fascinating, because state-builders everywhere act in geographic space, so the problem of distance and power is of universal relevance. The goal of this chapter is to formulate a geography of state power, mapping out and explaining the degree of power a state exercises over communities as a function of their physical and organizational distance from the political center.

The evidence draws on the well-documented experience of China, whose governance must deal with truly daunting distances, investigating the problem that county and township governments confront when they seek to penetrate their jurisdictions and to extract resources from the popu-

lation. The geography of power in Chinese counties illuminates questions of relevance far beyond the Chinese case: With the transportation and communication infrastructure available both to the state as well as to its citizens at the beginning of the 21st century, does it still matter how far away a locality is from a political center? What is the relationship between physical distance and the power of a state? What precisely are the various channels through which distance affects contemporary politics? Is conventional wisdom correct, according to which governments find it easier to rule over nearby communities, rather than distant places? Or are there also factors that make communities in the proximity especially challenging to govern? How important is the effect of physical distance compared to the effect of its close cousin, organizational distance?

From the perspective of a power-seeking state, both distance and proximity come with their own characteristic challenges. On the one hand, roads are an effective device for a state to project infrastructural power over long distances throughout its territory. Hence, as part of their state-building efforts, governments build roads. But on the other hand, the same roads also pave the way for petitioners, rebels and sycophants to confront their state. Therefore, thanks to the same roads, governments lose some of their autonomy from society. Roads are only one example that stands for a large number of state-building devices, which all bring a similar dilemma, including: Organizational networks, which function as instruments of control, but are often maintained on the basis of privileges, patronage and pork. Media presence not only allows the state to spread its message, but it also provides citizens with a common language to protest against state agents, as well as with the tools to coordinate their actions of resistance. Even ideology not only disciplines citizens, but also puts pressure upon governments to act in accordance with their ideology. State-builders who penetrate society more deeply at the same time expose themselves to societal pressures. In short, a state not only finds it challenging to project power over a distance, but also to exercise

authority at close range.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. The next section argues that a new approach to the geography of state power could help to explain still insufficiently understood sub-national variation in the reach of the state. Section 4.2 lays out the theory of how physical distance affects the power of the state in a given locality. Section 4.4 proposes a theory of how organizational distance, which in China is bridged through Communist party networks, affects the power of the state in a given locality. The Chinese party state extends its reach through a party network that seems a characteristic, if not unique, result of China's revolutionary history. Moving from concepts to measurement, the following section discusses the problem of measuring state power in terms of extractive capacity, when the state declares its intention to lower the fiscal burden; and the problem of measuring fiscal extraction in a context where taxes have been abolished. Section 4.6 formulates and test an empirical model. Section 4.8 concludes.

## **4.2 Toward a New Geography of State Power**

### **4.2.1 Charms and Flaws of the Geography Variable**

Seeking to explain political outcomes, for a political scientist to work with geographic variables can be a disconcerting experience, especially when the variable in question relates to purely physical features of the environment. Causal chains connecting features of the physical environment to human society, its institutions and its politics, tend to be longer than causal chains connecting, say, political institutions to political outcomes. There are exceptions, where the physical environment does have a direct and measurable impact on political outcomes, such as the well-documented effect of rainfall on voter turnout (Gomez, Hansford and Krause, 2007), but those exceptions seem

rare. Similarly disconcerting is the fact that geographic variables, such as distance, stand at the beginning of several causal chains, which might reinforce each other or cancel each other out. These are good reasons to turn to more proximate reasons and to middle range theory (Ziblatt, 2006*a*). But there are at least two reasons why political scientists should not discard geographic variables.

First, the distance variable stands at the beginning of causal chains. If one explains political outcomes as a result of institutions, one is almost always tempted to push further back in the causal chain, asking where the consequential institutions came from in the first place. By contrast, geographical variables, such as sheer physical distance of a locality from a political center, usually don't lend themselves to similar questions. Only when one considers very long stretches of historical time might human migration and the relocation of administrative capitals complicate the picture. As a result of being at the beginning of causal chains, geographic variables have the appeal of universality. To be sure, each country's social and cultural geography may change the way in which physical distance affects political outcomes, as will become clearer in section 4.4. But geographic variables such as distance usually evoke a comparable calculus of power. The ideas that mountains keep the state at a distance (Scott, 2009), that hydraulic systems predestine a society for authoritarianism (Wittfogel, 1957) or that natural resources are bad for democracy all are based on physical geographic variables and draw their appeal from their status as very deep reasons for political outcomes. To take Karl Wittfogel's hypothesis as an example, while hydraulic conditions may lead to authoritarianism, only geologists would be interested in finding out what caused certain kinds of hydraulic conditions in the first place. The distinction is a tad less clear-cut when taking into account human interaction with geography. People still find it difficult to move mountains, but they can always decide to move themselves to the mountains. If people up on the mountains are harder to govern, is it because of the mountains, or is it because of the kinds of communities

that prefer to move to the mountains? Similarly, with hydraulic systems, communities have the choice to move to places where they must rely on state coordination, or to move away from such places. Nevertheless, geographic variables are fascinating, because they point to profound causes.

Second, geographic variables include much more than purely physical variables. On the one extreme, distance can be understood as physical distance as the crow flies. Since political scientists are not studying crows, but people, they might instead want to study distance as the miles one needs to walk from point A to B; or the time a person needs to get from A to B; or the transportation cost for getting from A to B. Moving further and further from physical geography to human geography, at the other extreme the political scientist might end up conceptualizing distance in much more sociological or institutional terms. How close are the linkages between people in community A to people in community B? Variables of human geography tend to come with the advantage of giving us more proximate causes for political outcomes than variables of physical geography. But the disadvantage is that they tend to be less universal and more specific to the country context. Human geography is also less spatial and would not necessarily leave recognizable spatial patterns on a map.

#### **4.2.2 Refining the Center-Periphery Thesis**

According to conventional wisdom about the geography of state power, states are strong around their center and weak at their periphery. In its most parsimonious form, this center-periphery thesis simply defines the periphery in terms of a locality's physical distance from the one national capital. Regional systems analysis, as pioneered by William Skinner, provides more fine-tuned definitions of center and periphery. For the Chinese case, Skinner has identified nine macro-regions, primarily derived from drainage basins (Skinner, 1977). With an astounding degree of accuracy,

macro-regions correspond to the centers and peripheries of economic and political systems. Many economic historians have built on Skinner's analysis, although there is debate about the precise delimitation of macro-regions. For the Chinese case, important amendments concern the areas along the empire's Grand Canal, a man-made transportation route confounding a purely geographic logic of drainage basins (Esherick, 1987, p.3-7). What still urgently needs refinement, is not the already quite accurate delimitation of center and periphery, but rather an insufficient understanding of the nature of state-society relations around the center as opposed to the nature of state-society relations at the periphery, in terms of state strength in particular.

The center-periphery thesis is incomplete. To be sure, in some respects, states are indeed stronger around their centers: Military power resources are concentrated there and thanks to the density of people and trade, the absolute amount of tax revenues tend to be more abundant. However, in crucial other respects, states are weaker around the centers: The state apparatus is not autonomous from the society surrounding it and thus finds it hard to exercise coercive power over its immediate environment. As a result of the state autonomy effect, comparing two otherwise identical households, one living at the center and one further away from it, one would expect the household at the center to pay lower taxes. In the 1960s, economists in the tradition of Latin American *Teoría de la Dependencia* have elaborated the dynamics of centers exploiting their peripheries, both internationally and domestically. This contrasts with James Scott's findings about the art of not being governed. He suggests that one could escape state extraction by living far enough away from the center. As the next section will specify, these views can be reconciled, if one thinks of state power as an inverse U-shaped curve: Resource extraction by the state tends to be greatest at intermediate distances from power. Only citizens in extremely remote places -which nowadays are comparatively rare- escape extraction.

Thus, not only a powerful state infrastructure, but also a high degree of state autonomy are characteristics of a strong state. As a theoretical concept, state autonomy has been hard to pin down, partly because of normative concerns. On the one hand, the state should transcend particularistic interests to achieve the common good; but on the other hand, the state should not be totally insulated from the interests of its constituency either. Samuel Huntington defines a government's institutional autonomy as the independence of political institutions from non-political influences (Huntington, 2006 (1968, p.20)). But even this definition is unsatisfying for those with normative concerns, because influences arising from within the political sphere might well reflect particularistic interests that hurt the common good. Instead, when analyzing the success formula of typical developmental states, Peter Evans coined the purposefully ambiguous term "embedded autonomy", to express the difficult balance that a successful state must strike (Evans, 1995). Since the concern here is not quality of governance, but strength of government, a Machiavellian approach to state autonomy is most appropriate. State autonomy in this chapter refers to the capacity of a state to form, hold onto and fend for its own interest, independent from the social forces in the community that it governs.

The state can be said to be strong in a community, where it is able to exert pressure on society and where it is not vulnerable to pressures from society. The central challenge of state-builders, who seek to effectively project power throughout their territory, consists in penetrating society while at the same time remaining insulated from particularistic interests. In other words, state builders seek to expand infrastructural power as well as state autonomy. A powerful state bureaucracy not only permeates every corner of the empire, it also preserves an independence from the local society that hosts it. Reversely, the strength of a state in a particular locality depends on the presence of state agents, as well as on the autonomy of these state agents. The critical empirical test will be

whether the state prefers to extract resources in areas in the vicinity of government, or rather in areas that are further away where tax resistance would be a less immediate threat.

### 4.3 Physical Distance and State Strength in China

In China, according to the prevailing party line, there cannot be any systematic variation in tax rates, certainly not as a result of a household residence's geographic distance from the county or township seat. This is a point of considerable significance for state propaganda. After all, the legitimacy of the CCP draws on its advertised commitment to fairness and to defending the interests of disadvantaged peasants in the countryside. To be sure, this discourse is at variance with reality. Under a thin veneer of egalitarian ideals, China's reality is rife with legal discrimination, including tax discrimination, which to some degree citizens themselves are willing to tolerate as a transitional phenomenon. Unrealistic though is, it is worthwhile keeping in mind the official position on the micro-geography of taxation, which one hears in countless conversations with government officials.

*Hypothesis  $H_0$  (The party line): Households pay the same tax rates, whether they live close to local government or far away from it. Differences in effective tax rates are the result of income differentials, preferential treatment of poor areas, or the speed at which tax reforms are implemented. To the extent that there is informal taxation, it does not systematically discriminate against any particular group of people.*

#### 4.3.1 State Infrastructure and Distance

Social scientists have described the difficulty of projecting power over a distance. Africa historically had extremely high transportation costs. Authors such as Jeffrey Sachs take geographic determinism to an extreme, attributing slow economic and political development in Africa to the pernicious



effect of exorbitant transportation costs (Sachs, 2003). But even more balanced accounts of African political development revolve around geographical factors, including the costs of projecting state power beyond the narrow confines of the capital and its surroundings (Herbst, 2000). Scholars studying Latin America have identified “brown areas”, that are hard to govern and usually far away from the political centers (O’Donnell, 1993). Geographical distances are an important factor determining whether a state can uniformly penetrate its territory (Soifer, 2006).

The perennial idea that sheer distance poses formidable obstacles to state builders also plays a crucial role in James Scott’s depiction of Zomia, a highland area straddling the border of several countries in Southeast Asia, including some Chinese provinces. According to Scott, over centuries, the inhabitants of Zomia have consciously and successfully attempted to escape state-building, the “friction of terrain” greatly helping their cause (Scott, 2009). Certainly it would not be effortless for people to escape from the reach of a government that seeks to expand its rule and conquer ungoverned terrain; they might have to travel far away from the centers of power.

In China, at least since the Song dynasty, county jurisdictions have been designed with the purpose of maximizing the reach of the state, often quite explicitly (Mostern, 2011). Nevertheless, physical distance from administrative centers has always played a crucial role in the every-day interaction between state and society. Do they still play a role today? Transportation costs are much lower than before; the speed of infrastructure construction is breathtaking. Officials from most county seats nowadays reach almost any village within their jurisdiction and return on the same day, a big change compared to even twenty years ago.<sup>1</sup> However, this improvement by no means has made transportation costs irrelevant. It is still more convenient to inspect villages in the immediate environs of the county seat, rather than in some remote mountain villages, which as

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<sup>1</sup>This is a take-away from several conversations by one of the authors with officials in half a dozen counties of varying size and wealth in Shandong Province.

a consequence receive scant government attention. The point where the reach of the government slackens might have been pushed further away from the county seat than ever before, but one would expect that such a point nevertheless still exists.

*Hypothesis  $H_{1a}$  (State Infrastructure): Due to the friction of terrain and the difficulty of projecting power to remote localities, households living very far away from the county administrative center pay fewer taxes, controlling for family income and a host of other factors.*

### 4.3.2 State Autonomy

It is hard to project power over a distance, but it is also hard to exercise power at close range. Households living at the centers of local power are much more likely to have relatives or friends working for the party committee, the government, or one of the innumerable government-related agencies and enterprises. A large literature deals with Chinese relationship networks, also called *guanxi*. While some authors have made out a secular, modernizing trend away from traditional *guanxi* networks, the overwhelming consensus highlights the omnipresence, robustness and socio-economic impact of relationship networks in China (Yang, 2002). To counteract the corrupting influence of *guanxi*, a policy of “avoidance” determines that party secretaries and a handful of top leaders in the county government should not be locals in their jurisdiction. But since the top officials have a political interest in quickly building up *guanxi* networks after they arrive at a new post, and since much of the *guanxi* to secure tax privileges does not even involve the higher echelons of power, the “avoidance” policy is far from effective. Thanks to such relationships, households in the immediate environs of government authority can count on privileges and are lightly treated when it comes to tax enforcement.

Residents living close to the county and township seats are not only masters of cultivating

connections, but they can also put greater pressure on government. Protesters in remote villages will hardly attract the same attention as protesters just a few blocks away from the county seat. With higher population density, their protest has greater potential to spiral out of control. Moreover, county seat residents know well where to find the petition office, the tax office or other agencies where they can apply pressure. They might even know when higher-level government officials are in town thanks to car license plates that indicate visitors from the provincial government-, even if local governments try their best not to disclose such information. Information permeates from the government and circulates more easily in the community living at the county seat. Proximity has its perils; state infrastructure comes with unintended consequences for state autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

Citizens close to local centers of power can take advantage of upper-level government efforts at lightening the peasant burden. If local-level cadres are caught charging excessive levies and fees, their career is in jeopardy. In 2002, a group of central ministries proposed to turn the local per-capita tax rate into a formal criterion for the promotion of local officials, although one cannot know how many provincial/prefectural governments have actually implemented this non-binding proposal.<sup>3</sup> Citizens in places which receive most attention from upper-level governments can take most advantage of the upper hierarchy's watchful eye. Local leaders make sure that the peasant burden is not excessive in places where they expect monitoring from upper-level governments, namely local centers of power but also experimental spots and designated poor areas. In such places, pressures from below and pressures from above work in tandem to reinforce each other, so that local governments have good reasons to look for funding elsewhere.

*Hypothesis H<sub>1b</sub> (State Autonomy): As local officials are pressured by and collude with citizens*

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<sup>2</sup>That may be one reason why governments now build offices outside the core of cities. For example, in Jinan the prefectural government and party authorities have recently moved to the edges of the city.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Agriculture et al. “關於2002年減輕農民負擔工作的意見” [Opinion on the alleviating the peasant burden in 2002], January 31, 2002.

*who live in the immediate environs of power, households living in close vicinity to the county and township administrative centers pay less in taxes, controlling for the same factors as above.*

### 4.3.3 Synthesis

Hypotheses  $H_{1a}$  and  $H_{1b}$  are non-exclusive and complementary. As one moves away from the government seat, the power of state infrastructure declines, while state autonomy increases. It is highly unlikely that these two effects cancel each other out. For that result to hold, the rate at which the power of infrastructure weakens would have to be identical to the rate at which state autonomy increases. As recognized in natural sciences and social sciences, effects of distance tend to be non-linear. In physics, the inverse square law applies to fields ranging from electrostatics to acoustics, as well as to gravity, where Newton's law famously states that the "gravitational attraction force between two point masses is [...] inversely proportional to the square of their separation distance."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in international trade theory the gravity model predicts that the volume of trade between two countries is inversely proportional to the square of their distance. Translated to the present context, non-linearity would predict infrastructural power to dissipate fastest in the most remote areas, and state autonomy to dissipate fastest in the areas closest to power. If that expectation is true, then it follows that a theoretical synthesis would predict an inverse U-shape, with state capacity reaching its maximum at some intermediate distance from power, although the theory is agnostic as to where this maximum point might be.

*Hypothesis  $H_1$  The relationship between power and distance is curvilinear, corresponding to an inverse U-shape. Moving away from the centers of power, at first state power increases, thanks to strong increases of state autonomy. Beyond a certain point, infrastructure begins to dissipate so*

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<sup>4</sup>This particular wording of Newton's law comes from Wikipedia.

*quickly that it outweighs gains in state autonomy; state power begins to dissipate.*

## 4.4 Organizational Distance and State Strength in China

The CCP stands out as the most important organizational apparatus through which the Chinese government exercises power across its vast territory. The Leninist party apparatus is clearly distinct from the bureaucratic hierarchy. To be sure, double appointments are frequent, as the party controls the bureaucracy through individuals with functions in both systems, but it is perfectly clear, both in theory and in practice, which ones are the command lines of the party and which ones are the command lines of the bureaucracy. This distinction is especially obvious at the level of local government. In many places, the offices of the party, comprising the powerful office of the party committee, the organization department and the propaganda department, are located in a separate building. Whereas the state bureaucracy formally ends at the county or township level, the party apparatus reaches all the way down into the villages.

The party apparatus bridges the social distance between the rulers and the ruled. Because of the dualistic nature of distance, the party as a distance-bridging device also exhibits a dualistic nature. On the one hand, it has been designed as a power-wielding device, for the top-down transmittance of instructions, for the bottom-up transmission of critical information and more generally as a guarantor of political order. On the other hand, the party exhibits characteristics that have emerged as unintended, yet unavoidable consequences. Every since the party has evolved from the pre-1949 conquest organization to the post-1949 government constituency, party members have been demanding privileges. This trend has intensified as the ideological basis of party membership has given way to transactional motives. Upper-level cadres prefer to grant material benefits rather than political influence to the rank-and-file, in the interest of predictability and control.

#### 4.4.1 The Party As State Infrastructure

Like the Chinese central government, county and township governments also find the CCP vitally important to exercise control and effectively govern their jurisdictions. The critical role of the party in the tax and fee collection process reflects its indispensability for the smooth functioning of the state. The party transmits information that directly helps in the assessment of taxes, the monitoring of payments and the disciplining of citizens with overdue taxes. Rural tax collection systems in countries throughout the world suffer from often insurmountable asymmetric information problems; governments have great difficulties in accurately monitoring income and tax payments. In the countryside, most of the time, it is prohibitively costly to collect information and enforce payment, compared to the modest rural tax potential. In China, rural populations have historically resisted information collection efforts by the state, posing a formidable problem to state-builders (Lam, 2011). However, these days village communities make very significant contributions to local projects. Party members in the village are the critical link, since they are both well-connected in the village and also willing to take instructions from the township government. In this role, village party members are much more than tax collectors; they serve as mediators between the government and the village. Each party member keeps eyes and ears open, and critical information needed in the tax and fee extraction process is compared and centralized in village party committee meetings. The more party members there are in a village, the greater the extractive capacity of the local government.

Party presence matters for tax collection in a less mechanical, but maybe even more important way as well. The top leadership of China's county and township governments dread protests. If a protest escalates and reaches a significant size, it becomes an ugly blot on the resumes of the officials under whose watch it occurred. The prevention of protest is a key criterion in the cadre promotion

procedure, since the occurrence of a protest has “veto power” and can invalidate outstanding performance on all other dimensions. When implementing ambitious projects and collecting the corresponding fees, the county and township leaders need local leaders who communicate the goal of these projects well, so that they are better understood and hopefully endorsed by local citizens. They need an early warning system when the project creates discontent and when therefore it also becomes riskier to ask citizens to pay for it. And if tax protests do erupt, they need channels to mediate the conflict before it escalates to a level that would be noted by the media and upper-level government. It is the sub-governmental party system that provides these tools. Formal and informal contacts, party meetings and consultation across hierarchical levels -meetings may include up to three hierarchical levels at a time, seldom more- provide a regular, steady flow of information. The more reliable this flow of information is, the more confidently can county and township governments carry out projects without great risk of protest. The goal is not simply for the government to squeeze out the maximum amount of money, but also to understand better what kinds of projects would be genuinely welcome. Party penetration makes the state strong.

*Hypothesis H<sub>2a</sub>: Party networks alleviate severe asymmetric information problems inherent to any rural taxation system. Communities with greater party presence carry a heavier tax burden than communities where party members are few and far between.*

#### **4.4.2 The Party and State Autonomy**

Local governments pay a price for the indispensable services they receive from the party members in their jurisdictions. There is a principle-agent problem, because party members in the village can collude and treat each other lightly in the process of tax collection. This works as long as none of them is defecting in order to ingratiate himself with township officials and thus improve his own

power position. Party members also have more interaction and easier access to township and often even county-level authorities. They will be better able to present their case if they plead for exemptions from taxes and levies under particular circumstances. Most importantly, the government has an overwhelming political interest in maintaining good relations with its party constituency, on which the local government's power rests. Spoiling the relationship with the party members in its constituency would pose a vital threat to the local government, cut the local government off from the rural population and make projects impossible. As a result, ordinary citizens suspect that most people nowadays join the party for some kind of material benefits ("haochu"), a view that is amply confirmed by empirical evidence (Li, Lu and Sato, 2008).

*Hypothesis H<sub>2b</sub>: The party also functions as a patronage network; party members expect and receive tax rebates.*

### 4.4.3 Synthesis

On balance, does the party strengthen or weaken the state, in terms of extractive capacity? According to a structural functionalist argument, the party could not weaken the state, for if it were not an effective instrument of power, the state would dispense with it. One may or may not find this line of argument convincing. After all, many institutions have survived even when they were severely dysfunctional and had outlived any usefulness. But even conceding the problems with structural functionalist arguments, it is clear that the party on balance helps tax collection. About one fourth of all rural households are party households (defined as having at least one party member in the household). Therefore, as long as the patronage distributed to each party household is not four times the amount of additional taxes extracted from all village households as a result of the party presence, overall the party improves extractive capacity. Thus the conjecture is that the



party strengthens the state.<sup>5</sup>

*Hypothesis H<sub>2</sub>: Judging by the criterion of extractive capacity, the CCP makes the Chinese state stronger.*

## 4.5 Measuring State Extractive Capacity in China

Rural China provides an excellent case for testing hypotheses about the geographical reach of the state. The large size of the country, in terms of territory and population, as well as the exceptional diversity of its citizenry, make it illusionary even for a well-established and effective modern government to achieve anything resembling uniformity of control. State penetration into society, attitudes vis-à-vis the state, and the implicit social contract between state and society differ from place to place. As a result, the geography of state power is not flat and resource extraction is also highly uneven across space. To put it differently: Even after controlling for legitimate factors that should determine the fiscal burden of a household, such as household size, household income and household landholdings, there remains much variation. Since this kind of variation is neither entirely legal nor fully legitimate, it might be called tax discrimination.

There exist robust data on the micro-variation of state extractive capacity. The China Household Income Project, conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and more fully described later on in this chapter, has recorded private household spending in exceptional detail. Since questions about taxes, levies and fees are highly politically sensitive at a time when the peasant burden is one of the most salient issues on the political agenda, there are clear limits to the information enumerators could possibly elicit on such a large scale, from over 38.000 individuals. But the survey has the merit of investigating the whole picture of household finances. Taxes, levies and fees

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<sup>5</sup>Later on, this chapter will also present a marginal calculation to calculate the “optimal” size of the party for purposes of fiscal extraction.

are just several lines among literally hundreds of questions on other aspects of household finances. Moreover, survey designers try to match income and expenditures, just like a balance sheet, further increasing the likelihood that both income and expenditures are quite fully recorded. Since the survey has been regularly fielded since the 1980s, it routinely includes questions about the non-monetary and the informal economy of rural China; it is one of the most sophisticated surveys used in any non-OECD country. The richness of the data must be emphasized, because as this chapter now moves from concepts to measurement, it is not so much problems with the data, but challenges in defining what is meant by concepts such as “extraction” and “state”, which require attention.

#### **4.5.1 Resource Extraction as Measurement for State Strength**

Variation in the level of resource extraction has served as a valuable clue to state-society relations, usually in cross-national research, since resource extraction goes right to the heart of some important concepts in political science (Lieberman, 2002). Subnational variation in the level of resource extraction has been of greater interest to sociologists than to political scientists, however. In the 1980s, sociologists have tried to develop a “fiscal sociology” of the United States, comparing striking differences in the distribution of tax burdens in different US states (Jacobs and Waldman, 1983; Lowery, 1987). If anything, the fiscal sociology of China is more variegated, as tax burdens vary not only among provinces, but also among counties, villages and even neighboring households. To be sure, Beijing does promulgate uniform regulations, but how local cadres implement these rules is a different story altogether. Central authorities explicitly recognize that they exercise only limited control over rural finance, thereby comfortably disclaiming responsibility for local aberrations. Ray Yep has called this rhetoric an “evasive strategy” (Yep, 2004). The informality of resource extraction systems allows quasi-negotiations between local officials and the citizens in their

jurisdiction. While extraction-based approaches to state strength seem promising in the context of China, some refinements are necessary to account for the particularities of the Chinese state.

When political scientists use taxation levels as an indicator for state-society relations, the bottom line is that the ability to extract resources from the population indicates a strong state. For political scientists, in particular those studying International Relations, what matters is the absolute amount of resources that a country can spend, raising questions such as: “How long will the U.S. continue to outspend China?” But the key here is the share of domestic wealth that the state manages to bring under its control.<sup>6</sup> If similar households in different areas of a country pay different amounts of taxes, this indicates that the state is more present in the areas where households give up a greater share of their income to the government. This could be a result of discrimination, because certain areas enjoy less influence with the centers of power, or because the coercive infrastructure works more effectively in some areas than in others. But it could also be that citizens in some areas have a stronger preference to be served by the government, or that in some locales the ability of government to deliver valuable services is higher than in others, so that taxes are a worthwhile investment. As a shorthand for the greater role of government, it is often claimed that the state is stronger in these places.

Does this approach to measuring state power sit well with the case of China? In the Chinese case, one runs into an unusual problem when associating high levels of extraction with a strong state. For decades, the central government has declared its intention to reduce the “peasant burden”, that is all kinds of levies that local officials collect throughout the country. Beijing deplores high tax burdens borne by rural citizens around the country, publicly and adamantly urging local officials

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<sup>6</sup>Similarly, the chapter is not interested in how much a local government can spend, but how much it is able to collect. Due to budgetary transfers, local revenues differ from local expenditures. As with international budgetary transfers (e.g., development aid), state extractive capacity focusses on the local revenue side of the balance sheet; the ability to attract fiscal transfers does not indicate extractive capacity and thus does not indicate a strong local government.

to do something about it (Bernstein and Lü, 2003). Since peasant discontent and a rapid surge in villagers' protest is perceived as a threat to political stability, leaders' admonishments are more than mere rhetoric. The tax-for-fee reform in 2002, which commuted fees into a tax to formalize collection and stop abuse, as well as the abolition of the agricultural taxes in 2006 indicate genuine commitment to lower taxes on peasant households (Kennedy, 2007). There are fascinating attempts to differentiate between the central government's lack of ability versus lack of will to enforce a reduction of the peasant burden. Maria Edin finds some of both, but at the end of the day, her careful analysis argues against simply interpreting high local tax extractions as indicative of state strength (Edin, 2003). If the declared intention and formally sanctioned policy of the central government is to lower taxes, then high tax revenues can be taken as a sign of state weakness and low taxes a sign of state strength. Does this turn the usual interpretation on its head?

The heart of the problem is that, in the context of China, the concept of a unitary state is an analytical dead end (Perry, 1994). The Chinese state consists of the central government and local governments. Both are powerful in their own right. Since local governments possess significant autonomy when it comes to the implementation of tax policies, the most relevant political agents for local tax collection is not Beijing or even the few dozen provincial capitals, but the many thousand county and even township seats scattered throughout the country. These local governments by definition are no less a part of the state than the central government in Beijing. When they extract resources, this extraction is state extraction. Surely, the Chinese state has some agencies advocating higher taxes, and other agencies advocating lower taxes. Coincidentally, the official propaganda voice of the central state calls for lower taxes. But no matter what the political message and the political will of some leaders, at the end of the day there are parts of the state apparatus compelling or convincing citizens to give up part of their income and turn it over to local state agents.

To avoid fundamental ambiguities in interpreting local revenues, the analysis must disaggregate the multi-layered nature of the Chinese state, distinguishing among the central government, local governments and sub-state governmental structures. While the central government seeks to lower the peasant burden, local governments have great appetite for tax extraction and behave like revenue maximizers. For one thing, many county and township governments financially stand with their backs against the wall (Fewsmith, 2011). To remain functional, local governments have no choice but to go after whatever money they can. It seems plausible that the central government and local governments have fundamentally different preferences. The central government is not simply a revenue maximizer because it is concerned about the overall stability of the country. Central leaders have nothing to win from taxing poor farmers, but they have a lot to lose from systemic instability. By contrast, local leaders behave as free riders: To enhance chances for promotion, they need to -more or less secretly- extract revenues, with which they can fund highly visible projects welcomed by upper-level cadres (Guo, 2009). They do this knowing full well that their own choice contributes to the peasant burden that undermines the system and their own future. Central leaders are in their central positions for decades, often until their death<sup>7</sup>, and therefore have long time horizons. By contrast, the top local leaders with the greatest political clout, especially the county and township party secretaries, usually only serve for three or four years. Peasant anger builds up over time and extraction now might generate protest and upheaval only until their departure from the post. Sub-state officials, such as village leaders have less clear-cut behavioral profiles, tending to defend the interests of the village as long as their own position and privileges are safe. High levels of tax extraction are realized against pressure from the central government and against resistance by the population, and indicate first and foremost that local governments are strong.

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<sup>7</sup>They continue in informal positions of power after their formal retirement.

#### 4.5.2 Focus on Rural Household Income

In terms of theory, the scope of the hypotheses is broad and comprises any kind of taxation. For both pragmatic and substantive reasons, the empirical analysis focusses on individual household income of rural residents, instead of lumping together a variegated bundle of different kinds of taxes. In other words, the analysis excludes taxation of legal entities such as firms. Not only would it be exceedingly difficult to collect tax data on a country-wide representative sample of firms. In addition, choosing as the unit of analysis not households, but “taxable entities” ranging from private households to industrial firms, would make interpretation of the results highly abstract. Similarly, expanding the empirical analysis to urban households would add more confusion than it would provide insight. While urban household data are readily available, it is hard to measure the precise distance of these households from the government. Urban households are generally so close to the government that much would depend on how one defines the locus of government: Is it the seat of the county fiscal office? Or the county representative assembly? Or the county mayor’s office? Or the county party secretary’s office? By contrast, when it comes to rural households, variation in distance from the county’s center of power is sufficiently large that the result would not be influenced by how exactly the locus of power is defined.

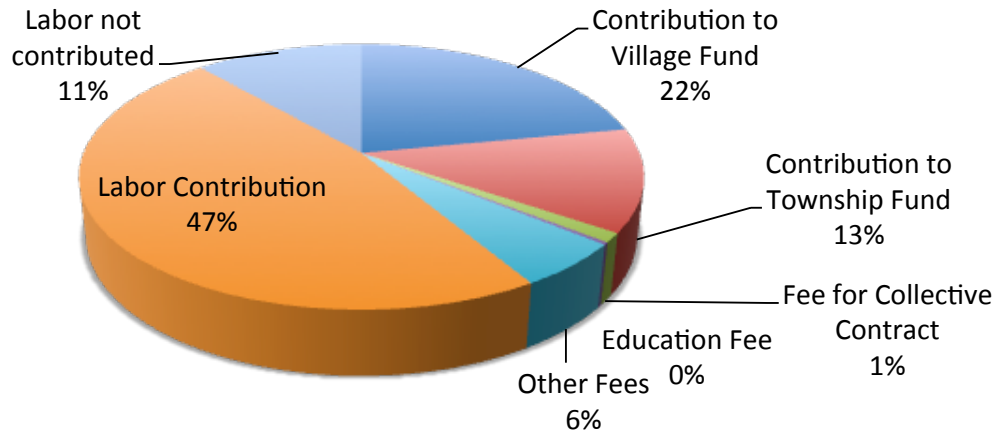
Most importantly, restricting the analysis to rural households greatly reduces the problem of economic structure as a confounding variable. Are households at different distances from the county seat paying different levels of taxes simply because they tend to engage in different types of economic activity? The fundamental problem is that economic and political geography overlap, but for the purposes of the empirical study need to be analytically separated. To do this, ideally one would compare economically identical households, differing only in their distance from the seat of the county government. A two-pronged approach achieves this analytical purpose: The first line of

defense is to create a more homogenous sample. Urban households are particularly diverse in terms of the kinds of activities they pursue. By excluding urban households, the remaining pool of rural households is much more homogeneous in terms of economic activity. This is partly a result of the household registration system, which includes under the category of rural households all households that “own” land. The income of a typical rural household includes agricultural revenues, revenues from migrant labor and occasionally from running a small workshop. Some variation remains even within this group. The second line of defense to tackle the problem of economic structure as a confounding variable is through the conventional approach of including control variables.

#### **4.5.3 Resource Extraction Without Taxation**

By China’s own legal definitions, nowadays peasants don’t pay taxes. Since 2003, rural citizens in theory should have been subject to only one tax, namely the agricultural tax. Since 2006 even the supposedly 2,600-year-old agricultural tax has been abolished, accompanied by grand propagandistic fanfare, hailing the end of a long history of peasant exploitation. However, the absence of rural taxation by no means implies that the state does not extract resources from its rural population. China’s rural population contributes “levies” and “fees” to public projects. Despite their euphemistic labels, these various contributions are compulsory and best understood as taxes-in-disguise.

In addition, even before the agricultural taxes were abolished, labor contributions -previously known as *corvée* labor- had made their come-back in rural China. Although the data from the 2002 round of the China Household Income Project have been widely used among economists, one surprising phenomenon has largely escaped their attention. While 77.5% of all household have not performed unpaid labor, the remaining 22.5% households each on average contributed 14.4 days of



Note: Does not include agricultural taxes.

Figure 4.1: The Peasant Burden in 2002

work. Since the average household size is 4 individuals, this corresponds to 3.8 days per individual, although in practice the burden might be unevenly distributed among household members.

Following standard economic methodology, this burden is translated into a monetary value to make it comparable to the monetary fiscal burdens, by using the daily wage for labor in the village or nearby township, as reported by the party branch secretary, the head of the village committee, or the village accountant, labor contributions amounted to an astounding 47% of the entire peasant burden. Additionally, 11% of the peasant burden consists in payments made to exempt households from labor contributions. Although there is no systematic evidence, it seems that when the rural population is drafted to carry out public works, such projects are usually initiated not by the village itself, but by township or more commonly by county-level authorities. Figure 1 provides an overview of the various known contributions made by rural households and included in this study. At the beginning of the 21st century, much of the fiscal burden of Chinese peasants once again consists of labor contributions.

The Chinese state hierarchy ends at the county or township level, depending on legal interpre-



tation. Village authorities are self-governing bodies below the state hierarchy. Therefore, if village authorities collect money from villagers for common projects, this revenue stream is not considered to be a tax and is not even formally administered by the state. However, village authorities are imbued with state-like authority, acting under the long shadow of a state that stands ready to back them up if challenged. Villagers don't have much of a choice but to pay. Moreover, the projects funded by village fees are usually the result of initiatives from higher-level authorities. Village authorities must be loyal to higher-level authorities despite village elections, because party and state heavily influence the appointment of village officials, issue instructions and exercise control. Even if the revenue streams to village authorities do not show up on any budget, for the villagers concerned they feel like taxes and they are effectively under state control. Thus this analysis considers revenue flows to village authorities as part of state extractive capacity.

Extra-budgetary non-tax revenues play an enormous role in the fulfillment of ordinary state functions in rural China. In addition, local authorities have invented a variety of "levies" and "fees", terms that at a closer look are misnomers. Following international standards, such as the widely used guidelines by the statistical division of the IMF, fees are contributions charged for consuming an excludable government service, which households could decide not to consume. Most of the fees in China are compulsory and therefore better understood as taxes.

Tax collecting agencies in China resemble a leaky bucket. Some taxes and fees may go unnoticed by higher-level authorities and never even find their way into statistics, let alone government budgets. An unknown sum of revenues flows into illegal schemes, some well intentioned, others amounting to outright fraud. The conceptual problem is that the amount of extraction from citizens does not equal the amount brought under state control.<sup>8</sup> The money gets stuck half-way

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<sup>8</sup>Pransanjit Duara, even if he refers to China during the Republican era, clarifies the conceptual problems involved (Duara, 1991).

between state and society, extracted from citizens in the name of the state, but never brought under state control. This chapter adopts the point of view of the citizen: Any money taken away by state agents, whether or not fraudulently, counts as tax extraction.

The problems of measuring state extraction in rural China are not problems that could be resolved by better surveying techniques. They are conceptual problems, ultimately related to the impossibility of drawing a sharp line between state and society. This chapter operates with the state-society-dichotomy as a conceptual tool, understanding state extraction as an indication of state strength. But we must keep in mind the multi-layered nature of the Chinese state and the fact that while rural extraction indicates a strong local government, it also indicates the weakness of central authorities. The remainder of this chapter excludes the agricultural tax from consideration because it has by now become obsolete. Instead, the empirical approach analyzes non-tax resource transfers, which despite various cover-ups nevertheless qualifies as fiscal extraction.

## 4.6 Empirical Analysis

### 4.6.1 Specification

The empirical specification for testing hypotheses  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  predicts the amount of levies that a household has to pay (in logarithmic form) as a non-linear function of physical distance from the county and township seats, as a linear function of the CCP's presence in the village, and a function of a dummy indicating whether any household member has joined the party. Hypothesis 1 expects that levies first increase and then decrease as one moves away from the county and township center, as an inverse U-shape. Households in villages with greater party presence pay higher levies. Finally, households with members who have joined the party pay lower levies. In

short, the empirical specification is designed to test whether physical and organizational distance have the hypothesized dualistic effect on state strength.

$$\begin{aligned}
Ln(Levy) = & \alpha * distance_{county} + \beta * distance_{county}^2 + \gamma * distance_{township} + \delta * distance_{township}^2 \\
& + \epsilon * party - presence + \zeta * party - membership \\
& + \eta * household + \theta * village + county
\end{aligned}
\tag{4.1}$$

*Household Control Variables.* The regression includes three control variables for household characteristics. First, all specifications control for the area of the land cultivated by the household, since village leaders use cultivated land as a proxy for household revenue, as a base for their tax assessment. Richer households -singled out as those using more land- are expected to contribute more to common projects than poorer household. Second, the assessment of levies sometimes also depends on household size, which is controlled for. Finally, the regression controls for household income, although the income of a household does not play an important role in the assessment of taxes in rural China.

*Other controls.* The baseline specification controls for county fixed effects. Apart from village population size, the regression includes the following dummy control variables

- Physical Geography: Is the village located in a mountainous area? In a hilly area?
- Village Finances: Does the village have income from collective enterprises? Is it in debt? Did the village have any industries during the Mao period? Did the village experience any kind of calamity during the last year (very broadly defined in China to include bad weather)?

- Official Designations: Is the village located in a county nationally recognized as poor? Is it located in a county recognized as poor by the province? Is it located in a township recognized as poor by the province? Has the village been designated as an experimental spot to carry out a pilot project?
- Connections: Is there any official working at the county level or above who originates from this village? - A surprising 52% report that they do have such connections.
- Political Interest: Are people checking the documents and village fiscal statistics published on the village blackboard?

Estimate coefficients for two alternative specifications are consistent with the findings. Including county fixed effects greatly reduces the variation of some variables and thus is a particularly hard test to pass. An alternative specification leaves out fixed effects. Since the regression still contains a large set of meaningful control variables, one can be confident that the result does not suffer from omitted variable bias. Without the county fixed effect, the specification also adds two variables that indicate whether a village is part of a nationally or provincially designated poor county with the accompanying political and media attention. It also moves from the logarithmic baseline model to a simple linear model, so that the coefficients can be interpreted in absolute terms instead of percentages. A third specification is a minimal model, to demonstrate how robust the result is to the precise choice of specifications.

#### 4.6.2 Data

Under the umbrella of the Chinese Household Income Project, a joint international research effort lead by Li Shih from Beijing Normal University, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has carried

out a series of surveys among Chinese rural and urban households in regular intervals since 1988.<sup>9</sup> The primary goal of the project is to estimate household income and the survey is famous among economists for its accuracy, especially the high standards in the sampling process, which make this survey representative at the national level and at lower levels as well, depending on the edition. The survey is primarily a household survey, but is complemented by surveys of village leaders. The questionnaires include a changing set of variables related to political economy, which provide uniquely powerful yet barely explored evidence for political science. For the purposes of testing the hypotheses on distance and state power, the 2002 edition of the survey contains all the necessary information.

From the household survey, levies are calculated in three steps. First, the calculation adds up the following categories of household expenditures:<sup>10</sup> Payments to the village 村提留, payments to the village and town 鄉鎮統籌, other fees for collective contract, money collected for rural education. Each category comprises cash payments as well as in-kind contributions, which have been turned into monetary values by the National Bureau of Statistics survey team. Second, the calculation multiplies the days of unpaid labor, as reported by the household, with the daily wage for labor reported by village officials.<sup>11</sup> Third, the calculation adds any payments a household has made to buy its members out of labor contributions.<sup>12</sup> The calculation does not include penalties, because of doubts about the reliability of the data and because they would amount only to a minor share of peasant burden in 2002, namely 1.2%.

Since the distances involved in governing the large province of Xinjiang are greater than in ordinary provinces and risk confounding the coefficient estimates, the analysis excludes the data

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<sup>9</sup>The data sets, a detailed description of the study and links to related publications are available from ICPSR, University of Michigan, [www.icpsr.umich.edu](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu), last checked on February 3rd, 2013.

<sup>10</sup>They are all subcategories of variable h1\_615. Compare codebook DS5 of the CHIP data.

<sup>11</sup>Variable h1\_617a of DS5 and variable v3\_208 of DS4. All CHIP data.

<sup>12</sup>Variable h1\_617b of DS5, CHIP data.

|                                                  | Mean  | Std. Dev. | Minimum | Maximum |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------|---------|---------|
| <i>Main Variables of Interest</i>                |       |           |         |         |
| Levy Paid in 2002                                | 143   | 264       | 0       | 2990    |
| Distance to County Seat [km]                     | 24    | 20        | 0.5     | 160     |
| Distance to Township Seat [km]                   | 5     | 5         | 0       | 33      |
| Village Party Strength [%]                       | 8.9   | 3.4       | 0       | 23      |
| Household Party Membership [dummy]               | 0.21  |           |         |         |
| <i>Control Variables (not including dummies)</i> |       |           |         |         |
| Household Income [Yuan]                          | 10873 | 8401      | 0       | 139807  |
| Household Cultivated Land [Mu]                   | 6.2   | 6.1       | 0       | 78      |
| Household Size                                   | 4     | 1         | 1       | 11      |
| Village Population                               | 1852  | 1192      | 186     | 8815    |

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics: 2002 Version of CHIP Survey, Without Xinjiang and Outliers

of the 400 Xinjiang households. Furthermore, two counties were rolling out the tax-for-fee reform right at the time when the questionnaire was fielded. This creates problems for interpretation, and there is concern that the questionnaire in the minds of respondents was an integral part of the tax-for-fee reform, prompting strategic answers. Thus, another 170 households from these counties are excluded. After these two adjustments, the data set contains observations for 8630 households in 436 villages in 112 counties in 21 provinces. Finally, there are drastic outliers in the ratio of party member households in the population. To prevent these outliers from unduly influencing the results, the analysis sets to “missing” the 20 observations that are more than four standard deviations above the sample mean (2 villages). Taking into account the various problems of missing data in the original data set, the analysis ultimately can still work with 7390 observations.

### 4.6.3 Results

As the regression coefficients and their very high statistical significance shows, there is a systematic relationship between levy extraction and physical distance. The second column of table 4.3 lists the coefficient estimates in the logarithmic baseline specification, controlling for a large number

|                                                     | Preferred<br>Specification | W/o Fixed Effects<br>W/o Logarithm | Short<br>Model |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>Physical Distance</i>                            |                            |                                    |                |
| Distance to County Seat                             | 0.010***                   | 1.16***                            | 0.016***       |
| Distance to County Seat, Squared                    | -0.00011***                | -0.013***                          | -0.00015***    |
| Distance to Township Seat                           | 0.045***                   | 14***                              | 0.11***        |
| Distance to Township Seat, Squared                  | -0.0013*                   | -0.43***                           | -0.0038***     |
| <i>Organizational Distance</i>                      |                            |                                    |                |
| Village Party Strength                              | 1.8*                       | 551***                             | 2.7***         |
| Household Party Membership                          | -0.15*                     | -18**                              | -0.26***       |
| <i>Control Variables: Household Characteristics</i> |                            |                                    |                |
| Household Cultivated Land                           | 0.051***                   | 6.29***                            | 0.088***       |
| Household Income [1000 Yuan]                        | 0.042                      | -0.63***                           |                |
| Household Size                                      | 0.068***                   | 5.24                               |                |
| <i>Control Variables: Village Characteristics</i>   |                            |                                    |                |
| Mountainous Area                                    | -0.69***                   | -81***                             | -0.60***       |
| Hilly Area                                          | -0.14**                    | -35***                             |                |
| Village has Collective Revenue                      | -0.030                     | 17                                 |                |
| Village Has Debts                                   | 0.04                       | 10                                 |                |
| Village With Industrial History                     | -0.24***                   | -12.                               |                |
| Village Experienced Calamity                        | 0.11.                      | 8                                  |                |
| Village Located in National Poor County             |                            | -40***                             |                |
| Village Located in Provincial Poor County           |                            | 64***                              |                |
| Village Located in Officially Poor Township         | 0.38***                    | -4                                 |                |
| Village Designated as Pilot Case                    | -0.29***                   | -14*                               |                |
| Village Population [1000 people]                    | -0.056.                    | -9***                              |                |
| Village with Good Connections                       | -0.12*                     | -27***                             |                |
| Village Level of Political Interest                 | -0.0090                    | 12*                                |                |
| Constant                                            |                            | 18                                 | 1.4***         |

\*\*\* significance at 0.005, \*\* significance at 0.01, \* significance at 0.05, . significance at 0.1

Table 4.3: Levy Burden on Households as a Result of Physical and Organizational Distance

of household and village characteristics, and including county fixed effects. One finds that the four coefficients on physical distance and the two variables on organizational distance all point in the predicted direction and are significant. From the coefficients it follows that households at intermediate distances from the county seat and at intermediate distances from the township seats carry the heaviest burden. The location where the local government is strongest, in terms of extractive capacity, are 46.5 kilometers from the county seat and 17.6 kilometers from the township seat. Only 3.5% of all households live further than 17.6 kilometers away from the township seat, so on balance the state autonomy effect prevails over the state infrastructure effect and all in all the government's extractive power increases as one moves away from the township seat. By contrast, 13% of households live further than 46.5 kilometers away from the county seat.

The role of the CCP in the process of levy extraction -and by implication the role of the party in the exercise of power by Chinese local governments - is clearly characterized by an implicit *quid pro quo*. Households containing at least one party member on average contribute 14.5% less in levies. But on the other hand, the existence of party networks facilitates levy extraction: An increase in party membership by one percentage point is associated with a 1.8% increase of levies from all villagers. Within normal parameters<sup>13</sup> this certainly is a good deal for the government. The bridges that party organizations build into village communities improves extractive capacity, albeit at a price.

## 4.7 Geography of State Power in Yanggu County

Yanggu, an unexceptional county in the Western part of Shandong, may serve as an example to illustrate the findings and the magnitude of the various effects. In terms of economic development,

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<sup>13</sup>For example, the calculation breaks down in a village where party members gain 13 times more than an average villager, a scenario that lacks practical relevance.

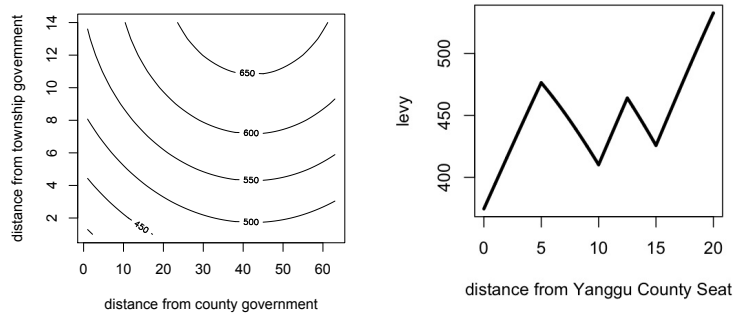


Yanggu County is close to the national average: The average household income in 2002 was 2,265 Yuan, as compared to a national average of 2,454 Yuan. To be sure, as with almost any county in China, one finds a unique local history. Yanggu county is situated along a section of China's Grand Canal that was particularly difficult to maintain, as it was close to the Canal's highest point above sea level, where it crossed a mountain pass. The empire had to maintain an extremely complex system of waterworks in Yanggu county, which as a result was of vital strategic importance for transportation between Northern and Southern China. In the strategic importance ratings first introduced by the Yongzheng Emperor (reign: 1722-1735), Yanggu was among the small number of counties which held the topmost 4-point rating.<sup>14</sup> Special regulations governed the appointment of officials to such places, the state was more powerfully present in Yanggu County than in other places. Today, the canal at this elevated level has long dried up and fallen into disrepair. Nowadays, the county seems of no particular significance to the nation as a whole, quite to the contrary.

An average rural household in Yanggu County pays levies amounting to 24% of its income, four times the national average of 6%. This is consistent with the regression analysis above: A highly significant county fixed effect even indicates that Yanggu's levies are 4.8 times above the national average. The distribution of levies paid in Yanggu roughly resembles a normal distribution around the mean of 550 Yuan, albeit strongly skewed to the left. The lowest levy paid by any of the 90 households in the nine sample villages is 110 Yuan, the highest is 2072 Yuan. The nine villages are located in the plains or in the valleys; none is on the mountains or hills. All of the villages are on the left side of the extractive maximum at 46 and 17 kilometers. This is unsurprising, since Yanggu County is small in size, the furthest county border lies just 30 kilometers to the Northeast of the county seat. Strikingly, the levies in the two villages furthest away from the county seat,

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<sup>14</sup>See chapter 9 for an explanation of the rating system.



(a) Mapping Levies in Space (b) Moving SW from Yanggu

Figure 4.2: Levy Extraction Over Distance

both at 25 kilometers, are drastically higher than the levies in the village closest to the county seat, namely 725 Yuan as opposed to 293 Yuan, suggesting that state autonomy in localities away from the centers of local power boosts extractive capacity. Similarly, in the village furthest away from a township seat (at 7 kilometers) households pay 606 Yuan in levies as opposed to 477 Yuan in the village that is closest to a township seat (at 1 kilometer). However, since these comparisons do not control for any of the other factors and, more importantly, since the 2002 edition of the CHIP survey is not representative at the county level, these impressive numbers should not be overinterpreted.

Instead, to illustrate the practical implications of the empirical analysis, let us simulate levies, predicting levies over space given the local conditions of Yanggu County. Figure 1a is a map of levies as a function of distance from the county and township seat, calculated for an average Yanggu household over a normal<sup>15</sup> range of distances as they occur throughout China. The contour lines illustrate that living at 46 kilometers is least attractive and that a household would be better off, for the purpose of avoiding levies either to move closer to the county seat or further away

<sup>15</sup>”Normal” defined as values up to the 95th percentile.

from it. However, given the size of Yanggu county, moving out of the reach of the state is not an option. The furthest distance one can move to within the county is 30 kilometers away. That is, for Yanggu county, moving to the county seat is the only option. Travelling Southwest from Yanggu County, through Gaomiaowang Town (at 10 kilometers) and Litai Town (at 15 kilometers), levies evolve as shown in figure 1b. The infrastructural limitations of the state are barely noticeable, the state autonomy effect prevails. To estimate the practical importance of distance, we compare the predicted levy of a village that is 2 kilometers from the county seat and 1 kilometer from a township seat with a village that is 25 kilometers from the county seat and 7 kilometers from a township seat. These distances actually occur in the nine villages of the Yanggu sample. As it turns out, the levies predicted for the village far away from power is 45% above the levies predicted for the village that is close to power.

Table 4.4 presents predicted values of how much a household has to pay in terms of levies, depending on whether there is at least one party member in the household, and whether the household lives in the sample village with most party members (7%) or in the village with fewest party members (17%). We know that it is advantageous for a household to join the party. However, there is a collective action problem. It would be better for a household to be a non-party member and live in a village with few other party members, rather than be a party member in a village with many other party members. If the majority of party members in the village with 17% party members (upper-right cell) would collectively decide to leave the party, this group of defecting party members would lose their 14% membership privilege. But since this collective action would remove the village somewhat from party control, on balance the defecting party members would gain 3% (lower-left cell). Admittedly, this slight improvement would not motivate people to defect from the party. From the point of the party that seeks to motivate members by material advantages,

|                  | village with<br>7% membership | village with<br>17% membership |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| party member     | 443                           | 528                            |
| non-party member | 512                           | 610                            |

Table 4.4: Levy Extraction Through the CCP

however, the fact that the exit-option is profitable could potentially be a weakness.

On the other hand, it is also clear that in terms of rural tax extraction relying on the party on the whole is a good deal for the state. Given that even in the village with many party members party members are the minority, the taxes collected thanks to the presence of additional party members greatly outweigh the fiscal losses from taxing party members lightly.

## 4.8 Conclusion

The reach of a state throughout its territory can be extremely uneven. The case of China suggests that this variation has a distinct spatial quality, related to the physical and organizational distance of a locality from local centers of government. In contrast to a simple center-periphery approach, which expects power to dissipate as one moves away from the centers, the argument is that distance has a dualistic effect on power. State power depends not only on the ability of a state to exert pressure through its infrastructure, but also on the vulnerability of the state to societal pressures. As one moves away from local political centers, state infrastructure dissipates, but state autonomy increases. The state is most amenable to pressures that arise in its immediate neighborhood. Therefore, a fundamental characteristic of the geography of state power is that the reach of the state is at its best at intermediate distances, where its infrastructure reaches well, yet where its autonomy is already great. Places close to the center and very remote places both would enjoy reduced resource extraction: One by co-opting the state, the other by escaping from it.

The evidence for this chapter dates from 2002, but the chapter's results indicate where rural China is headed in the future. According to optimists, the tax reform of 2006 solved the peasant burden problem. But there is no good proof for this. On the contrary, anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that imaginative local governments have found innovative ways to fundraise within their jurisdictions.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile the central government has continued to issue instructions urging cadres to keep working on the peasant burden problem.<sup>17</sup> Political economists have documented Beijing's puzzling inability to reduce the peasants burden, each round of reform invariably being followed by a backlash (Bernstein and Lü, 2003). In some places, the new name of the old fundraising game is "single-issue/single-discussion funding", which provides ample room for resource extraction. In ways not yet fully understood, the seemingly innocuous "direct household subsidy" is also turning into a potent fundraising device. Since this chapter has not included the now-abandoned agricultural tax and instead focused on the kind of informal non-tax revenues, which appear likely to remain intact after the reform, it is well-placed to shed light on the most likely new forms of extraction mechanics, now that formal taxes have been abolished. In particular, the very voluminous resource extraction through labor contributions has not been the focus of recent reform efforts and is therefore likely to persist. In a nutshell, the resource extraction landscape described here seems durable and not easily overcome.

The lack of state autonomy has become the Achilles heel of Chinese governance. Thanks to a formidable transportation infrastructure, physical distance limits the reach of the state in only the most remote corners of its realm; China has practically solved the problem of projecting physical power throughout its territory. However, the reluctance to extract resources in the immediate

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<sup>16</sup>For example, see *The China Youth Daily*, February 2, 2013.

<sup>17</sup>See for example the circular dated April 17, 2012, "Opinion on better measures to lighten the peasant burden," State Council Office Document 2012/22.

environs of local authorities reflects the fact that local governments are influenced by their physical surrounding. This is a problem, since it arbitrarily aggravates fiscal pressures on people living further away from government. The same is true for organizational infrastructure. The party functions effectively as an instrument to solve asymmetric information problems, boosting extractive capacity. But as ideological motivations become more tenuous, the party increasingly relies on patronage to “buy” loyalty. To the extent that the unevenness of the peasant burden threatens stability, the lack of state autonomy weakens not only local governments, but the state as a whole. The Chinese state has successfully bridged physical and organizational distances, but is not doing well on autonomy. One may conjecture that the scarcity of regular channels for citizens to exercise influence makes it hard to reign in the irregular channels, which citizens use instead.

As a contribution to the field of comparative politics at large, the Chinese case advances the fledgling subnational turn in the state-building literature. The analysis of the Chinese case exemplifies the advantages and disadvantages of explaining micro-variation of state power as a result of variables pertaining to physical geography versus explaining the variation as a result of human geography. The contrast between the two kinds of variables is striking: A purely geographic distance variable is more universally relevant, functioning as a deep cause, but the long causal chain from the physical to the social realm remains somewhat of a black box. By contrast, the party variable does not travel easily to other regional contexts, begging the question of why the party is stronger in some places than others in the first place, but the causal chain of the party effect is almost crystal clear. Taking the sub-national turn all the way to a household level to delineate the contours of state power in the countryside goes straight to the heart of contemporary state-building challenges and reveals strengths and weaknesses of states, potentially not only in the Chinese context. Combining the effects of physical and human geography, one finds that not infrastructure,

but autonomy, is the core problem of Chinese state-builders today.

## Chapter 5

# The CCP's Contribution to Regime Survival in Times of Crisis

The party's grassroots empower the state at the local level by faithfully implementing policy, as the past two chapters have shown. In addition, as this and the following chapter will show, the CCP's local party members helped the party state survive in times of crisis, either by taking their own initiative (this chapter) or occasionally even by defying self-destructive policies (chapter 6). This chapter focuses on the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), an era when Mao Zedong, for fear of revisionism inside the CCP, called on people to "attack the headquarters by overturning local party leadership. The Cultural Revolution brought China to the brink of anarchy. As a moment of existential crisis, the Cultural Revolution reveals how the party functions in emergency mode and brings to light the forces of order that ultimately prevailed, sustaining the regime against formidable odds even until today. Despite the political sensitivity that still surrounds this period, a wealth of new empirical material from flea markets, local archives, and online sources allow one to analyze the turmoil from a new perspective, namely the perspective of individuals close to



local governments. As it turns out, during this period many party members behaved in ways that ultimately prevented the People's Republic from falling into an abyss of anarchy. They acted in the interest of the CCP both out of loyalty to the institution and out of self-interest to improve their own chances of political and physical survival. When the party had ceased to function as a hierarchical organization, informal party institutions helped to preserve or restore political order. The party's loyalty networks, its organizational repertoire, as well as the well-rehearsed subordination of the military under the party were key. Ostensibly, China's regime had turned personalistic, but beneath the surface remnants of the party continued to shape events.

This chapter consists of five parts. The first part highlights the potential of a political crisis such as the Cultural Revolution to reveal the state's defenses, reminiscent of a stress test through which we can identify the institutions that uphold the political order of a highly mobilized society. The second part demonstrates that the party continued to be a dominant force of order in local communities, certainly in places and at times of relatively low-level conflict. Party members were more experienced in navigating the complex politics of power struggles; party networks turned out to be resilient and played a widely recognized role in managing the economy. The third part turns to places with more violence and shows that during the Cultural Revolution, as in other instances of violent conflict, military measures were necessary yet insufficient to contain the turmoil. Civilian measures and political processes, facilitated by pre-existing party organization, were indispensable in stabilizing the situation. The fourth part describes how top party leaders enforced their authority by taking advantage of local cadres' sense of party discipline. Part five offers a preliminary empirical test, indicating that the degree of party penetration on the eve of the Cultural Revolution was a predictor for the degree of turmoil. If the Cultural Revolution episode is suggestive of the Chinese polity's response to a potential future crisis, the conclusion speculates that even when the party

comes under attack, is torn apart by factional splits, or is led into turmoil by a revolutionary-minded leader, forces of order will emerge from the grassroots, helping to reestablish a political order that will carry on party legacies.

## 5.1 The Cultural Revolution as a Political Stress Test

The resilience of the Chinese party state, contrasting with the tenuous hold of the pre-1949 Republican regime as well as with the implosion of Eastern European Communist systems at the end of the 20th century, has drawn much scholarly attention (Nathan, 2003; Heberer and Schubert, 2006; Cai, 2008). But few political scientists have studied the remarkable resilience of the party state at the time when it was under greatest threat, namely at the height of the Cultural Revolution in 1967-68.<sup>1</sup> Although the party state lost its monopoly on violence and could not guarantee the physical safety of its citizens, it maintained authority in some key areas of governance, such as in the socialist state economy. What were the forces of order, which in the absence of normally functioning formal institutions, prevented China from falling into an anarchical abyss? And how could the state make such a formidable comeback beginning in 1969 after the Ninth Party Congress? Conventional answers, pointing out that in 1966 Mao unleashed the masses, suggest that later on Mao put the masses back on the leash with the help of military force. But these answers, pointing to the military intervention, are incomplete. Better answers can be found by studying and comparing local historical pathways, which were surprisingly diverse. If one knows why the turmoil was so much milder in some places than in others, one has identified some important sources of political order.

To understand the resilience of the Chinese political system, it is not enough to investigate

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<sup>1</sup>Detailed analyses of elite politics in 1967-68 implicitly address the question of resilience (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 2006; Bu, 2008).

its operations under the relatively favorable conditions of the last three decades. Since 1983, in 17 years out of 32, China experienced double-digit economic growth rates. Furthermore, since 1997 state budgets have grown faster than the economy. The annual growth rate of fiscal revenues was 51% higher than the growth rate of the economy.<sup>2</sup> The year 2011 was typical: the economy nominally grew by 18%, but fiscal revenues grew even faster by 25%. To understand the resilience of a system, ideally one would want a stress test. A political stress test is a kind of natural experiment comparable to doctors assessing the physical robustness of astronauts, elite soldiers, and sportsmen by measuring their vital signs while the patients are exerting themselves under extreme conditions. Stress tests are conducted on banking systems, computer systems, and other complex engineering systems, such as nuclear power plants. An alternative to stress tests are crash tests, as carried out on automobiles. Those are very revealing as well, but they have the downside of destroying the system. In China, the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the flight of the Republican government to Taiwan provide such crash tests. These events tell us much about the shortcomings of the Qing and Republican states, but will only become directly relevant for understanding the stability of the People's Republic post-mortem. A natural stress test of a political regime brings that regime as close as possible to its demise, but lets it survive. Political scientists have recognized the value of studying times of crisis. Peter Gourevitch argues that moments of great economic crisis expose societal cleavages and their impact on a state's decision-making (Gourevitch, 1986). Similarly, in her analysis of authoritarian regime breakdown, Barbara Geddes devotes attention to theorizing the behavior of regimes when they "run into unexpected problems" (Geddes, 1999).

The Cultural Revolution was the most severe stress test of the People's Republic. In 1966 Mao Zedong unleashed the Cultural Revolution by calling upon the masses to "bombard the headquar-

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<sup>2</sup>Author's calculations based on *China Data Online*.

ters,” using his personal authority to attack the authority of a party state of his own creation (Perry and Li, 1997, p.1). After China’s mass famine resulting from Mao Zedong’s Great Leap Forward policies in the late 1950s, party leaders had pressured Mao to abandon radical politics and even forced him to temporarily relinquish some of his powers by “retiring to the second front.” With de-Stalinization having occurred in the Soviet Union, de-Maoization in China seemed a possibility.<sup>3</sup> The Cultural Revolution was Mao’s recipe for combating moderate forces and training the younger generation to wage revolution, thereby securing Mao’s own legacy. Current President Xi Jinping is a product of the movement, having experienced the downfall of his powerful father and having actively participated in the movement as a Red Guard. The first targets of the Cultural Revolution were the bureaucratic apparatus along with the CCP, having become bulwarks of the status quo. Mao Zedong’s personalist authority seemed to prevail over the party’s authority, especially at the commanding heights of the state (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 2006). Party cadres came under physical attack. Red Guards and worker rebels toppled local governments. The party hierarchy stopped functioning. Yet at the end, the CCP made a narrow escape. Despite the violent onslaught, the party survived. To be sure, Mao might have hesitated to give the party its final death blow. Nevertheless, in most other countries it does not take a Cultural Revolution to throw the polity into permanent disorder. In China, as this chapter will show, the party retained considerable authority even in the midst of turmoil, quickly reconfiguring when the worst was over.

At the end of the turmoil, the CCP came out of the experience stronger than ever: Forged in the Communist Revolution and tempered in the Cultural Revolution, arguably no other party in world history has had similar opportunities to build up its defensive forces. Political order, in Samuel Huntington’s analysis, results from a degree of political organization that is on a par with and

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<sup>3</sup>For more detail, see Roderick MacFarquhar’s three-volume analysis of chairman Mao’s decisions (MacFarquhar, 1974-1994).

therefore is able to cope with a society's degree of political mobilization (Huntington, 2006 (1968)). In other words, as societies move into the modern age and political participation increases, more sophisticated political institutions are needed to deal with what Mao called "contradictions among the people."<sup>4</sup> Not unlike Mao, Huntington draws attention to the crucial role of political parties in cushioning antagonistic popular pressures emanating from the grassroots by shaping opinions and mediating interests (Huntington, 1965), an argument that is well known among Chinese political scientists.<sup>5</sup> The conceptual gain from Huntington's framework consists in measuring political institutions against the society surrounding them. Huntington is primarily concerned with long-term change. In his analysis, political mobilization is directly associated with a linear and irreversible trend of modernization, so that as a result political mobilization appears as a more or less steadily increasing function over time, as in figure 5.1a. This theoretical simplification brings considerable analytical mileage for the study of political development in the long run. An alternative view would emphasize that political mobilization fluctuates over time, as in figure 5.1b. In ordinary times, political systems operate far below their breaking point. It is in moments of crisis when the political system may or may not be able to absorb the shock. In the Chinese case, political mobilization appears particularly volatile, with periods of sudden mobilization alternating with periods of calm. In this model, a moment of crisis may be a wake-up call for the political elite to strengthen state institutions.

The party was able to cope with the Cultural Revolution not because it was particularly united, but because its local leaders and grassroots members were used to accepting temporary defeat and staging a tactical retreat. One might have expected that the outside pressure of the popular

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<sup>4</sup>Mao Zedong, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People," speech on February 27 1957, published in *People's Daily* on June 19.

<sup>5</sup>Author's observations in Hubei, Shandong, Zhejiang. Electronic copies of Huntington's work are very easily available on the Chinese Internet, indicating significant interest.

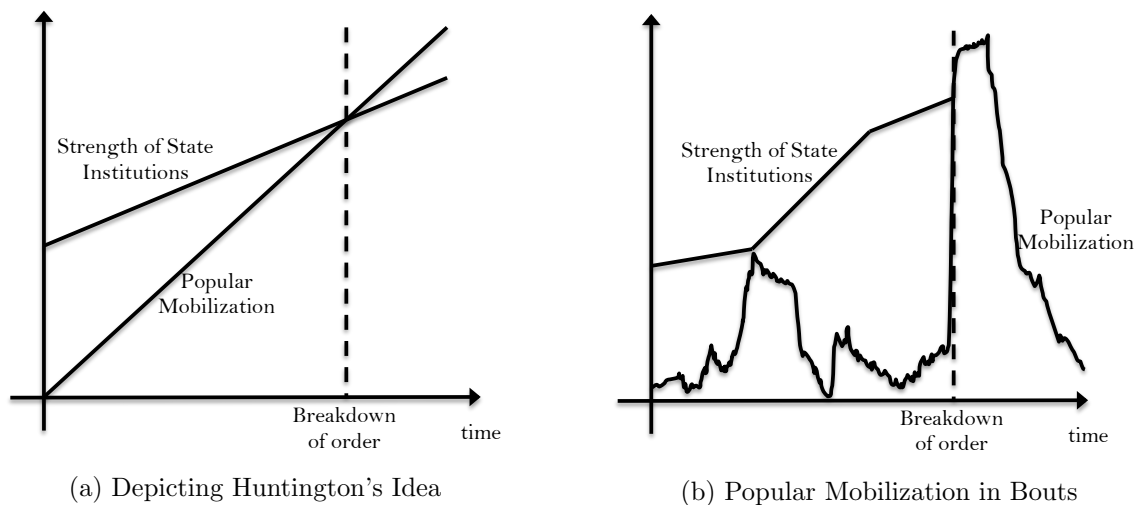


Figure 5.1: State Institutions Balancing Popular Political Mobilization

onslaught would have brought party leaders closer together, so that they could unwaveringly and uncompromisingly hold onto their position of power. Conventional wisdom on regime resilience certainly emphasizes the importance for unitary parties of avoiding elite factionalism in times of crisis and building a hard shell around their organizations (Geddes, 1999). In China, the hard shell of the party was cracked open. Factions outside the party linked up with factions inside the party, whose leaders were driven by ideological differences as much as career ambition. Moreover, the reaction of party leaders was characterized by judicious strategizing rather than outright opposition to the movement. The instincts of party leaders throughout the country, suddenly left to their own devices and without clear guidance from upper-level authorities, led them to tactical retreat and generous compromises. They quietly regenerated the organization and worked toward the long-term political survival of the party, whose destiny seemed bonded to their own.

## 5.2 Shandong: The Party as a Quiet Ground Force for Order

This section concentrates on Shandong province as a place that was unusually successful at keeping the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution in check. In Shandong as elsewhere, power seizures in early 1967 led to the breakdown of the CCP's formal Leninist party hierarchy. Yet, as this section will show, the party by no means disappeared. At the end of protracted power struggles, more often than not it was groups of party members who came out on top. Being a party member still made a difference, and party networks continued to exist and shape local outcomes.

### 5.2.1 The Party is Dead, Long Live the Party!

Even when the party ceased to function as a formal hierarchy, party members remained in charge, exercising a disproportionate influence on Cultural Revolution events. After surviving the onslaught by student Red Guards, local authorities in the first months of 1967 faced the *January Storm*, a movement that saw larger segments of society toppling local party committees and taking over government agencies. The rebels would occupy government buildings, publicly declare power seizures, hope for approval from higher-level authorities, and then carry on government business, while competing rebel organizations relentlessly challenged the new incumbents. The party fell victim to the turmoil, as the following official view of Cultural Revolution history describes:

運動開始後，黨的各級組織普遍受到衝突並陷於癱瘓，半癱瘓狀態，黨的各級領導幹部普遍受到批判和鬥爭，廣大黨員被停止了組織生活，黨長期依靠的許多積極份子和基本群眾受到排斥。

Once the movement began, most party organizations at all levels were beleaguered and fell into a state of paralysis or semi-paralysis; most party cadres were criticized and struggled against; party members stopped their organizational activities, activists and

the masses whom the party had relied on for a long time were ostracized. (CCP, 2000, vol.6, pp.1 f.)

Since political loyalty was owed to Mao Zedong personally and since the masses could at any time criticize and bring down party cadres, the party lost its authority and could not exercise power in Leninist fashion. Without denying that the party fell victim to the Cultural Revolution, however, it is also important to remember that the rebel leaders usually were also party members. The party went under, but most of the time party members came out on top.

Party members succeeded in securing positions partly because CCP membership remained a precondition for achieving important leadership positions, no matter how much the party was condemned for its “bureaucratism.” While publicly criticizing local party leaders, Beijing often replaced publicly recognizable party leaders by less well known figures. The stipulation to build Revolutionary Committees around “three-way alliances,” including revolutionary cadres, facilitated the survival of at least some incumbents. The fact that rebels without party membership tried hard to attain membership indicates that a party affiliation still improved career prospects.<sup>6</sup> The lack of party membership could undermine the position of leading rebels, as in the case of the top rebel in Shandong’s major port city Qingdao (Jin, 2006). Moreover, party members, especially the ones in leading positions, did not have the option of retreating to the sidelines, because rebels would come to seek them out. As a result, they had little choice but to compete for power at the center of the Cultural Revolution upheaval - ending up as victims, winners, or both. The destiny of the 15 members of Shandong’s Standing Committee on the eve of the Cultural Revolution reflects these dynamics: The two members from the military remained in power throughout the period,

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<sup>6</sup>Many rebels were successful. Among the Standing Committee members of Jinan’s prefectural-level Revolutionary Committee, no less than ten individuals joined the party during the Cultural Revolution: Five students, one person formerly working for the Japanese police, one school principal, one migrant worker, one cadre, and “only” one “true” worker (CRD 462, p.5).



four other members held leading positions in the Revolutionary Committee right from its start in January 1967, the other nine members were victims at least throughout 1967/68, and one of them died as a result of his remarkable attempts to protect the province's cultural relics.<sup>7</sup> In short, party members and leading cadres had to compete in the power struggles of the Cultural Revolution. In the process, some lost their power and even their lives, but others managed to advance their careers.

Maybe most importantly, individuals with a long party career had access to networks, experience, and knowledge, the triple combination needed to acquire and hold onto power.<sup>8</sup> This is comparable to the situation in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, where CCP members thrived economically, even after taking into account effects of non-random selection into the party (Geishecker and Haisken-DeNew, 2004). The triple combination was of the essence for an individual to maneuver in the midst of the violent struggles, even when there was high-level endorsement, as the example of Shandong's top rebel leader Wang Xiaoyu 王效禹 shows. He took control of a rebel organization in Qingdao, managed to rise to the top of the province, and remained the dominant political player throughout three years of intense Cultural Revolution turmoil from 1967 to 1969. When Wang Xiaoyu sprang into action and plunged into the unfolding Cultural Revolution in 1965, he looked back on nearly 30 years of a revolutionary career.

Prior to the Cultural Revolution, during his tenure as one of Qingdao City's vice mayors, Wang Xiaoyu had cultivated the networks that later became the basis for his success. Wang's connections were such that his success became a matter of family interests to one of China's top leaders. His most important acquaintance was the son of Kang Sheng, a pre-eminent leader in Mao's entourage with

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<sup>7</sup>This combines information on the composition of the Committee (CCP Shandong, 1991, p.362f.), on the status of its members in 1969 (CCP Shandong, 2001, p.551) and on Li Zaiwen's death (CCP Hebei, Historical Research Office, 2011).

<sup>8</sup>Inborn political capability is another factor: Gaining influential positions before the Cultural Revolution indicates political capability.

special responsibility for Shandong province. When rebels seized power in Shanghai, the central government through Kang Sheng's son gave Wang Xiaoyu the green light to take over power in Qingdao City. In the days leading up to his power seizure, wall posters in Qingdao informed citizens about the central government's endorsement. The wall posters summarized Wang's meetings with top leaders, including Kang Sheng, and were co-signed by Kang Sheng's son (CRD 50). Taking advantage of the connection to Kang Sheng, Wang Xiaoyu could establish himself as one of the "little Maos," who were locally powerful leaders free-riding on Mao's personality cult. Articles in the official party press implied Mao Zedong's endorsement of Wang Xiaoyu's action.<sup>9</sup> Movie images showing Mao Zedong shaking hands with Wang Xiaoyu were designed to bolster Wang Xiaoyu's legitimacy (CRD 475). Imitating the song and dance epic "East is Red," which was at the center of Mao's personality cult, artists in Shandong composed two song and dance epics around Wang Xiaoyu's power seizures in Qingdao and Jinan respectively (CRD 4).

In reality, Mao Zedong had largely delegated the task of steering Shandong's Cultural Revolution to others. Mao's attitude was well captured in his short rescript on a letter by Wang Xiaoyu, just months before the power seizure: "The views of Tan Qilong and that vice-mayor are correct, I think. Please deliberate and make a decision." 譚啓龍和這個副市長的意見，我看是正確的。請你們商議一下，酌定政策。(Mao, 1998, p.124) This "endorsement" suggests that Mao did not care much about Wang Xiaoyu, to whom he referred not by name but as "that vice-mayor." Moreover, Tan Qilong and Wang Xiaoyu politically stood on opposite sides, making Mao's instructions highly ambiguous. It was people around Mao, especially Kang Sheng, whose support enabled Wang Xiaoyu to proceed with his revolutionary designs and in the process promote Kang Sheng's son as well. At the outset of the Cultural Revolution, his son had been working as a minor official in the education

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<sup>9</sup>The first article in "People's Daily" that mentioned Wang Xiaoyu, appeared on January 30, 1967, praising the power seizure in Qingdao.

department of Qingdao City. Ten years later, he was among the top-ranked leaders of Zhejiang province. His rise was closely associated with Wang Xiaoyu's rise, although later investigations against Wang, led by Kang Sheng, carefully avoided this fact. Contrary to popular perceptions at the time, Wang Xiaoyu's rise had less to do with Mao Zedong than with Wang Xiaoyu's own cunning political maneuvers. Precisely because formal party organizations were paralyzed, informal connections between individual members became all the more important, allowing long-standing party members to remain present in the political arena.<sup>10</sup>

At least as important as connections was political experience gained in a long party career. Party members were better able to maneuver in the midst of complex power struggles. In times when the CCP was a party in power, its cadres were functionaries filling well-defined positions in the nomenklatura (Schurmann, 1966, p.107). When the party hierarchy disappeared during the Cultural Revolution, party members reverted to their past identity as revolutionaries in less institutionalized struggles to survive and to protect their families from persecution. Wang Xiaoyu had not only mastered the administrative side of the state, but had also encountered its revolutionary side. He had witnessed purges, first as a winner and then as a victim. During purges in 1947, he had stood with the leftists and seen the rightists dismissed from office (CRD 703). His experience at the head of Shandong's law enforcement agencies during the party purges in the second half of the 1950s influenced his approach to governing during the Cultural Revolution. Deviating from established operating procedures, he had the provincial public security bureau report directly to him, often meeting one-on-one with its director; this allowed Wang Xiaoyu to persecute his opponents and rehabilitate allies (CRD 4). Later on, Wang Xiaoyu created two para-police squads, which were more loyal to him personally than to the existing bureaucratic apparatus. One of the

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<sup>10</sup>Similarly, his fall was initiated by a group of provincial leaders, endorsed by a group of central leaders, and finally approved by Mao Zedong (CCP Central Document Research Office 中共中央文獻研究室, 1997, p.299f.).

organizations, the “Attack with Words - Defend with Weapons” group performed police functions and was known for its violence. The organization took over files from the provincial public security bureau (CRD 18). It also ran a network of black prisons.<sup>11</sup> Ostensibly modelled after the Shanghai example (Perry, 2006, ch.5), in reality Shandong’s “Attack with Words - Defend with Weapons” represented only a small section of the workers and included peasants. As a personalistic organization focussed on Wang Xiaoyu, it lacked revolutionary legitimacy. When the judicial system in Shandong was dealing with the Cultural Revolution in 1979, the only death sentence carried out was against the leader of the “Attack with Words - Defend with Weapons” organization.

The public security and procuratorial organs were among Wang Xiaoyu’s most potent weapons. He was able to wield them effectively because he had been learning to employ them ever since the 1950s. During the anti-rightist campaign, he overplayed his hand trying to protect individuals whom he believed to be innocent. He refused to serve on the team that was to single out rightists, and he refused to testify against those who had been singled out as rightists. Finally he became a victim himself. In 1959 he was classified as a rightist, his party membership was put on probation, he lost his position at the Prosecutor’s Office and he was demoted in rank (CRD 472). The absence from the political scene during the disastrous Great Leap Forward may have helped his reputation. After his rehabilitation, a couple of years before the Cultural Revolution, Wang Xiaoyu was in charge of the *Socialist Education Movement* (Baum, 1968) in the countryside outside Qingdao, giving him practical training in precisely the type of politics that would be enacted during the Cultural Revolution.

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<sup>11</sup>These prisons are referred to in many of the testimonies used here. In one self-criticism, a group formerly involved in running the prisons estimates that there were 4,000 inmates (CRD 453). In a conversation with the author, one individual who at the time was in charge of the prisons believes that the number is exaggerated, but does not deny the existence of the system.

Most tangible is the information advantage that party members such as Wang Xiaoyu enjoyed. His most important stock of information came from his time at the head of the Prosecutor's Office. At a time when denunciations were the weapon of choice, information was raw material for power and could be wielded as a weapon against political competitors. This includes what Max Weber defined as *Dienstwissen* (official knowledge), namely "factual knowledge acquired in the process of administering or found 'on record'." (Weber, 1922, p.129) Wang had extraordinary access to personal background information on leading cadres, especially of the incriminatory kind, thanks to his past work. During his time as the vice-director of Shandong's provincial Prosecutor's Office in the 1950s, Wang Xiaoyu worked with personnel files on an everyday basis. His wife, who also played an active role in the politics of the Cultural Revolution, had easy access to all incoming cables, because the Wang family lived inside the office compound - she supposedly was an avid reader of internal documents (CRD 457). Wang cut others off from this precious source of information by putting public security organs, procuratorial offices, and the people's courts on a tight leash. Knowledge concerning the details of people's personnel files could be used against political enemies, fueling the wrath of Red Guards. The work with personnel files also made Wang Xiaoyu particularly aware of the value of governing the provincial archives. He spent much energy cleaning the dossiers of his allies.

In sum, CCP members and incumbent power holders had a competitive advantage over newcomers and therefore could dominate the political scene even at the time of greatest turmoil. At the pinnacles of power, China's national leaders were at Mao's mercy. Being able to anticipate the chairman's mercurial wishes was by far the most important skill for career advancement at Mao's court in Beijing (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 2006). But at the local level, out of Mao's

sight, other factors became more salient, as the example of Wang Xiaoyu shows.<sup>12</sup> Occasionally, the Cultural Revolution saw “showstoppers,” who quickly rose to fame thanks to Mao and then disappeared from the stage just as quickly once Mao moved on to another exemplary revolutionary. Such elevator careers were not only exceptional, but also short-lived (Zhang, 2006). Party membership was essential for more lasting success, partly because it gave leaders legitimacy, and more importantly because their networks, experience and information made them strong contenders in the power struggles at the time.

### 5.2.2 Local Coalitions for Stability

The presence of party members ultimately contributed to stability. To be sure, power competition between factions inside the party created upheaval as well. But having participated in running the party state prior to the Cultural Revolution, either as local cadres or as rank-and-file members, party members shared a vision of how the polity could be maneuvered into calmer waters. Their informal networks allowed them to work effectively toward peace. The case of Wang Xiaoyu also demonstrates how at the top of provincial politics in Shandong, the situation quickly calmed down after the power seizure. Thanks to Wang’s networks and his long experience with party affairs, he knew how to fend off competitors, thereby establishing hegemonic stability, which left Shandong in a more peaceful situation than many other provinces. Further down the hierarchy, one also sees evidence of how the long shadow of the party facilitated effective coalitions for stability.

The events surrounding the “Eight Big” 八大 in Linyi, a prefecture on the southern periphery of Shandong, epitomizes how party members formed coalitions that ultimately helped to bring about stability. Once the power struggles of the Cultural Revolutions started, factional struggles put

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<sup>12</sup>As well as Parris Chang’s analysis of the political maneuvers by incumbent provincial leaders (Chang, 1972).

Linyi's party unity to a hard test. Local leaders followed the trends of the movement and staged a power seizure, led by the "Eight Big," even before Shandong saw its provincial power seizure. By doing so, the local party sacrificed some of its leaders, but avoided a power vacuum. Subsequently, when Wang Xiaoyu's rebels took over the provincial center, these new leaders resented their lack of influence in Linyi, feeling that allies of the previous provincial government were left in charge. This was particularly unacceptable to the new provincial leaders, because Linyi was strategically located in the south of the province, where rebels were to be recruited for battles in Xuzhou. Xuzhou, a major city in the neighboring province of Jiangsu, fell under Shandong's jurisdiction in terms of military command and railroad management, so that Wang Xiaoyu had stakes in the struggles there. Just a week after the provincial leaders had approved Linyi's new Revolutionary Committee, they dispatched a student from Shandong Normal University to denounce the newly established Revolutionary Committee for having used methods of "white terror" against dissenting rebels (CRD 401, p.1).

It became more and more apparent that provincial leaders were nurturing the underdog faction, referred to as the "Six Big" 六大. Some party members in Linyi saw this as an opportunity for their own advancement and defected from the local coalition for stability. As the battles in Xuzhou escalated, provincial interest in Linyi increased and the "Eight Big" came under more and more pressure. In the summer of 1967 struggles in Xuzhou costed hundreds of lives. Thus Wang Xiaoyu took great interest in the southern part of Shandong, flying there in July and returning at least one more time later in the summer (CCP Tengzhou, 1995, pp.278-279). According to one estimate, among the 80,000 fighters in Xuzhou were 20,000 rebels sent in from Shandong, mostly from its southern parts (Red Guards, 1967-1973, vol.1:7, pp.3285-3288). Linyi's neighboring prefecture of Zaozhuang contributed 9,000 men and generously provided them with vehicles and weapons,

including rifles and machine guns (CCP Zaozhuang, 1999, p.333), putting pressure on Linyi to send fighters as well.

The prefectural “Eight Big” coalition was so strong that the provincial government had a hard time making its authority felt. Even when provincial authorities were determined to dislodge the local coalition, this turned out to be difficult. The student who had been sent in to “light the fire of revolution” managed to organize an opposition force, but at one point, as they were assembling in a local agricultural school, the opposition was physically attacked and nearly defeated by the incumbent “Eight Big.” Provincial leaders at the time realized that Linyi’s coalition was very robust. After Wang Xiaoyu’s fall from power in 1969, his right-hand man Han Jinhai had to make a lengthy self-criticism, during which he recalls reporting to Wang Xiaoyu after a field visit and describing the great difficulties in undermining the local coalition in Linyi.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, I talked about how difficult the task ahead was. In Linyi Prefecture, we really had to exercise a lot of pressure. Originally, the “Eight Big” had seized power, and it was a revolutionary [that is good and legitimate] power seizure. The “Six Big” seceded from the “Eight Big.” We stubbornly supported the “Six Big” and smashed the “Eight Big.” On the ground, popular support for the “Eight Big” stood at 70% or 80%, maybe even 80% to 90%. No matter how much pressure you exercised, they wouldn’t go down. So even after we went in, we had a strong sense that the task ahead wasn’t easy. If you tell us to support the “Six Big,” but in every so many villages you only find one outright supporter, what can we do? The majority were “Eight Big,” so we were in trouble. When Wang Xiaoyu heard my report, he didn’t say a thing and his face looked rather pale.

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<sup>13</sup>Han Jinhai’s Self-Criticism, September 12, 1969, pp.26-27.



As is often the case with self-criticism, it is not clear from the transcript what part is his actual report at the time and what part is background provided for the audience of the self-criticism meeting. But it is clear that the coalition in Linyi was thought to be extremely resilient. When, at the end of the Cultural Revolution, Han Jinhai had to spend more than ten years in prison, one of the main accusations was that as the second-in-command of the provincial government, he had brought chaos to Linyi through a series of heavy-handed interventions against the “Eight Big.”

In July 1967 the “Six Big” narrowly escaped defeat thanks to Wang Xiaoyu sending in investigators; firing some members of Linyi’s Revolutionary Committee; and finally dispatching an outside intervention force, which by some accounts amounted to 20,000 individuals.<sup>14</sup> But even in summer 1968, after the “Eight Big” had been removed from power, Wang Xiaoyu felt compelled to dispatch a squad of workers from Jinan to Linyi to defend the new power holders. An embedded journalist accompanied the crowd and later recalled the events in vivid detail. On August 20th, the rebel organization most supportive of the government, the *Shandong Workers General HQ*, convened for an emergency meeting, preparing to send a *Workers Propaganda Team* to Linyi. After a pep rally, “on August 24th, a 1,000-plus-people-strong *Workers Propaganda Team*, in several dozen small and big cars, having organized people to stand along the street and cheer them on, majestically set out for Linyi” (CRD 31, p.2). Driving for most of the day, by evening the troop arrived in Linyi and concluded the day with a parade. Over the next few days they spread out to the counties of the prefecture, then reassembled. In the process, they had mobilized at least 10,000 locals to join in the fray. Then, with new orders from Wang Xiaoyu, they went after members of the “Eight Big.” They encircled a village where leading members of the group were suspected to be hiding.

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<sup>14</sup>The number comes from a narrative posted online, whose quality is apparent both because many other facts can be confirmed from written sources and because other users make knowledgeable comments. <http://tieba.baidu.com/p/448755094>. Link checked November 2013.

They also broke into military barracks, vandalized the place, beat up 500 people and finally chose more than 40 leaders from the local coalition as targets for a public struggle meeting the following day.<sup>15</sup> The muscular measures that provincial authorities needed to break up Linyi's local coalition for stability speak to the resilience of this coalition. Ultimately, however, the "Eight Big" could not prevail against provincially supported rebels, who were able to seize power and replace the incumbent party leadership. In one county of Linyi, locals vividly remember the traumatic moment of takeover: The dead body of a former leader was hung from a tree at a major intersection and people were required to shoot at it to show their loyalty to the new local leadership.<sup>16</sup>

After its defeat in late 1967 and its complete downfall in summer 1968, the coalition for stability helped to de-escalate an explosive situation. When the hegemonic power of the "Eight Big" broke down in the autumn of 1967, Linyi looked ripe for all-out factional warfare. Yet instead of fighting it out, the coalition for stability staged a tactical retreat with a markedly de-escalating effect. Like prior generations of refugees from Shandong escaping political turmoil of the Republican era and political campaigns of the Mao era, some people from Linyi escaped to the China's Northeast, never to return. Other members of the coalition followed tactics familiar from the guerilla warfare of the Sino-Japanese War and Civil War, which some participants had witnessed and which had taken place in exactly the same locality. They retreated to Mount Maling, patiently and confidently waiting for their return.<sup>17</sup>

Up on Mount Maling members of the conservative faction thought of themselves as a guerilla force, struggling in support of Mao Zedong's revolution, just as some of them had done prior to the Communist takeover. Their opponents called the group the Mount Maling Gangsters. Asked

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<sup>15</sup>This account is based on the testimony by the embedded journalist Zhang Shi, summer 1969, CRD 31, pp. 34-37, and confirmed through an interview with another participant in June 2013.

<sup>16</sup>Conversations in Linyi, summer 2013.

<sup>17</sup>Conversation with eye-witnesses, one of whom at the time was shuttling between the mountain and the township, summer 2013.

why they would be perceived as gangsters, an eyewitness recalled:<sup>18</sup>

We clearly had a big supply problem: What could we eat? At first we relied on the peasants, but as the older comrades remembered, a guerilla force cannot alienate the peasants. Therefore, our leaders became more creative. For example, some of us stopped a train headed south carrying food. They used a slogan saying that food produced in Shandong should be eaten by Shandong's revolutionaries. Later I participated in a bank robbery. After taking out the very substantial sum of RMB 20.000, I still remember that we decided to leave behind two pieces of paper. One was a receipt, because after all we weren't ordinary bank robbers! The other one was a letter to Mao Zedong, explaining our action. Our thinking was that if he understood the situation on the ground, he would approve. I was so young at the time!

This quote reflects that the tactics and measures of the Mount Maling guerilla force were geared toward survival rather than taking over government.

The defensive strategy of the Mount Maling group became most visible when under attack. The rebels in power in the county capital occasionally sent out expeditions to wipe out their political enemies in the mountains, fearing that they might one day return. In these cases the Mount Maling group chose a particularly easy-to-defend site. I visited the site of one of the most dangerous battles, comparing eye-witness accounts to the documentary evidence. The site was chosen for its steep and stony slope, which makes Mount Maling look hard-to-climb, even though its elevation is not great. Moreover, military barracks were located at the foot of the mount and the stability coalition convinced the military commander in charge to place a tank on the road up the slope. The tank signalled to rebels that they should not cross beyond that point, because of the "nearby" provincial

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<sup>18</sup>Conversations in Tancheng, mid-June 2013. This paragraph is not a verbatim quote. Instead, it summarizes both the long answer and further details that the eyewitness provided in follow-up conversations.

border. The steep-looking slope in conjunction with the threatening tank let the rebels give up the pursuit of the “Eight Big” and return to the county seat without major battle<sup>19</sup>. The coalition for stability found its natural partner in the military, which also sought de-escalation.

Up on Mount Maling, the coalition of stability awaited a signal to return. When Wang Xiaoyu was swept out of power and publicly denounced for his support to Linyi’s “Six Big,” the group thought that time was ripe for its return. On June 22nd, 1969, after receiving reassurances from their adversaries who were still in power, an advance party of 42 former cadres, out of a group of about 200 former cadres waiting for a return, ventured back to one of Linyi’s county seats. After crossing a small river close to the county border, they looked back and noticed that the river had turned into a torrent: The sluice gates had been opened. Next, they saw a threatening group of men approaching from the front. Cut off in the rear, they climbed up a mountain, were surrounded and after a long battle surrendered. They were attacked by unguided mortar artillery, leaving three dead. The killing began in earnest after the surrender, exhibiting an unusual degree of violence: Apart from fatal shootings, there were instances of a person’s head being smashed, eyes poked out, and a heart dug out. Fifteen more individuals were killed, nine of them party members, some of them having held local positions of leadership before the Cultural Revolution. This was a desperate explosion of violence, committed by people who had realized that their days in government were numbered.<sup>20</sup> The main force of the coalition of stability had stayed behind and returned more successfully a few months later - the last slaughter helping their legitimacy as leaders restoring peace to the prefecture.

Linyi was by no means exceptional in that the local party at first managed to preserve unity,

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<sup>19</sup>It seems that there was no fatal shooting, although this is a hard-to-asertain fact.

<sup>20</sup>This paragraph summarizes the collective denunciation made at a struggle session in Jinan, especially CRD 401, p.21-23. The author also visited the site, with a former member of the Mount Maling Guerilla.

until higher-level authorities stirred up trouble to bring to power new leaders, who would be dependent on upper-level support and therefore would ensure upper-level influence. Liaocheng prefectures held out even longer than Linyi, until the province denounced its “fake” power seizure. But even then Liaocheng’s leaders were able to temporize and minimize the effect of provincial intervention. In both prefectures, the early compromise between competing local rebel organizations was a formidable achievement, which was deliberately broken up by outside intervention.

### 5.2.3 Party Members Resorting to Production

Even during the most destructive phase of the Cultural Revolution in 1967/68, economic disruption was more limited than one might think, given the widespread civilian conflict. The economy was shielded from the turmoil as a result of a strategic calculus by party cadres: production promised personal safety. Cadres could build on a patriotic consensus, according to which production was indispensable to defend China against foreign threats. In the name of “making revolution and promoting production” cadres, who were indispensable for keeping China’s production going, could hope to be left alone by Red Guards and worker rebels, thanks to the pre-eminent rank of production in the Maoist hierarchy of values.

Cadres suffered severe political and physical attacks from Red Guards and worker rebels throughout the Cultural Revolution. In Shandong as elsewhere, these attacks reached a climax in late 1966 and early 1967. Li Zaiwen was Shandong’s most politically senior Cultural Revolution victim. Having served as a Standing Committee Member of the Provincial Party Committee, he was killed in February 1967 when rebels reacted against his tireless, public efforts to protect artifacts in Shandong’s world-famous Confucian temples.<sup>21</sup> Mu Lin, another Standing Committee Member was

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<sup>21</sup> Although the article fails to acknowledge Li Zaiwen’s contribution, the battles surrounding Confucian sites in Qufu are well-documented in Dahpon Ho, “To Protect and Preserve: Resisting the Destroy the Four Olds Campaign, 1966-1967,” in Joseph Esherick, Paul Pickowicz and Andrew Walder, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*,

trying to abscond into a military dormitory, but when rebels found him, he was paraded around in several localities, including in Confucius' hometown Qufu, in the provincial capital Jinan, and even in the national capital Beijing (Mu, 2000, p.409).

To the extent that they had a choice, most cadres opted for one of two survival strategies: Exile or working for the new government. The exile option meant either absconding or going on medical leave. Finding safe havens to hide was difficult, as Red Guards were effective at tracking down their targets. Throughout the Cultural Revolution, investigation and search teams were active across the country. Big cities like Beijing and Shanghai were natural places to seek refuge, but Shandong's rebel organizations set up representative offices there and maintained close contact with local rebel organizations there. Shandong's beautiful seaport city of Qingdao was an attractive hideout for rebels from other provinces. Among the more prominent guests was the vice-Party Secretary for Qinghai province, Gao Keting, who had been granted sick leave and was allowed to stay in Qingdao, with a Red Guard student to watch over him (Gao, Keting, 2000, p.529).

The most prominent target for Shandong's rebels was the provincial party secretary Tan Qilong. His ordeal began in late August 1966 after trying in vain to mediate between radical Red Guards and moderate worker rebels in Qingdao (CCP Shandong, 2001, p.504). By November, Tan Qilong had lost his authority, so that Red Guards could disrupt a high-profile meeting in Jinan with impunity and coerce Tan Qilong to immediately travel to Beijing "for discussions" (ibid.). After spending all of January under house arrest in Qingdao, Tan was taken to Jinan, expecting the worst. Shortly after Tan Qilong's arrival in the provincial capital, military officials under orders from Zhou Enlai took him to the airport, changing cars on the way, and put him on an early morning flight to Beijing. There he stayed in the Capital West Hotel, with other distressed officials

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Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

from around the country. Even with protection from Zhou Enlai, Tan remained in a precarious position. In late April, he was compelled to briefly return to Jinan, where he suffered verbal and physical attack. Back in Beijing, to escape from rebel attacks the distressed officials had to move from the Capital West Hotel to the Central Government Guesthouse and finally to an office building at Beijing Nanyuan Airport. To confuse potential followers, they took circuitous routes and the cadres themselves sometimes did not know where they were. They had to spend one particularly volatile night inside the leadership compound of Zhongnanhai.<sup>22</sup> Terrifying though his ordeal was, Tan Qilong's escape to Beijing during much of 1967 probably saved his life (Tan, 2003).

Some less prominent cadres tried to escape by returning to their hometowns. Since outsiders arose suspicion, they would need families with the wherewithal to ward off rebel attacks there. An example is Liu Peixia, rumored to have a relationship with Wang Xiaoyu, which she heatedly denied: "What relationship? Could I be attracted to his pock marks for their size, or rather for their quantity?" (CRD 457) In any case, when she came under rebel attack, Wang Xiaoyu sought ways to get her out of Jinan. At first, the idea was to let her see a doctor in Shanghai or Beijing, but that did not seem safe. Wang Xiaoyu then considered placing her on a big state farm in a neighboring province, but feared that the rebel organization there would realize that she was on the run. Liu Peixia ultimately did go to a state farm, carrying an introduction letter saying that she was an "old cadre" and accompanied by two standing committee members of Shandong's Revolutionary Committee (CRD 457, p.20). In short, escape was extremely difficult.

By far the most promising -though far from risk-free- survival strategy was to make oneself indispensable to the new provincial leaders. Five Standing Committee Members of Shandong's Party Committee took this path, with varying success: Su Yiran, Mu Lin, Chao Zhefu, Li Zi'ang,

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<sup>22</sup>This was in the aftermath of the Wuhan Incident (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 2006, ch.12).

and Duan Yi. Three of them survived the turmoil in positions of leadership, at least until the Ninth Congress.<sup>23</sup> Su Yiran, Mu Lin, and Chao Zhefu's survival strategy was to become affiliated with the Production Headquarters, the bureaucratic apparatus responsible for keeping the economy going. For rebel groups, the Production Headquarters were an unattractive target. The Production Headquarters were subordinate to the Revolutionary Committee and wielded limited symbolic power. Taking over the production headquarters also did not promise to improve the rebels' fighting power, as there were neither weapons nor personnel files for denouncing cadres. Production Headquarters controlled substantial economic resources, but taking those over was a politically risky proposition, as rebels could easily be accused of capitalist greed or economic mismanagement. These factors alone would have been enough to discourage rebel attacks.

In addition, production headquarters were relatively safe, because upper-level government and the military were committed to their smooth functioning. Zhou Enlai in particular was adamant about maintaining the production headquarters. In meetings with him, the consensus was that "production cannot stop. People must eat and wear clothes. There must be a bureaucratic apparatus taking care of production" (Mu, 2000, p.410). This was perceived as a matter of political survival. "People need oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, as well as soap and towels. Women need hair pins on their heads and clothes to wear. If they do not find these things in the shops, there will be rebellion. This more than anything else will make people unhappy about the government" (Mu, 2000, p.424). One of the top leaders of Shandong province surviving in high office throughout the turmoil saw production as a defensive weapon:

At the time, Mao Zedong came up with a series of slogans like "Our agriculture must study Dazhai," "Our industry must study Daqing," "Grasp revolution, promote pro-

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<sup>23</sup>Chao Zhefu and Li Zi'ang fell in autumn 1967.



duction,” all of them supporting the promotion of production. These slogans turned into sharp weapons in the hands of production headquarters at all hierarchical levels to organize the expansion of production. (Mu, 2000, p.411)

Production headquarters were safe because they were deemed indispensable.

With party cadres throughout the province flocking to the Production Headquarters as a relatively safe haven, the bureaucratic apparatus was functional within weeks after Wang Xiaoyu's takeover. One attack on the Production Headquarters in April/May 1967 was easily warded off, as Wang Xiaoyu negotiated with the rebels and appeased them by admitting one student and one worker representative to the leadership of the Production Headquarters (Mu, 2000, p.412). The situation changed only in December 1968, when Wang Xiaoyu himself decided to topple the leadership of the Production Headquarters. He had his trusted associates Han Jinhai and Zhang Meizhi organize over 1,000 workers in worker propaganda teams. They boarded trucks and drove to the Provincial Production Headquarters, motorcycles opening up the road before them. Loudspeakers and banners declared the goal of their mission: “Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team of Shandong Workers to be stationed at the Provincial Production Headquarters.” Once they arrived at the Production Headquarters, they declared that henceforth, no order, no report, and no decision would be valid if it had not been made in the presence of a member from the Propaganda Team (CRD 464). This round of disruption had disastrous consequences for Shandong's economy. Wang Xiaoyu's decision had to do with his dissatisfaction about meager increases in production output during his tenure, as well as with the perception -probably correct- that the Production Headquarters had concentrated much real power in their own hands. But his decision was a fatal mistake. Not only did Shandong's production fall into utter disarray, Wang Xiaoyu also hastened his own downfall in the spring of 1969.

In Shandong enough former cadres sought shelter at the Production Headquarters for the system to run. As one would expect during a movement directed against bureaucrats, mid-ranking provincial cadres in Shandong virtually disappeared from the stage. Out of 1,099 mid-ranking provincial cadres), only 31 continued working under Wang Xiaoyu. By contrast, the topmost party leaders at each level knew how to navigate the treacherous terrain of the Cultural Revolution. The political survival rate among Standing Committee members was 20% at the provincial level, 21% at the prefectural level and 29% at the county level (CCP Shandong, 2001, p.551 f.). More often than not, involvement in managing production was the key to local party cadres' successful survival strategy.

#### **5.2.4 The Party-State Returns**

The most puzzling aspect of the Cultural Revolution is not how swiftly the turmoil unfolded, but how quickly it was stopped. At the end of 1968, it was hard to envision how the People's Republic could ever overcome the violent civilian turmoil that had spread throughout the country. The establishment of transitional governments, in the form of Revolutionary Committees, was essential for the state to maintain at least a modicum of political authority. The next step toward stability was to transform the Revolutionary Committees into organs fully responsive to upper-level instructions, more permanently moving the party state out of its self-inflicted emergency mode. In China's quest for regular governance, the party made a formidable comeback and after the Ninth Congress, by mid-1969, much of its hierarchy was back in place.

The longer Wang Xiaoyu stayed in power, the more actively he created institutions that had no link to the party and were tailor-made to consolidate his power. "Attack with Words - Defend with Weapons" and the "Shandong workers propaganda troop" were the two mass organizations whose

chains of command were least compatible with the party state, but which were intimately linked to Wang Xiaoyu. Therefore, to destroy competing organizations and revive the party state, Wang Xiaoyu had to go. Following the Ninth Party Congress, in May 1969 the politbureau decided to “remove Wang Xiaoyu from his leadership position and to put Yang Dezhi in charge of Shandong” (CCP Central Document Research Office 中共中央文獻研究室, 1997, vol.3, p.296). Wang Xiaoyu and other provincial leaders from Shandong were forced to make self-criticisms, both in Beijing and in Jinan. A central official document, endorsed by chairman Mao, specifically pointed to Wang Xiaoyu’s “anti-restoration movement” as a “grave mistake” (CRD 11). The “anti-restoration movement” had been carried out mainly by the “Attack with Words - Defend with Weapons” and the “Shandong workers propaganda troop.” Wang Xiaoyu experienced remarkable personal loyalty. One military leader was concerned about rumors alleging that a “peaceful military takeover” had ousted Wang Xiaoyu and that now “a military regime” was ruling (CRD 55, p.3). Indeed, Wang Xiaoyu has fervent admirers even today. At the end, the frontal attack from Beijing diminished Wang Xiaoyu’s authority and undermined his support base.

The violent onslaught by Red Guards and worker rebels during the Cultural Revolution had paralyzed the CCP. Yet the same Red Guards and worker rebels who had gone all-out in attacking the party often sought to attain party membership as a vehicle for political and social advancement. According to widespread perceptions at the time, party membership remained an important condition for taking up leadership positions. On his visit to Shandong, a journalist from the official People’s Daily questioned Wang Xiaoyu about the director of Qingdao’s Revolutionary Committee, who was a worker lacking party membership. In response to the journalist, Wang Xiaoyu picked up the phone, called the director and upon learning that the party membership had not been arranged yet, instructed the director to take this formality seriously. Wang Xiaoyu then turned back to

the journalist, making it clear that in the absence of a party organization, party membership was meaningless, since it was merely a question of him signing off a person's membership (Jin 2006). The journalist remains outraged even today, but Wang Xiaoyu had correctly pointed to a curious phenomenon: People valued party membership even in the absence of the party.

The political salience of party membership sharply increased when it became widely known that another Party Congress was in the making. The Ninth Congress was held in 1969, but preparations had started much earlier. In late 1967, a central government document summarized responses to an "opinion survey," which ostensibly had been sent out to collect feedback on things like how to run the congress and how to select the representatives (CRD 690). More important than the feedback, the questionnaire signalled that the party was planning its return. Much of the debate was about whether the party was to be restored in a top-down or a bottom-up fashion, with local party congresses preceding the national party congress and each level electing representatives to the next higher level. At least since the beginning of 1968, Shandong's local leaders were maneuvering themselves into advantageous positions for the upcoming congress.

In February 1968, at the time of the provincial revolutionary representative assembly, Wang Xiaoyu took Zhao Xiude and standing committee member Chen Fenglai (representing the military) aside and said: 'As soon as possible put together a team to investigate the background of [the province's] new and old political leaders, in preparation for the Ninth Party Congress.' He clarified that this team would be led by himself, Zhao Xiude, Chen Fenglai, and Qin Hongzhou (member of the provincial revolutionary committee, number one in the organization for organization [sic], representing the military), that no locals must be included and that everyone was to come from the military. This organization was not to be disclosed; only a small circle should be in the know.

According to Hua Guanglong's denunciation, before that conversation, Wang Xiaoyu had also told him the same thing, asking him to transmit the message to Chen Fenglai and to instruct Chen Fenglai to organize some military men, without telling anyone, only military men, telling them to investigate the cadres of the Revolutionary Committee. According to this denunciation, after getting a green light from Yang Dezhi, Chen Fenglai went to the Department for Political Cadres of the Jinan Military Region Command. The department then recruited 13 politically reliable cadres from various military branches. [...] At the end, there were altogether 18 individuals serving on the Provincial Revolutionary Committee's Personal Files Team. (CRD 473, p. 116f.)

Initially, there was ambiguity over whether representatives all had to be party members. Some believed that the selection of representatives would follow the Cultural Revolution's triple formula, consisting of an even portion of military, cadres, and rebels, with rebels not necessarily being party members. In reality, the Congress turned out to be dominated by party members.

The salience of party membership increased even further when local "Party Small Leading Groups" were created, which were instrumental in moving from transitional government to more permanent structures. These groups eventually were to help select participants for the Ninth Congress. In turn, these Party Small Leading Groups found themselves at the center of local power competition. The decisive difference between Revolutionary Committees and the Party Small Leading Groups was that only party members could participate in the latter, as the name suggests. At a meeting of leaders from Shandong's 13 prefectures in June 1968, the provincial leader Wang Xiaoyu cautioned the group that going forward, party membership would once again become a decisive political asset:

Now let me highlight an extremely crucial point, especially keeping in mind the prepara-

tory work for Party Small Leading Groups. Some comrades participate in Revolutionary Committees, but they are not yet party members. Their political consciousness may or may not conform to the party's demands. However, when we develop the party and incorporate new members, we cannot lower the standards. Thus we must increase and strengthen party education. (CRD 650)

The "Party Small Leading Groups" were the crucial focal point, as it became increasingly clear that they were the entry point for the returning Leninist hierarchy.

Filling the power vacuum left by the Cultural Revolution turmoil with party organizational structures was part of the challenge. Destroying strong non-party institutions was another aspect. For Shandong, as for other provinces, both goals were achieved through a *Study Group of Mao Zedong Thought* taking place in Beijing under the auspices of China's top leadership. In late June 1969, more than 570 delegates from Shandong arrived in the capital, including not only members of Revolutionary Committees at various hierarchical levels and military leaders, but also representatives from mass organizations (CRD 1). The proceedings lasted for three month, beginning with 50 days of studying various documents concerning the nature, goals and organizational principles of the CCP, in particular including the newly promulgated Party Constitution. During that period, the government's central office guided the delegates in the critical task of defining the study group's "CCP small leading group," in charge of governing the study group. Only once this group was in place did the debate turn to specific Cultural Revolution events in Shandong, through an ordeal of sharp denunciations and extorted confessions (CRD 1, p.23f.). The more divisive task of evaluating the Cultural Revolution and apportioning blame for aberrations was the test of whether the newly defined party leadership was up to the task of running Shandong.

Study Groups of Mao Zedong Thought were deployed in a similar fashion to restore order at

the lower levels of the party state. The city of Qingdao was important enough for the central government to summon leaders from that city to Beijing, not least because of important military assets stationed there. Upon return to Shandong, provincial leaders replicated at home the same approach which they had seen in Beijing. One of the most important provincial study groups included representatives from around the province, including for the most part prefectural leaders and local leaders from places that had become Cultural Revolution hotspots.<sup>24</sup> Another very important study group was held inside the military and law enforcement agencies (CRD 520). The methodology, which had been devised by people like Kang Sheng, the CCP's expert for party purges, quickly trickled down from Beijing and was adapted at lower levels of the party state.

Lengthy proceedings and roundabout methods cannot obscure that the essential agenda of all these meetings was straightforward. In order to revive the party, the nomenklatura system had to be revived, which in turn required clarifying three closely related questions: Who counts as a party member? What is the pecking order? Who gets what position? At the outset of the Study Group in Beijing, one member transmitted instructions from the central leadership, raising questions about the meaning of party membership.

On July 5th we talked about the composition of our study group: How many party members? How many Youth League members? How many non-party members? You all have some ideas about these numbers. But what about those: The time when these party members and Youth League members joined? How many joined before [the Cultural Revolution]? How many have only recently joined? How many filled out the application form, but were never admitted? Those questions we don't really know

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<sup>24</sup>Some hotspots, like Guan County, are conspicuously absent from the records. Were they just not on record, potentially because of the involvement of certain personalities, who had not fallen from power? Or were representatives not even invited along with the big group, to avoid complications?

much about at all, we must investigate thoroughly. If someone's application form hasn't been approved, the person certainly wouldn't count as a party member. If someone has just recently filled out an application form, the person counts even less as a party member. In his Yan'an speech, chairman Mao talked about people who entered the party organizationally, but not ideologically. In reality, such people haven't even entered organizationally either. They must have entered based on personal relationships, how could they organizationally count as party members? (CRD 85, p.9)

It was standard practice for central leaders to put some local leader on the spot and question whether the person's party membership was genuine, with the certain effect of discrediting and politically destroying that person. Day after day, the pecking order was negotiated and gradually fixed. Some participants were altogether removed from the proceedings for "lacking quality" (CRD 1, p.16). Others ran away to avoid trouble, jumping the wall of the compound. Some continued to participate as scapegoats, while others, including the various rapporteurs, turned into political victors. Repeating the central procedures at the sub-provincial level, jurisdiction after jurisdiction the chains of commands were fixed, once again securely fastening cadres to their hierarchical positions.

### **5.3 Hubei: Order Grows Not Out of the Barrel of a Gun**

To demonstrate that even in places where the Cultural Revolution took a more violent course than in Shandong, civilian measures involving both the army and the party were indispensable for restoring stability, this section shifts attention to Hubei province. Thanks to extraordinary archival access, including military cables, it is possible to analyze important aspects of the peace-keeping efforts in Hubei during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>25</sup> Contrary to the conventional emphasis on hard

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<sup>25</sup>Over the years, much information on the Cultural Revolution has appeared, but I am unaware of any other comprehensive set of military cables from this era. The information is most valuable in combination with traditional



power, as in Mao's dictum that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun," in reality military firepower alone cannot explain how the remnant institutions of the party state warded off anarchy after factional warfare had broken out throughout the province. The greatest "military" asset of the PLA (People's Liberation Army) was not its arsenal of guns, but discipline and a functioning hierarchy, so that it could deploy both military and civilian tactics. The military saw its role in supporting a political process rather than taking over permanent political power. Thanks to its revolutionary tradition, China's military was at its best when it threw its military resources behind state-building efforts involving party cadres and ultimately led by party leaders. The Cultural Revolution turmoil was overcome because peace-building with Chinese characteristics rests upon civilian measures. Although the CCP had ostensibly disappeared from the political stage, these measures were in fact shaped by the CCP. Intervention by the PLA was necessary but insufficient to contain anarchy and reestablish order.

Nationwide, the military appeared on the stage of the Cultural Revolution in January 1967. When Mao instructed local military forces in Anhui to provide security for a rebel meeting, which was to oppose the provincial leadership, this instruction signaled the beginning of PLA interventions to "support the left." In the aftermath, the central leadership developed a "three support and two military" policy, which led to an unprecedented involvement of the army in local affairs (Li and Hao, 1989, esp. ch.8). Henceforth it was up to local military leaders to identify the factions that would count as "left". According to the "three support and two military" policy, the military was to support the left, support agriculture, and support industry, while exercising military control and military education. What this meant was interpreted differently in different localities. While

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sources, such as gazetteers, and online information. There are rumors that declassification has been revoked. One needs to be aware that publicly available military cables may underreport violence. Soldiers in the field may underreport violence. Military leaders may not share some of the most violent reports with civilian authorities, whose archives have been opened. Within the civilian archives, some cables concerning violence may not have been declassified.

local military leaders often sought their own safety by de-escalating local violence, they adopted a variety of tactics. The only universal consequence of the “three support and two military” policy was that it legitimized military intervention into local politics.

In Hubei, politics at the height of the turmoil in 1968 were still marked by the Wuhan Incident of the preceding year, “the most dangerous incident” of the Cultural Revolution epitomizing “actual threats of anarchy” (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 2006, ch.12). Justifying their action with the “three support and two military” policy, during the first half year of 1967, military leaders in Hubei had overplayed their hand, taking strong-armed action against Red Guards and worker rebels, arresting many of their leaders (CCP Hubei, 2011, p.158). Beijing felt increasingly alienated by Hubei’s generals, whom it considered “rightists” emphasizing stability over revolution. When chairman Mao visited the provincial capital Wuhan during the summer of 1967, conservatives in Hubei beleaguered China’s national leaders, forcing Mao to escape to Shanghai. As a reaction, central leaders ousted some of the leading conservative generals and strengthened Hubei’s radical forces.

Although radicals had greatly increased their political leverage over provincial affairs, the result of the Wuhan Incident was not an uncontested hegemony of the radicals, but violent competition between conservative and radical forces, especially in the hinterland. The establishment of Hubei’s Revolutionary Committee at the beginning of 1968 was an ambiguous compromise that continued the political uncertainty. The committee included both prominent representatives from the rebels and from the conservatives. One of the eight vice-directors of the committee was the incumbent governor of the province, while another was a radical leader whom the military had arrested a year earlier (CCP Hubei, 2007, p.355). As a result of this stalemate between the parties at the provincial level, at local levels both parties tried to win the upper hand, often leading to conflict escalation.

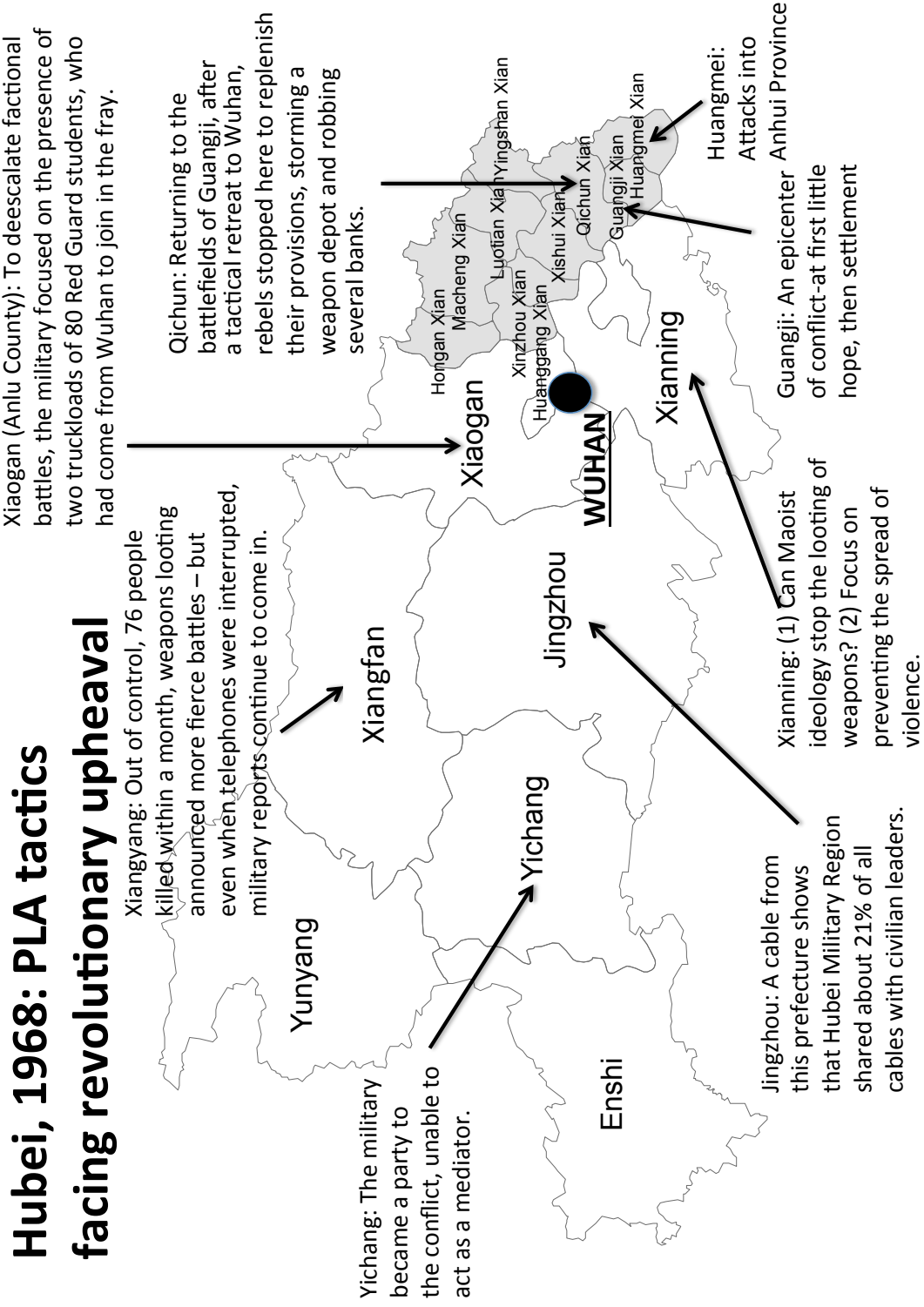


Figure 5.2: Struggle for Stability in Hubei during the Cultural Revolution

Yet while the year 1968 began in a political climate of rising tension, by the end of the year the province was on the road to lasting stability. To clarify the strategies that led to this outcome, this section moves among different theaters of conflict, as indicated in the map. Although the complexities of the Cultural Revolution make it impossible to find “typical pathways,” the attempt is to select those incidents and procedures which, based on the archival record, seem to “represent” the military and the civilian approaches for coping with the turmoil in Hubei.

While the Wuhan incident was an exceptional event getting nationwide attention, the role of the military in Hubei province is by no means atypical. Although in Hubei the tensions within the military, as a result of the Wuhan incident, were particularly obvious, in other provinces the military was no more united (Nelsen, 1972). For instance, in Qinghai province recently available documents show that the internal military divisions were at least as severe as in Hubei. The vice-commander of the military subregion there arrested the commander and kept him in confinement for more than three weeks, because he was convinced that the commander had been too permissive of revolutionary action (CRD 605). The vice-commander then cracked down on the rebel organizations. In one infamous battle, his forces surrounded the local newspaper,<sup>26</sup> killing 169 people and arresting thousands (Li and Hao, 1989, p.232). When the central government arrested the vice-commander and reinstated the commander, as it had done in the wake of the Wuhan Incident, this was insufficient to fix the chain of command. The case of Hubei might not be representative, but it certainly is not unusual either.

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<sup>26</sup>My conversation with two eyewitnesses, December 2013.

### 5.3.1 Production as a Force for Stability Amidst Violence

Stability mechanisms found in relatively orderly places like Shandong (see section 5.2) also functioned in the more violent context of Hubei. For example, the incumbent leaders involved in the Wuhan Incident built a provincial-level stability coalition with affiliates throughout the province, resembling the stability coalition in Linyi (see 5.2.2). Economic production stands out as an effective stability mechanism that was even more powerful, precisely because of the more turbulent situation in Hubei. The generally agreed-upon need to keep the economy afloat induced stability centered around party cadres. The economic realm became a shelter for incumbent party cadres, and incumbent party cadres were a last resort to effectively coordinate production.

Production could provide shelter even in the midst of violence, because economic output was used to legitimize the use of force. The military succeeded in isolating itself from the factional struggles inside the party by cutting off the organizational interconnections that had hitherto secured the party's authority over the PLA. Before the onset of the Cultural Revolution, local party secretaries had concurrently served as political commissioners of the local military forces. But as the Cultural Revolution unfolded, this arrangement was no longer respected and the party secretaries had to leave the military alone (CCP Hubei, 1991, p.842). With the political commissioner gone, the legitimacy of the armed forces became tenuous. The military urgently needed new sources of legitimacy, because it was taking strong-armed action. For instance in March 1967, the military dissolved the *Workers General Headquarters* and arrested hundreds of its leaders (CCP Hubei, 2011, p.158). The most prominent people arrested had impeccable revolutionary credentials - like Xia Bangyin, who was a party member from a poor peasant family then working in a steel rolling mill.<sup>27</sup> Many rebel groups could make ideologically-based claims to power, but the military had

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<sup>27</sup>CVs of several individuals at the heart of the contestation at the time can be found in preparatory documents for the Ninth Party Congress (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-19).

one great advantage over all other groups: As the only major state hierarchy still largely intact by mid-1967, the military was the only organization that could maintain a cadre network capable of managing the highly complex coordination of the state-economy.

If anything, the problem of legitimacy was trickier at lower levels of the hierarchy. Unlike military leaders at the provincial level, local military leaders could not claim connection to Beijing's top leadership, but only to a discredited provincial military establishment. In Yichang a leadership split had occurred in 1967 after a seemingly arbitrary arrest of a rebel. When a number of rebel factions began investigations, the police at first did not compromise, but made more arrests.<sup>28</sup> At the ensuing, violent struggle session, the party secretary suddenly decided to fraternize with the rebels, possibly as a result of a Stockholm Syndrome-type sympathy of a hostage with his captor, and several days later wrote a denunciation letter to the provincial center. Henceforth, top party leaders together with the most powerful rebel organizations opposed the local forces of law and order. When the military took control in Wuhan, local military commanders had one underdog rebel faction lock up the party secretary for two months. Since other incumbents had until then been self-castigating and steady supporter of what appeared as the majority of radical rebels, this move begged questions about legitimacy: How could the military be right and everyone else wrong? As elsewhere, military forces in Yichang bolstered their legitimacy by making itself indispensable for securing production.

To justify its strong-armed action, the military relied not only on Maoist credentials, but also portrayed itself as a pragmatic state-builder, securing production output at a time of crisis. The military for the first time publicized its new leading role in the civilian domain by announcing

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<sup>28</sup>This paragraph is based on a revealing "Investigation Report on Comrade Yang Chunting," written by the *Steel-Tempered Second Headquarters* branch in August 1967, owned by the author. Yang Chunting was the prefectural party secretary at the time. An autobiography entitled 一個人的文革時代 [One Individual's Cultural Revolution Era], probably by a certain Hua Hui and circulated on the Internet since 2010, as well as the Party Organizational History complement the account.

the establishment of an *Office for Grasping Revolution and Promoting Production*. Reflecting the experimental nature of this initiative, the new administrative apparatus at first resided in Hongshan Hotel: Room 703 was the secretariat, room 635 coordinated public transportation, room 805 did finance and trade, and so on (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-1-1). Presumably, the organization was scattered over several floors to ward off rebel attacks. A public communiqué announced the names of the office's leaders. While the draft version still mentioned previously held positions, the final version left out any indication of the leaders' backgrounds (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-1-1), presumably to prevent them from being associated with past policies that could be criticized as "rightist." In the elusive struggles over the fine points of Maoist ideology, masking a complex web of private interests and personal loyalties, the public announcement of March 2nd was a much more tangible message: For the spring sowing season to proceed smoothly, everyone was to return to his place. Those peasants and sent-down youths who had left their villages to petition or to make revolutionary connections were to return home. Other professions were to support the peasants by simply doing their work. Leaders were to set up a functioning administrative system to coordinate production (CCP Hubei, 2007, p.345). In the name of production -and maybe because the terrible consequences of failed harvests were still fresh in people's memories from the Great Leap Famine- people were called to order and many followed.

The office quickly set up branches throughout Hubei. Weary of being exposed to the onslaught of popular criticism, cadres were relieved to be able to go back to work under military protection. Military leaders kept track of the mood among provincial-level cadres and had reports sent to them, which suggest that cadres were genuinely enthusiastic, hoping for a return to stability. An estimated 30,000 cadres came to a mobilization meeting to listen to speeches by Hubei's generals. Participants are cited (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-1-1) saying things like: "After all these months,

this was the first time that I participated in a revolutionary mass meeting. Listening to chairman Mao's words [relayed via the generals], we know that he once again solicits and trusts us cadres." Another person, with theatrical tears in his eyes announced: "Under the lead of the military party committee and with the help of the broad revolutionary masses, I want to atone for my crimes by grasping revolution and promoting production." A flowery, but accurate comment of one cadre went as follows: "Listening to the speeches was like eating watermelon in the heat of summer; it cleared up our minds." Moving from Red Guard Publications and confusing speeches on ideology to the clarity of the military project, today's reader of the archival records experiences a similar mental relief.

The military was closely tracking the people who had been recruited to its cause, not only at the provincial center in Wuhan, but also at the county and the prefectural levels. According to one internal report (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-1-1), no less than 3,398 individuals throughout the province (excluding Wuhan) had literally enlisted with the military by mid-March 1967. Of these individuals 85% were civilians. The report identified the three-level cadres conference, held at the beginning of March, as the crucial turning point after which cadres at all levels of the hierarchy rallied around the flag of the military. The conference not only solved the problem of cadre absenteeism, but also led many counties to organize hundreds of cadres to travel around the countryside to investigate the situation on the ground, township-by-township and village-by village. Most importantly, in all counties and prefectures a group of leaders had been identified to be in charge of production.

The coalition forged around the goal of promoting production was extraordinarily stable. The Wuhan Incident in July 1967 threw local production headquarters into turmoil. But despite antagonizing leadership splits at the provincial center and extreme political uncertainty, large parts of the hierarchical apparatus continued to function. Provincial leaders regularly investigated the



efficiency of the apparatus. They would classify counties into three categories. A-type counties had a clearly identified production leadership team, and people were going to work regularly. B-type counties had a clearly identified leadership team, but many people did not show up for work; or people were working regularly, but there was no effective economic coordination. C-type counties were in great turmoil. In November 1967, according to on-the-spot investigations, about one third of the counties found themselves in this last category. Production output statistics also reflected the effectiveness of the system, some jurisdictions fulfilling their quotas, while the most turbulent places only delivered about half of the quota (Hubei Archive, SZ 75-1-247). Despite the great turmoil, agricultural output in 1967 fell by only 7% (CCP Hubei, 2007, p.353).

### **5.3.2 Deceptive Promises of Force and Disarming Effects of Propaganda**

Experiences with peace-keeping operations around the world show that most of the time military action can only bring lasting stability if it is combined with a political solution. During the Cultural Revolution, the PLA had a similar experience. Hard military capabilities were of limited use and well-armed soldiers were impotent when confronted with severe factional warfare. The case of Tongcheng in Xianning Prefecture is illustrative. Fighting broke out on June 14th, 1968. Military leaders came in on the 16th, but were so powerless that rebels could even detain them. On the 17th and 18th, eight people died, including one soldier killed by a hand grenade. To stop the fighting, prefectural military leaders suggested sending in one brigade, or about 500 soldiers, and simultaneously having leaders from the contending factions travel to Wuhan for mediation (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-57, p.16). The reaction of sending in reinforcements follows the natural instincts of a conventional military leader. Yet committing such a large number of soldiers to a local conflict that looked like so many other conflicts in the province was a questionable strategy, especially since

the temporary detainment of the military leader suggested that the two parties were not interested in being pacified through outside intervention. Unsurprisingly, the military official in charge in the provincial capital did not endorse the idea of the “surge” and of militarily forcing the parties to make peace. He noted on the cable that one should investigate, send a report and take it from there.

Even to the leaders in Xianning, in hindsight, their initial strategy of sending soldiers for a robust pacification mission must have looked like a bad idea. Less than a week after Xianning’s leaders had sent their report to Wuhan, a similar local conflict broke out in another part of the prefecture, this time closer to the prefectural seat (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-57, p.18). Just another two days later, in yet another place an attack targeted the PLA itself (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-57, p.20). Given this escalating situation, sending in enough soldiers to pacify each of these places and keeping the soldiers there to consolidate the peace, would have overcommitted PLA resources. Either recognizing this reality or understanding the strategic thinking of their superiors, the commanders in Xianning henceforth recommended softer approaches, namely making detailed investigations and outlawing particular organizations. A week after their cable on factional warfare in Tongcheng, the commanders had learned that their initial strategy of militarily robust pacification was doomed.

In some cases, apparently when turmoil occurred in geo-strategically important locations, leaders did try to employ a military strategy. The situation in Guangji County in late 1967 and early 1968 epitomizes the challenges facing any kind of intervention.

Battles in Guangji County and other counties here continue to escalate, spreading ever more widely, now already affecting counties in three different provinces. [...] As of now, the two conflicting parties in Guangji County, the “Workers Association” and the “Reds,” have accumulated 4,000 firearms and are engaged in fierce battle. They are

already well organized; it is too late for measures to defuse the situation, escalation is occurring and the risk of large-scale battle will without any doubt materialize, with grave consequences. Presently, Huanggang Military Subregion and Unit 8206 have dispatched people to the scene to solve the problem of Guangji. However, even after two days have passed, they are still outside the county seat without being able to enter the town. The most important reason is that their capabilities are limited, their numbers are insufficient and there is no way to control the evolving situation. (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-57, p.24)

The military was aware that in many cases the use of force did not promise to resolve the conflict. In March, the military sent reinforcements to Guangji, but these forces left in May without achieving a lasting settlement (Guangji County, 1994, chronology).

Military force was also of limited use in preventing the innumerable instances of rebels storming military bases and looting PLA weapon depots. Often rebels had already been engaged in fierce warfare for a while before they decided to procure weapons. In Dongfeng (today: Xiaogan) Prefecture, by mid-May 1968 battles drew supporters from the provincial capital and resulted in injuries. Since both sides had taken hostages, there was little hope for de-escalation. In this climate of rising tension, rebels plundered weapons depots (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-60, p.42). In Xiangfan Prefecture, 43 people had already been killed by the end of June and the death toll was quickly rising (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-62, p.36). Engaged in life-and-death warfare, rebels fetched weapons from one county in Xiangfan prefecture, adjacent to the main battleground, probably because the PLA had quickly removed or secured weapons in the places that saw the most severe fighting. By doing so, however, the PLA gave the rebels a reason to make surprise attacks on weapon depots in relatively calm localities, thereby spreading warfare to less afflicted localities. Military force was of

little avail in stopping the looting –partly because commanders thought it unwise to shoot at rebels and partly because the massive onslaught of rebels had a good chance of carrying off the victory, even if shot at. A massive onslaught by local citizens usually overcame the well-armed soldiers.

Ideology could have a surprisingly disarming, if transient effect, as events surrounding the defense of a weapon depot demonstrate. From the PLA's perspective, among the most promising de-escalation tactics was talking people out of looting weapons - or in the language of the times "propagating Mao Zedong thought" and doing "ideological work." But would anyone listen to a Maoist sermon, at a time when one's livelihood was under threat? One problem was that during a short period in the summer of 1967 Mao had supported the idea of handing out weapons to left rebel organizations. Looters would cite this policy (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-20, p.70), even when Mao had already abandoned the policy of arming the left because of its disastrous consequences (Schoenhals, 2005). Experiences from China's civil war certainly helped officers to engage locals in political dialogue and occasionally to talk them out of rebellion. The case of Xianning Prefecture exemplifies both the possibilities and limits of ideology as a weapon. One certainly cannot underestimate its effectiveness in Maoist China. Ideology helped to achieve military goals, but its success could also be transient, as the military report from Xianning, after 24 hours of turmoil on 22 May 1968, shows:

Since 8p.m. on May 21st, the weapons depot of Xianning Military Subregion has been plundered. At first, the May 16 Brigade from the machine tool factory sent a carload of people, who broke into the depot to grab weapons and ammunition. Then people from Hengou district in Xianning, including workers, farmers and students of the agricultural school followed, altogether 300 to 400 individuals. After the incident, officers and soldiers from the subregion and brigade 8204 went out to propagate Mao Zedong thought

and do ideological work, refreshing the memory of people by propagating the September 5 Directive. By dawn of May 22nd, almost all the weapons and ammunition had been returned. But around noon, the May 16 Brigade once again sent a carload of people to plunder weapons, threatening with arms and beating up those officers and soldiers, who were on site doing propaganda work. Lots of weapons and ammunition were taken. By 7p.m., several hundred people from the local farm tool factory and Maqiao Middle School came to plunder weapons. The Jinggang Mountain Brigade from the local senior high school also appeared on the scene to stop the plundering. There were moments when armed battle appeared highly likely. (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-57, p.13f.)

At first, Mao Zedong thought proved to be literally disarming. But on second thought, the May 16 Brigade convinced itself that plundering weapons was the right thing to do after all. In Hubei, the vilification of the provincial military by central authorities during the Wuhan Incident was one factor. It resulted in important precedents, such as in August 1967, when in a couple of days rebels carried off 19,361 rifles, 4,691 submachine guns and 1,021 light machine guns ("Wuhan Military Region", 1988, p. 261). It was hard to convince rebels to stop attacking their rivals and it was even harder to talk them out of attacking the headquarters at a time when, according to prevailing ideology, it was "right to rebel." At the end of the day, the implications of Mao Zedong ideology were ambiguous. Precisely because ideology was ambiguous, the ability to make a forceful arguments was indispensable to achievement appeasement, creating an opportunity for rank-and-file party members to contribute by working toward stability.

### 5.3.3 Information Power and the Use of Communication Channels

The PLA prevailed not only thanks to its guns, but also thanks to collecting and harnessing information in extremely effective ways. The army's communication channels, both internally and with the party, had been forged in the fire of China's revolutionary wars. As a result, transmission of information between different military units in Hubei functioned smoothly, even in the midst of chaos. Take the example of Xiangfan Prefecture, where in June 1968 a wave of violence in the prefectural capital had killed 43 people in the first 10 days. On the one hand, the military saw little chance for appeasement, was unable to stop the looting of weapon depots and had no plan to solve the crisis. But on the other hand, the military was well informed about the factions, their strongholds and their effect on ordinary citizens' lives; the frontline was a river, with the faction on one shore having a less devastating effect than the faction controlling the other shore (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-62, p.36). As the fighting continued, the number of victims almost doubled within two weeks, more looting of weapons occurred and ordinary postal and phone connections ceased to function, yet the local military kept the commanders in the provincial capital up-to-date (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-60, p.21). When local military units in the ordinary chain of command became dysfunctional as a result of internal struggles, provincial military leaders could rely on intervention forces. In the archive, numerous cables dispatched by such intervention forces show that they routinely complemented the information coming from the prefectural commands.

Military officers wrote their reports using the matter-of-fact language of state-builders rather than as Maoist ideologues. The PLA's traditional organizational culture was so strong that in this case the functional language of the officers prevailed over the otherwise predominant, revolutionary language characteristic of Red Guards and rebel workers (Perry and Li, 1993). Military reports stand in sharp contrast to almost all other documents in the archive for this period. Both speeches

on such mundane issues as economic management, and circulars on highly technical administrative-matters were all framed in terms of ideology and replete with empty slogans. Military cables were also in sharp contrast to the military's public announcements. Even if pragmatic officers routinely deployed revolutionary language in their outside communication, the military's internal communication was goal-oriented and concise.

Civil-military relations were such that the military was well-informed thanks to local civilian supporters, and the provincial military committee was well-informed thanks to the military sharing information. Thanks to consecutive numbers in the headings of the cables, it is possible to estimate with high precision the number of incoming reports per day, as well as the number of reports shared with the civilian leadership. On November 5th, the overall number of military reports received by Hubei Military Region during that year amounted to 2,855 cables (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-62). This is a very high number: It implies that on average, almost every day each of Hubei's prefectures sent a military cable to the provincial commanders, although fewer cables were sent during times of calm and more cables during periods of upheaval. As the Revolutionary Committee's own consecutive numbering shows, about 21% of all reports were directly forwarded from Hubei's military leadership to the civilian leadership (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-62). Over the course of the year 1968, trust between Hubei's military leadership and its civilian leadership increased. Between the establishment of the Revolutionary Committee on February 5th and mid-May, only about 9% of the cables were shared; between mid-May and end of June 18% were shared; and in the remainder of the year 22% were shared.

Beyond cables as the routine communication channel, much information was transmitted in person, since during the Cultural Revolution unlike in ordinary Maoist times, many people were on the move. Take the example of one nightly factional battle, involving over 1,000 fighters and

resulting in hundreds of wounded, as well as over 30 casualties. At midnight, the county militia placed a telephone call to the battalion commander in charge, who at 2:20a.m. dispatched a cable to the provincial capital. In response to the crisis situation, the militia recommended the following action, as was standard procedure (Hubei Archive, SZ 239-6-62 pp. 89-90).

The best way forward would be, following instructions by central authorities concerning the looting of weapons in Hubei, to have the provincial Revolutionary Committee or the provincial military command send down orders telling them to immediately stop fighting and to send representatives to Wuhan for mediation. If you decide to send in military forces, only if you send large numbers will they be able to stop the fighting.

Not only did military officials bring back information from their various mission assignments throughout Hubei. In addition, local faction leaders were summoned to Wuhan for consultations.

Rebel leaders did not always wait to be summoned, instead bringing their grievances before the provincial authorities without having been asked. There are cases when losing factions escaped to the provincial capital, where they lobbied for help from Hubei's military (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-20). Revolutionary cadres wrote letters to higher level authorities, even straight to Mao's wife (CRD 321, letter to Chen Boda and Jiang Qing). Red Guard and worker rebel organizations collected and edited information, copying it to widely advertise their viewpoints (CRD 321 is such a set). When the provincial leadership needed information to make personnel choices, such as in the run-up to the Ninth Party Congress, public denunciations and self-criticisms offered yet another method to solicit detailed information about local events. While many of these information channels were also accessible to rebels, at the end of the day the military could make more of these informal channels, because it could complement them with the steady stream of cabled reports, which were prompt, comprehensive and concise.



Military leaders used their information advantage to insulate violence and prevent spillover effects from one jurisdiction to another. Military cables routinely highlight the presence of outsiders and the outsiders' role in instigating violence. The reports often include actionable information, so that concrete measures could be taken to stop the movement of well-identified individuals. For example, reporting on three large-scale battles in Anlu County (Dongfeng Prefecture), the local military was careful to mention that in support of one faction, two truckloads of altogether 80 students from Wuhan had come to Anlu County and were still present on the scene. In this case, we can look over the shoulder of the reader in Wuhan to understand the reception and reaction to the report: The reader underlined exactly two phrases, both referring to the presence of Wuhan students in Anlu County; in the section reserved for instruction 首長批示, the reader also emphasizes that the students must return to school (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-60, p.40). The military seems to have paid more attention to student outsiders than to peasants or workers, for two reasons. First, students were particularly mobile and thus were more likely to spread conflict over vast distances. Second, it was easier for the military to exercise control over students, who were affiliated with a handful of big universities, rather than disorganized peasants and workers from small work units scattered throughout the province.

As local violence escalated, there was an almost inescapable tendency for conflicts to expand geographically, transcending county borders, as factions engaged in an arms races and sought out allies and provisions. Guangji County had been the initial trouble spot in Huanggang Prefecture and by February 1968 had already infected several counties in three provinces. Not only the hot phase of a conflict, but also moments of relative calm, saw the conflict spreading to far away counties. After a series of deadly battles in early August 1968, one faction was forced to retreat. However, faction leaders did not see this as a final defeat, but rather as a tactical move to build

up their strength. The rebels fled to the provincial capital, where they lobbied for support from the military and organized military training for their fighters, in preparation for a return. Later, on their way back to Guangji, they robbed a bank and plundered 14 sacks of rice and 19 sacks of flour. Most importantly, in a successful attempt to get weapons, they incited 200 followers to attack the militia of Qichun County. Their tactics in Qichun involved an alliance with one local faction, so that their passage escalated the local factional conflict in that county. Much better equipped, the rebels from Guangji robbed a few more banks before they finally returned to their original battlefield (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-20). As the escalation spiral was turning, the conflict expanded, as factions sought to pick up money and provisions. The path of least resistance often led rebels to spread to more peaceful counties.

When factions sought allies, they often mobilized local peasants to enter the cities and join the fray; a practice that was widespread yet frowned upon (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-60, p.49). Alternatively, they might seek reinforcements from neighboring localities. This practice was facilitated by well-organized networks of worker rebel groups, which often had representative offices in larger cities to broker alliances. The Red Guards probably had the best connections of all, because early on in the Cultural Revolution chairman Mao himself had encouraged them to build up revolutionary linkages. Eight mass rallies in Beijing brought together Red Guards from all over the country and provided an opportunity to link up. Being allowed to use the railway free of charge, Red Guards criss-crossed the entire country; wherever they stopped overnight, local rebel factions competed to organize food and accommodation, thereby making allies.<sup>29</sup> On an ideological basis, rebels did not think in terms of jurisdictions in the same way the military did. Local declarations of power seizures were often co-signed by organizations that did not belong to the jurisdiction concerned,

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<sup>29</sup>interviews with Red Guards from Shanghai and Nanjing in August 2012

reflecting rebels' sense of being unrestrained by administrative boundaries.

The following report from Xianning Prefecture reflects both the rebel strategy of recruiting outsiders to their cause and the military strategy of containing local conflicts, taking advantage of good information.

In Xianning's handicraft guild, yesterday at about 6p.m., Qu Hongji, the vice principle of Middle School No.2, who is also standing committee member of the County Revolutionary Committee, has been illegally arrested. Today at the transport station, Hu Deyun, the vice-director of the Prefecture Revolutionary Committee has also been arrested. (Both factions, the one at the guild and at the transport station share the viewpoints of the workers representative association.) Factional warfare has erupted. Shooting has wounded two people: Peng Chuang, another vice-director of the Prefecture Revolutionary Committee, and Jing Gangshan, an official. Both parties have made telephone calls to Wulongquan and Tingsi, asking to have people sent to Xianning's armed struggle. The situation is evolving. Big-scale factional warfare is likely. Zhou, the commander of the military sub-region, and the political commissioner have given the following commands: (1) Quickly report the situation to Hubei Revolutionary Committee, to Wuhan Military Region, to Hubei Military Region, to the Garrison Command, so that through Steel-Tempered September 13 work is done in Wulongquan and they would not come to Xianning joining in the fray. (2) Halt our military unit's movements in the hillside. (3) We have sent people to Tingsi to do political work, but it was ineffective and people insist on fighting. We have done more thorough political-ideological work, still to no avail. We consider this a violation of the tactics following from the grand strategy given by the great leader chairman Mao. Therefore, we intend to use violence to confiscate

the weapons, thereby preventing large-scale factional warfare. We will also arrest the ruffians who provoked the eruption of armed struggle. (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-57, p.22)

Two critical pieces of intelligence allowed the military to act: The military knew about telephone calls to neighboring cities, and the name of the rebel organization that would have to decide whether to dispatch fighters to the scene of battle. Superior information allowed the military to confront the rebels outside the city on the hillside, before they could join the larger group. Similarly, instead of confronting the main rebel groups, the PLA concentrated on potential reinforcements from the small township of Tingsi, 10 kilometers away from the battle site in Xianning. At the point, the goal was not to stop the fighting, but to prevent outsiders from joining and thereby spreading the violence even further.

When conflict spread not only across county borders, but across provincial borders, this would solicit immediate, high-level attention. In mid-June 1968, over 340 rebels from Huangmei County took six trucks to cross the provincial border from Hubei to Anhui, attacking the militia forces there (CRD 751). Five days later, a delegation of seven military officials led by Hubei's vice commander Liang Renkui 梁仁魁 (plus two bodyguards) from Wuhan flew to Anhui's provincial capital, where they met with their counterparts to decide on tactics that would stop violence from crossing the border (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-63, p.23). They then continued on to Huangmei County, where they found highly mobilized rebels getting ready for a "memorial meeting" (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-63, p.24). It proved hard to convince the rebels of their own mistakes –including shooting four people- because the rebels chose not to say anything at meetings with the officials (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-63, no numbered pages, cable from the 7th Brigade dated June 21, 1968). Each time the officials were about to take off, dramatic new developments delayed their departure, such as the

arrival of violent students from Wuhan, who simply defied military orders and planned to again attack Anhui (Hubei Archive SZ 139-6-63, as above). Even if the military was not always successful, this episode from Huangmei County shows that the military focused on preventing violence from crossing administrative borders, and information was key in this enterprise.

#### **5.3.4 The PLA's Political Subordination Under the Party**

An ordinary military is good at exercising hard power; soldiers and officers are trained to deploy violence to its best effect. But the PLA was not merely an ordinary army. It had been forged in the midst of the Chinese revolution, tempered through the protracted eight-years of war against Japan and the ensuing four years of civil war. During that time the PLA learned to engage in guerilla warfare that depended on the soldiers' ability to move among the masses "like fish in the sea". Only by mobilizing peasants through effective propaganda and shrewd politics could the PLA survive Japanese occupation and ultimately vanquish the Nationalists. At the time of the Cultural Revolution, these events were just two decades away and still shaped the experience and strategy of military leaders at all levels. Without its tradition of revolution, the PLA could not have known how to effectively build peace after the breakdown of civilian order. Thanks to the revolutionary legacy, the PLA knew how to leverage its power by supporting a well-defined political process, involving -and increasingly dominated by- CCP cadres.

Minimizing its involvement in politics helped the military to maintain an image of neutrality, which was important for its success. Yet like outside intervention forces in international conflict, the PLA had a hard time avoiding being drawn into the conflict. PLA leaders were highly alert whenever local factions began to turn against its local forces. For that reason, a suicide in Dongfeng County (today: Xiaogan County) came to occupy Hubei's top military leadership, because it was

blamed on the military. As a result, the Hubei Military Region felt obliged to report on this incident to its superiors in the Wuhan Military Region (in charge of two provinces) and to the civilian leaders sitting on Hubei's Revolutionary Committee.

On 15 November at 2a.m., the Standing Committee member of the Dongfeng County transportation station [...] Yang Sisheng hanged himself in the stable of that station. During the Cultural Revolution, Yang had committed some mistakes, such as looting weapons, factional warfare, and perverse acts [likely referring to homosexual sex]. After the army propaganda team entered his work unit, thanks to propaganda work, he began to change, revealed some problems of his elder brother Yang Dongsheng, and the two of them were made to confront one another face to face. When Yang Sisheng then returned home, his wife and daughter scolded him. Yang Sisheng convinced Yang Dongsheng to hand over his arms, but when he confessed his own crimes, Yang Sisheng would scold him as a “traitor” and “rightest” etc. Before his death, during his encounters with the masses he talked like someone who received insults from both sides. After his death, the masses thought that it all was shocking, thorough investigations are still being carried out. (Hubei Archive SZ 139-6-62, p.31)

The remainder of the cable goes on to describe how popular resentment against the military began to build up. First there were students who wanted to look into the case. Later, factional representatives of the prefectural Revolutionary Committee came to ask questions. Finally, hundreds of people came to the transport station and put pressure on the military. In conclusion, the cable pleads with leaders to ascertain the facts and back up the local military –a course of action which the Revolutionary Committee endorsed. The suicide of a minor local cadre had extreme political significance because it could render the local military ineffective as a neutral mediator. Higher

levels of government did everything possible to prevent such a development.

If certain individuals or military units lost their neutrality and became targets of attack, the upper-level PLA leaders did not hesitate to transfer personnel. In one county in Jingzhou Prefecture, local commanders were in a difficult situation. They had seen the slow escalation of violence, without being able to do much about it. In the process, they had made enemies, so that their safety could no longer be guaranteed. Thus, their superiors at the prefectural level suggested having the leaders transferred to a different position (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-63). Instead of asserting the military's position, the PLA was prepared to give in to popular pressure. This tactic not only helped to de-escalate violence, but sometimes also gave factions a "veto power" against the most unpopular military leaders. Most importantly, the circulation of personnel prevented personal grievances against particular personalities from undermining the neutrality of the PLA.

However, the circulation of personnel could not help in cases where the PLA as an institution was perceived to have taken sides. In Yichang Prefecture, the military had become deeply embroiled in local power struggles. In a typical case of path-dependency, where minor decisions early on in the process have major consequences down the road, an incident on 7 February 1967 came to define local factions for a long time. In the aftermath of the arrest of one rebel leader, a group of protesters asked for his release. Public security officials decided to remain firm, however, and arrested several of the protest leaders. At this critical juncture, local military leaders came out in strong support of the security officials and henceforth were associated with several months of crackdowns on rebels (CRD 321, memo by Yang Chunting). Rebels came to perceive the military as their primary enemy. When the erstwhile party secretary of Yichang, who had sided with the rebels early on, saw that rebels in the provincial capital were looting weapons, he called up the rebel leader with a clear message: "Now in Wuhan, people are plundering weapons, you guys [in Yichang] should also go

plundering!" (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-20, p.70) The rebels, who identified with Wuhan's Steel-Tempered Second Headquarters, would see the local military in Yichang as a subsidiary of the military in Wuhan, which by that time had been openly denounced by China's central authorities as a counter-revolutionary clique during the Wuhan Incident. The military stood little chance of protecting their weapons depots against rebel forces that were not only numerically superior, but also immune to propaganda. The confrontation between rebels and military reached a culmination point in August 1968, when over 1,000 people attacked the local army barracks (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-20, p.70). Only when the political tides changed, in the run-up to the Ninth Party Congress, did the military in Yichang gain the moral high ground that was necessary for the officers to engage in peace-keeping.

In the political process, the creation of Revolutionary Committees stands out as a momentous event, because the prospect of a transitional government dramatically changed local political dynamics. Before the creation of transitional governments, factions maintained their political status by engaging in violence and by displaying their fighting strength. To the extent that factions could transform their fighting power into political power, thanks to "permanent" seats on the Revolutionary Committees, they no longer needed to prove themselves in street battles. Therefore, the establishment of Revolutionary Committees was a game-changing move, helping to pacify local factions. The emergence of recognizable institutional rules of the game helped the military forces to transform Hubei's violent power struggles into a political struggle. Not all rebels were hooked, but the number of troublemakers became more manageable and the peacekeeping task more feasible, compared to a situation of complex all-out factional warfare without a clear goal.

The military forces first helped to establish Revolutionary Committees in the places where peace was just around the corner. Guangji was a hard nut to crack, and the military started its



initiative there relatively late. Unit 6090 had left in May 1968, without achieving lasting peace. The situation continued to look grim throughout the summer, with extreme violence throughout August. In September, the military came back, with a large army detachment, active throughout Huanggang Prefecture. Reports sent back to Wuhan show few indications that major military force was used. Was the threat of military force enough to achieve the political goals? To what extent did military officers in the field downplay their use of force, especially in the reports shared with the Revolutionary Committee? Would reports of PLA violence even be accessible in the archive? There probably was more violence than is officially remembered today. Nevertheless, there was a distinctly civilian component to the PLA's mission in Guangji. As an initial step, the military brokered an armistice between the two sides on September 5th. The military then followed up on this armistice by sending thousands of soldiers to talk to both parties to get them to surrender their weapons and ammunitions. The 19th brigade alone had 1,580 people in dozens of groups who convened some 6,500 meetings with 160,000 participants (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-62, p.64). In Guangji, soldiers confiscated over one thousand guns, 70,700 bullets and 465 hand grenades, days before the Revolutionary Committee was established.<sup>30</sup> While the disarmament proceeded, the military negotiated the distribution of positions on the transitional government, resulting in the endorsement of the final list of participants by the provincial Revolutionary Committee in late September (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-1-494, p.50). Twelve positions on the 48-person committee were left temporarily unfilled, maintaining additional maneuvering space for negotiations.

The PLA was strongly represented in Hubei's local Revolutionary Committees, but did not monopolize them. Comparing the backgrounds of committee members in Guangji County to the backgrounds of committee members in four less-violent counties, the military had a particularly

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<sup>30</sup>Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-62, p.66. The exact number of guns is illegible in my copy of the report.

strong grip on committees in counties with much violence (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-1-494). In Guangji, for instance, the top four positions were occupied by military men, whereas in the other places the third and fourth places were occupied by former high-ranking county officials, as for example the county party secretary, the county vice party secretary, or the county mayor. Moreover, in the case of Guangji, the director of the Revolutionary Committee was sent from the prefectural command, whereas in the other cases, the director came from the local militia - in this case with one exception, namely Xishui County, which belonged to the same prefecture as Guangji County. All in all, Guangji's committee consisted of 39 members, nine of whom were military men - a higher proportion than in the other counties. The unusually violent path of Guangji County and the subsequent, unusually large presence of forces in the county explain the striking preponderance of the military on that particular Revolutionary Committee.

The military was dominant, but otherwise Revolutionary Committees were quite pluralistic -for a Leninist regime-, representing large segments of society. Very similar to other places, Guangji's Revolutionary Committee consisted of an almost equal number of former county-level cadres, students (two of them female) and peasants. There were half a dozen white-collar workers and half a dozen blue-collar workers, ranging from a worker in the printing factory and a driver to an accountant and a technician. The Revolutionary Committee also included the leaders of both local factions: Guo Xisheng 郭熙盛, who before the Cultural Revolution had worked as a performance artist on the county's official cultural work troupe and during the Cultural Revolution had become a leader of a radical faction known as "The Reds;" and further down the list Wu Hanjiang, a worker at the agricultural machine tool factory, who had led the contending faction. The name list is notable for its diversity, bringing everyone to the table. Even if former cadres and military did not hold a majority, they held the top-ranked positions. Revolutionary Committees held out

the promise of political participation and it was this promise that helped convince the rebels to lay down their arms.

Yet the promise was a false one. What started as a representative assembly quickly mutated into a Leninist organization. The commitment to the new assembly was haphazard and rebels failed to effectively institutionalize their gains.<sup>31</sup> Soon after their power on the street had dissipated, rebel leaders on the Revolutionary Committee saw their influence falter. In Guangji County, the decline was particularly rapid. The Committee was established at the end of September. Throughout October, the military continued disarming and disbanding worker rebels and Red Guards. In November, the rebel representatives on the Revolutionary Committee came under political pressure. At the time, provincial authorities held a series of struggle meetings in Wuhan, where people from counties all around Hubei made denunciations and self-criticisms. On 21 November 1968, it was the turn of Guangji's factional leaders. Each of them had to make a devastating self-criticism. Statements such as this one by a Guangji Revolutionary Committee member and former leader of the local Red General Headquarters, destroyed these rebels' political future :

On August 3rd, I shot dead Zhu Xiwang 朱細旺. During the battles from August 2nd to 6th, I was a 'general'. [...] Distorting chairman Mao's most recent instructions, we believed that the battles in Guangji were between KMT Nationalists and CCP Communists. Thus beating and killing a few of the opponent KMT party members was not a big deal for us. (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-20)

These maneuvers could be used to purge and demobilize unwanted Revolutionary Committee members, who had only been taken on board to get them off the streets. The result of these maneuvers was that the dominant alliance of military and civilian cadres consolidated their power and pushed

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<sup>31</sup>Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun note rebels' difficulty to institutionalize their gains (Perry and Li, 1997, ch. 6).

others out of the committee. Instead of allowing the pluralist Revolutionary Committee to run local politics, the winners took all and purged the losers, in Leninist fashion. When, in the following months, the representatives for the CCP's Ninth Party Committee were selected, the procedures were top-down. Hubei's provincial leaders submitted personnel files, but the central leadership decided who would be on the team representing Hubei at this momentous event. The resulting group was much less diverse than the early Revolutionary Committees, but instead consisted of well-disciplined civilian party members, with very similar resumes.<sup>32</sup>

The PLA accompanied the stabilization process even after the establishment of local Revolutionary Committees. The military was visible at the inauguration of Revolutionary Committees, rooted out pockets of resistance, and did not return to the barracks hastily. In Huanggang Prefecture for instance, in order to manage popular expectations and send a strong signal that the conflict was now over, the creation of the Revolutionary Committee was accompanied by great political theater. Most importantly, there was an inauguration ceremony, as in previously extremely volatile Guangji County (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-62, p.68.) The festive meeting on September 22nd lasted from 9a.m. until noon, with over 20,000 civilians as well as 1,700 soldiers participating. Protocol was of the essence. People were seated not according to their factional affiliation, but according to profession. Factional flags were banned; only the national flag was allowed. Overall, the meeting proceeded in an orderly fashion and sent a signal of reconciliation, but the note is honest enough to report dissenting voices, such as one person exposing what he saw as the reactionary nature of the Revolutionary Committee: "Now clearly the proletariat and the Red Guards won't be governing." As we have seen above, that was an uncomfortable truth. While numerically, the distribution of seats on the Revolutionary Committee was surprisingly even-handed, the top leadership positions

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<sup>32</sup>The preliminary list of representatives, accompanied by their resumes, is in the Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-19.

were reserved for the military and for former cadres. To dissuade people from questioning the legitimacy of the Revolutionary Committee, it was of utmost importance to have so many soldiers attend the meeting. In the wake of the inauguration, the military continued to keep track of the discontented, who had lost out in the political process. A week after the establishment of the transitional government, the military reported on rebellious students who continued to travel around the county propagating violence, by organizing sports competitions, film screenings, and small meetings. According to the report, the students proclaimed that chairman Mao wanted class struggle, that class struggle meant factional warfare, and that “the Revolutionary Committee is conservative and factional, going backward in history. We do not recognize it.” (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-62, p.74, report dated September 28) But since the establishment of a local Revolutionary Committee, the balance of power had shifted, the students had fewer allies, and the military could prevent them from organizing substantial attacks on the new authorities.

The military was also busy clearing out pockets of resistance. Some places were more impenetrable to the political overtures than others. Although initially, much of the Cultural Revolution turmoil in Huanggang Prefecture had originated in Guangji County, in the end it was Bahe, a commune in Xishui County, where rebels held out longer than anywhere else in Huanggang Prefecture (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-57, p.116). In that commune, Wang Renzhou 王仁舟, a charismatic student of foreign languages from Beijing, had led a spectacular peasant rebellion (CRD 754). Claiming to be inspired by the Paris Commune of 1871, he had developed a new form of government, which he called “cheap government” 廉价政府. His followers worshipped him and believed that chairman Mao had personally sent him on a special mission to Bahe (CRD 753). When the military first tried to retake this commune from Wang Renzhou, he moved to the provincial capital, attacked the provincial newspaper, which had criticized his commune, and blamed the death of six

villagers on a military assault (CRD 754). It was not possible to convince rebels in Bahe to turn in their weapons. After two days of intense propaganda, the PLA were only able to confiscate one gun and 16 hand grenades; the villagers had taken an oath to stand together. On October 16, the military finally reported the arrest of Wang Renzhou, along with 30 of his closest followers; another leader defiantly declared: “They arrested Wang Renzhou, they will soon arrest us as well, but our new villages, they cannot arrest.” (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-57, p.125) The group of visionaries was then sent for imprisonment in Xianning’s May 7 Cadre School, where at the time many of China’s intellectual celebrities were held. From the military’s perspective, they had retaken the place, although Wang Renzhou’s followers continued to make surprising appearances at least to the end of the year (Song and Shi, 2006).

In other places, resistance was more goal-oriented. The radical attitude of Bahe’s rebels, epitomized by the unusual pledge to remain steadfast and not join any committee, made any political process as good as impossible. Some continued in the attack mode even when their situation had become entirely hopeless (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-63, p.63). Usually, rebels were more calculating and at least some of them could be won over by an offer to join the Revolutionary Committee. Once the transitional government was established, those more Machiavellian rebels sought to increase their faction’s presence on the Revolutionary Committee. Many county Revolutionary Committees had specifically set aside a number of seats to be filled at a latter date, which in turn whetted the rebels’ appetite. Thus, one would expect counties to remain relatively calm if the distribution of seats on the Revolutionary Committee closely reflected the local power balance. By contrast, if the Revolutionary Committee did not adequately reflect the local power balance, or if factions overestimated their own strength, one would expect violence, as the underrepresented faction hoped to improve their political influence by challenging the transitional governments. This

was the situation in Xianning in May 1968 (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-57, p.15).

Xianning Military Subregion has been experiencing a continuing series of incidents, where mass organizations arbitrarily arrest, struggle against and beat up members of the Revolutionary Committee. As a result, factual splits in the prefectural Revolutionary Committee and in several county-level Revolutionary Committees have sometimes resulted in serious battles, paralyzing Revolutionary Committee work. Under these circumstances, it is simply not possible to uphold the revolutionary authority of the Revolutionary Committee. We therefore propose that next time such incidents occur, we arrest the ringleaders of grabbing and beating people. Please send instructions.

Such military cables show that the military concentrated its energy on preserving the power of local Revolutionary Committees, once they had been established. From the perspective of the military, in order to return to civilian order, the most promising strategy was to preserve the power of the newly-founded local transitional governments, especially since military personnel occupied leading positions. But even if military leaders tried to support the transitional government, the under-represented faction in Xianning seemed quite successful at destabilizing the status quo. This case emphasizes the importance of politics: If the Revolutionary Committee was not well-constructed, the military could also not live up to its role as the guardian of the transitional government.

True to the civilian concerns of its leadership, the PLA continued its stabilizing mission long after factional warfare had ceased and the mission's strictly military phase was completed. In Jingmen County (Jingmen Prefecture), the most severe turmoil had occurred in a relatively short time between late June 1968 and early July of 1968. Around that time, 152 people died in the county, most of them driven to commit suicide, and at least 2,309 people were tortured (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-63). Remarkably, four months later, the prefectural military conducted thorough

investigations. For the military leaders, the episode of violence was not simply over: “Even if this bout of evil wind has stopped, it has created serious aftereffects, which are not easy to solve. Even today, this commune’s Revolutionary Committee cannot exercise its authority very well, and the emotional tensions among the masses are severe.” (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-63) In order to come to terms with the past, military investigators reconstructed the evolution of violence, further improving their already detailed knowledge. Looking into the arrest of 150 people in one commune, the investigators specify the physical torture methods, to which these prisoners were subjected: “hanging them up, then beating them; or having them kneel on sharp, pointy stones; giving them lime water to drink, or pulling needles through their fingertips.” (Hubei Archive, SZ 139-6-63) They were equally careful to record the names of various rebel organizations involved. In short, the PLA did not pull out when the violence stopped, but instead actively worked toward consolidating the peace and promoting the authority of the Revolutionary Committee, now in a fully civilian capacity.

The PLA was at its best when it combined military force with civilian politics. Pacification attempts based on military preponderance would have been impossible had they not been accompanied by a political process, including the creation of local transitional governments. Conversely, the political process might not have resulted in a sustainable solution had the military not loomed in the background. Some local Revolutionary Committees survived thanks to the threat and occasionally the use of military force. The military was only effective thanks to a smooth political process; and the political process was only smooth thanks to the military’s presence.



## 5.4 The CCP's Control Over Local Revolutionary Committees

To rebuild the strong Leninist hierarchies of the party state, not only did the party have to create stable governing coalitions at the local level. In addition, to recreate an effective central command, leaders in Beijing had to find ways to put local revolutionary committees on the leash. Engineering the subordination of local politics was entirely within the domain of the CCP. Even in the most difficult cases, apparently in places where the CCP had a limited presence before the Cultural Revolution, the CCP applied a relatively standardized methodology to achieve this.

Revolutionary Committees were the institutional core around which the CCP re-created political order after the power seizures of early 1967. In some places the establishment of Revolutionary Committees was swift and seamless, in other places it was a tortuous process. In part the degree of difficulty depended on local leadership, but in part it depended on the extent to which local political processes were dominated by the CCP's political practices and organizational norms. Although the party's bureaucratism was their target of critique, many rebels organized themselves in ways that closely resembled the Leninist structure of the party. Certainly in Shandong, Wang Xiaoyu had come to replace the leaders, not the system. In Hubei rebels organized in hierarchical structures modelled on the party itself, which is why the provincial leaders could urge provincial rebel leaders to have their local affiliates retreat from a battle, knowing that local affiliates would actually listen to their rebel leaders (see 5.3.3). If Communist organizational culture had been inculcated, this helped to give the power struggles some direction, and to have power wielders coalesce around Revolutionary Committees. When rebels had a chance, they stepped right into the shoes of the CCP. Even in the most difficult environments, where this process was not forthcoming, central leaders with difficulty convinced or cajoled rebels into accepting the authority of local Revolutionary Committees, and the right of higher-level authorities to adjudicate on the composition of these

powerful bodies. This stood at the beginning of efforts to restore order.

As soon as CCP party committees throughout the country lost their power in early 1967, party leaders moved quickly to define a political process, designating Revolutionary Committees as the new locus of power. The leaders' moves were defined by their familiarity with the effective power of organizational measures in the midst of turmoil. In February 1967 central leaders decided that henceforth the legitimate transitional authorities at local levels were to be called "Revolutionary Committees," thereby defining the terms of the power struggles. A month later, a circular by the party's Central Committee went a step further. At a time when only four provinces had officially recognized Revolutionary Committees, the center decided how power seizures were to be organized, thereby structuring the power competition of the next two years (et al., 1989, p.292):

Before any action is taken, power seizures at the provincial level must first be approved by the central government, through consultation between representatives sent to Beijing and the central government. Without prior approval from the central government, local newspapers and local radio stations cannot announce any power seizures by a transitional government (Revolutionary Committee).

This circular inspired similar regulations further down the hierarchy, with provincial authorities approving prefectural power seizures. Henceforth, positions on the Revolutionary Committee became the most valuable prize of factional fights. Rebels around the country were trying to maneuver themselves into an advantageous position, so that they would be part of the Revolutionary Committee once it was established and formally approved.

Even before the most tumultuous phase of the Cultural Revolution started, the party had already defined the endpoint of the political struggles. Throughout most of 1967 and 1968, central leaders were undertaking great efforts to broker such transitional governments, negotiating with the

constant stream of rebel representatives who showed up in Beijing or were summoned to Beijing. In order to achieve success, they needed patience. At first, leaders could not do much more than collect information, call on the parties to refrain from violence, and try to disarm the rebels. As an illustration of these peacemaking efforts, let us look at two typical excerpts from Prime Minister Zhou Enlai's August 1967 work schedule (CCP Central Document Research Office 中共中央文獻研究室, 1997). On August 3rd and August 5th, he met with representatives from Jiangxi, reiterating that "neither military nor militia should hand out weapons at random, and instead should try to get the weapons back. Mass organizations should stop fighting, stop plundering weapons and stop encouraging peasants to join the fighting in the cities and should instead trust the PLA." And on August 22nd, meeting with representatives from two competing factions, he critiqued them for "plundering weapons and material from the PLA earmarked for use in Vietnam - which simply showed that they had no awareness of the enemy and were ignorant." Zhou ordered them to return the weapons to the military.

Over time, the central government developed an increasingly sophisticated formula to bring together the contending rebel factions and set up a functioning government. By far the most powerful tool was so-called "Study Groups of Mao Zedong Thought." The methodology had supposedly been endorsed by Mao Zedong himself, although this approval was based on a rather unspecific statement of his, which was omnipresent at the time, appearing even on the participants' conference ID cards: "The organization of study groups is a good method, study groups can solve many problems." (ID cards found on flea markets.) The first few transitional governments did not need this vehicle, but the later, harder-to-appease provinces relied heavily on Study Groups of Mao Zedong Thought. Here, I will introduce two such study groups. Later on, I will describe in greater detail the study group used to move from a transitional government to a more permanent solution.

By the summer of 1968, five provinces still had not established a transitional government. At the time, Zhou Enlai blamed the disorder on China's foreign foes. Each enemy country allegedly gained from chaos in its own pet province: "Our enemies are happy: Taiwan says that Fujian [just across the Taiwan Strait] won't pull itself together. The Soviet Union says that Xinjiang [strategically situated in Central Asia] won't pull itself together. Indian counter-revolutionaries say that Tibet won't pull itself together. American imperialists say that Guangxi [with supply lines to Vietnam] won't pull itself together. Myanmar says that Yunnan won't pull itself together" (CRD 323, p.14). Instead of putting the blame on foreign countries, a better explanation for the unusual level of turmoil in these five provinces might point to the tenuous hold of the CCP in these five provinces. With the exception of Xinjiang, the proportion of party members in the other four provinces was much below the pre-Cultural Revolution average of 2.4%. In 1965, Guangxi and Tibet were the two provinces with the least party penetration, namely 1.8% and 1.1%. These striking regularities will be further explored in the statistical analysis of section 5.5.

Guangxi Province is known for its Cultural Revolution violence. Trying to contain the crisis, the central government had been in consultation with local military and rebel leaders throughout 1967 and 1968. In the summer of 1968, the situation in Guangxi was rapidly deteriorating: collective killings spread throughout the countryside of Guangxi, and the death toll reached new heights (Su, 2011, esp. pp.48ff). At that same time, military and rebel leaders were summoned to Beijing for a Study Group of Mao Zedong Thought. Contrary to what the name suggests, these were intensely conflictual discussions, where the central government exercised great pressure. In the case of Guangxi, Beijing had initially supported the April 22nd faction, emboldening them to an extent that fostered violence and made the group unwilling to compromise. In the summer of 1968, central leaders had turned against the April 22nd faction (Bu, 2008, p.706 ff.). The following

excerpts from the transcript of a five-hour meeting in the East Auditorium of the Great Hall of the People on July 25th epitomize the way in which the top leadership brought pressure to bear on local leaders during Study Groups of Mao Zedong Thought. Central leaders bullied local leaders into a peace settlement and politically destroyed those who stood in the way. References to party discipline were omnipresent. The following is an excerpt from the meeting notes of the decisive meeting that moved Guangxi province to a settlement in July 1968. The outward appearance of the material, the plausible explanation of its origins, the apparent obliviousness of the salesperson as to the document's political importance (cheap price) and the accuracy of its details convince me that the document is authentic.

*Kang Sheng:* I heard that at a Party School in Guangxi, there is a certain instructor called Zhu Ren. Zhu Ren, are you still in your seat? (At that, Zhu Ren from the 'Red Wave Faction' of the District Party School stands up.) [...] You, party member, represent what party? The Guomindang or Wang Gang's party? [...] What rumors did you carry to Beijing? What kind of underground meetings have you participated in? What kind of illegal activities have you been carrying out? Are you under the command of the black commando headquarters?

*Chen Boda:* Fully reveal your black headquarters.

*Kang Sheng:* If you still have some revolutionary language left, then speak up in front of the central government and chairman Mao's face. Where are you from? (Zhu Ren: Liucheng County in Guangxi Province.) What is your class background? (Answer: Middle Peasant.) Even the landlords call themselves peasants, even the rich peasants call themselves peasants. [...]

*Premier:* Are you in the ‘denunciation troop’?” (Answer: We are the ‘report troop’.)

When you set out, you might have been called ‘report troop’, now you are called ‘denunciation troop’. Are you together with Xiong Yijun? (Answer: Haven’t seen him.)

Strange! Both of you came here in April. (CRD 323)

The study group was a resounding success. The military had been trying for a while to stop the bloodshed in Guangxi, but did not get very far, partly as a result of internal divisions. By contrast, one month after the July 25 meeting, on August 26, Guangxi announced the establishment of a centrally approved Revolutionary Committee. More importantly, at the same time, violence in Guangxi subsided and by mid-autumn of 1968, mass killings had become rare events.

Out of all provinces, Xinjiang took the longest to put together a Revolutionary Committee. In March 1968, the province’s two main factions went to Beijing for consultations, seeking to negotiate a transitional government. But four months later, in July 1968, the two factions remained deeply divided. From the detailed records of the first meeting between the rebels and top-ranking central leaders, it is clear that the Chinese leadership was at a loss.<sup>33</sup> The meeting started with Kang Sheng explaining why he had not met with the group before: The sharp divisions among the Xinjiang group were too extreme. Zhou Enlai reproached the factions: “You have been staying in the same place for four months, you are eating together and you are living side-by-side. How can you still not unite? How come you haven’t reached out to each other and talked things through?” One factional leader, referred to as Hu Luanchuang (Reckless Dash) instead of by his own preferred name of Wu Julun, and who apparently was seen as a critical figure to bring stability to Xinjiang, appeared uncompromising, threatening to return to his native Shandong, if his arch-enemy Wang Enmao were not removed. But since Wang Enmao had a large following, that was not an option. Mao’s

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<sup>33</sup>The following paragraph is based on a record of central leaders meeting with representatives from Xinjiang, National Congress Hall, 20 July 1968, GX, pp.289-295.

wife Jiang Qing, not known for being a passive listener, came in halfway through the meeting, but according to the record did not utter a word. Even as Kang Sheng reminded people that it was getting rather late, and the meeting dragged on for almost five hours until 2a.m. Although the discussion was inconclusive, Kang Sheng ended with an ultimatum: “Today is July 21st. I wish that within the next 10 days, that is by the end of the month, you representatives in Beijing reach a comprehensive compromise.” As it turned out, Kang Sheng’s deadline was overly optimistic. It took until early September for Xinjiang to set up its revolutionary committee.

## **5.5 Quantitative Evidence for Local Party Organization’s Contribution to Order**

This section tests empirically whether a greater presence of the CCP at the grassroots level made a difference for the preservation of state authority during the Cultural Revolution crisis. Both the presence of party members and the impact of the Cultural Revolution were extremely uneven across China, with Shandong representing a milder course than Hubei or the extreme breakdown of authority in Guangxi. This variation gives empirical leverage to test whether provinces where the party was strong experienced less turmoil than provinces where the party was weak.

### **5.5.1 Measuring the Decline of State Capacity**

The most advanced approach to measuring the intensity of the Cultural Revolution considers its human impact, using large numbers of local gazetteers to estimate the number of victims (Walder and Su, 2003) Counting casualties is one way to assess the human impact of a violent mass movement. But for the purpose of tracing the impact of a movement on the state, the death toll is an inappropriate measure. At a time when the state purposely abandons its monopoly on violence by

reckless measures such as “arming the left,” insecurity cannot indicate a weak state (Schoenhals, 2005). Moreover, since factional violence was not directed against the state, it would be faulty to assume that more violence always translated into a greater degree of state breakdown. The opposite could be true, when the military successfully resorted to all-out violence to restore order. Finally, for practical reasons, death tolls are inappropriate for comparing the local severity of the Cultural Revolution, because data are too unreliable.<sup>34</sup>

Fiscal revenues are a better alternative, both for conceptual reasons and because they are more readily available. Medical professionals rely on vital signs, such as the pulse rate, to monitor the basic functions of a human body. If there is a vital sign commonly used by political scientists to reflect the most basic functions of a state, it is fiscal revenue (Lieberman, 2002). For a market economy, it makes sense to distinguish between the strength of the economy and the strength of the state, by defining state strength not in terms of absolute revenues, but in terms of the share of state revenues as a percentage of the economy. For a socialist state economic system, the link between the state and the economy is so intimate that conceptually there is not much of a distinction to be made. Thus, the preferred model specification will work with absolute revenue levels. However, an alternative specification includes a control variable for GDP levels, with essentially similar results. This section uses local fiscal revenues, including all provincial tax revenues and all profits surrendered by state-owned companies, but excludes resources mobilized outside the province, such as transfers from upper-level government. Fiscal revenue data reveal whether a province had an effective bureaucratic apparatus in place, was able to coordinate the socialist state economy, was strong enough to enforce taxation policies, and was capable of centralizing large amounts of financial resources.

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<sup>34</sup>Andrew Walder and Yang Su warn that their estimates are defensible only as a measure for the national aggregate death toll, but are unsuited for more fine-grained comparisons among provinces.



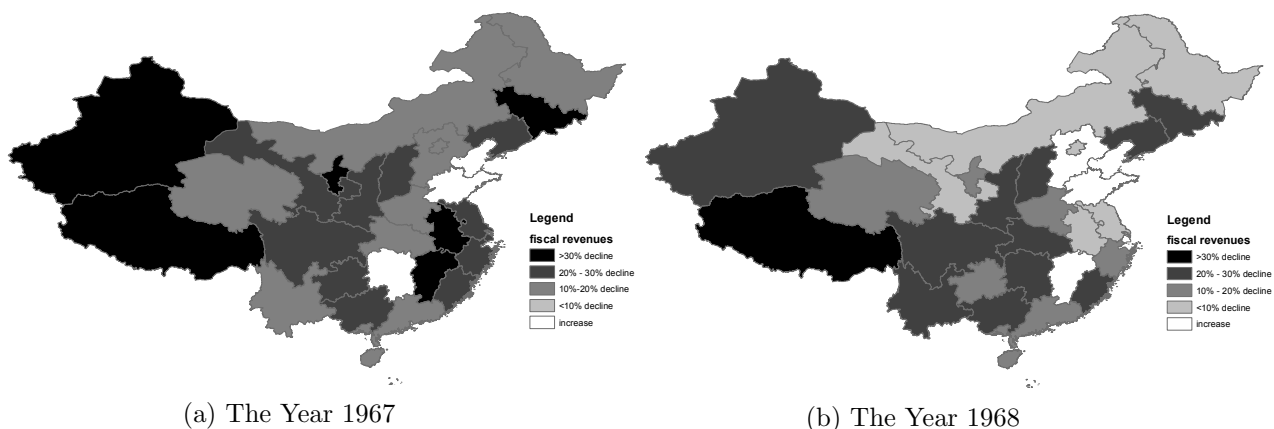


Figure 5.3: Severity of the Cultural Revolution

### 5.5.2 Specification and Control Variables

Historical contingency played a major role in the unfolding of the Cultural Revolution. Social scientists would be hard-pressed to devise a model that accurately predicts the degree of state breakdown in any particular locale. However, it is possible to identify risk factors, as well as mitigating factors. If the theory of this section is correct and the presence of party members helped to contain the turmoil, then the following proposition should hold true:

*Proposition: During the most tumultuous phase of the Cultural Revolution, areas where the party had been stronger on the eve of the Cultural Revolution suffered a less severe decline in state capacity.*

As an operationalization of this proposition, this section predicts that between 1967-68, provinces with widespread party membership had significantly higher fiscal revenues, controlling for pre-Cultural Revolution revenues and certain potential determinants of Cultural Revolution turmoil.

The empirical baseline specification includes four control variables: (1) Fiscal revenues on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. It could be that higher party membership alleviated asymmetric information problems of tax collection and led to higher fiscal revenues. Failing to include initial

|                                      | Mean  | Standard<br>Deviation |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| Party penetration 1965 [percent]     | 2.4%  | 0.6%                  |
| Fiscal revenue 1965 [log]            | 1.88  | 1.13                  |
| Industrial share in total production | 35.8% | 14.5%                 |
| Distance from Beijing [1,000 km]     | 1.17  | 0.67                  |
| Ethnic non-Han population            | 13.5% | 21.8%                 |

Table 5.1: Cultural Revolution, Descriptive Statistics

fiscal revenues as a control variable would then lead to a positive bias, overestimating the stabilizing effect of party presence. (2) On the other hand, presence of industries and thus of industrial workers, would positively affect party membership, but aggravate the turmoil, since Mao had deputed the workers as “the main fighting force of the Cultural Revolution.” To avoid a negative omitted variable bias, I control for the industrial share of total production. (3) According to conventional wisdom, geographic distance from Beijing is a variable that greatly affects all sorts of political outcomes in China, whether party membership (Yang, 1996) or the severity of Cultural Revolution turmoil. Including a squared term allows for the possibility that distance might have a non-linear effect. (4) Finally, the presence of ethnic minority groups is another variable that affects many political outcomes in China. Both the dynamics of party recruitment and the dynamics of the Cultural Revolution may have been different in provinces with large groups of ethnic minorities. (5) One specification also includes a dummy variable for the year 1968.

### 5.5.3 Result

Table 5.2 summarizes the regression results. The second column shows the estimates for the baseline model, predicting provincial fiscal revenues (logarithmic) for 1967 and 1968. At the time, China

|                                      | Baseline<br>Model<br>N=55 | Only<br>1967<br>N=28 | Cumulative<br>Decline<br>N=28 | Control for<br>Economic Output<br>N=55 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Party penetration 1965 [percent]     | 0.38**                    | 0.45*                | 0.33**                        | 0.43***                                |
| Fiscal revenue 1965 [log]            | 1.21***                   | 1.21***              | 0.18.                         | 1.04***                                |
| Economic output [log]                |                           |                      |                               | 0.22                                   |
| Industrial share in total production | -0.90                     | -0.92                | -0.75                         | -0.77                                  |
| Distance from Beijing [1,000 km]     | 0.76*                     | 0.99*                | 0.54                          | 0.84*                                  |
| Distance squared [1,000 km]          | -0.35*                    | -0.39.               | -0.28.                        | -0.37*                                 |
| Ethnic non-Han population            | -0.24                     | -0.65                | -0.03                         | -0.19                                  |
| Dummy 1968                           | -0.20*                    |                      |                               | -0.18*                                 |
| Intercept                            | -1.50***                  | -1.78**              | -1.36**                       | -2.22**                                |

\*\*\* significance at 0.005, \*\* significance at 0.01, \* significance at 0.05, . significance at 0.1

Table 5.2: Covariates of Cultural Revolution Turmoil

consisted of 28 provincial-level administrative units, so we are able to work with 56 observations.<sup>35</sup>

There is a positive relationship between party presence and stability, statistically highly significant at the 1% level. Moreover, the coefficient is also substantively important. At the height of the Cultural Revolution, an increase of party membership by half a percentage point (that is one standard deviation) on average is associated with a 14% increase in fiscal revenues, controlling for initial levels of fiscal revenue, industrialization, distance from Beijing, minority populations and a time dummy variable.

Are the results of the baseline specification driven by events in 1968, when the CCP was already beginning its comeback and was preparing for its Ninth Congress? This is not the case. Column 3 is identical to the baseline specification, but only predicts provincial fiscal revenues for 1967. As a result of the much smaller sample size, significance levels drop across the board while the signs of all coefficients remain the same. More importantly, it turns out that party penetration prior to the Cultural Revolution makes a statistically significant difference even during the one year of

<sup>35</sup>Tianjin is absent from the data, since it temporarily lost provincial status between 1958 and 1967. Tibet in 1968 is lost, because it has no fiscal revenue and the logarithm of zero is undefined.

local power seizures, following the Shanghai January Storm. If anything, the party effect is even greater.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, to illustrate the robustness of the analysis, column 4 reports results from an alternative specification. Instead of absolute fiscal revenue (logarithmic), the new dependent variable for column 4 is the cumulative percentage of fiscal decline, comparing fiscal revenues in 1968 to fiscal revenues in 1965. Again, significance levels drop due to the smaller sample. Unsurprisingly, the initial level of fiscal revenues as a control variable is less important than before, because the definition of fiscal decline already goes a long way in eliminating size effects. An increase of provincial party membership in 1965 by 0.6% (one standard deviation) on average is associated with 20 percentage points less severe fiscal decline. Again, this is a very substantial effect. Simply by virtue of having a comparatively strong party membership, a province could preserve one fifth of its entire fiscal revenue during the destructive phase of the Cultural Revolution. Compared to other factors that are usually cited as determinants for the degree of turmoil, party penetration stands out as a factor that made the state resilient.

## 5.6 Conclusion

What might things look like should the CCP fall from its current position of hegemonic power? To the extent that Mao empowered the mob and exposed party leaders to popular wrath, the People's Republic already experienced a similar scenario in 1967-68. Studying the Cultural Revolution crisis, we discover that the CCP has been much more than a Leninist apparatus facilitating top-down rule. Bereft of its hierarchical command lines, the CCP continued to contribute to political order in a bottom-up fashion, thanks to party networks at the grassroots level. Under severe attack from

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<sup>36</sup>Running the baseline regression with an interaction term between party penetration and dummy 1968 points in the same direction

Red Guards and worker rebels, local cadres knew how to contain the turmoil, how to negotiate compromises for stability, and how to recreate government structures. The exercise of military power certainly played a major role, but in and of itself would not have been enough to control mass violence. Cadres' political experience, their party networks, and their strategic habits helped them to work toward a return of stability. In that sense, political order hinges not only on the formal power structure of the CCP, but also on the party's informal tools for regulating societal conflict.

Would the PLA be in a position to play a similar role if civilian disorder was to occur in 2014? Does the PLA's revolutionary legacy live on? Personal memories of the pre-1949 wars have given way to textbook memories, since even the youngest soldiers of the pre-1949 wars are now over 80 years old. Personal memories of the Cultural Revolution continue to be present, at least at the highest echelons of power. All 10 members of the 18th Central Military Commission (except Xi Jinping) joined the PLA at the beginning of or shortly before the Cultural Revolution. One should not underestimate the long-lasting effect of formative periods on an organization's culture. Yet by now, much also separates the PLA from its historical roots. After the Reform and Opening period, the military turned into a profit-making business and was reoriented to its military mission only at the turn of the millennium (Yang, 2004, p.125-142). Since then, PLA soldiers are taught nationalistic values and apparently are prepared not so much for dealing with internal turmoil, but for fighting a conventional international war. In light of the mishandling of the Tian'anmen Crisis of 1989, it seems that the PLA today would have difficulty recovering the revolutionary legacy which allowed it to play a de-escalating role in Hubei in 1968. Political order did not come out of the barrel of a gun in 1968. It is even less likely to come out of the barrel of a gun at the beginning of the 21st Century.

Between the Maoist era and today, the CCP underwent great transformations. Does the party still possess the qualities that helped it to cope with upheaval and ultimately reassert control in 1969? Or has it become no more than a repressive apparatus run by bureaucrats, who would not know how to react to a major popular onslaught, other than by straightforward suppression? Would the People's Liberation Army subordinate itself under the civilian leadership and be content as guardians of a political process? The Tian'anmen Incident of 1989 suggests that violent suppression has taken the upper hand, although we must remember that in many parts of China, including Shanghai, local party leaders did engage in -ultimately insincere- negotiations with demonstrators. When local governments deal with small-scale protests, they at times use clumsy police-state methods, but at other times exhibit more responsive governance, amenable to serious compromise. If one day political change comes to China, the new polity will certainly be characterized by CCP legacies, both in terms of political personnel and in terms of governance practices. How much of the party remains will depend on the degree to which CCP leaders have cultivated local cadres' skills in regulating local conflicts without instructions from above.

Based on the case of the Cultural Revolution, this chapter underlines the role of the CCP's grassroots organization for regime resilience. Some of the most important contributions to the literature on Chinese regime resilience have highlighted questions of political legitimacy and interest politics (Heberer and Schubert, 2006) Others have dealt with aspects of Chinese statecraft that are more tangentially related to the party, like Yongshun Cai's identification of the strategic value of dividing up tasks between central and local levels of government (Cai, 2008). Oftentimes, scholars highlight the ability of the party state to innovate, for example by formalizing the process of political succession (Nathan, 2003; Heberer and Schubert, 2006). Yet as the notion of adaptive authoritarianism suggests (Heilmann and Perry, 2011), it is the combination of innovative governance

techniques and tried-and-tested strategies of domination that makes the People's Republic resilient. The Cultural Revolution reveals much about the party's state traditional strengths, achieved by tried-and-tested means of overcoming the onslaught of popular uprising.

The history of the Cultural Revolution is not only a history of the idiosyncratic leadership of Mao Zedong, who unleashed the masses in 1966 and then re-leashed them in 1969. In explaining the return of order throughout the country, the party mattered: The strong presence of party members in Cultural Revolution politics contributed greatly to de-escalation, as both qualitative and quantitative evidence shows. Unraveling the micro-politics of the party's de-escalating effect, unsurprisingly, it is not formal Leninist institutions, but broadly defined informal institutions that saved the day. As a formal hierarchical organization, the party had practically ceased to function in most parts of China throughout 1967-68. The long shadow of the party was a catalyst that allowed the Chinese polity to return to peace. Not only did party members share an interest in the survival of the party state. More importantly, they had the wherewithal to work effectively toward a return of stability. From their revolutionary experience, CCP members had a vision how order could be established, in coordination with military.

This chapter also takes sides in a Chinese domestic controversy as to what exactly the lesson of the Cultural Revolution should be (Esherick, Pickowicz and Walder, 2006). Some Chinese have drawn a democratic lesson. Even the official party line in the early 1980s endorsed a diluted version of democracy, after explicitly blaming Mao Zedong for the violent turmoil of the Cultural Revolution: "We failed to institutionalize and legalize inner-party democracy [...] This meant that conditions were present for the over-concentration of Party power in individuals and for the development of arbitrary individual rule and the personality cult in the Party." (CCP, 1981, p.47) Other Chinese draw an authoritarian lesson, which asserts that collective action must be repressed

early before it spirals out of control. This is the party line today, but it is not supported by the findings of this chapter. It was not suppression that let the party live on in 1967-68.

This chapter has focused on the Cultural Revolution as a window onto regime resilience in 1967-68, arguing that party networks at the grassroots were indispensable for regime survival. Considering the long-term impact of the movement, one might also argue that the Cultural Revolution provided the CCP with additional experience on how to withstand massive popular upheaval, thereby making the party state more resilient. After all, a party that is never challenged will never have an opportunity to build up its defenses. The vital challenges of the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War certainly transformed the party into a resilient organization. Mao for one was convinced that episodes of mobilization made a polity stronger, famously postulating that “in our society, it is bad when groups of people make disturbances, and we do not approve of it. But when disturbances do occur, they force us to learn lessons from them, to overcome bureaucracy and educate the cadres and the people. In this sense, bad things can be turned into good things” (Mao, 1960, p.62). At first, Chinese leaders learned a quasi-democratic lesson from the Cultural Revolution, blaming it on Mao’s leadership style and calling for inner-party democracy and consultation with the people (CCP, 1981). That lesson seems to have been lost on the current generation of leaders, as Xi Jinping sets about concentrating more power in his own hands than Deng Xiaoping enjoyed, which would make him second only to Mao Zedong in terms of clout.<sup>37</sup> Later, especially in the aftermath of the Tian’anmen Uprising, the Cultural Revolution was said to hold an authoritarian lesson. More important than explicit, macro-historical lessons might be the lessons that local cadres and rank-and-file members of the CCP have gleaned about dealing with widespread unrest.

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<sup>37</sup>Even if this perception is the result of a carefully orchestrated propaganda strategy, as some observers suspect, it would still mean that the lesson has not been learned.



## Chapter 6

# The Party and the Great Leap Famine

From a dictator's point of view, paradoxically, the ideal party is not one that slavishly implements his policies, but one that functions as a self-corrective device, where disobedience slows down the implementation of disastrous policies liable to delegitimize and undermine the regime. China's Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) with its horrific famine is a case in point. Chapters 3 and 4 have shown that strong party grassroots help with implementation. Chapter 5 has shown how the party grassroots contributed to regime survival in the midst of the Cultural Revolution turmoil, because party members acted on their own initiative in the interest of political stability. This short chapter goes a step further, suggesting that in at least one historical instance some members dragged their feet on self-destructive central policies, thereby somewhat dampening its catastrophic impact. The events under consideration in this chapter occurred only one decade after the Communist takeover, so that local experiences of the revolution were still fresh and, as this chapter argues, influenced the behavior of local cadres, rank-and-file party members and -possibly to a lesser extent- ordinary citizens. After discussing the Great Leap policies and their implementation (section 6.1), the chapter describes local variation in policy implementation. To explain this variation section 6.2

proposes a hypothesis, which will be tested (section 6.3) before the conclusion.

## 6.1 Enforcing Great Leap Policies

The Great Leap Forward refers to a bundle of radical policies adopted by the People's Republic of China to leap from the capitalist stage of development straight into a communist utopia, while skipping the socialist transition stage embraced by other communist parties. Bold policy proclamations at the 8th Party Congress in 1956 foreshadowed the official launch of the Great Leap Forward two years later. Rural collectivization was the center-piece of Great Leap Forward policies. Another devastating idea was to boost steel production by constructing backyard furnaces in the countryside; instead of reaching the goal of surpassing Britain's steel production, this turned into a tremendous waste of resources. Other policies were even more surreal, for example urging people to systematically kill and extinguish mosquitos and sparrows. Turning a Marxist materialist worldview on its head, Mao Zedong believed that by sheer willpower the Chinese people could overcome almost any difficulty. The Great Leap Forward ended in 1960 with the realization that people were starving to death. The movement resulted in a famine that killed tens of millions of people.<sup>1</sup> Maybe more accurately than the statistics, fiction writers capture the unspeakable suffering of ordinary people throughout China during this era (Mo, 2001, "Iron Child"). After Mao Zedong's perceived success in the Korean War, the famine disaster put Mao so much on the defensive that for several years he had to relinquish some of his powers, before he could recover them in the late 1960s.

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Dikötter puts the death toll at 45 million (Dikötter, 2010).

### 6.1.1 Activism of Provincial Leaders

The radical communization policies of the late 1950s were highly controversial among party leaders from the beginning of the campaign, but even more so after the campaign's disastrous consequences became increasingly obvious (MacFarquhar, 1974-1994, vol.2 ch.10 ). Among ordinary people the policies were, to say the least, unpopular: In order to create communal property the CCP essentially took back from the tiller the land, which it had distributed to them during land reform a decade<sup>2</sup> earlier. The more localized famines of the early 20th Century, such as the infamous Henan famine in the 1940s, pale in comparison to the countrywide famine caused by the Great Leap Forward -since the Taiping Rebellion in the mid-19th Century, China had not seen a comparable famine. For a party that had come to improve the destiny of peasants, the famine was an acute threat to its legitimacy, undermining the remains of revolutionary idealism. The extreme misery disappointed rank-and-file party members as well as many cadres, as we read in autobiographies, because they had fought in order to improve the lot of Chinese peasants. Moreover, expectations that party policies aligned with popular preferences turned out to be mistaken, so that the party had to deploy fear to implement its policies against resistance. Instead of saving the peasants from subsistence, the party pushed them over the cliff. Despite doubts from the beginning and despite the human price that quickly became obvious, by and large local cadres not only complied with the policies, but were zealous implementors.

In an effort to explain compliance, comparative political scientists have analyzed regional variation in Great Leap outcomes, focusing on the provincial top leadership. At the pinnacle of the hierarchy, Mao Zedong was able to prevail over more moderate leaders, because his power had reached a climax after the perceived success of the People's Republic in the Korea War. At the

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<sup>2</sup>or two decades, depending on where in China

provincial level, the degree of activism varied, although overall compliance was very high. Existing literature shows that career incentives go a long way to explain the degree of activism, with aspiring alternate members of the Central Committee being the most eager implementors (Kung and Chen, 2011). A dissenting view suggests instead that in the context of the Maoist polity, loyalty to Mao and inner convictions were far more important than rational career incentives (Yang, Xu and Tao, 2014). Both hypotheses focus on the characteristics of individual leaders to explain famine outcomes. In part this is because of the literature's focus on the provincial level, which in turn is motivated by the previously very limited data below the provincial level.

Institutional variables, such as the organizational strength of the party has received scant attention. In the context of a larger argument, Dali Yang has brought up the possibility that a stronger party -measured in terms of membership- might have alleviated the pressure for local cadres to be activist implementors. By contrast, those areas with few party members had to show their loyalty and be "more Catholic than the pope" (Yang, 1996, pp.58ff.). Dali Yang did not elaborate his theory and only provided preliminary tests - at the time he did not have access to the kind of provincial membership statistics presented in this dissertation, let alone to famine data below the provincial level.

### **6.1.2 The Great Leap Forward and Party State Formation**

The Great Leap Forward was a momentous event in the twisted process of transforming the CCP from a revolutionary party to a ruling party. From the point of view of China's top leadership, the challenge was to discipline independently acting revolutionaries to become part of a hierarchical cadre corps. While a party struggling to attain power needs independently thinking individuals who take bold decisions on their own initiative, a party in power values obedient foot soldiers. This

transformation took a while. In the first years after their takeover the new leaders consolidated their power and targeted perceived enemies outside the party state apparatus. Most importantly, triggered by the Korean War, the ferocious *Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries* in the early 1950s killed tens of thousands, creating an atmosphere of fear among people who were distant to the regime (Yang, 2008), in Shandong notably individuals related to religious organizations (Liu, 2013). In the second half of the 1950s, the top leadership used increasingly coercive methods to instill Leninist discipline within its cadre corps (Teiwes, 1979), justifying its harsh measures by pointing to foreign agents supposedly trying to destabilize China from within during the Korean War.

Evoking the Yan'an Rectification Movement of the 1940s, Mao decried "subjectivism, bureaucratism and factionalism" and in two related campaigns -the *Party Rectification Movement* and the *Anti-Rightist Movement*- launched purges inside the organizations of the party state (CCP History Research Office, 2011, vol.2, ch.11). In 1958, in Shanghai alone 3.6% of the incumbent party members were purged (CCP Shanghai, 2001, p.323); nationwide the quota was 3.5% - more than in any other year of the PRC's existence (CCP Organization Department, 2011, own calculation based on pp.8-10 and pp.207-08). The fear that these purges instilled among cadres and bureaucrats allowed Mao Zedong to enforce his radical collectivization policies of the Great Leap Forward with generally good compliance among the lower ranks.

### **6.1.3 Implementation Procedures**

A primary bureaucratic channel for transmitting the policies of the 8th Party Congress from the center to the country at large was through party meetings at various levels of the hierarchy, all the way down to the local party branches. After the 8th Party Congress had decided to fulfill the

targets of the second five-year-plan in merely four years, local party leaders felt the need to display their own loyalty by making additional commitments. They did so by formal decisions to overfulfill the already inflated production targets. Some local party committees went further than others.

Cadres were made more pliable by shrewd organizational measures. One set of organizational measures brought local politics more firmly under central control by increasing the social distance between the rulers and the ruled. For instance, the Organization Department deployed new cadres unfamiliar with a particular place to replace long-serving cadres, who had attained their position before the Communist victory. Such cadres tended to be more willing to enforce unrealistic grain procurement targets.<sup>3</sup> Re-posting new cadres to an unfamiliar environment made them dependent and obedient to their superiors. Re-drawing jurisdictional boundaries helped to break local resistance in a similar way. Successful implementation depended on undermining the common sense of local cadres familiar with local conditions, and by reducing their empathy for the plight of their policies' victims.

The other set of organizational measures was designed to strengthen bureaucratic discipline by inspiring fear of severe punishment. For bureaucrats the most imminent threat was to be demoted into production. The Great Leap Forward drastically reduced the number of jurisdictions at all levels, for instance reducing the number of counties in Shandong from 139 to just 85 counties in 1960. The Organization Department sent the redundant cadres to the urban-industrial or rural-agricultural "production frontline", where living conditions were life-threatening. This was called the *Initiative to Streamline Administration and Send Cadres to the Countryside* 整編機構下放幹部工作. The prefecture of Jinan in 1958 sent 52% of its cadre corps to the countryside, that is a total of 17,000 cadres (GLF 602). Another typical prefecture in Shandong in mid-1957 decided to

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<sup>3</sup>Conversation with a historian in December 2014.

reduce the number of bureaucrats by 15 to 20% and in the course of 1958 realized this goal, making 11,000 cadres redundant and deploying them to take care of more arduous tasks (CCP Zibo, 1997, p.122).

## **6.2 Uneven Implementation, Uneven Famine**

Overall the central leadership was remarkably successful to achieve compliance with Great Leap Forward policies. Yet amidst widespread compliance there was also resistance. In the two years leading up to the official launch of the Great Leap Forward anecdotes of resistance are plentiful. In the second half of 1957 and especially in 1958 resistance became increasingly more dangerous. Different degrees of enthusiasm are more easily discovered, but resistance never fully disappeared.

### **6.2.1 Life and Death Choices by Local Leaders**

Foot-dragging was dangerous in Maoist China. Being sent down to the poor countryside as a cadre who had been made redundant at the height of the famine was almost tantamount to a death sentence. Starvation was not only a concern of farmers in rural areas. Bureaucrats, even at the top of the provincial administration, found themselves in a precarious situation facing starvation, as the following description from the Finance Department of Shandong Province shows:

Current situation of Jinan staff with edema symptoms (according to phone call from Shandong Production Headquarters, November 12, 1960): The provincial Finance Department now consists of 54 people, of whom 19 (35% of total) have edema symptoms. Reason for falling sick: lack of nutrition, work overload. The Finance Department used to have 191 officials, of whom 106 were dispatched to the first frontline of production and 31 to support the third harvest, so there are only 54 people left. They must shoulder

all the work, plus supplemental production (cultivating more than 70 mu of land), the department is busy with many extra shifts and extra hours. Cadres' food rations are low, they also have to let their children eat some of it; there are some people who suffer from other diseases. Similar edema outbreaks are occurring in other departments. Reasons: food rations too small, wrong nutritional balance, undernourishment. Measures being taken: (1) The sick eat canteen food at their workplace, stop working and receive some supplemental medicine. (2) The severely sick with edema developing above the abdomen are treated in hospital. (HYL 1)

The lives of the 31 officials who were sent to help with the third harvest production were at greatest risk. By late 1960, people throughout Shandong's countryside were starving to death and there was not much of a harvest. Arriving to the countryside as outsiders, the officials would have very little chance to find support from people who were struggling for their own survival. The lot of the 106 people on the production frontline was similarly uncertain, although chances of survival were better as long as they could stay in urban areas. Staying at the provincial Finance Department and avoiding being sent to the countryside was a question of life and death, although the report shows how extremely precarious conditions were even there.

Measured by the risks local leaders were taking, foot-dragging was a form of resistance. Local leaders who actively implemented policies despite the harm to their population might be called opportunists, but with a twist: These "opportunists" were not out for riches, but sought to preserve the lives of their families. Locally powerful people, including party members and cadres, were under extreme pressure to go "all out" in implementing the Great Leap policies. They had minimal discretion of their own, at a time when the slightest form of foot-dragging could lead to one's dismissal.



### 6.2.2 Resistance to Implementation

Zibo prefecture stands for the places in Shandong where local cadres complied with policies, but displayed a lack of enthusiasm that borders on resistance. Foot-dragging started as soon as the 8th Party Committee in 1956 set the tone for the Great Leap Forward. Contrasting to the ambitions of the central leadership, local leaders in Zibo decided to exceed production targets by merely 7% (CCP Zibo, 1997, p.111). Later on when large meetings were to transmit the spirit of increasingly radical central government directives, local leaders failed to convene the expected meetings altogether. Half a year after calling for large-scale meetings of grassroots-level party organizations, prefectural leaders ran out of patience with their intractable subordinates and tasked the Organization Department to carry out an investigation. From the point of view of eager prefectural leaders, the progress report was sobering indeed. Not even half the party committees and general party branches had convened the required meeting. Worse, 20% of all grassroots organizations in Zibo self-responded that they were not preparing for any such meeting (CCP Zibo, 1997, p.121). Although it was clear that the promulgation of directions from a party congress had utmost priority, certain leaders at the party grassroots were defying orders and slowed down the mobilization effort.

Throughout the Great Leap Forward, the party identified local cadres who failed to follow radical communization policies. Not using generic labels such “rightist” and “counter-revolutionary”, the party referred to such cadres as “right-leaning conservatives”, “wave the white flag” over them and “temporarily relieve them from their posts for self-examination” (CCP Shandong, 2001, pp.310f.). To be sure, resistance from local cadres and party members was not necessarily a result of their own inner convictions, but also reflected pressures from ordinary citizens. Anecdotes suggest that ordinary citizens stood up to increasing state intrusion. In Heze prefecture local authorities found it most difficult to deal with local secret societies of the Daoist creed. In Cao County, when

the government refused to provide emergency provisions, local citizens made a point of burning incense in a Daoist manner. The cadre in charge of collectivization felt threatened enough to call in security forces. After an attempt to crush the movement, the government ended up giving in to the demands (CCP Heze, 1999, p.343). In Zibo prefecture, local leaders had to beware of another religious network, namely the ethnic Hui muslims. When in the early phase of Great Leap Forward mobilization tension arose in one township, it spread quickly throughout the whole prefecture, and even beyond, thanks to informal networks among the Hui muslim minority (CCP Zibo, 1997, p.127). When collectivization policies created too much popular discontent, local leaders had reason to drag their feet because disturbances would be held against them.

In the atmosphere of the Great Leap Forward few cadres dared to report resistance and failures. In Linyi grassroots cadres had a remarkable tolerance for local protest and local leaders informed the center about the unrevolutionary realities on the ground. As far as we can tell from currently available archival material, Linyi's leaders did not go through official channels. But they found other channels. For instance, early on in the crisis amidst an atmosphere of quickly rising pressure, they let Xinhua news agency report as follows:

Xinhua New Agency, Linyi, 8th [of April, 1957]. In Linyi Prefecture (Shandong) there are still many rural communes where due to protest from its members the spring/summer harvest is severely affected. [...] Currently nearly 15,000 trouble-making households demanding to retreat from the commune. [...] They gang up and collectively loot food, firewood, drag off livestock and retreat from the commune. If commune cadres resisted in any way, there would be fighting. [...] At the communal spring sowing, generally about 30% to 50% commune members attended, production activities were slacking, about 40% of the fields for spring sowing have not been sown, fertilization is in bad

shape. [...] The prefectural committee's analysis: There are multiple reasons for the disturbances, such as production shortfalls, poor management, undemocratic cadres, fiscal disorder and cadre corruption, and 90% of the problem has to do with contradictions among the people. (GLF 600)

What is remarkable is not that locals were resistant to communization policies and that communization policies failed - Mao's radical Great Leap Forward policies failed in most places, as the disastrous famine revealed. What is remarkable is how permissive grassroots party leaders were toward discontent, how local leaders let the center know about their problems, how they spelled out the consequence of these problems for production output and even pointed out the fundamental difficulty of implementing the Great Leap Forward policies. The official analysis by the Prefectural Committee, while referencing "cadre corruption" in the conventional way, by mentioning production shortfalls, "undemocratic cadres" and "contradictions among the people" in an unusual frank way point out that people were fundamentally opposed to communization, years before the central government began to acknowledge the problems with the Great Leap Forward. Even today, official historiography denies the realities pointed out by leaders in Linyi at the time. The provincial government responded strongly by replacing leaders and sending in trusted officials from the provincial government such as Mu Lin (CCP Linyi, 1988).

Two months after Mu Lin's arrival on his post in Linyi, in August 1958 Linyi County became known throughout North China as the main experimental spot for establishing People's Communes (CCP Shandong, 2001, p.310). Locals had to pay for their leaders' activism. Mortality rose to a catastrophic 49‰, whereas the provincial average at the height of the famine was 24‰.<sup>4</sup> Mu Lin dealt with locals who did not believe in the utopian promises of the Great Leap Forward, as one

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<sup>4</sup>The source for county-level mortality data is explained below.

can infer from a careful reading of the following quote. The quote describes a visit by leaders from Linyi to Shouzhang, the other county in Shandong known for “success” in carrying out the Great Leap Forward. Shouzhang was a “production satellite” that had been extolled by People’s Daily for supposedly having achieved a bumper harvest yielding 10,546 Jin per Mu of land<sup>5</sup>.

對「大躍進」和公社化異乎尋常地發展中暴露出的問題，我們當時就有所察覺，產生疑問，並通過適當方式表示了意見。壽張現場會後，我和縣委副書記包培智帶領20多名鄉，社幹部前去參觀，面對任意虛報產量，感到驚訝。雇工出身的包培智對此更獨居看法，他說：臨沂那樣好的生產條件，畝產也不過三，四百觔，壽張那麼超過臨沂？回到濟南，我專門向省委負責人談了對壽張產量的看法。

Concerning the problems encountered during the extraordinary developments of the “Great Leap Forward” and communization, we at the time had a certain awareness, we had doubts and we did express our opinions in appropriate ways. After the on-the-spot-meeting in Shouzhang, I and county vice-party secretary Bao Peizhi took more than 20 local township and commune cadres on a tour in the field, confronting them with random misreporting of output numbers, to their astonishment. Bao Peizhi, who himself used to be a farmer, could see what others cannot, saying: ‘Linyi with its good agricultural production conditions cannot yield more than 300 or 400 Jin, how could Shouzhang surpass Linyi?’ Back in Jinan I talked to people in charge at the Provincial Party Committee, telling them my opinion on the output numbers of Shouzhang. (Mu, 2000, p.341)

It is not possible to evaluate Mu Lin’s complicated role in the Great Leap Forward based on his own autobiography. He had worked as the top provincial cadre in charge for agriculture and was demoted

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<sup>5</sup> *People’s Daily*, August 27, 2957, “Rice yield jumps to over 10,000 jin, Shouzhang’s Beitai Commune achieves a yield of 10,546 Jin per Mu”

to a position in Linyi county, apparently as a result of his hesitations to radically implement the Great Leap Forward. Yet once posted in Linyi county, it is hard to see him as siding with moderates like Bao Peizhi, as the pronoun “we” in the autobiography suggests. In private conversations with friends at the party committee Mu may have voiced doubts, but it was under Mu Lin’s lead that Linyi turned into the province’s example of rapid communization. The important information in this quote concerns Bao Peizhi. He had joined the CCP in late 1940 and stood at the dangerous frontline of resistance against Japan in his native Linyi. Since 1951 Bao was among the three top leaders in Linyi. He was present in 1957 when difficulties in communization were communicated from Linyi to the central leadership. Given his biography, it is plausible that Bao Peizhi had the courage to openly challenge Great Leap Forward policies at the very site that was presented as Shandong’s first production satellite. A local gazetteer, apart from listing Bao’s official positions between 1940 to 1975 in coded language highlights his “being present at the grassroots” 經常深入基層 and “sharing weal and woe” 同甘共苦 with the people during the Great Leap disaster (Lanshan District, 2002). A speech, given in early 1960, at the height of the Great Leap, ostensibly agrees with the party line, but emphasizes what in comparison to prevailing discourse must have looked like “meager” yields of 1,000 Jin per mu; Bao prematurely deplores not only “rightist”, but also “leftist mistakes” (Lanshan District, 2001). While his maneuvers were careful enough to allow him to remain in power, Bao’s behavior represents foot-dragging of local cadres.

In other places, resistance to Great Leap Forward policies was more successful in averting the famine disaster. At the height of the movement one county in the Western part of Shandong experienced a veritable uprising, which at the time alerted even leaders in Beijing. When serious food shortages occurred in the winter of 1958/1959, social order broke down, accompanied by massive outflows of people (CCP Liaocheng, 1998, p.153). It is hard to establish how much of

this turmoil was due to restive citizens and how much to recalcitrant local cadres. It is significant however, that the part of Guan county where the uprising occurred had been an independent county until December 1958, when higher-level government decided to abolish that county and incorporate it into Guan County, indicating dissatisfaction with an insubordinate leadership of that earlier county. The discredited leaders may have done less than they were expected to stop their people from emigrating. Other counties in the area routinely deployed agents at train stations and river crossings to stop the emigration (CCP Liaocheng, 1998, p.151).

The party grassroots were indispensable for alerting higher government to the situation. During the Great Leap Forward, numerous investigation teams travelled the country, only to let themselves be deceived by local cadres. By contrast, when a provincial investigation team came to Guan County a significant number of basic-level cadres filed their complaints. For instance, out of 1,195 mess halls the managers of 82 mess halls self-reported that they had altogether stopped giving out food; many more reported that they had “half-stopped” giving out food (GLF 603). Other cadres reported cases of food theft, human trafficking, numerous suicides and famine deaths (ibid.). The 82 mess hall managers, as well as the other cadres, were courageous because at the time their reports came close to self-indictions. Although they were in the minority, they were numerous and outspoken enough to have food requisitioning cut and emergency supplies shipped in. Without being able to pin down exactly how much of the resistance originated with the people and how much of it originated with the party grassroots, apparently the resistance saved the county much distress. Guan County is extremely peripheral and thus prone to famine, but the mortality rate in the wake of the Great Leap Forward increased only slightly to 13‰, whereas for all of Shandong mortality doubled to 24‰.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>The source for county-level mortality data is explained below.

### 6.2.3 Previously Embattled Areas as Most Resistant

Why was there so much more resistance in some place than in others? To understand where resistance against the Great Leap Policies was most likely, this chapter suggests local party history as a highly relevant variable. Since the Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War had ended only decade earlier, local experiences of violence still shaped the behavior of rank-and-file party members and local cadres. Arguably, in places that experienced the sharpest confrontation, a spirit of resistance had survived the Communist revolution and helped to reduce the devastating impact of the Great Leap Forward.

The case of Guan County is an anecdotal example, because both its resistance against Great Leap Policies and its exposure as a battleground during the Second Sino-Japanese War are striking. The area of Guan County was at the fringes of Japanese-occupied territory and not far away from a Communist base area. As a result, the area epitomizes an “embattled area” where both parties clashed, as shown on Japanese military maps (Japanese Defense Agency, 1968-1971, vol.2, appendix 5) (compare map in figure 6.1) and the party mobilized successfully (Tianjin CASS 2). Some of the individuals in power during the Great Leap Forward, although not always from the county itself, were battle-experienced and presumably particularly committed party members, like the county party secretary Chen Guanghan 陳光漢, who had spent time in a Japanese prison. This suggests a historical link between local resistance and revolutionary history.

Guan County continued to defy the politics of centrally-prescribed mass mobilization during the Cultural Revolution. A local coalition for stability, built around incumbent party cadres, held onto power and kept radicals down until in spring 1969, when provincial rebel leaders decided to take down the conservatives. The local coalition was so strong that rebel leaders had to recruit large numbers of outsiders. In the end 10,000 violent rebels from eight counties, half of them armed,

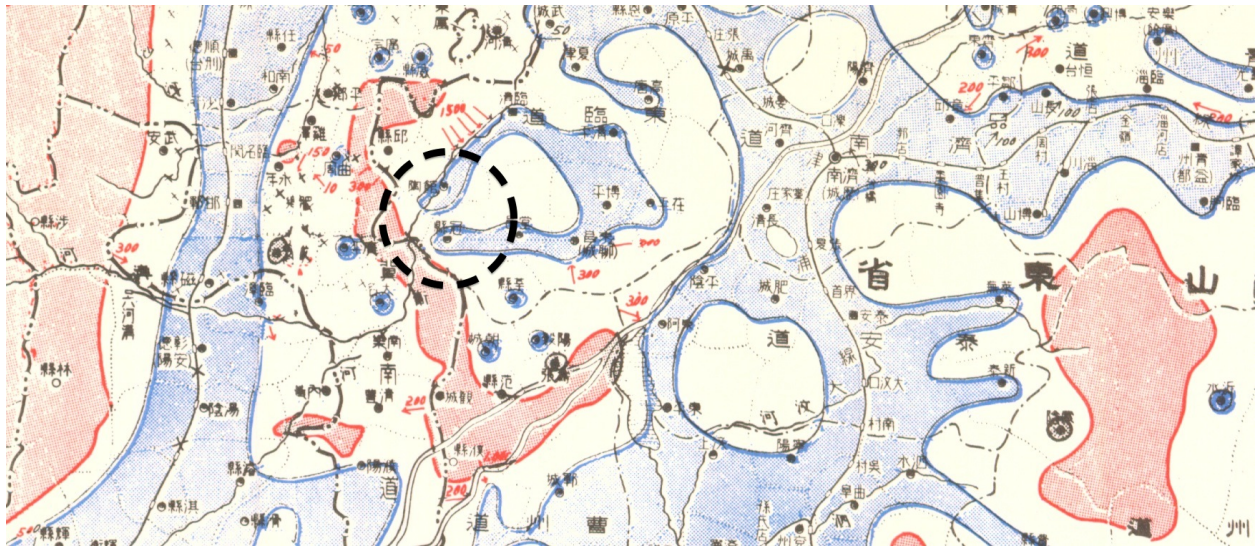


Figure 6.1: Guan County as an Exemplary “Embattled Area”

descended upon the county (CCP Liaocheng, 1998, p.289 f.). Locals refer to this troop as the “Eight Nations Alliance”, evoking the memory of the eight nations who came to Shandong to quell the boxer uprising in 1900, and put the death toll at over 60 people (Guan County, 2001). Guan County is the mirror image of the observation that the famine disaster had prepared the ground for the anarchical violence (Thaxton, 2008): Cadres shielded the county from the Great Leap Famine and later on were relatively safe from local attack during the Cultural Revolution. The origin of party strength in Guan lies in its encounter of the Japanese Imperial Army.

More systematically, one can distinguish among three different historical pathways according to how much violence a locality had experienced and under how much risk locals had joined the party: Base areas, embattled areas and Japanese strongholds. Base areas were firmly under Communist control, and were typically located in the province’s periphery so the Japanese threat there seemed remote. To be sure, occasionally punitive expeditions reached into peripheral areas, but people did not join under the same kind of permanent threat as people in immediate proximity experienced. In these embattled areas, chances were that people had been displaced as a direct result of Japanese



violence. Calling people who joined the Communists in the base areas “opportunists” and people who joined in the embattled areas “idealists” might go too far. But in fact the risks people took depended greatly on the locality where they joined the party. And so did the violence that people experienced during the wars before the Communist takeover.

This three-way distinction, rather than a dichotomous base-area dummy variable, has been a conventional geographical distinction made by decision-makers and academics alike. Party documents at the time of the Sino-Japanese War routinely classified territory into three groups: liberated, contested and occupied areas (Lawson, 2012, p.287). Chinese analyses as well as Western scholarship, to the extent that they take subnational variation seriously, employ similar categories: base areas, early-liberated and late-liberated areas (Vogel, 1969; Bo, 1997); or base areas, guerilla zones and areas outside the party’s reach (Himeta, 1993, p.150). Decision makers at the time found this three-way distinction practically useful and scholars later on found it to have analytical value as well.

Prior to the Communist takeover in 1949, the party’s base areas in rural areas of China’s periphery were the geographic center of the revolution. Communists took refuge there, experimented with government and then started their expansion, which finally encompassed the whole country. Once in power, the CCP lost much of its interest in the base areas. As was to be expected, the national capital was of course not established at the seat of the CCP leadership during the war, in the remote mountains of Shaanxi, but rather in the geo-politically and symbolically vital city of Beijing. Like the party’s top leaders, who left the periphery to rule the country from the center, low-ranking cadres and rank-and-file members were needed in less marginal places, which were also more comfortable for living. In other words, the wartime base areas, which had always been understood as a transient way-station of the revolution, saw an exodus of the party.

*Hypothesis: Those areas most embattled during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) saw most resistance to collectivization policies and as a result had lower mortality rates. By contrast, areas firmly under Japanese control, where the party gained a foothold very late in the war, and safe havens far away from Japanese occupation both were home to more obedient cadres.*

## 6.3 Quantitative Evidence

### 6.3.1 Famine Data

This chapter uses new data on the severity of the famine, which the author discovered in newly acquired materials in the Harvard-Yenching Library (HYL famine). Population statistics, collected by the Chinese security apparatus, provide the most reliable data on the severity of the Great Leap Famine. On a yearly basis, public security bureaus collect population data, including birth and mortality rates. For Shandong province the most fine-grained data available, as of today, are disaggregated to the county level. The relative autonomy of the public security apparatus from the local party secretary might to a certain extent insulate it from pressures to downplay the devastating effect of the famine, the mortality statistics should nevertheless be considered as a lower bound. An additional bias might occur when the public security bureau decides whether to explain the missing people as having out-migrated or as having died. Yet it is not clear in which direction the bureau would be biased: On the one hand, deaths represent a severe failure of the local government, but on the other hand, out-migration represents a failure of the public security office, which is supposed to keep people in place.

### 6.3.2 Historical GIS

In the mind of historians, base areas are relatively well-defined areas on the map. Studying primary material pertaining to local history, such as the detailed maps in the well-known series *Material on the Organizational History*, reveals that in reality the borders were more fuzzy than historians might make us believe. Chapter 8 shows that among locals on the ground there is considerable confusion as to where exactly the base areas were. To identify base areas, I rely on a map by Rana Mitter showing “areas under Communist control in Northern China” in August 1945 (Mitter, 2013, p.374), which reflects well the scholarly consensus among historians of China. Ultimately, this view is based on cartographic material by the CCP. After geo-referencing, I assign a dummy variable to each of the counties in the 1960 borders, defining counties as having been a base area -as opposed to an embattled area- if the entirety of their territory falls within one of the areas designated by Rana Mitter’s map as “under Communist control”.

The areas most firmly under Japanese control can be identified from Japan’s military maps. The range of Japanese control varied over time, but in Shandong two corridors were securely under control: One along the railroad from Beijing to Shanghai and the other along the railroad from the provincial capital, Jinan, to the most important provincial port of Qingdao. To be sure, the army could not always ward off all surprise attacks by guerilla forces, but it could prevent an open presence of Communist troops. Since the thickness of the corridor was highly uneven, I use an authoritative map, which the historical research office of the Japanese Ministry of Defense compiled based on its own maps from the time (Japanese Defense Agency, 1968-1971, accompanying map). After geo-referencing the map, I assign a dummy variable to each of the counties in the 1960 borders, defining counties as having been fully under the control of the Imperial Army if the entirety of their territory falls within the area designated as being “under Communist control”.

### 6.3.3 Units of Analysis

Until the Communist takeover, counties have been stable administrative units, persisting over hundreds of years with only minor adjustments.<sup>7</sup> In the early years of Communist rule, the number of counties proliferated, to around 140 in Shandong, and has remained at that level until today, with one exceptional time period: The Great Leap Forward was accompanied by radical restructuring of the administrative apparatus, reducing the number of counties in Shandong by over one third to 85 counties in 1960. The motivation was partly ideological, seeking to scale up every imaginable aspect of administration. But as described above, uniting counties also had a political effect of keeping lower-level cadres in line and on their toes, because the likelihood that their workplace would be made redundant was high. Administrative restructuring poses an analytical problem, because at different points in time data are reported in different units of analysis. Using counties as units of analysis poses difficulties, since jurisdictional boundaries changed quickly and drastically during the Great Leap era.

The solution for the present analysis is to use counties of 1964 as the reference point and then develop a concordance to map the 1953 counties and the 1960 counties on the map for 1964. This requires a close analysis of various volumes of *Material on the Organizational History*, local gazetteers, party histories and chronologies. For the 1960 to 1964 concordance, in many cases the 1960 county is split into two “new” jurisdictions, so that I assign the 1960 statistics from one county to two or (rarely) more new counties. In other cases “new” counties were made out of parts of several “old” counties, usually by reassigning entire townships. In this case, I calculate what percentage of townships from the “old” county were assigned to the “new” county and weigh the

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<sup>7</sup>Shandong had 107 county-level jurisdictions since at least the 18th Century until after the 1911 Revolution. By the time of the Communist takeover, the number had only marginally increased to 110 counties. By contrast, county borders had not been well-defined in the imperial era.

1960 statistics accordingly. In both cases, the methodology is an approximation because it is based on the assumption that the famine was evenly severe throughout each county. It could well be that the most severely affected parts of a county were purposefully joined with townships from a less affected county. These are well known problems of working with historical data and using data pertaining to historical jurisdictions. The 1953 to 1964 concordance is less problematic, since in many cases the former administrative units of 1953 had been restored by 1964. Using historical GIS data avoids difficulties with the units of analysis, since geo-data do not depend on county boundaries in the first place.

### 6.3.4 Specification and Results

To control for confounding factors related to overall levels of development, the specifications control for mortality in a “normal” year prior to the Great Leap era. I use mortality data for the year 1952, which is the mid-point between the Communist takeover in 1949 and the beginning of collectivization in 1956. The data come from the same source as the famine data, and GIS techniques allow me to map the 1952 data to the jurisdictions of 1960. The second most important confounder might be urbanization, since Japanese occupation focussed on urban centers and the famine hit rural areas the hardest.<sup>8</sup>

Table 6.1 shows the result. Having been an embattled area decreases mortality by 7.6 per thousand, compared to all other areas. Reversely, choosing the embattled areas as comparison point, places that used to be Japanese strongholds and base areas on average experience 7.0 and 7.9 more deaths per thousand, respectively. The results are not only statistically significant, but also substantively very important. As a point of comparison, note that in Shandong mortality

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<sup>8</sup>If urban areas were systematically more embattled and less hit by the famine, this would create an overestimate the hypothesized effect of a place having been embattled.

|                     | specification 1 | specification 2 |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| mortality 1953      | 1.034*          | 1.032*          |
| rural               | 0.242*          | 0.234*          |
| embattled area      | -7.558**        |                 |
| Communist base area |                 | 7.905*          |
| Japanese stronghold |                 | 6.988*          |

\*\*\* significance at 0.005, \*\* significance at 0.01, \* significance at 0.05, . significance at 0.1

Table 6.1: History Effect on Mortality in 1960

doubled from 12 per thousand in 1953 to 24 per thousand in 1960 (county averages), the difference being 12 per thousand. If on average the fact of having been an embattled area reduces mortality by 7.6 per thousand, this is a large effect indeed: It means that the impact of the famine was cut in half.

The results are statistically significant at the 95% level. Overall, it is surprising that the results are not statistically more significant. For example, one might have expected that mortality in 1953 is very closely correlated to mortality in 1960. The main problem is that the unit of analysis was not stable. Apart from the fact that the mergers of jurisdictions left only 85 county-level units as opposed to 140 before these mergers, inaccuracy is a result of projecting mortality from counties in the 1953 borders onto counties in the 1960 borders.

## 6.4 Conclusion

In the case of the Great Leap Forward, strong party grassroots were helpful as a self-corrective device. It is not a coincidence that this historical instance of disobedience in the interest of the common good occurred merely ten years after the Communist takeover. As the party state continued to institutionalize its bureaucratic routines, it retained its revolutionary memory. It is harder to find systematic evidence that a local tradition of disobedience, supported by revolutionary identity and the success with earlier episodes of disobedience, can be transmitted to the present.

Anecdotes suggest that such traditions of bottom-up party-based disobedience to certain destructive policies can persist. As described in this chapter, Guan County in Liaocheng Prefecture not only stood out for resisting the Great Leap Forward, but also for resisting the disruptive schemes of the Cultural Revolution. More recently, when Shandong's leaders rolled out a movement to construct a socialist countryside accompanied by rhetoric reminiscent of the Great Leap, Liaocheng Prefecture was slow to implement the policy, citing worries that this top-down policy involving public appropriation of land might not be in the best interest of local farmers. While higher-level authorities deplore the failure of local officials to implement what they praise as constructive policies, local-level authorities are convinced that before long their deviation from central policy will be recognized as people-friendly behavior.<sup>9</sup>

In principle Leninist party doctrine acknowledges that internal dissent can be in the best interest of the party. The top social engineer of the CCP, Liu Shaoqi, in the 1940s highlighted that the new party constitution for good reasons guaranteed the right of party members with minority views to express themselves without fear. After the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping and the "Resolution on CCP History" emphasized that the turmoil had much to do with one man's arrogant leadership and that it was essential for the party to return to the founding principle of inner-party democracy (CCP, 1981). This democratic lesson of the Cultural Revolution seems to have been lost on the post-Tian'anmen leadership.

This chapter has raised the question how historical legacies going back to the period before the Communist takeover influence the strength of local party organization. In the case of the Great Leap Forward, the links appear more apparent compared to the later effects, on which the following chapters will focus.

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<sup>9</sup>Conversations in Liaocheng, fall 2012.

## Chapter 7

# Explaining the Shifting Geographic Patterns of the CCP's Power Base

The CCP is much more present in some areas of mainland China's territory than in others. As the previous chapters show, this has far-reaching consequences for local governance outcomes. In “red” localities with many rank-and-file party members, the state is more effective at implementing policies, and local government is more resilient in times of crisis. Moving back the causal chain, this chapter asks what determines the degree of local party strength in the first place. The following short section points to temporal dynamics as the major challenge when analyzing the political map of China, because of the interplay between contemporary and historical factors. Section 7.2 describes membership recruitment in the 21st Century, showing that party organizers pivot to urban areas and otherwise seek to even out the party's presence across space. Section 7.3 suggests that the geography of Japan's partial occupation of China during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) goes a long way in explaining the distinct geographic patterns of the CCP's power base even today. While it is expected that Japanese occupation influenced membership patterns in the



early years of the PRC, section 7.3 spells out the counter-intuitive hypothesis that these patterns have survived until today. Borrowing quantitative techniques developed by economists, the last section uses a model to investigate the connection between membership patterns at the time of the Communist takeover and today. The central finding of this chapter is that the “history effect” of Japanese occupation on membership remains central to understanding the CCP’s power base: The history effect is disappearing, but only at a very slow rate.

## **7.1 Analyzing the Dynamics of the Party’s Power Base**

When explaining the geographical shape of the CCP’s power base, complex dynamics pose the central theoretical, empirical and methodological challenge. The geography of party membership is a slowly shifting target. Neither is it frozen in time, nor is it moving swiftly enough to be analyzed as a result of contemporary factors alone. To arrive at a satisfying theory of party membership patterns, one must consider both present and past influences. Since Paul Pierson’s call to place politics in time, political scientists have worked hard to innovate and find ways to better take into account influences of the past (Pierson, 2004). This chapter inscribes itself into these efforts. This section specifies the nature of the problem and describes the multi-pronged approach, which this chapter uses to disentangle layers of history. The goal is not only to show significant linkages to the past, but also to explain why the past is so sticky and to decide whether these linkages are transient phenomena or lasting regularities. The substantive question of interest is limited to the CCP and its membership, but the methodologies developed in 7.4 could also be used to tackle the historical development of other membership-based organizations.

The analysis takes into account accumulation effects, but also goes further to identify a subtle yet consequential path dependent effect. Accumulation effects occur simply because once recruited,

members usually remain in the party until their death. By contrast and more interestingly, path dependent effects occur because it is easier to recruit people in places where there are already many party members to begin with. To isolate the accumulation effects, let us for a moment rule out path dependency by assuming that at any given point in time recruitment and drop-out are determined exclusively by the circumstances at that time. In other words, current recruitment and current drop-outs patterns are perfectly independent of past recruitment and drop-out patterns. Even with this strong assumption, membership patterns would still be linked to history, because current membership is a stock variable resulting from continuous recruitment and drop-outs, which are flow variables. Figures 7.1 and 7.2 illustrate the accumulation effect. Figure 7.1 looks at Shandong's party members at the end of 2012 and divides them into groups, depending on the time of their recruitment. The categorization of recruitment eras follows the one laid out in the source, namely the Yearbook of the CCP in Shandong (CCP Shandong, 2002-2003, 2004-2013). One fourth of all party members were recruited since 2002, almost coinciding with the Hu Jintao era. Two fourth of all party members were recruited after Deng Xiaoping took over in 1979. Similarly, figure 7.2<sup>1</sup> divides all CCP members into groups. If there were no path dependency, recruitment patterns preceding the Cultural Revolution -and certainly those preceding the Communist takeover in 1949- would be irrelevant to explain membership patterns in 2012.

As will become clear in the course of this chapter, accumulation effects alone do not explain the persistent unevenness of the party's power base. While party organizers have recruited significantly more party members in places where the party is underrepresented, they have still not privileged these places enough for the unevenness of the party's power base to disappear - even after 70 years. As a result of path dependency, the party is bound by the past. By one measure to be

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<sup>1</sup>This graph is based on data from a compilation of internal party statistics (CCP Organization Department, 2011, p.78 f.).

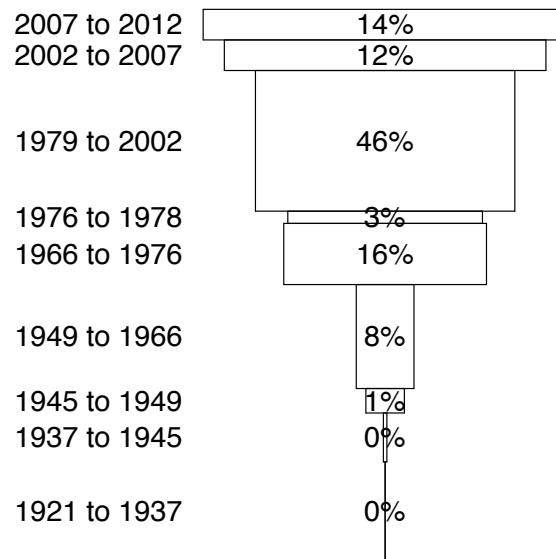


Figure 7.1: Party Membership as Accumulated Stock (Shandong 2012)

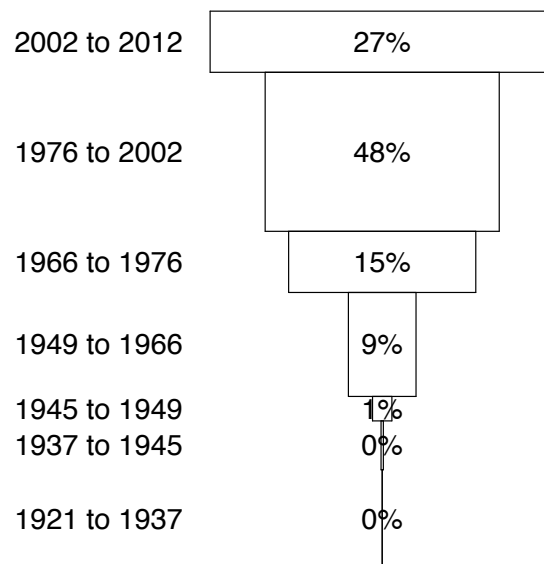


Figure 7.2: Party Membership as Accumulated Stock (All China 2010)

presented later in this chapter, at least 3/4 of the variation in party presence today can be explained by variation in the past. Even if accumulation effects alone considerably tie current membership patterns to decisions made in the past, they are unlikely to give the complete picture. Ignoring path dependency severely underestimates to the degree to which history matters. The path dependent effect is subtle, because it does not re-enforce and escalate spatial differences, which would lead to divergent patterns. It is powerful, because it delays convergence of the party base by almost one century.

When indicating that party organizers recruit more members in places with few party members, regression analysis can potentially be misleading and obscure how the present is tied to the past. Economists, who in turn borrow mathematical tools from natural sciences, have developed more appropriate approaches to analyze dynamic growth processes. To assess the persistence of membership patterns, this chapter will present a party growth model. Noting that accumulation effects and path dependency also occur in economic growth processes, I translate the recruitment dynamics of the CCP into a simple formal model inspired by a standard economic growth model. Estimating the parameters of the model, I show that the Japanese legacy disappears over time, but only at a very slow rate. Using a model instead of a regression design has important advantages. While regression analyses that compare current party membership to past party membership are extremely robust, they say nothing about dynamics: Are differences disappearing over time, or are they aggravating? The modelling approach is also more satisfying than standard time series analyses, because of the ad-hoc assumptions needed for the latter (King, 1998, p.167). Instead, the modelling approach uses the known structure of membership accumulation and estimates the parameters of the dynamic process.

The dazzling speed of socio-economic transformations in China obscures the extent to which

the country's political institutions are shaped by the past. The CCP is a product of institutional layering, adapting to new external circumstance, but also retaining techniques of government that have served the organization well. As for innovation, the admission of capitalists into the party is the most definite sign that the CCP knows how to pragmatically shift its social base, accommodating and co-opting new strata into the system (Dickson, 2003; Walder, 2004; Tsai, 2006). As for retention of characteristically Communist tactics, the use of the party as a screening, disciplining and mobilizing device stands out. Membership patterns are an instance of this institutional layering - and they are readily amenable to quantitative analysis.

## **7.2 Contemporary Factors Shaping the CCP's Power Base**

This section investigates contemporary factors, which are re-shaping the geographic power base of the CCP in the 21st Century. To say it right upfront: The search for contemporary determinants has yielded a surprisingly modest harvest, compared to the much more fruitful search for historical determinants of local party presence, as described starting in section 7.3. There is no lack in strategic thinking and efforts to readjust the CCP's power base, undertaken in particular by the party's powerful organization department. Yet with the exception of the recent urban focus in recruitment, organization building strategies of the 21st century do not have tangible geographic implications. Recruitment plans are designed to counter challenges that come with modernization, such as socio-economic differentiation that tends to obstruct the reach of the state. Since many of these challenges are most severe in urban areas, party organizers are paying most attention to the cities. Empirically, geographic recruitment trends of the Hu Jintao era (2002-2012) reflected this focus on the cities. Even after controlling for the very rapid increase in urban population, the CCP has been disproportionally recruiting members in urban areas. Just as striking as the relative

retreat from the countryside is the apparent attempt to even out the membership base. The party recruits more new people in places where it is least present. Yet at the same time the data indicate that these attempts at evening out the membership base have only limited success. Therefore the following section will adopt a longer time horizon and study how historical contingencies from the period before the Communist takeover shape contemporary outcomes.

### 7.2.1 Recruitment Policies to Meet the Urbanization Challenge

Recruitment follows carefully formulated “membership development plans” 發展黨員計劃. As is characteristic of state-led central planning procedures, recruitment quotas are at the heart of these documents. For example, the Organization Department of a county typically sets targets for how many party members each party committee within its jurisdiction should recruit; in addition it may stipulate that, say, at least 75% of all incoming party members have a senior high school degree, at least 70% are under 35 years old, and at least 30% are women.<sup>2</sup> Although the recruitment plans include additional, detailed political guidance, local party leaders tend to ignore these aspects and see only the quotas (Zhang and Yu, 2003), interpreting them as a minimum requirement. This is comprehensible, since higher-level authorities observe recruitment statistics as the only readily observable signal about local party-building performance. When quotas are not met, higher-level authorities will ask for explanations.<sup>3</sup> Even if central recruitment policies are only imperfectly implemented - with overperformance creating more imbalance than underperformance- they allow central planners to discourage organization building in some places and accelerate it in others.

Recruitment plans are a strategic response to the party’s most pressing challenges. Mastermind-

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<sup>2</sup>The numbers are from Pingyao County’s 平遙縣 recruitment plan for 2009. Document available from the author.

<sup>3</sup>When Organization Departments give out recruitment quotas for the coming year, they may also ask for justification of underperformance in the preceding year, e.g. Organization Department of the CCP Committee at Zhangzhou Normal Institute 中共漳州師範學院委員會組織部: “Notification Concerning the Membership Development Plan Targets for 2012” 關於制定2012年發展黨員計劃數的通知. Document found online, also available from the author.

ing party construction policy are the powerful Organization Department and a top-level steering committee called *Small Coordinating Group for Country-Wide Grassroots Organization Building* 全國基層組織建設協調小組. The group has considerable political weight: Although the exact composition of the group remains undisclosed, the group's importance is reflected by the fact that its secretariat is headed by Wu Yuliang 吳玉良, a Vice Director of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission who has been intimately involved in Xi Jinping's formidable Anti-Corruption Campaign. At lower levels we also find much strategic thinking on strengthening party organization, both inside the party and in academia. Journals on party building, such as the internally circulating 黨建研究內參 and the public 黨建研究 along with their local equivalents, provide insights into the thinking of party organizers, if in remarkably dry jargon.

A central theme running through the thinking about party organization work is innovation in the face of various challenges of socio-economic modernization, including globalization (Chen, 2010, 2012b). The more specific the authors are in describing the concrete challenges, the clearer it is that they are almost exclusively concerned about challenges in the cities.<sup>4</sup> As became clear under Jiang Zemin's leadership in the 1990s, the party is prepared to embrace modernization. The party is ready to work with "the newly productive forces in society" and accept their representatives into the party. By contrast, challenges pertaining to presumably "backward societal forces", such those coming from ethnic communities and religious movements, are dealt with by a strategy of containment rather than penetration. To penetrate the newly productive force, party recruitment in the last decade has been fixated on the cities, reducing the CCP's presence in less developed rural areas and increasing it in highly developed urban areas.

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<sup>4</sup>In general, the mixture of technocratic and Marxist jargon does not help to understand what problems on the ground the authors have in mind. Under supervision of Professor Lei Fang at Shandong University, students wrote about challenges of party building, including case studies (Ge, 2011), but it is necessary to talk to Fang Lei or his students to discern the specific meanings.

The urban challenge begins with the incumbent party members themselves. Marxist theory reserves a prominent place to the urban proletariat, so that workers in large, state-owned factories for many decades used to be the privileged class of the Chinese Socialist state. This group formed the core constituency of urban party organizations. Yet with Deng Xiaoping's policy of Reform and Opening, the privileges of this group dissipated. The urban proletariat turned from the winners of revolution to the losers of reform. Instead of the erstwhile complacency among its rank-and-file members, the CCP had to face disgruntlement from within. To be sure, having some unemployed workers in its own ranks might help the party to keep connected to and informed about sentiments in this group. But in many cities the number of unemployed people and retired workers among CCP members far exceeds what could by any stretch of the imagination be a politically useful level. The city of Qingdao epitomizes this problem. It may entail one of the major port cities that prospered under the socialist market economy, yet many of the party members lost their privileges and were forced into early retirement or unemployment. Statistics from the Northern district of the city reflect the alarming dimensions of the problem: "Altogether 26,610 party members, of whom 17,378 are either retired or unemployed. This is 65.3% of the total membership." (CCP Shandong, 2004-2013, 2005 edition, p.272) Since mass exclusion of party members for socio-economic reasons is not a legitimate option, the organization department resorted to diluting the incumbent membership by recruiting large numbers of new party members.<sup>5</sup>

Jiang Zemin's idea of the "Three Represents", elevated to party dogma at the 16th Party Congress in 2002, calls for the party to represent the most advanced productive forces in society. The most well-known implication of Jiang Zemin's instruction was that the CCP could henceforth recruit entrepreneurs, that is precisely the capitalist class it had vowed to overthrow. In practice,

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<sup>5</sup>A second approach consisted in redrawing district boundaries, also to dilute the problem: That is part of the reason why Qingdao abolished the districts of Sifang and Shibei.



the recruitment of capitalists has not yet changed the face of the party. In Shandong in 2012 of all party members only 1.5% belong to the “new classes” 新的社會基層; of whom 77% were self-employed 個體勞動者 (CCP Shandong, 2004-2013, 2013 edition, p.763) and thus not quite fitting the ideal-type image of a capitalist. The “Three Represents” had other types of practical implications for local party organizers. To party organizers in Qingdao, Jiang Zemin’s injunction was disconcerting, because their local party branches represented mostly the least productive forces in society. As a result, they engaged in recruiting not capitalists, but workers in the more successful sectors for the economy.

Part of the urbanization challenge comes with migration. Traditional party organizing was designed for citizens who remain not only in the same locality, but also in the same work unit for their entire life. Two decades of large-scale migration have destabilized grassroots party organization. When villagers leave to work in the cities, their relationship to the village party committee becomes attenuated. Many of them turn into members who “pocket the party” 口袋黨員 or turn into “hidden members” 隱形黨員. It is too much bureaucratic hassle for migrant party members to transfer their file and join a party cell in their new community, especially if they frequently switch workplaces. In addition, local party cells tend not to welcome outsiders. From the perspective of higher-level party organizers this is regrettable, since migrant party members would provide a much-needed link into migrant communities. Two initiatives are designed for the party to penetrate China’s floating population: One is to offer practical support to migrant party members in their new environment, thereby providing them with incentives to reveal themselves. Another consists in strengthening party branches in residential communities with many migrant workers.<sup>6</sup>

The urban factory floor has remained a critical frontline for the CCP’s organization work.

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<sup>6</sup>Conversation in 2013 with a professor at Central China Normal University, who specializes on migrant workers and is observing efforts of the party to penetrate these migrant communities.

Economic reform has made the task of organizing the proletariat harder than during Maoist times. While party organizers are at ease<sup>7</sup> in state-owned enterprises (Jiang, 2013), the emergence of new economic actors presents difficulties. Partly because in the absence of strictly enforced labor regulations the potential for labor conflict is enormous, the CCP is concerned about penetrating the quickly evolving non-state sector:

做為佔非公企業總數90%以上的小微企業，由於黨員數量少，業態分類廣，人員流動快，存在週期短等原因，一直是黨組織覆蓋和黨建工作開展的難點。In micro-companies, which make up more than 90% of all companies in the private sector, as a result of few party members in the firms, their diversity, the quick turnover of personnel and the short life-span of these firms, it has been a great difficulty to organizationally cover that ground and carry out party-building (CCP Shandong, 2004-2013, 2013 edition, p.738)

. Local party organizations employ innovative strategies to improve their reach. A party-building project in Shandong that was highlighted as exemplary tried to work around the principle that the factory floor is observed by party cells established within each factory. Instead, observing that in their jurisdiction migrant workers switch factories more often than they switch homes, local party organizers recruited the workers in their living communities, thereby hoping to establish a lasting link into several factories through just one party cell.

Especially in urban settings, the party has been warily watching the rise of “new societal organizations” 新社會組織, roughly corresponding to Non-Governmental Organizations in a broad sense and including anything from community associations to employers associations. Their existence comes to party organizers’ attention through the registries of the Civil Affairs Office and

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<sup>7</sup>In the traditional state-owned companies sector, the party is playing a well-rehearsed mediating labor conflict. On the role of the CCP within the history of Chinese labor politics, see Elizabeth Perry (Perry, 1993).

through the security apparatus. Once aware of an organization's existence, party organizers may decide to try to penetrate it by setting up a party branch. To get a foot in the door, instead of just waiting until enough party members have joined the NGO, the organization department can either encourage existing CCP members to join the NGOs in question or try to recruit NGO members. At the very least, potential new party members could not be turned down just because they are also active in the NGO sector. Success quotas in penetrating new societal organizations may be part of local CCP organizers' yearly reports on their achievements.<sup>8</sup> Since new societal organizations are predominantly an urban phenomenon, attempts to be present in NGOs further accelerates the tendency for urban recruitment.

### **7.2.2 The Quest for Uniformity**

When party leaders face an uneven power base, they can either accommodate this imperfection or they can try to grow their power base in places where it is still insecure. Chinese state builders do both. Like their imperial predecessors (see chapter 9), party leaders have mastered the art of strategically differentiating their governance, taking into account an uneven presence of the party. But at the same time, they are also keen on evening out the infrastructural reach of the party. After the Communist takeover of 1949, establishing a presence through the territory became a high political priority of the new government. During the formidable recruitment drives of the early 1950s, in some places new members were too hastily recruited and turned out to be politically unreliable. Therefore, the early period of quick expansion was followed by a period of purges, which gave a sense that evening out the reach of the party is not a trivial matter. Telling apart opportunists and true believers was even harder after the Communist victory. Though a high

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<sup>8</sup>Leafing through Shandong's party organization yearbook, examples abound (CCP Shandong, 2004-2013). I first became aware of these penetration attempts through a conversation in 2011 with a journalist in Shanghai.

priority, it is difficult for places with underdeveloped party organization to catch up with the places of high party presence. Contrary to notions that the Organization Department of the party is almost all-powerful and can fully control the size of party organizations at the grassroots, in fact the CCP is bound by history. This section points out why organizational dynamics inherent to the Leninist organization work against evening out the party's reach.

Even if the CCP has more members than a country like Germany has citizens, and even if almost 7% of all Chinese citizens are members, the party's penetration of society is far from perfect. There are many places that lack party members altogether. Outside the traditional state-owned companies, only 45% of companies have a regular party organization and 28% of companies have no link to the party at all (CCP Shandong, 2004-2013, 2013 edition, p.803). These estimates likely overestimate the reach of the party, since they do not count firms in the informal sector, which are below the radar of the party state. In the villages, the situation is not much better. Even in Shandong, where the party is exceptionally present, in the mid-1980s about 16% of villages did not have any party members (Shandong Government, 1984/85, p.1). The problem was superficially solved by merging natural villages into larger administrative villages. Since then migration has further reduced party presence in rural areas.

The highly formalized procedures for admitting new party members make it easier to recruit in localities where there are already many party members. For example, the party requires each new party member to garner recommendations from two existing party members, who will guarantee politically loyal behavior of the new party member for the rest of his/her life. Not only are existing party members reluctant to give such guarantees, there also appear to be rules -at least informal rules- that each member can recommend only a limited number of people throughout his/her party career. In places with few existing party members, it can be hard to find a guar-

antor. More generally, upper-level party organizations expect party cells to provide detailed and personal information on membership applicants. As with other kinds of information, so also with recruitment-related information: The greater the presence of the party within a given locality, the easier it is for party administrators to collect and verify the information needed during the admission process of new party members. Thus, places with few party members find it hard to catch up.

In work units or villages where there are no existing CCP members, it will be exceedingly difficult to recruit the first member. The risk is great that the party will not pick the right person and that empowering such a person will create new tensions in the village or in the work unit. In the past, the solution would have been to dispatch work teams to investigate carefully and to carry out recruitment. Especially before the Communist takeover, the materials collected by such work teams are impressively detailed.<sup>9</sup> We do not see such work teams, because the organization department seems satisfied with rural recruitment and, as described below, because more innovative solutions exist for urban settings. Nevertheless, enormous efforts are needed to carry out proper recruitment in places where there is little in terms of grassroots party organization.

Besides organizational dynamics, there are also political obstacles to convergence. To the extent that local party leaders are concerned about power arithmetics, small party cells recruit fewer new members than large party cells. Consider the marginal effect of admitting a new party member on the power of the incumbents. If a party cell is large, an additional member would have only a negligible effect on the power games within the party cell. However, if the party cell is small, the new party member might well shift the power balance among the members. Here it is important to note that according to the party regulations a party cell must consist of at least three members;

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<sup>9</sup>I am thinking of many volumes of investigation material, making up the bulk of the pre-1949 material in Liaocheng's Prefectural Archive.

and that many party cells are actually very small organizational units of three or four members. Clearly, power dynamics in such a setting are easily swayed by an additional party member, who eventually will take a side in party-cell internal disagreements. The incumbents of small party cells and large party cells alike are wary of new recruits, who may displace them from their position of influence. However, incumbent members of large party cells have less to fear from new recruits than incumbent members of small party cells. The same power arithmetics also apply to larger aggregates of party organizations, such as party committees at the various hierarchical levels. Since new recruits have a larger marginal influence in small party organizations, small organizations tend to grow more slowly than bigger party organizations.

Currently a central contention in Shanghai revolves around the ratio of long-established Shanghai residents to new Shanghai residents. Long-established Shanghai residents are said to be less zealously pursuing party membership, since they already have excellent connections to provide them with good career opportunities. By contrast, newly arrived residents have a great interest in joining the party. However, accepting too many “immigrants” creates discontent among the “old Shanghainese”, who are weary of sharing the privileges of their urban wealth. While it is unclear whether the presence of outsiders in the party would lead to a more migrant-friendly policy, the individual opportunities that the party provides to its members in the long run will leave more migrants in powerful and profitable positions, creating envy among old Shanghainese. Even more importantly, a major concern of Shanghai party leaders is to make their city appear politically loyal, since the center might have many reasons to distrust the metropolis for its capitalist traditions and foreign connections.<sup>10</sup> As a result, city leaders might be worried if they can only find sufficiently zealous party members among the new immigrants, rather than the Shanghainese.

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<sup>10</sup>Report by an exceptionally well-informed Western diplomat, written in 2007.

The strategic calculus surrounding the question of how many migrants to admit into the party also highlights a more general problem. It seems that the established party elite tends to be wary of new recruits, especially if they have a different socio-economic background or a greater education or superior wealth. After all, once admitted into the party, new members may displace the old members from their positions of power and influence.<sup>11</sup> In case of a political campaign, it is important for the old members to recruit new members who will be loyal. This gives incentives to recruit among family or at least to recruit among citizens with a similar life path. A side-effect of the current anti-corruption campaign is to remind party members of the importance of personal loyalty, since that is the only hope for surviving the erratic political winds of a clean-up campaign that leaves much room for discretion in choosing its victims. It is believed that membership in one of the People's Republic's old ruling families is the best guarantee for one's safety, except if your family was connected to Bo Xilai's clan.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, one would expect that party organizers try to level the playing field and recruit more party members in places where so far the party is underrepresented. At the same time, one would expect that it is not easy for the CCP to achieve an even reach. In addition, the recent focus on urban areas is bound to result in a new unevenness, over time leading to a drastic underrepresentation of the party in rural areas. The party has long worked toward a more uniform presence throughout its territory. These efforts at evening out the power base are best described as patient yet consistent: When there is a chance, the party grows in places where it had henceforth been less present. Yet the party has a very long time horizon and will not compromise the quality of its networks and the reliability of its members. Determining the success in evening-out and the speed

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<sup>11</sup>Thanks to Carles Boix, who first came up with the idea that there might be such dynamics - through conversations in China, I found ample confirmation for his suspicion.

<sup>12</sup>This is according to a conversation with a Chinese professor and another conversation with a foreign journalist.

of convergence is an empirical question.

### 7.2.3 Quantitative Analysis of Recruitment Trends

Let us now test whether the available quantitative evidence is compatible with the argument presented above. Based on deductive reasoning and on qualitative evidence, it seems that since the beginning of the 21st Century CCP organizers have focussed on recruiting in urban areas more than in rural areas and that despite formidable obstacles inherent to a Leninist apparatus, party organizers sought to achieve as uniform a party presence as possible. The following quantitative test of these hypotheses is possible thanks to uniquely complete and fine-grained time series data of party member statistics. The data set contains county-year observations and covers all 140 counties<sup>13</sup> of Shandong<sup>14</sup> between 2001 and 2012, that is the Hu Jintao era plus 1 year.<sup>15</sup> Since only five observations are missing<sup>16</sup>, the data set contains the number of party members for 1673 county-year observations.<sup>17</sup>

To put a spotlight on recruitment trends, the dependent variable is defined as the increase in party membership.<sup>18</sup> Party member recruitment statistics exhibit remarkable characteristics. Between 2002 and 2012, counties on average recruited about 500 new party members a year. While most counties carried out recruitment close to that average, numerous counties carried out reorganization campaigns that resulted in recruitment -and very rarely in exclusion- of party members at

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<sup>13</sup>Until 2003 Shandong had only 139 counties, but Lanshan District 嵐山區, which was established in 2004, had already been listed separately in party membership statistics since 2001. For 2012, there are only 138 observations, because two urban districts of Qingdao, Sifang 四方 and Jiaonan 膠南 were abolished during that year.

<sup>14</sup>Since it is cumbersome and maybe impossible to collect similar statistics for all of China, as in previous chapters, the analysis is limited to Shandong.

<sup>15</sup>The Hu era began in 2002, but the 2001 data are useful as a baseline.

<sup>16</sup>The following localities failed to report party membership for certain years: Sishui and Taishan for 2001, Tianqiao for 2005 and 2006, Yanzhou for 2007.

<sup>17</sup>Since there are missing observations for the independent variables as well, additional observations will be lost depending on the specification.

<sup>18</sup>With rare exceptions, party membership is increasing from year to year, in almost every county.



|                                                      | Mean    | Median  | S.D.    | S.D. (w/o outliers) |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------------------|
| Population                                           | 669,060 | 622,000 | 287,909 | 289,130             |
| Members                                              | 32,216  | 30,244  | 14,371  | 14,311              |
| Members 2001                                         | 29,966  | 28,957  | 14,384  | 14,387              |
| Membership Percentage                                | 5.0%    | 4.7%    | 1.5%    | 1.5%                |
| Yearly Membership Change                             | 563     | 446     | 2,214   | 718                 |
| Yearly Membership Change Percentage                  | 2.4%    | 1.6%    | 10%     | 2.7%                |
| Urbanites                                            | 245,325 | 201,866 | 16,085  | 16,017              |
| Urbanization [Urbanites per Population]              | 41%     | 32%     | 28%     | 28%                 |
| Minority Population                                  | 4,514   | 2,582   | 5,418   | 5,347               |
| Minority Presence [Minority per Population]          | 0.7%    | 0.4%    | 0.8%    | 0.9%                |
| Big Religious Organizations                          | 3       | 1       | 9       | 9                   |
| Religious Presence [Organizations per 10,000 People] | 0.05%   | 0.01%   | 0.1%    | 0.1%                |
| Economic Development [million Yuan]                  | 39,308  | 23,963  | 44,910  | 43,780              |

Table 7.1: Descriptive Statistics on Party Recruitment in the 21st Century

different orders of magnitude, reflected in a large standard deviation. Therefore the outliers at the tail-end of the distribution should not be brushed aside as reporting errors.<sup>19</sup> As a robustness check, one estimation of the baseline model excludes outliers, defined as yearly membership percentage change below the 1% quantile and above the 99% quantile, and arrives at essentially similar results.

Data from the 2000 census provide the number of urbanites and the number of people belonging to minority populations. The number of officially registered religious organizations comes from the China Data Center, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, which provides this data through China Geo-Explorer II. I measure the degree of a county's urbanization by dividing the number of residents with an urban hukou by the number of all residents. Similarly, the presence of minorities and the religious presence divides the absolute numbers by population size. The alternative specification in the fourth columns of table 7.2, as a robustness check, uses a different strategy to control for size effects. Instead of membership change, the outcome variable is membership change

<sup>19</sup>Investigating the extreme values, I identified one observation that did appear like a reporting error. Dongping 東平 for 2003 reports half as many party members as the year before and after; the local rectification campaign of that year does not explain such kind of variation. In two other cases the redrawing of jurisdictional boundaries distorted the statistics.

|                                                   | Baseline Model | W/o outliers | Alternative Model |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| CCP Members in 2002 [10,000]                      | -260***        | -77**        | -0.01**           |
| Urbanites [10,000]                                | 9.2*           | 11.3***      |                   |
| Urbanization [Urbanites per Population]           |                |              | 0.062***          |
| Minority Population [10,000]                      | -34            | 54           |                   |
| Minority Presence [Minority per Population]       |                |              | 0.12              |
| Big Religious Organizations                       | -4.7           | -2.7         |                   |
| Religious Presence [Organizations per Population] |                |              | -91               |
| Economic Development [log GRP, 10,000 Yuan]       | 157**          | 72***        | 0.000             |
| Population [10,000]                               | 13             | 1.6          | 0.000             |
| Population Square                                 | -0.032         | 0            | -0.000            |

Table 7.2: Party Recruitment in the 21st Century: Results

divided by total membership in the previous year. The independent variables also are transformed from absolute numbers to percentages as indicated in the table.

The results of the baseline model indicate that for each 10,000 additional urbanites there tend to be 9.2 additional party recruits every year, controlling for population size among other things. The effect is not only significant at the 5% level, but also substantively important. Comparing an entirely urban jurisdiction to an entirely rural jurisdiction, one would expect 615 additional recruits in the urban area, which is twice the average yearly recruitment. Moreover, party organizers successfully work towards convergence, recruiting fewer party members in places that had already many party members at the beginning of the Hu era. Each 10,000 additional initial party members in 2002 are associated with 260 fewer recruits in each of the following years. There is convergence.

As it turns out, growth trends in party membership do indeed reflect the organization builders' twin goals of urbanization as well as evening-out their reach. Importantly, the fact that the party tends to recruit more members in places where it is underrepresented says nothing about the speed at which this evening-out takes place. In other words, the results should by no means obscure the high importance of history to explain spatial variation in party membership patterns. In fact, looking at the bigger picture, current recruitment patterns are only the last layer in a series of

sediment layers accumulated over time. The data speak clearly. Since 25% of all party members were recruited during the Hu era (2002-2012), one might think that recruitment during this time goes a long way in explaining variation in local party presence. If evening out party membership patterns had been the top priority, much could have been done to level the number of party members. From a historical perspective, however, recruitment activities in the last ten years have had only a comparatively small effect on membership patterns. A bivariate regression that models the number of CCP members in 2012 as a linear function of party members in 2001 can explain 90% of the variation. To control for size effects, a regression that models the proportion of party members in the population in 2012 as a function of the proportion in 2001 can still explain 74% of the variation. Despite the fact that party organizers have been seeking to even out the reach of the party, the presence of the party in local communities is still strongly shaped by the past.

### **7.3 Do Historical Legacies Survive Episodes of Great Disruption?**

It is counter-intuitive that the seven years of the Sino-Japanese War would continue to shape the political map of China seventy years later. While it is plausible to argue for a short-term link between Japanese occupation and membership patterns right after the Communist takeover, what seems more questionable is the long-term link between membership patterns right after the Communist takeover and membership patterns today. Leaving the more intuitive short-term effect of Japanese occupation to the following chapter, the remainder of this chapter focusses on the surprising long-term link.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the party took deliberate measures to gain a foothold in more recently conquered areas of the South. As early as 1948, half a year before Communist victory, the party selected tens of thousands of its more capable cadres and trained them to take over and

administer cities of the South (Wakeman, 2007). Despite the impressive number of Southbound cadres, it is highly questionable whether such measures could unmake history and annihilate the difference between areas that the CCP dominated early on, and other areas that turned Communist only in the last months of the Civil War. Without overstating the lingering tension between North and South, there must have been some resentment in the South against a group of people from far away dominating their local governments (Vogel, 1969). To be sure, rotating cadres between different regions had been a long-standing governance technique in China, but the one-way-street of Northerners going to govern the South was unusual. More importantly, individuals who joined the party at a time when prospects for Communist victory were slim must have been different from individuals who became party members after 1949. The ratio of idealists to opportunists must have been much higher in the areas that had been liberated early on. In short, no deliberate policy could erase regional differences in party-societal relationships, inherited from pre-1949.

One might be tempted to disregard historical legacies from the founding moments of the party, given the great upheavals that took place between 1949 and today, which on the face of it may have led to great discontinuities. Mao's personal leadership turned the party upside down, almost entirely paralyzing it at the height of the Cultural Revolution. Transformations resulting from Reform and Opening make one wonder whether under such tumultuous conditions, historical transmission would be possible. Some would suspect that the shocks of these great disruptions hit places independently of their historical past. Once the Cultural Revolution had struck, the pre-1949 revolutionary past would be no more than a remote echo, drowned out by more recent uproars. A place that did not have much revolutionary merit before 1949 might have earned it in a later movement. And rural communities that had stood out for revolutionary achievement pre-1949, may have lost their

good relationship to the party later on.<sup>20</sup> With every wave of history, legacies should increasingly average out, until there is convergence and the party is similarly strong throughout the country. However, places with good revolutionary credentials and governed by old revolutionaries did not have to prove their loyalty and could afford to defy or at least modify orders from Beijing. Even nowadays, local leaders are eager to claim their jurisdiction's revolutionary legacy, trying to "own" the revolution.

If neither deliberate policies nor great disruptions totally erase historical legacies, then the investigation of institutional change must shift focus to slow-moving processes. The complex interplay between forces of sturdy inertia and the forces of dynamic change will determine whether an institution drifts away from historical legacies and at what speed. It might even be that dynamic change itself amplifies historical legacies and contributes rather than diminishes the history effect. An important feature of dynamically changing systems is whether there is convergence or divergence. Economists have developed sharp methodological tools to analyze slow-moving processes of accumulation. Section 7.4 formally conceptualizes the steady flow in and out of the pool of party members in any given jurisdiction. The interplay of these forces can potentially result in the following macro-political outcomes.

## **Five Hypotheses on Historical Legacies and Party Strength**

The first set of three hypotheses are competing views of the impact of history on contemporary outcomes. Hypothesis 1 denies that historical legacies matter, whereas hypotheses 2 and 3 point to different ways in which history might matter. Hypotheses 4 and 5 are competing views on the dynamic effect of history, whether a history effect disappears in a puff or erodes over time.

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<sup>20</sup>For example, one prefecture in Shandong, famous for bravery in the Sino-Japanese war, but also one of only few rural areas where the military intervened in 1989, in the wake of the Tian'anmen crisis.

*Hypothesis 1 (Irrelevance of History): History does not matter any longer. Historical experiences shape an area for a while, but are soon forgotten. As a result, there is rapid convergence: For example, revolutionary base areas today are just as loyal to the CCP as any other area. Places that served as the CCP's power bases in the early People's Republic today are just as supportive as any other place.*

A strong believer in the irrelevance of history and the omnipotence of contemporary party organizers would predict absolute convergence, expecting the disappearance of any kind of variation across China. For example, party membership in the base areas as well as in the CCP's power bases of the 1950s will converge to the national average. In the spirit of modernization theory, the convergence process could be thought of as approximating a growth trajectory, which in the long run tends toward a steady state. By contrast, the moderate version of this hypothesis predicts not absolute, but relative convergence. A set of structural characteristics, such as the geographic setting or the level of economic wealth, prevents absolute convergence. Nevertheless, places with identical structural characteristics will tend to have the same number of party members per capita, whether or not they had been base areas and whether or not they had served as the CCP power base in the 1950s. People who believe in absolute or relative convergence also disagree on how long it takes for the dust to settle and for history to become irrelevant.

*Hypothesis 2 (Historical Continuities): History matters and institutions endure, even across great societal transformations. Loyalty to the CCP is inherited from the parents through upbringing. Therefore, a person living in one of the CCP's power bases of the 1950s is more likely to be a loyal party member. Population in former base areas is also more loyal to the CCP.*

Historical continuities are transmitted (1) through people, (2) through formal institutions and (3) through less tangible informal institutions. As for people, parents heavily influence their off-

spring's politics in many political contexts. The American case is particularly well-researched. Party identification is inherited from generation to generation, even if party identification has lately become more responsive to policy preferences as well (Niemi and Jennings, 1991). Interestingly, party identification is more easily transmitted than political preferences (Jennings and Niemi, 1981). If this result provides any guidance for the non-democratic Chinese context, it implies that old revolutionary families would remain loyal even if the CCP has radically changed its program.

As for informal institutions, the Chinese one-party systems may exhibit complementary transmission mechanisms, which are less relevant in a democratic system. Leaders of the CCP trust some communities more than others, because they had occasion to show their loyalty to the party's cause. Trust can work like a self-fulfilling prophecy: Given their privileged place in the system, there is a lot at stake for these communities, if they disappoint the party's trust. Vice versa, some places may never overcome the self-reinforcing spiral of suspicion and disloyalty.

*Hypothesis 3 (Historical Reversals): History matters, but in unexpected ways. The most faithful supporters of the CCP by now have turned into its most ardent critics. And former power bases have turned into a liability.*

People in the former base areas are growing up listening to stories told by their parents and grandparents, about enthusiastic revolutionaries emerging from the Long March, with promises for a better future. They also hear about the disappointments when land newly acquired during land reform was taken away again in the name of collectivization, when hunger struck the liberated peasants and turmoil tore apart village communities. Most of all, they see that the Communists have turned into technocrats ruling from far away in Beijing. They might have realized that since Jiang Zemin's *Three Represents* principle, that they and the workers are no longer the indisputable core constituency of the party; instead, the party represents the most productive forces of society.

In short, the CCP is not what it used to be. Precisely because of the first-hand experience of their grandparents, embellished by creative peasant narration, people in the base areas do not like real existing socialism. In a sense, hypotheses 2 and 3 are not entirely opposed, because reversal in some sense means that people have remained faithful to themselves: Revolutionaries then and regime critics now.

*Hypothesis 4 (Puff Theory): As conventional wisdom has it, historical legacies do not survive great upheaval. Disruptions such as the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, as well as the political reorientation of Reform and Opening drastically change the political geography of the party's membership base beyond recognition.*

*Hypothesis 5 (Erosion Theory): Historical legacies do not easily go away just because of great political upheaval. Only time slowly erodes the party's uneven historical legacies.*

## 7.4 Party Growth Model and Convergence Test

This section investigates the dynamics of party membership growth between 1956 and 2010. The first goal is to test empirically whether party membership in different provinces is converging over time. If there is convergence, the second goal is to numerically estimate the speed of convergence. The approach builds on well-established theoretical and empirical work in the field of economics, especially the seminal approach by Robert Barro and Xavier Sala-i-Martin (Barro and Sala-i Martin, 1992), which has become a standard methodological tool for economists working on capital accumulation, economic growth, and economic convergence. After presenting a model of party membership growth, I will transform the model into an empirical model, the coefficients of which can be estimated using non-linear least squares.<sup>21</sup> With these estimated coefficients, the speed of

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<sup>21</sup>For tricks to achieve this transformation, I used a standard text book (de la Fuente, 2000).



convergence can be described, finally leading to the half-life of history indicator.

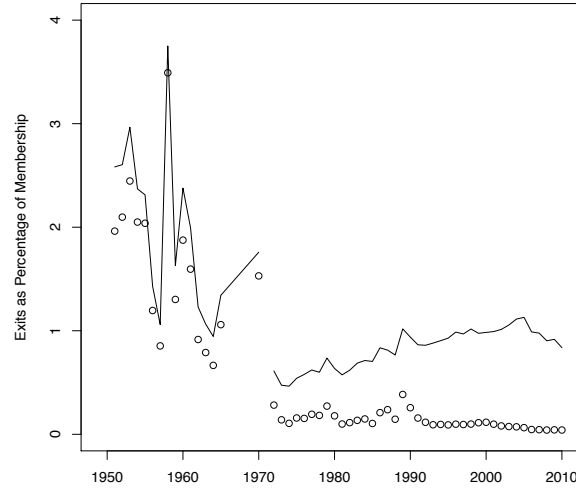
### 7.4.1 Party Growth Model

The mathematical formulation of the party growth model is laid out in the appendix (starting on page 10.3). In essence, the model follows the intuition that certain dynamics of growing *political* capital can fruitfully be analyzed with the same tools as the dynamics of growing *economic* capital. After all accumulation processes share almost universal dynamic characteristics: growth is conditioned on the previously accumulated stock, and there is attrition along the way. In the social sciences, economists have developed the most formally rigorous growth models. Similar dynamics are also encountered in the natural sciences. When it comes to convergence, ordinary regression analysis runs into “Galton’s fallacy”: Contrary to the simple intuition, the coefficients found when regressing average growth rates on initial levels implies little about convergence (Quah, 1993). Explicitly modelling the dynamics of party growth also takes advantage of substantive prior knowledge about the underlying process. The model is valid not only for the CCP, but could be applied more broadly to study growth of membership-based organizations, including for instance churches, NGOs and the mafia.

The model begins with assumptions about annual changes in membership. In any given location, the number of new recruits<sup>22</sup> depends on the number of incumbents, although the model only imposes a very generic functional form. Moreover, the model factors in that there is population growth and that members exit the party, either because they are expelled or because they decease. Mathematical transformations demonstrate that this conceptualization of annual membership changes implies a very specific organizational growth path: The logarithm of party membership

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<sup>22</sup>This number includes cases of re-admitted party members, whose membership had previously been revoked. In the post-Mao era, such cases were on the decline and hit an all-time-low of just 78 individuals in 2009 (CCP Organization Department, 2011).



Note: The line represents all exits. The dots represent expulsions. Source: CCP Organization Department (2011).

Figure 7.3: Party Members Exiting - Purges and Deaths

at any point in time is a weighted average between initial party membership when the People's Republic was founded and party membership some future steady state. The speed at which the influence of initial party membership recedes depends on the parameters of the model.

The model assumes that the proportion of members exiting the party is constant. This assumption holds in the post-Mao era, when we observe only slight fluctuations as a result of demographic trends. The assumption is problematic for the Mao era. From the foundation of the PRC to the Cultural Revolution, each year there were more expulsions than natural deaths leading to party exits. The rate of expulsions varied greatly depending on the political winds and the occurrence of purges (see figure 7.3). Also unrealistically, the model assumes constant population growth. In the early years of the People's Republic, annual population growth accelerated to a 2.8% peak in 1966 and subsequently slowed down to about 0.5% since 2007<sup>23</sup>. While the simplifying assumptions serve the interest of parsimony, the empirical section will estimate separate model coefficients for different historical eras, to account for changing dynamics over time.

<sup>23</sup>World Bank, World Development Indicators

The model has some noteworthy characteristics. First, within the practically relevant range of parameters, convergence proceeds along with a growth trend. In other words, places where the party is strong do not experience membership decrease. Membership grows everywhere. Convergence can still occur if the party grows more slowly in places where it is already strong. Second, the convergence process ends in a steady state. The percentage of party members in society does not cross a fixed upper bound, although the model does not make any prior assumption as to where the upper bound lies. Third, there is no “systematic overshooting”. In other words, the model rules out cases where convergence occurs as with a pendulum, swinging from one extreme to the other, until places reach the steady state. This characteristic makes the convergence test more demanding. With the possibility of “systematic overshooting”, temporary divergence could still be interpreted as a complex adjustment mechanism. Fourth, the specification itself predicts absolute convergence: In the steady state all places have exactly the same membership penetration. To test relative convergence that, say, only places with similar income level have the same membership density, one must include additional control variables. Finally, the two model coefficients are substantively meaningful and readily interpretable: Taken together, the speed-of-convergence coefficient and the steady-state coefficient provide a clear characterization of the dynamic growth process of party membership.

#### **7.4.2 Empirical Estimation of the Party Growth Model**

The empirical task consists of estimating the two coefficients in equation 10.21 (see appendix), namely the steady state  $m^*$  and the speed of convergence  $\lambda$ . After determining these two variables, the model is fully determined and can be used to predict party growth dynamics. Depending on initial party strength, which varies from province to province, the model predicts the growth

trajectory into the future, again different for every province. The first empirical approach consists of using the two endpoints of our time series –that is, initial party strength in 1954 and final party strength in 2010– for every province, and find the best possible fit for the steady state and the speed of convergence coefficients, using non-linear least squares. Based on equation 10.21, the baseline specification becomes

$$m_{2010,i} = e^{-\lambda 54} m_{1956,i} + (1 - e^{-\lambda 54}) m^* + \epsilon_i \quad (7.1)$$

Only including membership statistics at the start date and at the end data of the panel data is not an efficient use of the information. The approach loses membership statistics along the way, which provide further information on membership dynamics. For every province, we possess 11 data points along the growth curve. In order to make use of every time slice, each observation starting in 1965 is linked to the previous observation, so that there are ten time periods that can be analyzed. This procedure increases the number of observations from just under 30 to almost 300 observations.

$$m_{t_2,i} = e^{-\lambda(t_2-1956)} m_{1956,i} + (1 - e^{-\lambda(t_2-1956)}) m^* + \epsilon_i \quad (7.2)$$

The two preceding specifications test absolute convergence. Predicting conditional convergence is a more modest claim to make, but it is probably more realistic. By introducing control variables, the model can be transformed from a model of absolute convergence to a model of relative convergence. In keeping with the analysis above, the specification includes controls for the level of wealth, degree of urbanization, and the presence of minorities. Each of these factors are often said

to determine the strength of the party.

$$m_{t_2,i} = e^{-\lambda(t_2-1956)}m_{1956,i} + (1 - e^{-\lambda(t_2-1956)})m^* + \beta controls + \epsilon_i \quad (7.3)$$

Party membership statistics come from the recent compilation by the CCP Organization Department mentioned above (CCP Organization Department, 2011). Data on the Gross Regional Product of various provinces, which is a control variable, are found in the 2009 edition of the China Statistical Yearbook. The division of the national territory into Coastal, Middle and West follows a widely used Chinese convention.

As table 7.3 shows, the rate of convergence is positive and highly significant at the 0.001 level in all three specifications. In addition, the baseline model of absolute convergence predicts that, extrapolating from the trend over the last 54 years, around 10% of the population will belong to the party in the long-run steady state. In the conditional convergence model with controls, a province located in the Eastern party of China and with an average per-capita income party strength would eventually reach a party strength of 7.9%, with richer provinces hosting significantly more party members than less affluent places, even in the long run.

To illustrate the results, compare Hebei province and Guangxi province (see figure 7.4). The Northern province of Hebei, fully occupied by the Japanese at the very outset of the Sino-Japanese War, was the province where the party was strongest throughout the 50s. By contrast, the Southern province of Guangxi province, located in the South, had barely been touched by Japanese occupation and subsequently was the province where the party was weakest in the 50s. Both provinces belong to the Eastern region, but Hebei is wealthier. In 1956, the difference in party strength

|                                     | baseline<br>growth model<br>(equation 7.1) | with<br>controls<br>(equation 7.2) | using all<br>years<br>(equation 7.3) |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Rate of Convergence $\lambda$       | 0.02***                                    | 0.027***                           | 0.04***                              |
| Steady State Indicator (log) $m^*$  | -2.24***                                   | -2.54***                           | -3.12***                             |
| GRP (log)                           |                                            |                                    | -0.99***                             |
| Share of Rural Population (log)     |                                            |                                    | -0.06***                             |
| Share of Minorities (log)           |                                            |                                    | 0.00                                 |
| Party Strength at Steady State      | 10.6%                                      | 7.9%                               |                                      |
| Half-life of Historical Disparities | 109 years                                  | 66 years                           |                                      |
| Year when Half-life is Reached      | 2065                                       | 2022                               |                                      |

\*\*\*significance at 0.001, \*\* significance at 0.01, \*significance at 0.05

Table 7.3: Empirical Estimate of Party Growth Model Coefficients

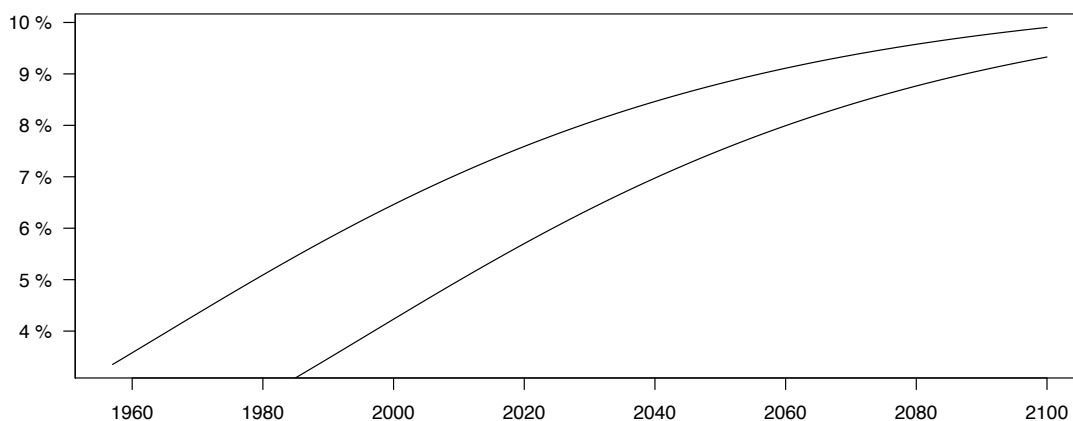


Figure 7.4: Slow Convergence: Membership Density in Two Provinces Over Time

between the two provinces was 371 party members per 10,000 people in Hebei versus 109 members per 10,000, that is, Hebei was a “crimson province” with a party strength more than three times greater than the “pink” province of Guangxi. The baseline growth model predicts absolute convergence moving toward 1.060 party members per 10,000 people. The half-life of the historical disparities between the two provinces is 109 years: It would take Hebei and Guangxi until 2065 to bridge about half of their initial difference. The historical legacy of Japanese occupation on the party organizational network does disappear, albeit at a rather slow pace.

The message from the model of conditional convergence is similar. Again comparing Hebei

|                                         | baseline<br>specification | with<br>controls | logarithmic<br>version |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Party Membership 1956                   | -0.653***                 | -0.723***        |                        |
| Party Membership 1956 (logarithmic)     |                           |                  | -0.015***              |
| Gross Regional Product (per capita)     |                           | 0.001*           |                        |
| Gross Regional Product (per capita log) |                           |                  | 0.004**                |
| Central China                           |                           | -0.000           | 0.001                  |
| Western China                           |                           | 0.001            | 0.002                  |
| Intercept                               | 0.034***                  | 0.033***         | -0.0043***             |

\*\*\*significance at 0.001, \*\* significance at 0.01, \*significance at 0.05

Table 7.4: Alternative Convergence Test Using Linear Model

and Guangxi, this version of the model predicts that there would be a lasting disparity in party strength of 61 party members per 10,000 people, due to underlying economic disparities, which are significant but not great.<sup>24</sup> This time, the half-life of historical disparities would be defined as the number of years until the initial difference has shrunk half-way to the persisting disparity in party membership.<sup>25</sup> In the case of Hebei and Guangxi, the half-life is reached in 2013, that is, 57 years after the departure point in 1956. In order to explain the CCP's regional power base, historical legacies are a key factor.

As an alternative to the non-linear model above, we now use a linear model for a simple convergence test. For convergence to occur, it must be true that party membership has been expanding more rapidly in provinces with a lower density of party members in 1956. The appeal of the linear specification is its simplicity. However, linearity is an unsatisfactory assumption, because extrapolating converging lines into the future, these lines will necessarily cross and begin to diverge thereafter, for purely geometrical reasons. Therefore, the linear specification tests a necessary, but not sufficient convergence condition. In that sense, it will be easier to pass than the non-linear test above. Table 7.4 presents estimation results regressing the average party growth

<sup>24</sup>If we follow economists' prediction of economic convergence, there could not be such a lasting disparity.

<sup>25</sup>Formula:  $Half - Life = Initial\ Difference - \frac{Initial\ Difference - Persisting\ Disparity}{2}$ , in the case of Hebei and Guangxi  $HalfLife = 2.6\% - \frac{2.6\% - 0.6\%}{2}$ .

| Characteristic Event              | Period    | Annual Party Growth | Rate of Convergence |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Great Leap Forward/Famine         | 1956-1965 | 4.6%                | 0.06***             |
| Proletarian Cultural Revolution   | 1965-1973 | 6.0%                | 0.041.              |
| Final Years of the Mao Era        | 1973-1977 | 5.4%                | 0.01                |
| Transition into Post-Mao Era      | 1977-1982 | 2.8%                | 0.09***             |
| Years of Political Liberalization | 1982-1987 | 3.7%                | 0.00                |
| Tian'anmen Crisis                 | 1987-1992 | 2.0%                | 0.01                |
| Years of Political Repression     | 1992-1997 | 2.8%                | 0.03**              |
| Turn to Nationalism               | 1997-2002 | 1.8%                | 0.01                |
| CCP Opens Up to Capitalists       | 2002-2007 | 2.2%                | 0.03*               |
| Contemporary Era                  | 2007-2010 | 2.7%                | 0.04**              |

\*\*\*significance at 0.001, \*\* significance at 0.01, \*significance at 0.05

Table 7.5: Speed of Convergence, by Party Congress Legislative Period

rate against initial membership density. A one percentage point higher membership density in 1956 is on average associated with a 0.7 percentage points slower party growth rate between 1956 and 2010, controlling for geographical region and per capita income. This result is statistically highly significant and the effect is large in practical terms, since small differences in growth rates translate into huge differences over time. For example, Guangxi had been the province with 1.1% of the population being party members in 1956, at the time the lowest membership density in the country. For the time until 2010, the model predicts an average yearly growth rate of 2.7%, which happens to correspond precisely to the actual growth rate. The model predicts that party membership would have grown only by 2.1% a year if the province had started out with 1.9% of the population being party members, which was the national average. Without the convergence effect, party membership would have grown only to 3.3% by 2010, but with convergence effect to 4.5%. CCP growth dynamics easily pass a linear convergence test.

Up to this point, we have analyzed party growth as an average over 54 years, thereby considerably simplifying the crooked path of the CCP's history. The panel data allow us to trace party dynamics from one Party Congress to the next. Before the 11th Party Congress in 1977, marking



the end of the Mao era, legislative periods were irregular; thereafter, the legislative period was five years. When was convergence unusually fast, and when unusually slow? Table 7.5 estimates the speed of convergence for every legislative period, using the baseline non-linear growth model with controls (equation 10.21). As it turns out, in four out of ten periods, there was no statistically significant convergence. During the early period of the Great Leap Forward and Famine (1956-1965), during the transition into the post-Mao era (1977-1982), during the years of political repression (1992-1997), as well as in most recent times, a very strong trend of convergence prevailed. Interestingly, during the Cultural Revolution, convergence was only mildly significant; this defies conventional wisdom, according to which the Cultural Revolution was a sharp break with the past. Instead, party rectification campaigns and party construction drives following the 9th Party Congress had the intended effect of revitalizing the old party organization and reversing the impact of the Cultural Revolution. Convergence comes in spurts, but it never ceases for a long time. The privileged relationship that some areas have traditionally entertained with the party as a legacy from the Sino-Japanese War is a slowly dissipating legacy.

### 7.4.3 The Disappearance of Historical Legacies

If the party growth model is correct, after how many years would political scientists cease to perceive the history effect? When are historical legacies no longer empirically perceptible? Starting in what year would empirical observers make a type I error, that is mistakenly rejecting the null hypothesis that historical legacies continue to influence the present? The following analysis consists of three steps:

1. History between 1956 and 2056 plays out 50 times, according to the party growth model, including the stochastic term  $\epsilon$ . The simulation is based on the baseline model (equation 7.1)

with the coefficient estimates in table 7.3 (column 2).<sup>26</sup> The result are 50 panel data sets of party membership in each province, each representing one particular realization of history.

2. In each even year between 1958 and 2056, there are 50 political scientists studying the history effect. Each one studies the impact of the past on contemporary party membership, looking at one out of the 50 particular realizations of history. Specifically, they all run the simple linear regression of contemporary party membership on party membership in 1956 (all logarithmic). There will be disagreement for two reasons: (1) The further away the political scientist lives from the critical juncture, the harder it is to perceive any history effect. (2) Because of random disturbance, some political scientists happen to encounter stochastic noise.
3. We summarize the findings of all 50 political scientists, across time as in figure 7.5. For each year, how big is the history effect that each of the 50 political scientists in charge for that year identified? How statistically significant is the result typically? What is the likely range of party member development in the “crimson” province of Hebei and the “pink” province of Guangxi? How quickly do the two provinces converge?

Take the 50 political scientists who work with data from 2010. Each one of them looks at a different, hypothetical realization of history; hence their results vary. On average, they find a history effect of 0.28, with 90% of the scholars finding a history effect in the [0.15; 0.37] range. Their results are significant with an average t-value of 3.5 (range:[1.6; 4.9]). My own estimation, studying the actual realization of history, yields a history effect of 0.31 with a t-value of 3.68, well within the range of typical results.

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<sup>26</sup>I also assume that the standard error is normally distributed with mean zero and constant standard deviation equal to the variance of the residual in the non-linear regression.

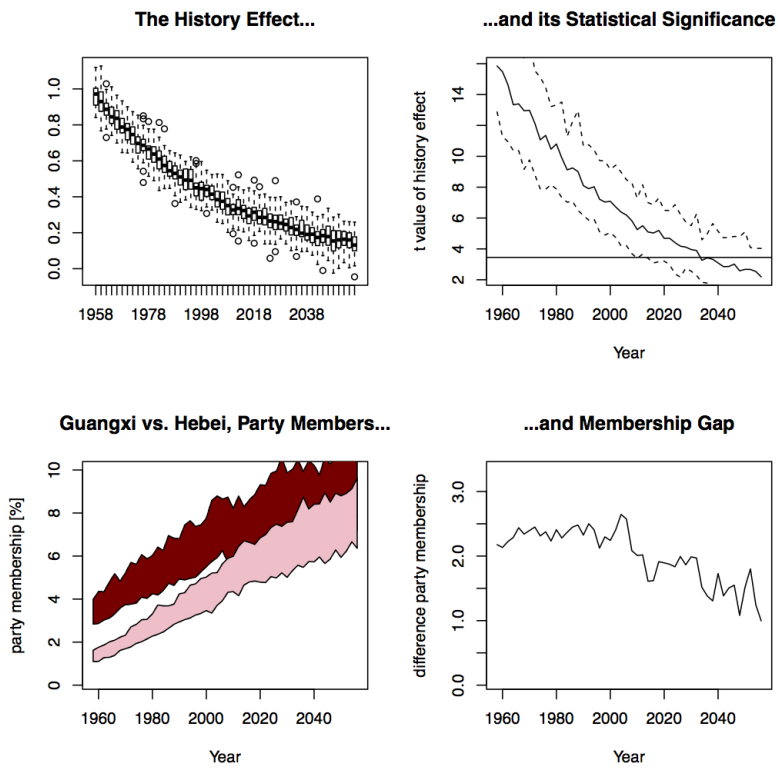


Figure 7.5: Simulation of 50 Realizations of History

Let's look at each panel of figure 7.5 in turn. The box plot summarizes the estimate of the history effect by political scientists in various years. In the early years of the *People's Republic*, regional patterns of party membership were closely associated with membership patterns immediately after the Communist takeover. By now, the absolute size of the effect has shrunk, but analysts would correctly sign the history effect. In 2042, for the first time more than 5% of all analysts will identify the sign of the history effect incorrectly, pointing to a reversal of fortune. The next panel summarizes the statistical significance of the various findings. The horizontal line marks the significance test at a 0.001 level. Historical significance of the history effect becomes tenuous as early as in the year 2000, although a majority of analysts will still find a statistically highly significant result until 2020.

The two lower panels illustrate how convergence plays out in two provinces. Shaded areas indicate typical developments of party membership in the two provinces, comprising 25 out of 50 simulated historical pathways. The lower left graph shows a converging trend that will eventually approach 10%, differences in party membership became hard to discern around the year 2020. The lower right panel displays the membership gap, starting with a gap of just over 2 percentage points in 1956 and gradually oscillating down to 1 percentage point gap by 2056. Even averaging out over all 50 simulated scenarios, the random disturbance remains large, and the trend only becomes visible after the year 2000. Finally, a small single-digit gap translates into a great relative difference. The essence of the simulation visualizes that historical legacies persist over several generations before the statistical afterlife of the history effect disappears.

## 7.5 Conclusion

As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, a variety of important local governance outcomes in China depend on the strength of local party networks. For example, the ability to contain turmoil during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the ability to enforce the One-Child Policy (1979-2013) was greater in China's "crimson provinces" than in its "pink provinces". This chapter asked why the CCP today is so much more present in some parts of its realm than in other parts? The answer takes us to revolutionary history. When the Communists took over in 1949, war contingencies shaped their power base. The central claim of this chapter is that the uneven patterns of the immediate post-war era continue to shape the CCP's territorial presence today, despite great political upheaval and despite the party-state's attempts at penetrating society more evenly. The party still has most members in areas that Japan occupied during wartime.

Local party strength is the result of a combination of Anti-Japanese War legacies and strategic considerations in the present. Contemporary party organizers are focussing on urban areas, because that is where the party state faces the most governing challenges. If the legacy of Japanese occupation, as reflected in the membership patterns during the first years of the People's Republic of China, remains the single most important *historical* factor shaping China's political landscape today, the degree of urbanization stands out as the most important *contemporary* factor shaping the CCP's membership base today: The CCP is becoming more present in urban areas and retreating from the countryside. While the dynamic analysis is built on an absolute convergence, if current trends are any guide, a relative convergence model would indicate a lasting imbalance between CCP presence in the cities and in the countryside.

To analyze the dynamics of change, I formulate a party growth model and use previously highly classified statistics to estimate its parameters. The half-life of history, defined as the time it takes

for the effect of Japanese occupation to be cut in half, is about sixty to ninety years. In physics, the half-life period measures the speed of decay. Here it reflects the slowly declining influence of historical legacies, which are more context-specific than in physics. There is a slow-moving process of convergence away from historically conditioned patterns. These dynamics are reminiscent of Kathleen Thelen's proposition that slow institutional change in "normal" times may be more consequential than change in times of crisis (Thelen, 2004). The dynamic model simplifies a complex process, since historical legacies do not decay in a linear fashion, being manipulated in a myriad ways (Perry, 2012a). It is also clear that not all legacies decay over time. For example, Eastern Europe has experienced the swift comeback of pre-Communist legacies, which had been temporarily swept under the table during the time of Soviet dominance (Ekiert and Ziblatt, 2012). Going forward, we might see slower decay of the anti-Japanese war legacy. Since 1991, the government has promoted a Patriotic Education Campaign to kindle anti-Japanese sentiment and prop up CCP legitimacy (Zhao, 1998). However, the campaign is nation-wide and seems to affect places indiscriminately, whether they had actually experienced Japanese violence or not. Therefore, the local effect of actual anti-Japanese war experience—as opposed to the effect of textbook indoctrination—will likely continue to decay.

This chapter contributes to research on the origins of effective parties, showing that anti-colonial struggle can be a long-lasting source of party strength. Are Communist regimes more durable in countries where they have mobilized peasant masses on patriotic grounds, during their party's ascent to power? Does anti-colonial struggle produce strong parties? It is hard to generalize from the small number of surviving Communist regimes. But my subnational analysis of the Chinese case suggests that the legacy of peasant mobilization on patriotic, anti-Japanese grounds does contribute to regime resilience even today. Legacies from the Anti-Japanese War continue to loom

large in Chinese politics and continue to shape the Chinese party-state. Regional patterns of the CCP's membership base carry the imprint of the past. Since rank-and-file party members are vital for the functioning of the party-state, we can say that China's regime strength still flows from successful patriotic peasant mobilization before 1949. As the following chapter will show, legacies of redistribution may have turned against the party state, but legacies of peasant anti-Japanese mobilization remain a source of grassroots party strength today.

## Chapter 8

# War Contingencies at the Origin of the CCP's Power Base

沒有你們皇軍侵略大半個中國，  
中國人民就不能團結起來對付你  
們，中國共產黨就奪取不了政權

If it wasn't for your Imperial  
Army invading most of China,  
the Chinese people could not  
have united to deal with you  
and the CCP would not have  
been able to seize power.

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Mao Zedong<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Remarks at the occasion of a meeting with representatives from the Social Democratic Party of Japan, led by Sasaki Kōzō and others, on July 10, 1964 (Mao, 1969, p.533). The source of this quote is Red Guard material, that is, confidential government documents confiscated and published by young Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution in their attempt to publicize the most “pure” version of Mao’s thinking. The page number refers to an edition found in the library of the Harvard-Yenching Institute under call number 4292.11 2135.643(2).



Geographic patterns of party membership in the wake of the Communist victory of 1949 still shape the party's power base today, as described in the preceding chapter. Exploring the origins of the party's power base, this chapter finds that war contingencies stand out as the paramount determinant for party membership geographic patterns of membership in 1949. The effect of war contingencies overrides other potential determinants of Communist party growth, such as landholding patterns or center/periphery divides. This chapter unpacks the notion of "war contingencies", conducting qualitative as well as a quantitative analyses. A key result is that patterns of Japanese occupation go a long way in explaining the membership patterns at the foundation of the People's Republic. By contrast, the establishment of Communist base areas had an ambiguous, even reverse effect on the evolution of grassroots party organizations down the line. Today the party is *not* more present in the former base areas. As one would expect in light of the previous chapter, the transmission of the Japanese occupation effect is mediated primarily through the Leninist party organization. The war was inscribed in the foundation of the party apparatus, which reproduced geographically similar membership patterns from generation to generation, thereby creating a strong link between contemporary outcomes and past events.

As the epigraph quote reminds us, Mao Zedong recognized that the Japanese invasion provided the CCP with a golden opportunity for mobilizing the masses and for revival after the near-defeat in Southern China, resulting in the Long March retreat to Northern China. Political scientists like Chalmers Johnson agreed with this evaluation (Johnson, 1962). This chapter takes the argument a step further, drawing out its implications for sub-national variation in the strength of Communist mobilization. Little is known about how patterns of Japanese presence were linked to patterns of local party organization. To explicate the link between the Japanese presence and organization-building outcomes, this chapter surveys existing scholarship and primary material, before moving

to a quantitative analysis, which takes into account that Japanese occupation in the statistical sense was not a random treatment. While Japanese occupation is by no means the only determinant for the strength of local party organization, it goes a long way in explaining the uneven presence of the party. The chapter also draws attention to the fact that the Japanese occupation effect is distinct from what could be called a base area effect.

## **8.1 Party Member Recruitment, 1921-1949**

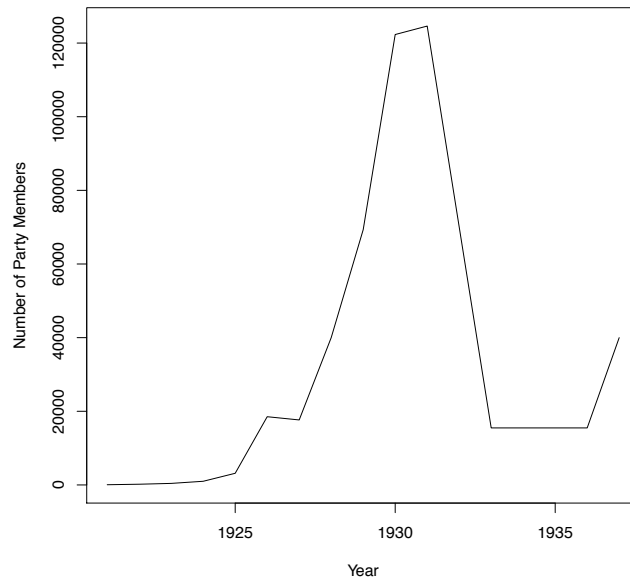
Between the foundation of the CCP in 1921 and its victory in 1949, the development of the party can be divided into three distinct phases of popular mobilization and membership recruitment. The initial phase, which lasted until the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, ended in near-defeat and arguably left few historical traces. From then on until the end of World War II the party made its breakthrough. The years 1937-1945 were the formative period of the CCP, which continues to shape the geographical patterns of party membership. The Civil War between the CCP and the incumbent Nationalist Party saw further rapid expansion of the party's membership base, but as we will see in this section, even that era was shaped by Japanese occupation, especially by the void left after the departure of the Imperial Army. Japanese presence not only shielded the CCP from persecution and allowed it to mobilize the rural population. In addition, the Japanese departure left a void which the Communist party would fill more quickly and more effectively than the Nationalist Party.

### **8.1.1 Recruitment in the Base Areas**

The Republican era (1911-1949) was the CCP's formative period, setting the stage for the party's foundation and growth. In particular, historical legacies from the Sino-Japanese War of 1937 to

1945 crucially shaped party organization and ideology. The legacies of Japanese occupation are present in contemporary China on many levels. Innumerable TV series as well as museums around the country -big and small, sophisticated and dull, dovish and hawkish- not only keep this historical memory alive, but draft it for legitimizing CCP rule. The impact of the Sino-Japanese War is also apparent in contemporary party strength across China. The CCP's rise began with the Sino-Japanese War, which mobilized the peasant masses into politics and in that sense brought political modernity to China. Finally, as waves of anti-Japanese mobilization remind us, even these days the party holds legitimacy as a defender of the nation, a reputation it earned during the Sino-Japanese War. This war not only determined regional patterns of party domination directly after the Communist takeover of 1949. Implicit, privileged relationships of loyalty and trust that the party developed historically with people in some areas of the country, forged during the crucible of war, have been preserved until today; despite efforts to achieve more even party strength and despite the many tumultuous upheavals between 1949 and 2010.

Its fluctuating membership, peaking at 120,000 members in 1930/1931 (see figure 8.1) reflects the unstable power base of the party during this early period. Until settling down in the famous Yan'an base area in 1935, the CCP was on the run. The First Party Congress of 1921 began in a Shanghai back alley, but after French police intervention had to abscond to a lake outside the city, so that the foundation of the party was declared while floating on a boat. As pressure from the secret police mounted, the CCP soon had to abandon the cities and the workers, turning to the countryside and the peasants instead. Soviets were established and subsequently crushed in the provinces of Anhui, Jiangxi and Zhejiang. Before long, increasingly intense military operations sent the CCP on the Long March, passing through most provinces in Southern China and coming into touch with minorities in Western China. At each stop, the CCP left behind its agents for



Source: Official party history (CCP, 2000, vol.1 p.39 and vol.2 上 p.68).

Figure 8.1: Party Membership During the Pre-War Period

underground work and for setting up depots with weapons and provisions. Memories from this early period of revolutionary struggle were revived after the Communist takeover. During this early stage of its struggle, the party left only a limited impact on its numerous but temporary host communities. Membership gains during that early period turned out to be elusive. According to one scholar there was even another peak in membership in 1933, no longer reported in the official statistics today, when the party for a short period of time had 300,000 members (Schurmann, 1966). In any case, five years later it had been decimated to just 15,000 members, recovering only slightly to 40,000 members once settled in Yan'an. The CCP was struggling for survival, not building a lasting organizational network.

### 8.1.2 Japanese Invasion Kickstarts the Party

It was the Second Sino-Japanese War that provided the party with a historical opportunity to break out of its remote base area in Yan'an to establish a lasting organizational network across Northern China. In the space of eight years, its membership exploded from just over 40,000 members to 1.2 million members (CCP, 2000, vol.3 上 p.1). For one thing, faced with the military challenge from Japan, the Nationalist government had little choice but to give the Communists some breathing space and enlist them in the war effort, resulting in a “United Front” policy. But this policy does not explain the remarkable geographical correspondence between Japanese-occupied territory and Communist strongholds, clearly emerging in the late 40s.<sup>2</sup> This correspondence was a result of the CCP’s success in turning Japanese occupation into a powerful tool for peasant mobilization. The CCP grew most rapidly behind enemy lines in Japanese-occupied areas; the invasion of mainland China facilitated the quick expansion of CCP control, since Japanese occupation became the rallying call that allowed the party to mobilize peasants for the first time to take an active role in modern political life, on nationalistic grounds (Johnson, 1962).

One of the provinces where this process unfolded in a typical way was Shandong. The Japanese army invaded the province at the end of 1937, shortly after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Protection of civilian lives and properties was not a priority. In fact, the first victims after Japanese units crossed into the province were a group of peasants who had been drafted to reinforce the ditches and who were so removed from the military command structures that they were informed neither of the impending arrival of Japanese units, nor of the retreat of the Nationalist army, which obviated the need for ditches. The peasants were put to death on the spot. The iron fist of the Japanese occupiers did not win them hearts and minds. In areas invaded

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<sup>2</sup>Compare Wu Yuexing’s map that overlays the Japanese occupied area and the Communist base areas (Wu, 1999, p. 201).

beginning in 1937, Tokyo did not plan to establish Japanese settlements, so that rural popular acquiescence seemed dispensable. The Japanese presence almost immediately brought instability. As people's livelihoods were threatened, peasants transformed into floating bandits, as so often was the case in Shandong's history. A downward spiral of widespread violence and economic downturn had begun.

In Shandong as in many other provinces, the Nationalist government had lost its credibility as a defender against Japanese invasion. The powerful governor of Shandong, Han Fujū, had brought some prosperity to the province, even if he was feared for his brutal methods. The life of farmers throughout the province improved greatly as a result of the governor's successful efforts to suppress bandits and establish civilian order, often with the help of locally organized militia. As streets were repaired, Shandong was also economically recovering from decades of instability. In the early Republican period, large numbers of immigrants left the province and settled in China's Northeastern territories. When Han Fujū took over Shandong, the stream of migration was reversed. But the governor was powerless in the face of Japanese encroachment. Ordinary people would hardly have been able to appreciate Han's strategic efforts to ward off the dangers of Japanese occupation. What counted was that, at the end, Han Fujū's forces left without even putting up a fight, making the way free for the Japanese. The Nationalist government reinforced this impression by labeling the governor a traitor and executing him; a decision that had to do with Han Fujū's decade-long defiance of government policies. All in all, the message transpiring in the countryside was: the Nationalist government, as represented by Han Fujū, was dysfunctional and unable to protect the prosperous province from the destructive Japanese presence.

The Communists gradually became an important element in people's strategies of survival. Villages did not turn Communist overnight. At first, they may have offered food or shelter to

Communist fighters as a way of hedging their bets and taking out an insurance against yet another armed group. Support for the Communists was not an exclusive strategy, villages could try to seek some kind of arrangement with the Communists, the Japanese, the Nationalists and other bandits all at the same time.<sup>3</sup> When the Japanese army focused on controlling some broad territorial corridors along the railways, it might not have been apparent to local community leaders in more remote places that sheltering Communist fighters could be an extremely risky strategy. When confrontation with the Japanese became unavoidable, throwing in their lot with the Communists might have promised a way out. Signing up with the Red Army was not necessarily about sacrificing oneself for a higher cause.

The Communists' higher cause was, nonetheless, an additional factor. What made the Communist appeal distinctly modern and fundamentally different from the classic appeal of local militias or bandit armies was that for the first time, the CCP mobilized ordinary peasants on political grounds as well. The modern version of a peasant army needed a cause, and as it turned out, Communism and patriotism against the Japanese provided an effective ground for peasant mobilization. Beyond simply serving the interests of poor farmers through land reform and security interests of Communists, patriotic Communism appealed to peasants as agents of a modern political arena in unprecedented ways.

Areas in Southwestern China, far away from Japanese imperial expansion, were the mirror image of developments in the North. To be sure, Japanese occupation did have a systemic effect on the Southern economy as well. But there was no tangible presence, Japanese occupation occurred beyond the experiential horizon of the peasants and was thus not effective as a rallying call. Party organization could not prosper in the same way. Interestingly, the places in the South where

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<sup>3</sup>A detailed history of Zouping County during the Republican era reflects the gradual rise of the Communists (Shen, 1997, chapter 4).

the Japanese were present, namely industrially developed port cities like Shanghai, did have a large and flourishing underground Communist movement, despite intense persecution in an urban environment. Official Shanghai party history describes the ten years prior to Japanese occupation as an era where the party experienced “big ups and downs” (CCP Organization Department, 1991, p.85), but the period of Japanese occupation as one of “steady growth” (Mei and Qiu, 2001, p.305). Having been reduced to fewer than 200 members on the eve of the Sino-Japanese War, in the first two years of Japanese occupation party membership in Shanghai grew tenfold.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that Japanese occupation worked as a catalyst for mobilization not only with peasants in the countryside, but also with intellectuals and workers in the cities.

The following years of Civil War between Communists and Nationalists did little to fundamentally alter this regional pattern. Party membership at the time of the Communist takeover had much more to do with the time of Japanese occupation than with the Civil War. First, Japanese occupation lasted twice as long, thus membership networks had more time to grow. Second, during the Japanese occupation, party membership grew 30-fold, from an initial 40,000 in 1937 to 1.2 million in April 1945, whereas during the Civil War it expanded only three-fold (Schurmann, 1966). Third, and most importantly, even as the frontline during the Civil War was changing, the Communists generally remained strongest in places that they had already taken over by 1945 and could only advance in the Nationalists’ heartland in the South during the last few months of the war. In short, when we talk about pre-1949 legacies of party strength, for the most part the geography of party expansion followed the geography of Japanese domination.

After the Japanese defeat in 1945, the Communists consolidated their grip on formerly Japanese territories. The CCP quickly stepped into the power vacuum left behind by the retreating Japanese

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<sup>4</sup>To be precise, between May 1937 and October 1939, party membership grew from 160 to 1610 (Mei and Qiu, 2001, p.305).



before Nationalist troops could arrive from the South. Now the party took over the railroads and connected base areas that had been isolated from one another, precariously linked via secret transportation channels. All of Northern China, with the exception of some major cities like Beijing and Tianjin, became the power base from which the CCP was able to wage and win the Civil War. The only Japanese-occupied territories where the CCP remained unsuccessful were those in Southern China. These territories were small compared to the Japanese-occupied territories in Northern China and presented a logistical challenge to the CCP, since the areas were disconnected patches of land, with Nationalist-controlled areas in-between. At the end of the Second World War, the geographic overlap between Japanese occupation and party strength was almost perfect.

### **8.1.3 Recruitment During the Civil War, 1945-1949**

For Manchuria the bottom line is the same as for the rest of the country: Japanese occupation allowed the Communists to establish a strong local party organization long before their victory in 1949. However, there are notable differences in how this effect worked. Japan's influence in Manchuria dated back to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/05 and culminated in the foundation of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukoku in 1932. By the time the CCP had made a close escape from annihilation in the South thanks to its Long March in 1935, Manchuria was not only firmly under Japanese control, but was also doing relatively well economically, making it extremely difficult for Communist agents to attract followers to their cause.

The sudden breakdown of Japanese authority at the end of World War II provided the Communists with an opportunity to make inroads into Manchuria. Japanese occupation had kept the KMT out of Manchuria and the hasty departure of the Japanese occupiers created a void, which the Communists knew how to exploit. To be sure, the KMT was competing to fill the void, airlifting

troops into major cities of previously Japanese-controlled territory (Academia Sinica, Institute of Modern History, 2000). Fierce battles between CCP and KMT forces in Manchuria led to large numbers of civilian casualties, such as during the Communist siege of Changchun in 1948. While Communist superiority in Manchuria was not a foregone conclusion, the fact that KMT forces were also just arriving in the theater was a decisive strategic advantage for the Communists forces, compared to the consolidated KMT presence in Southern China. At the end of the day, Communist tactics of encircling the cities from the countryside, now well-rehearsed, worked well in Manchuria, not least because of open support from Soviet troops that had crossed the border at the time of Japanese defeat. Shortly after the Japanese surrender, the CCP established a strong presence in Manchuria's countryside. Japanese occupation accounts for a strong presence of the Communist party in Manchuria in 1949, both because occupation had kept the KMT out and because the end of occupation had created a political vacuum in 1945.

Also outside Manchuria, Communist recruitment occasionally faced counties with a strong Japanese presence that preceded the Second Sino-Japanese War. In Shandong in particular, there were places that resembled a "Manchuria away from Manchuria". As a result of migration from Shandong to Manchuria and back, there were strong personal ties to the Japanese puppet state. The Manchurian Railway Company, which was at the heart of Japanese colonization efforts, was actively recruiting workers in certain counties in Shandong. In the year before the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the company had recruited over 200,000 workers throughout Shandong, so that in some counties a substantial proportion of the rural population had close connections to the Japanese. Table 8.1 displays the percentage of households with at least one member working for the company (Tianjin CASS 1, p.248). Even without the Manchuria connection, in Zaozhuang in Southern Shandong, thanks to a coal mine, locals had encountered Japanese first as employers

| county                      | total recruits 1936 | rural household with<br>at least one member working<br>for the company |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ye Xian (today: Laizhou)    | 20,375              | 55%                                                                    |
| Huang Xian (today: Longkou) | 15,752              | 30%                                                                    |
| Muping                      | 15,660              | 20%                                                                    |
| Penglai                     | 11,857              | 47%                                                                    |
| Wendeng                     | 11,100              | 16%                                                                    |

Table 8.1: A “Manchuria-Style” Japanese Presence in Certain Counties of Shandong

and only later as soldiers of an invading army.

The case of Manchuria gives rise to a more general observation. Japanese occupation had two distinct effects on the chances for the CCP to mobilize local followers. First, the invasion displaced rural populations and provided a rallying call. Second, the Japanese presence kept the KMT government out, creating a political vacuum after Japan’s defeat in World War II. In the areas most tightly under Japanese control, the CCP profited from the second effect only. This is true not only for Manchuria, but also for many county seats, which in contrast to their rural surroundings were often under tight Japanese control. In areas where the Japanese were present, but where there was still room for the CCP to operate, such as much of the Shandong countryside, both effects came into play, creating optimal conditions for the party to thrive. Reversely, most difficult for the CCP were territories where the Japanese had never reached.

## 8.2 The Japanese Occupation Effect

To the question why at the moment of the Communist takeover in 1949 some places ended up with so many more party members than others, an exhaustive answer would include a detailed description of war contingencies. The goal of this section is more modest, in the interest of parsimony, limiting itself to one aspect of these war contingencies: the degree of Japanese occupation. While some

areas of China were fully under Japanese control, other areas were barely touched by the military operations of the Imperial Army. This one variable stands out as a good predictor and goes a long way to explain geographic patterns of party membership after the foundation of the People's Republic. This section first provides a province-by-province overview, putting the account of the previous section on a map and thereby demonstrating the close linkage between occupation patterns and membership patterns. As a next step, this section evaluates to what extent membership patterns persist over time, and whether there is a continuing, direct effect on membership patterns today. It turns out the effect of Japanese occupation is almost entirely mediated by the initial membership patterns in the early years of the People's Republic. Historical transmission occurs through the mechanical inertia of the Leninist organization structure.

### **8.2.1 War Contingencies, Province-by-Province**

The description of the war contingencies suggests three reasons why the Communist party was able to build up a strong organizational base in areas under Japanese occupation. Japanese occupation functioned as a shield from persecution of the revolutionaries by the incumbent government, with Japanese persecution being not nearly as dangerous to the party as persecution by the Nationalist Party. Second, Japanese occupation allowed the CCP to mobilize rural citizens who had been dislocated by the war on nationalistic or xenophobic grounds. Third, in places that were firmly under Japanese control, especially Manchuria, recruitment efforts by the party during the time of Japanese occupation were limited. But as soon as Japan retreated at the end of World War II, the Communists were able to step into the political vacuum left by the Japanese.

To compare the degree of occupation and party presence, the following table 8.2 for each province presents the estimated percentage of territory under Japanese control. Comparing maps, both by

scholars in Chinese history (Wu, 1999) who base their research on Communist maps and by scholars in Japanese history (Gordon, 2003) who base their research on Japanese military maps, it appears that there is a widely shared consensus as to the reach of the Imperial Army's presence. Party membership statistics for the early years of the People's Republic are more problematic. In order to assemble the best available data for the year 1949, I gleaned information from various sources. While the results are essentially the same as the ones presented here, the problem with this approach is that definitional standards were not fixed at that transitional stage, creating problems in particular with the month of reference. At a time of quick party growth, this creates important distortions. Instead, a more reliable approach is to use data from 1956. For the purposes of determining the size of seats allotted to each province, membership statistics are collected at times of party congresses. The Seventh Party Congress, held briefly before the Communist takeover in 1949, was a chaotic event that did not allow the compilation of good membership statistics. The Eighth Party Congress, held in 1956 provides the earliest reliable data.

Using data from 1956 not only increases the accuracy of party statistics. It is also a much harder test as to whether Japanese occupation really had an effect. Between 1949 and 1956, membership of the CCP tripled, so that some regional convergence in party strength could occur, blurring initial differences. Nevertheless, as it turns out, party statistics from 1956 continued to closely reflect the patterns of Japanese occupation. Despite the impact of the Civil War and despite post-1949 efforts to boost membership in areas where the hold of the party had been more tenuous, membership patterns clearly reflected legacies of Japanese occupation.

Table 8.2 ranks all provinces according to party membership density in 1956. Column three indicates the extent of Japanese occupation. The ten provinces with lowest party penetration are all situated in Southern China and did not come in close contact with Japanese occupation; if they

| Province       | Party<br>Members<br>per 10,000 | Percentage of<br>Territory under<br>Japanese Control | Year of first<br>Japanese<br>Occupation |
|----------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Beijing        | 436                            | complete                                             | 1937                                    |
| Hebei          | 328                            | complete                                             | 1937                                    |
| Shanxi         | 308                            | 90%                                                  | 1937/38                                 |
| Shanghai       | 305                            | complete                                             | 1937                                    |
| Tianjin        | 284                            | complete                                             | 1937                                    |
| Heilongjiang   | 266                            | Manchuria                                            | 1931                                    |
| Liaoning       | 252                            | Manchuria                                            | 1931                                    |
| Shandong       | 225                            | complete                                             | 1937/38                                 |
| Inner Mongolia | 222                            | 30%                                                  | < 1937                                  |
| Gansu          | 218                            | none                                                 | n/a                                     |
| Qinghai        | 208                            | none                                                 | n/a                                     |
| Jilin          | 196                            | Manchuria                                            | 1931                                    |
| Xinjiang       | 175                            | none                                                 | n/a                                     |
| Jiangsu        | 172                            | complete                                             | 1938                                    |
| Shaanxi        | 170                            | none                                                 | n/a                                     |
| Jiangxi        | 167                            | 15%                                                  | 1939                                    |
| Henan          | 151                            | 80%                                                  | 1944                                    |
| Anhui          | 142                            | 80%                                                  | 1938                                    |
| Fujian         | 140                            | < 10%                                                | 1938/41                                 |
| Guangdong      | 137                            | 20%                                                  | 1944/45                                 |
| Hubei          | 132                            | 30%                                                  | 1938                                    |
| Yunnan         | 129                            | < 10%                                                | 1942                                    |
| Guangxi        | 120                            | none                                                 | n/a                                     |
| Sichuan        | 119                            | none                                                 | n/a                                     |
| Zhejiang       | 118                            | 20%                                                  | gradually                               |
| Guizhou        | 116                            | < 10%                                                | 1944                                    |
| Hunan          | 109                            | 50%                                                  | 1944                                    |

Source: Internal Party Statistics (CCP Organization Department, 2011) in combination with widely accessible population data (China Data Online). Areas under occupation and years of occupation derived from a map (Wu, 1999, p.198).

Table 8.2: Japanese Occupation and Party Presence in 1956

did have contact, then only late in the war. By contrast, the three provinces forming the Japanese puppet state of Manchuria all have a very high membership density of 2% or more. Most of the ten provinces with highest party penetration had been fully under Japanese control. Most strikingly, the ranking of provinces closely reflects the progression of Japanese occupation over time.

The greatest outliers are Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang, whose relatively strong party presence is not related to Japanese occupation, but to geo-strategic interests of the USSR. These areas would have been the bridgehead for Moscow to secure influence in China in case the Chinese Communist Party lost to the Nationalist Party. The other unusual case is the province of Sha'anxi, where the famous and large Yan'an base area was located. While it confirms the theory that the absence of Japanese occupation made mobilization difficult, it seems counter-intuitive that the party would be so weak in its former base area. This receives further investigation in section 8.3. Overall, the findings not only confirm what historians already knew, namely that Japanese occupation gave the party an opportunity to escape from extinction and make a strong comeback. They also refine this understanding by demonstrating that the link between Japanese occupation and party strength was also of a geographical nature: Places that experienced occupation had a stronger party presence than places without occupation.

### **8.2.2 Mediating the Japanese Occupation Effect**

The close relationship between Japanese occupation and geographic patterns of party membership, apparent in table 8.2, remains strong even today, after controlling for the confounding factors of population size and economic performance, as a simple regression analysis confirms. The specification predicts the number of CCP members in a province in 2012, based on the percentage of its territory that was occupied by the Japanese army, while accounting for the size of its population

|                                        | Direct Effect | With Mediator |
|----------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| occupation [% of provincial territory] | 417,556***    | 40,840.       |
| party presence (1956)                  |               | 0.9***        |
| population (1956)                      | 419***        | 71***         |
| GDP (1956)                             | 1,235         | 2,216***      |

\*\*\* significance at 0.005, \*\* significance at 0.01, \* significance at 0.05, . significance at 0.1

Table 8.3: The Party Apparatus as the Mediator of the Occupation Effect

and its economic development.<sup>5</sup> The effect is both highly significant and substantively important. As the coefficient displayed in table 8.3 indicates, a province that experienced full occupation by the Imperial Army is associated with 420,000 additional CCP members, compared to a province that did not experience occupation. Since an average-sized province has between 2 million and 3 million party members, Japanese occupation makes a big difference. This result is unsurprising, because it combines two earlier points: Table 8.2 has established the link between Japanese occupation and geographic patterns of party membership in 1956. Chapter 7 demonstrated that membership patterns persist over long periods of time. Column 2 in tables 8.3 simply draws out the implication that occupation in the late 1930s and early 1940s therefore also affects geographic patterns of party membership today.

In addition to Japanese occupation having shaped initial membership patterns and initial membership patterns shaping contemporary membership patterns, it might be that war contingencies are affecting membership density today in other, more direct ways, as sketched out in figure 8.2. For example, the experience of wartime cruelty, recounted by grandparents to their grandchildren, could give citizens more nationalistic preferences and as a result they might be more amenable to the nationalistic aspects of the CCP's ideology today. Given the role of national memory transmitted in schools and propaganda overriding locally experienced memory, however, one may regard

<sup>5</sup>The percentages used are the same as in table 8.2, party membership comes from CCP Organization Department (2011), population and GDP statistics from *China Data Online*.



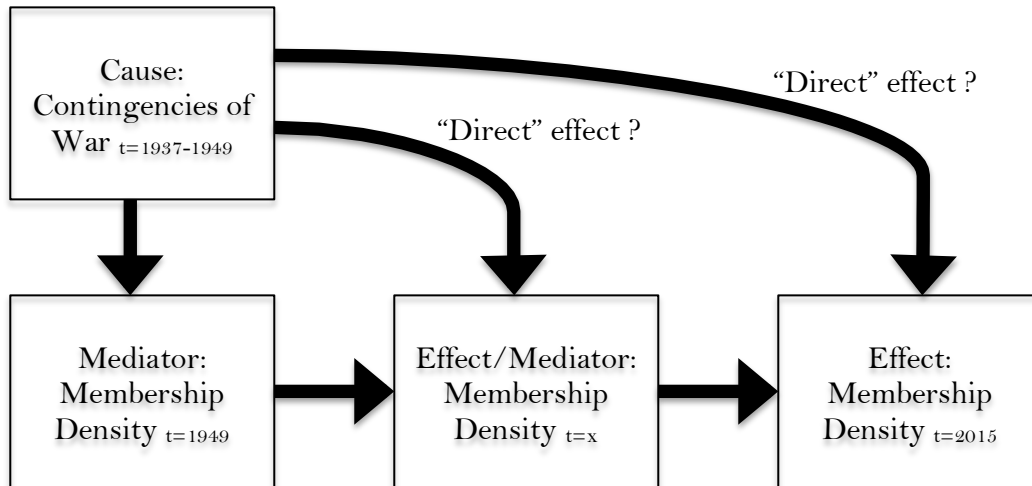


Figure 8.2: Direct and Indirect Effects of War Contingencies

such a hypothesis with skepticism. Methodologically, the question is whether the effect of Japanese occupation on contemporary membership patterns is a direct effect or an indirect effect mediated by another variable, in this case initial membership patterns.<sup>6</sup>

The result is clear-cut (compare columns 2 and 3 of table 8.3). The effect of Japanese occupation is almost entirely mediated by the initial, geographic patterns of party membership. After controlling for initial membership patterns, the occupation effect is barely significant at a 10% confidence level; it is substantively negligible, since 41,000 additional members would be a very small percentage of the overall membership pool. Instead, causation seems to be of a sequential nature, with Japanese occupation shaping initial membership patterns and those membership patterns then persisting into the future. The relationship between party members in 1956 and 2012 is not one-to-one, but not far from it: The coefficient indicates that after controlling for population size and economic prosperity, an additional party member in 1956 is associated with 0.9 of an additional party member today, and in a statistically highly significant way. In short, the transmission

<sup>6</sup>For the distinction between direct and indirect effects, as well as a definition of a mediator see Acharya, Blackwell and Sen (2015).

of historical legacies occurs through the formal institution of the Leninist party apparatus rather than through informal socialization.

### **8.3 The Quickly Fading Base Area Effect**

Amidst the amorphous geography of armed struggles and warfare between the foundation of the CCP in 1921 and the party's victory in 1949, the Communist base areas stand out as relatively well-delineated places where the party first gained a foothold. At first glance, one might think that the Communist base areas of the past would exhibit the strongest grassroots party organizations today. At a closer look however, one finds that there is no such simple relationship. As laid out in this section, in many base areas military developments and even ideological legacies were of little help in advancing local party strength.

Militarily, base areas were transient phenomena. Although the KMT eventually lost the war, its early counter-insurgency campaigns were thorough and effective. In the first decade of the CCP's existence, KMT government forces annihilated many important base areas, so that the CCP had little choice but to abandon them, disappointing the loyalty of a population that had thrown its own fate in with the party. In such places, the party left little in the way of a local legacy. In the context of historical peasant uprisings, especially the Boxer rebellion, historians have observed that once the imperial army defeated a movement in a particular location, the movement could reappear in other locations, but rarely returned to a place of defeat (Esherick, 1987). An analysis of name lists comprising Communist "martyrs" from Xianning, a locality in Southern Hubei, shows that mobilization in that area was very swift early on, but stopped when the party fled the area during the Long March and only resumed during the Civil War beginning in 1945 after a lapse of 10 years (Xianning Government, 1992, starting p.873). In short, the destruction of base areas in

Southern China was effective, wiping out any base area effect.

Ideologically, recruitment in base areas was primarily based on pro-peasant redistributive policies, such as radical land reform (Selden, 1995). Base areas epitomize the argument that, besides peasant nationalism against Japan, the other side of the Communist revolution was pro-poor policy and a modern version of traditional peasant rebellion (Perry, 1980). To the extent that few scholars had doubts that the revolution was won in the countryside (Kataoka, 1972), academic debates in the 1960s and 1970s revolved around the question of whether the CCP attracted rural support primarily thanks to its patriotic appeal or thanks to its Communist appeal. Today scholars recognize that both factors played a crucial role, so that the bitterness of prior debates appears as a reflection of American political polemics (Pepper, 2004). Chen Yung-fa expresses a new scholarly consensus when he identifies a need to “differentiate peasant support by place, time, and kind” in order to discern the underlying peasant motivations and the CCP’s specific mobilization strategies (Chen, 1986, p.8). My analysis subscribes to Chen’s differentiated view about the origins of the CCP’s rural success during the revolutionary wars. In some places the party’s anti-Japanese credentials motivated people to join the CCP, in other places the party’s pro-peasant policies were of the essence to attract new party members.

However, we must distinguish between sources of early party success and sources of party strength today. While both peasant nationalism and redistributive appeals were crucial in the wars preceding the Communist takeover of 1949, this section contends that today the anti-Japanese War legacy is an asset, but the Communist-revolutionary base area legacy may be a liability. Distinguishing between base areas and areas suffering most sustained and direct confrontation with the Japanese occupiers, the assumption is that peasant nationalism was most important in the latter areas. The distinction between non-Japanese occupied areas, occupied areas and Communist base

areas is reminiscent of the three-way classification used by the CCP itself in the 1950s, distinguishing between “later liberated areas”, “early liberated areas” and “old revolutionary bases” (Vogel, 1969, p.41). The previous chapter has already shown that in the wake of China’s Great Leap Forward, local party networks in formerly occupied areas were stronger and resisted the most devastating central policies, resulting in fewer famine deaths.

In short, legacies of patriotic mobilization trump legacies of redistribution as sources of contemporary party strength. This is by no means to deny the hardships that Communists suffered in their base areas, nor the commitment of those Communists who suffered the deprivation and dangers of the Long March. However, locals who joined the party inside the base areas arguably had more opportunistic motivations compared to those who joined the party in territory in immediate proximity to the enemy. Joining the party outside the base areas behind Japanese enemy lines carried greater risks and promised fewer rewards. This resonates with the conjecture by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way that authoritarian parties are strongest when they are built on a legacy of violent struggle rather than on material incentives (Levitsky and Way, 2012). Non-material motivations have a much longer half-life than material motivations. The effectiveness of material gains wears off quickly, once the erstwhile material benefit disappears.

## **Base Areas Today**

Former revolutionary base areas play a central role in CCP mythology. In textbooks as well as TV series, they serve as the stage for legendary stories of loyalty and betrayal, of heroism and cowardice. Yet the actual places have by and large fallen into oblivion, except for the comparatively small number of more accessible sites that have turned into popular destinations for Red Tourism. Just as in imperial and Republican times, the quintessentially remote and impoverished base areas

once again do not have much of a strategic importance for the country as a whole, and by now have returned to their erstwhile marginality. Former party leader Bo Yibo begins his memoirs describing the post-1949 challenge of transplanting party organizations from the countryside into the cities, just as they had been transplanted from the cities into the countryside a couple of decades earlier. As the CCP transformed itself from a conquest organization into a governing organization, the former base areas ceased to be the power base from which the party drew its strength.

Given this radical transformation of the CCP, has the party at least sought to retain a special relationship with residents of former base areas, whether for sentimental reasons, to shore up its own legitimacy, or in order to prevent them from becoming the base areas for another revolution? Alternatively, if party leaders' attention has been absorbed by other pressing tasks, do people in the former base areas have a more deeply rooted and more loyal commitment to the party than in other places? I submit that historical revolutionary base-area legacies no longer translate into intimate party-society relations. To the contrary, people whose parents knew the enthusiastically committed revolutionaries of the pre-1949 period may be all the more critical of cadres in market-oriented post-Mao China. When exactly the tipping point occurred and when exactly base areas turned from the party's power base to the party's weak spots is an empirical question.

## **Statistical Evidence**

The following analysis suggests that former base areas have turned from strongholds into weak spots of the CCP. As before, party membership serves as an indicator of party strength. The analysis proceeds in two steps. First, I analyze the determinants of individual party membership, using 2002 data. Living in former base areas makes it significantly less likely for a person to be a party member, holding other socio-economic factors constant. Second, to identify the tipping

point in time when base areas ceased to be CCP strongholds, I calculate the proportion of party members in the population, comparing membership in base areas to membership in ordinary rural areas. Simple t-tests indicate that base areas turned from strongholds into weak spots in the early 1990s.

The data come from the China Household Income Project (CHIP), run by leading economists from China, Japan and North America. Designed primarily to estimate household income and income inequality, the project has generated a series of datasets that –almost as a valuable by-product– contain essential information on historical legacies and the presence of the CCP. Specifically, the survey asks focus groups whether their survey village is part of a former base area. The survey also asks individuals in these villages whether there are any party members living in their household. Data are available for three waves of surveys, namely 1988, 1995 and 2002. Recording household income inequality is particularly challenging and requires extraordinarily careful sample selection. Among economists, the CHIP surveys are considered the methodological gold standard for studying China’s grassroots economy. Thus, we can confidently make inferences.

One caveat concerns perceptions of history. The dataset reveals that local history, as recounted by village representatives, is a shifting target. To be sure, even historians would be hard-pressed to pin down on a map precisely which areas should count as a former base area. There is considerable room for interpretation. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that an important question of local history, namely whether a village had been an old revolutionary base area or not, is answered differently over time. According to well-informed village focus groups, in 1988 almost 15% of all rural households lived in former base areas. Less than ten years later in 1995, that number had dramatically increased to almost 24%. According to the 2002 edition, that number has declined, indicating that 20% of rural households lived in former base areas. Neither demographic trends nor migration pat-

terns could explain such discrepancies. Instead, the discrepancies reflect the volatility of historical accounts, depending on whether it is fashionable and lucrative for a village to pass as a former base area. In the 1990s, village representatives tended to interpret the meaning of a base area more broadly, eagerly portraying their village as an active participant in a revolutionary past. Even if former base areas have long lost their special relationship to the CCP, red legacies serve former base areas well as a rhetorical and marketing tool. There are both idealistic and opportunistic reasons for claiming revolutionary legacies. The inconsistency is unlikely to be a problem with the data, but reflects the reality of shifting historical priorities and perceptions.

The first step tests whether living in a former base area affects the likelihood of being a party member. If a local legacy of pro-peasant Communist revolution today has turned into a liability for local party construction, we would expect it to be less likely for people in former base areas to be party members. The outcome variable of the specification, individual party membership, is a binary variable. I therefore estimate both a linear and a probit model. Control variables include income, education, minority status and whether a person has served in the People's Liberation Army. Citizens in the generally remote and poor former base areas will be different from the average Chinese citizens in all of these socio-economic factors, which are also likely to affect party membership. Table 8.4 displays a series of coefficient estimates.

As the results indicate, the base area effect on the likelihood of contemporary CCP membership is negative, controlling for other important socio-economic determinants of party membership. The preferred probit specification with all control variables (table 8.4, last column) indicates that the fact of living in former revolutionary base areas is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of party membership by 17 percentage points. This is a very substantial effect, since the overall likelihood of being a party member is only 5.8%. As of 2002, people who live in a former revolutionary base

|                            | linear model<br>no controls | probit<br>no controls | linear model<br>with controls | probit<br>with controls |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Former Base Areas [binary] | -0.008**                    | -0.076**              | -0.031***                     | -0.169***               |
| Income [logarithmic]       |                             |                       | 0.016***                      | 0.088***                |
| Education [years]          |                             |                       | 0.013***                      | 0.074***                |
| Minority [binary]          |                             |                       | -0.014                        | -0.072                  |
| Member of PLA [binary]     |                             |                       | 0.374***                      | 1.236***                |
| Constant                   | 0.058***                    | -1.568***             | -0.091***                     | -2.388***               |
| N                          | 37969                       | 37969                 | 10511                         | 10511                   |

\*\*\* significance at 0.005, \*\* significance at 0.01, \* significance at 0.05, . significance at 0.1

Table 8.4: Determinants of Party Membership in Rural China

area are much less likely to be party members. The result is statistically highly significant at the 99.9% level.

The results also reflect the party's new focus on recruiting what Jiang Zemin calls the "most productive forces of society", that is the wealthy and the well-educated. On average, a 1% higher income level is associated with a 9 percentage points greater likelihood of being a party member. Similarly, an additional year of schooling is associated with a 7 percentage points greater likelihood of being a party member. Only the ethnicity variable is insignificant, but this result must be taken with a grain of salt, since the survey could not be fielded in Tibet as well as some other places known for ethnic tensions. Unsurprisingly, another well-known determinant of party membership, whether or not a person has served in the People's Liberation Army, has a strong effect on the likelihood of party membership.

The next step identifies the tipping point, when the base area effect became alienated from the CCP. Table 8.5 shows the results of simple t tests. Between 1988 and 2002, party membership has rapidly expanded, in rural areas from 3.4% to 5.7% of the population. The expansion has been much slower in former base areas. In 1988, the party was still significantly more present in former base areas, but by 1995 the situation had reversed. In 2002, it was almost 20% more likely for a



|                                          | 1988   | 1995   | 2002   |
|------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Party Strength in All Rural Areas        | 3.4%   | 3.9%   | 5.7%   |
| Party Strength in Former Base Areas      | 3.8%   | 3.3%   | 5.0%   |
| Party Strength in Ordinary Places Only   | 3.3%   | 4.1%   | 5.8%   |
| Difference Compared to Former Base Areas | -0.48% | +0.77% | +0.84% |
| Statistical Significance                 | 0.0173 | 0.0007 | 0.0022 |

Table 8.5: Party Presence in China's Rural Areas

rural citizen to be a party member if the person did not live in a former base area. In 1988, the party still had a particularly good presence in its former base areas, but no longer today.

In part, these findings are the result of a secular trend of convergence, since local memories of the base area history fade, just like memories of the Sino-Japanese War. As fewer and fewer people with good memories of the pre-1949 period survive, and as older generations fail to transmit their historical experience to their descendents, the base areas' exceptional historical experience becomes less salient for present-day outcomes. But there must be other factors at play, because party strength in former base areas does not simply converge to the national average of 5.7% in 2002, but is noticeable for falling behind the rest of China. This loss of influence could be the result of official neglect, with party organization departments not investing organizational capital in the ever-marginal base areas. Having seen other communist parties collapse in the early 1990s, CCP organizers concentrate their energy on building the party in strategically important places, not in the poor backwaters that former base areas typically are.

Even official neglect may not be a satisfying explanation. As table 8.4 suggests, conventional measures of marginalization like income and education levels do not fully account for the weakness of the party in former base areas. An alternative explanation for the party's reduced influence in former base areas might be that older generations do instill in their children a revolutionary tradition, but that this tradition does not translate into CCP partisanship and, starting in the

1990s, begins to turn against the CCP itself. This indicates historical reversal (as in hypothesis three of section 7.3). Those who best remember the party's Communist ideals and who benefited little from Opening and Reform are no longer the power base of the party (Perry, 2012*a*). Since only 20% of China's shrinking rural population live in former base areas and since base areas tend to be far away from the centers of power, this trend may not be too dangerous for the party. However, the trend in the party's former base areas also reflect broader trends of the CCP losing its legitimacy as a party known for pro-peasant, pro-poor redistributive policies.

## 8.4 Refinements of the Japanese Occupation Hypothesis

Japanese occupation gave the CCP an opportunity for a formidable comeback. In addition, by comparing Chinese provinces, we found that geographical macro-patterns of party membership reflect macro-patterns of Japanese occupation. This view of history resembles the proverbial “looking at flowers from horseback” 走馬觀花. A local perspective of Japanese occupation and party development significantly complicates the picture. Zooming in to county-level historical developments, the following section suggests that at the local level there is a U-shaped relationship between Japanese presence and party development. In places firmly under Japanese control, such as many county seats in Shandong, party recruiters had little maneuvering space. In places unaffected by the Japanese invasion, the party also had difficulty mobilizing people. The places where party recruitment was at its best were localities out of reach of Japanese authority, but where people had been displaced by the turmoil of war. This refinement draws attention to the fact that the scale of geographical analysis is essential. Findings at the macro-scale do not simply translate one-to-one to a more fine-grained micro-scale.

#### 8.4.1 Local Centers of Power, Local Peripheries

The most important primary evidence on the geographic patterns of party development are maps found in Japanese archives and in Chinese archives. The Imperial Army not only knew where its own forces were deployed, but was also carefully tracing the development of Chinese enemy forces, including the CCP. Impressionistic evidence from archives at the Japanese Defense Ministry and at the Yasukuni Shrine suggests that early on in the war the Imperial Army was much better informed about CCP movements than later on, when Japan was approaching defeat. On these early maps, compiled by researchers at the Japanese Defense Agency after the war, the party had most of its members at the fringes of Japan-occupied territory (Japanese Defense Agency, 1968-1971).

Similarly, the CCP carefully recorded the local evolution of party cells and was also aware of Japanese enemy positions. Communist material by-and-large confirms Japanese information on the deployment of the Imperial Army and on the rise of party organizations. The definitive book series on this issue is the “Material on the Organizational History of the CCP in county X (province Y)” 中國共產黨某某省某某縣組織史資料, compiled by all counties as well as other administrative units. The series contains near-complete information on the establishment of local party organizations, most of the time including detailed maps, as in figure 8.3 and 8.3, which reflect the situation in Linyi County (in Shandong) in 1944 and in Chiping County (in Shandong) in the early 1940s, respectively.<sup>7</sup> The battles fought in and around Linyi were among the fiercest battles of the Sino-Japanese War, because Chinese forces had exceptional and transient successes, holding the county seat of Linyi against repeated attacks, destroying 30,000 troops 50 miles Southwest of Linyi in Taierzhuang and finally resulting in military stalemate (Long-hsuen Hsu, 1971, p.227). Even after a Japanese campaign to wipe out Communists in October 1941 had reduced party membership in

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<sup>7</sup>The boundaries of the counties changed greatly. The map defines Linyi by the boundaries of 1988.

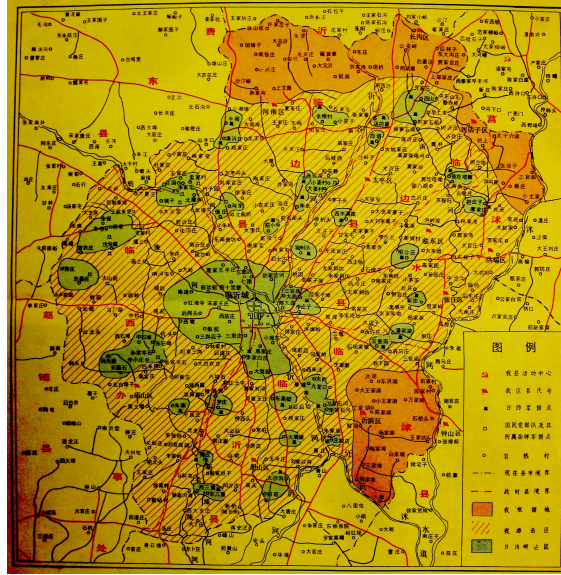


Figure 8.3: No Recruitment In Japanese Strongholds: Attacking from the the Fringes (Linyi)

Linyi from more than 1,500 members to no more than 338 members, the party ultimately had great recruitment success, with almost 2,000 party members in 1945 and almost 5,000 party members in 1949 (CCP Linyi, 1988, p.119).

While the case of Linyi confirms that the Japanese invasion kick-started the party, the map in figure 8.3 in conjunction with the dates when village-level party cells were established (later on in the same book), suggest that the CCP did not primarily recruit inside the areas fully under Japanese control. The map distinguishes between Japanese-controlled areas (green color), Communist base areas (red color) and areas targeted by guerilla warfare (yellow, hatched area). It shows KMT-government forces, although they are barely visible on the map, apparently because the editor thought that they were irrelevant for local party development. Finally, there are 10 red flags planted, indicating the areas of Communist operation. Japanese-occupied areas comprised the county seat and a couple of dozen smaller outposts throughout the county. Significantly, guerilla warfare was concentrated on areas in proximity of Japanese occupation, but was not aiming at



Figure 8.4: No Recruitment In Japanese Strongholds: Staying at the County Periphery (Chiping)

the occupied areas themselves. In other areas with a strong Japanese presence, such as in Chiping (compare figure 8.4), the same pattern holds: The party stayed away from the county seat, where the county's two important highways (red lines) cross (CCP Chiping, 1989, p.9). Mao's tactical doctrine to surround the cities from the countryside also played out between rural county seats and their surrounding villages. Party development and membership recruitment occurred not at the heart of Japanese occupation, but at its fringes.

#### 8.4.2 Opportunities in a “Close Distance” to the Imperial Army

The CCP grew fastest in intermediate distances to the Imperial Army. On the one hand, as an influential study of the Sino-Japanese War in Shandong points out, “[i]n the vast area not directly impacted by the Japanese army the initial reaction of the peasantry was apathy”, at least in the early years of the war (Paulson, 1982, p.47). On the other hand, at times and places where the Japanese military presence was firmly entrenched, Communist recruitment was slow. Both Japanese and Communist observers at the time paid close attention to the geography of occupation and the

effectiveness of the party's anti-Japanese propaganda. One detailed account on the micro-geography of Japanese occupation and Communist recruitment comes from two Japanese investigators, whom the North China Liaison Office of the Asian Co-Prosperity Institute sent in 1939 to report on the situation along a large section of the Grand Canal, including on "ordinary people's ideological state of mind" (Tianjin CASS 2). As the investigators travelled by boat along the Grand Canal, at the time no longer central for transportation and thus penetrating peripheral areas, they found people who had made their peace with the occupiers and others who called for violent opposition to the occupiers. When the investigators disembarked the boat, in some places they experienced a friendly welcome and in others encountered things like graffiti next to the landing dock calling for "opposition to Japan, rescue for the country" (Tianjin CASS 2, p.17). The observers provide a rich account, involving a local who graduated from a Japanese university, refugees who destabilize the situation, "devastating" rumors of Japanese defeat and hosts of Communist propaganda teams urging people to rise against Japan (Tianjin CASS 2, pp. 109-121). Their summary suggests that a strong Japanese presence pre-empts anti-Japanese "agitation" and that the key is stability 安定 (Tianjin CASS 2, pp. 107-108). The occupier has nothing to fear as long as citizens have enough to eat and as long as they can live in safety, but a half-hearted presence could be a recipe for disaster.

This point is re-enforced by another Japanese investigation team, painting a grim picture of the security in one county, where the Imperial Army is able to defend itself and secure key strategic points in the county seat, but is too thinly spread to prevent bandit attacks against ordinary people. In the village under investigation, the investigators experience regular bandit incursions (Tōyō Bunko 3, p.33) and even the county seat was not safe from occasional bandit incursions (Tōyō Bunko 3, p.33). In the light of this report, joining either the Japanese "Railway-Loving

Youth Team” 愛路青年團 or the Communist forces were survival strategies employed by ordinary people to defend their livelihood from ordinary bandits. To the extent that ordinary people joined military forces as a survival strategy, it may be conjectured that they turned to whomever looked like the stronger player at a certain point in time. At the same time, it could be that investigations by the colonizers were biased, tending to exaggerate material motivations and downplaying the potential for patriotic mobilization.

Communist accounts confirm that mobilization based on peasant nationalism was most straightforward in areas which were directly affected by the Japanese invasion, but not fully under Japanese control. The first systematic mobilizers were sent to Shandong’s countryside as soon as the Japanese army had moved into the province. Some were released from Nationalist prison as the Imperial Army approached, others returned from big cities and other provinces. Some underground party members had stayed at Yan’an, where they participated in the University of Japanese Resistance and then returned to build up the local party organization. Others had attended or taught in schools and returned to the hinterland<sup>8</sup>. But the success of these organizers varied substantially from one locality to the next. According to one such account, most peasants were indifferent toward the Japanese occupation and found it a “matter for secret rejoicing” that the Imperial Army brought instability and misery to the lives of local landlords. By contrast, “the peasants who lived near the cities and along the highways” held different attitudes, because they had “seen Japanese soldiers plundering their property, raping their sisters, slaughtering their brothers, and burning down their villages” (Wang, 1940, p.92). It was these peasants whom organizers of the CCP first mobilized.

In Shandong, land reform was inadequate for mobilizing locals. The slogans reported in Japanese

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<sup>8</sup>These pathways are described for numerous early organizers in the list of outstanding revolutionary martyrs (Martyrs). I have studied the cases of Heze, a peripheral prefecture.

sources (such as Tianjin CASS 2) usually do not refer to land reform. Communist accounts have a hard time explaining the class composition of their anti-Japanese alliance in Shandong, especially the greater enthusiasm of better-off peasants compared to poor peasants in joining the anti-Japanese front (Wang, 1940, p.94). Given the original anti-Japanese battle cry, establishing a Communist order involving land distribution created much irregularity (Luo, 2013). The people who had valiantly fought against the Japanese in Shandong and who therefore ended up in powerful positions were oftentimes not the landless and therefore organized land reform in ways that deviated from the ideal of taking from the rich and giving to the poor. Communists oftentimes discovered that local landholding patterns did not allow to carry out proper land reform: one county on the Shandong peninsula, for example, not only lacked landlords in the conventional sense, but “middle peasants actually rented out more land than the landlords.” (Wu, 2005, p.54) One study on Shandong finds that land reform was counter-productive in Shandong, because it alienated all but the poorest peasants, whose practical grievances were better addressed by groups such as the Red Spears (DeVido, 1995, p.58).

Competing with other local groups set up for self-defense, the Communists’ competitive advantage was of an ideological kind, because they were most credibly an effective force against the Japanese invader. The anti-Japanese appeal helped Communist organizational to overcome the great challenge to insert themselves into existing local self-defense organizations, such as the Red Spear Society, organized out of secret societies. In Shandong secret societies could be so strong that instead of the CCP taking control of secret societies, occasionally the Daoist organizations co-opted grassroots cadres during the Cultural Revolution (Shandong Archive, A121-04-21). Liangshan County, known in Chinese fiction as gathering site of Robin-Hood type bandit-rebels, in reality also was home to protective bandit groups. Yet the CCP had a hard time mobilizing these groups



to its cause, possibly because the Japanese threat seemed remote. The low number of “notable martyrs”<sup>9</sup> from this county is a telling indicator: While on average counties in Heze produced 32 martyrs, Liangshan brought forth only 8 martyrs, two of whom had joined after the Communist victory and died in the Korean and the Vietnam War respectively (martyrs 1).

## 8.5 Going Even Further Back the Causal Channel?

This section argues that Japanese occupation was a historical watershed and as such a very good starting point for historical explanations of local party strength and local governance outcomes. To be sure, the Imperial Army did not randomly occupy China, as would be the ideal treatment to isolate an independent effect of Japanese occupation on later governance outcomes. But at the same time, war contingencies were so complex that the geographic patterns of occupation cannot easily be reduced to pre-existing geographic patterns. Neither economic potential nor traditional administrative priorities provide satisfying proxies of Japanese occupation. The railway may be the best available proxy for patterns of Japanese occupation, but its linkage with colonization is so intimate that going back the causal chain from Japanese occupation to railway lines may not be a great conceptual gain. There does not seem to be a parsimonious way to push much further back the causal channel. In short, war contingencies created a new political landscape.

### 8.5.1 Japan’s Lack of Economic Priorities

The prospect of economic gain did not provide Japanese colonizers with any clear sense of geographic priorities. There is no apparent economic logic behind Japanese occupation patterns in Shandong.

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<sup>9</sup>The number of “notable martyrs” is derived for each county in a standardized procedure. The Department of Civil Affairs had lists of martyrs, which have been compiled in order to determine which families deserve support as descendents from a revolutionary martyr. From this list a sample of “notable martyrs” is drawn, the number of “notable martyrs” being proportional to the number of all martyrs.

At the time, investigators compiled volume after volume assessing China's economic potential and they found abundant riches almost everywhere. Raw materials, for instance, were on the minds of Japanese industrialists who could potentially have influenced decisions taken by the government and the military; yet the investigators showed that raw materials were spread throughout Shandong province, not concentrated in any particular geographical zone (Kuwatarō, 1938). Making the case for an expansion of Japan's activities in China, synopses of Shandong's economic potential, compiled by think tanks close to the government, such as the Co-Prosperity Institute, would praise the widespread presence of raw-materials, industrial potential, trading opportunities, investment opportunities in agriculture and the raising of life-stock, as well as the transportation sector all at the same time (Tokyo Tōyō Bunko 1).<sup>10</sup>

Japan's interest in agricultural development complicated the formulation of geographic priorities based on economic potential. Historically, as a result of the scarcity of arable land, the strategic thinking of Japan's state-builders revolved around arable land as being fundamental to power. Controlling arable land was equivalent to amassing power (Gordon, 2003; Hall, 1966). Early on in the colonization process, Japan had gathered county-by-county data on arable land (Kahoku Sōgō Chōsa Kenkyūjo, 1944), but in terms of land, most of Shandong would be desirable - except for the mountainous areas, which were attractive for the sake of raw material exploitation. In addition, the Asia Co-Prosperity Institute had high-flying ambitions to encourage investment into new land development projects, which would use capital-intensive technology to turn wasteland into arable land. (Tokyo Tōyō Bunko 2). Wherever in North China the Japanese colonizers looked, they saw economic potential. This outlook, bereft of geographic priorities, was well-summarized by the illustration in a popular magazine (figure 8.5, (Kahoku Kōtsū Kabushiki Kaisha, 1939-1943,

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<sup>10</sup>Such explorations were abundant, as a voluminous compilation by Japanese researchers shows (Honjō, 2009).

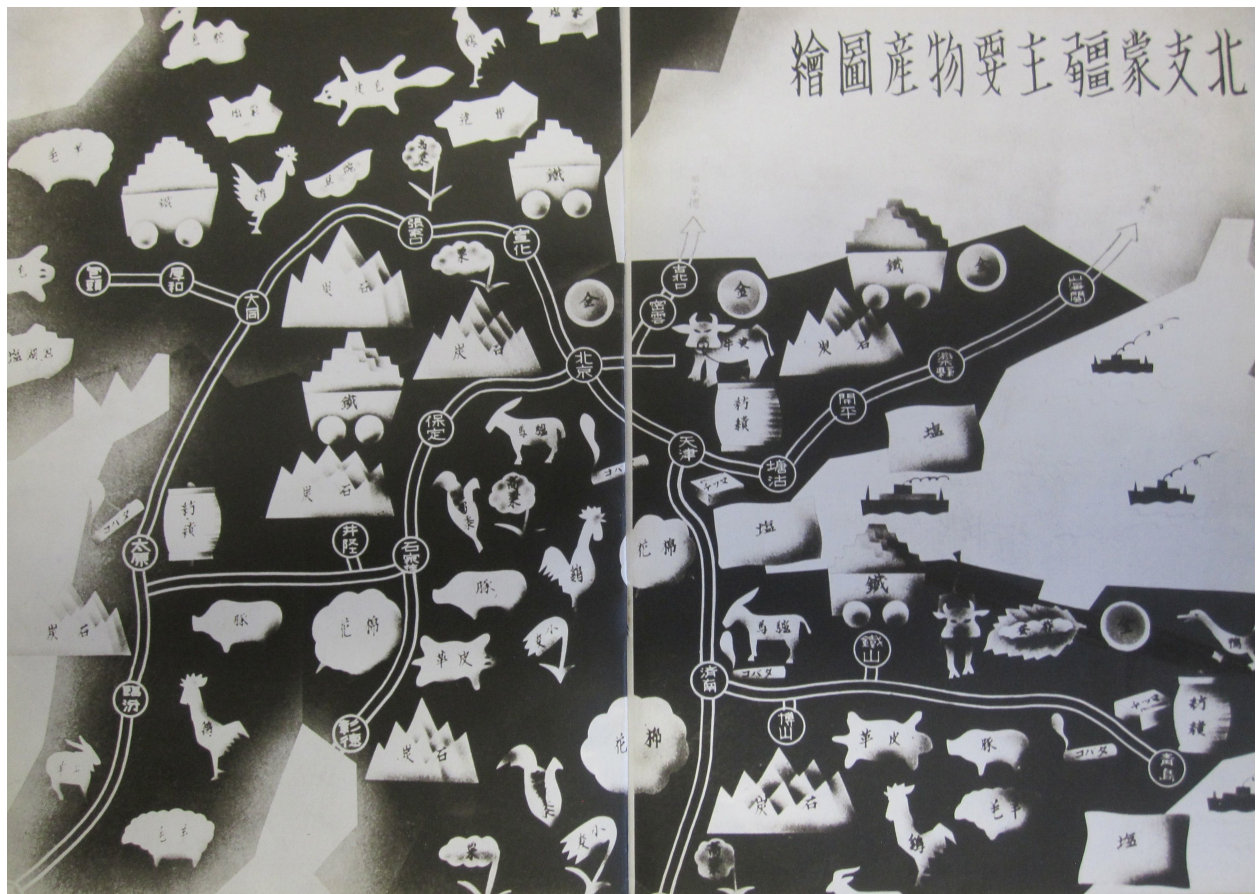


Figure 8.5: Popular Version of Japanese “Strategy”: Riches Everywhere!

vol.1-6)). The lack of priorities were part of Japan's "myth of empire" that pushed the army to expand further and further in ways that in hindsight seem hard to rationalize (Snyder, 1991).

Japan did not follow in the footsteps of the Chinese government, and it did not prioritize the same places that Chinese governments had traditionally prioritized. This is particularly apparent in the Northwest of Shandong province, where the imperial government had traditionally maintained a strong presence despite the area's decline in importance during the 20th Century (Pomeranz, 1993). The Japanese marched through that area at the end of 1937 without stationing any substantial military forces. Instead, the Japanese established a strong presence in Dezhou.

### **8.5.2 Following the Railroad**

In Shandong, Japanese occupation patterns closely followed the railroad. Troops were deployed to secure a corridor along the Shandong section of the busy Beijing-Shandong line, as well as the branch lines from the provincial capital to the major port city of Qingdao. There were three or four other minor branch lines, also under firm control. The width of corridor varied substantially, from just a dozen miles to almost a hundred miles in the area around Jinan, and the density of military protection was also uneven, with more troops covering the North than the South (Japanese Defense Agency, 1968-1971, map). Some branch lines were built after the occupation, complicating things further. Yet unlike other provinces, in Shandong the railroad is a very good approximation of occupation patterns. If one were to go further back in the causal chain, one could establish a link that begins with railroads affecting occupation patterns, which in turn led to a strong party and predictable governance outcomes.

Since railroad geography and Japanese occupation in Shandong are highly co-linear, based on county-level statistics, it is hard to disentangle in a quantitative way the causal effect of each.

The railroad passes through a very diverse set of counties. It passed through plains as well as mountainous terrain, touched on some economically backward localities and left out some of the more prosperous local economic centers. At the time when the two railroad lines were constructed, the goal was to connect important end-points in an economic fashion, from a railroad engineering perspective: Beijing to Shanghai and Qingdao to the Beijing-Shanghai trunk line.<sup>11</sup> While falling short of a “random treatment” in the statistical sense, it would be hard to identify county-level characteristics that could predict the construction of the railway.

Being left with a choice between the colonial railroad of the 1910s versus Japanese occupation of the late 1930s/early 1940s, this dissertation has chosen the latter as the starting point. Arguably, Japanese occupation was a more important watershed event than the construction of the railway three decades earlier. While the railway fundamentally changed the established travelling routes and brought modernity to Shandong, the railway line in and of itself had a limited impact on the province’s political map. Only because the railroad later on became the backbone of the Japanese invasion could it become such a consequential infrastructure, determining the geographic patterns of party membership and China’s political geography even today.

## 8.6 Conclusion

The Second Sino-Japanese War shaped the geography of the party’s power base. An irony of history, Japanese violence made the anti-Japanese CCP strong. Foreign occupation protected the CCP from government persecution, and allowed the CCP to mobilize members for a patriotic cause at the end of World War II, giving the CCP a head-start in the power vacuum left behind by the retreat of Japan’s Imperial Army. When the People’s Republic was founded four years after

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<sup>11</sup>Although the timing of construction was such that the trunk line was finalized only after the branch line.

Japan's departure, the CCP enjoyed its strongest organizational base in the very provinces that had been under tightest Japanese control. The channel through which the Japanese occupation affects present-day outcomes has little to do with local mentalities or memories, but with party organization. Organizational inertia strongly links the present to the past.

In contrast to the persistence of the occupation effect, the base area effect is largely ephemeral. In the first half of the 1930s, in the Long March operation, the CCP abandoned its early base areas in South China, leaving behind no significant underground organizations, and presumably no pro-CCP sympathies. But even in the later base areas in North China, much of the party's organizational presence was transient, moving to the new centers of power or strategically more important -and more liveable- localities after the Communist takeover of 1949. Therefore, transmission through organizational inertia did not occur in base areas. To the extent that the base-area ethos has survived, it appears to be turning against the party itself. This may help explain why the party has a smaller presence in its former base areas.

While the results seem robust for macro-geographical spaces such as provinces and prefectures, the relationship between Japanese occupation and party development becomes more complex at the level of micro-geographical spaces. Resonating with the results in chapter 4, it seems that the CCP could develop fastest in localities at an intermediate distance to the Japanese strongholds. In areas that were very close to the Imperial Army, locals would not risk supporting the party; their best survival strategy was to accommodate to the occupation. In areas unaffected by the invasion, people continued their habitual life and their habitual survival strategies and had little reason to get involved in the fight against Japan. Yet in contested areas, directly affected by the violence and where the violence destabilized people's everyday lives, supporting the CCP was more likely to be a good survival strategy and attacking the Japanese was more likely to be a desirable option.

This chapter contributes to arguments about the origins of strong authoritarian regime parties. It has been observed that the handful of surviving Communist parties all have in common “a legacy of nationalistic, rural revolution” (Perry, 2007, fn.98). Based on a comparison of four countries, researchers have suggested that strong parties may be the result of a “sustained, violent, and ideologically-driven conflict” (Levitsky and Way, 2012, p.870). This chapter in conjunction with the preceding chapter confirms these arguments at a subnational level: The CCP today remains stronger in localities where it fought against the Japanese army during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The legacy of nationalistic violent revolution continues to invigorate regime parties, although this legacy may not help the party indefinitely. It is puzzling that the CCP has made the best of its uneven reach, instead of evening out its presence throughout the mainland. The next chapter will address this question, investigating the answers found in traditional Chinese statecraft to the paradoxically uneven reach of the state.

## Chapter 9

# State Priorities: Imperial Legacies of Differentiated Governance

居今識古 Living the present

while mindful of antiquity

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Sima Qian<sup>1</sup>

Analyzing the Chinese party state, we face a fundamental paradox: On the one hand, the People's Republic of China so far stands out as a strong, robust and vigorous authoritarian regime. Yet on the other hand, the uneven implementation of important policies across the vast Chinese realm seems to betray a serious weakness. CCP party strength is far from uniform across space, but varies partly as a result of historical contingencies. A strong, but faulty way to reconcile these two observations would be to say that the Chinese state is strong at the center, but weak at its periphery. To the contrary, the Chinese state is notable for having good control beyond the center over a vast territory. To properly understand the tension between strong state and

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<sup>1</sup>Motto associated with Sima Qian, the ancient founder of the Chinese historical discipline. A president of the Republic of China, Xu Shichang, inscribed a calligraphy, which now hangs outside the office of the Harvard-Yenching Institute Director.



uneven reach, we need to question a bad assumption, which is common among political scientists. According to this bad assumption, homogeneity indicates a strong state and subnational variation indicates a weak state (Soifer, 2008, p.242). Yet in reality, smart rulers will be able to achieve more ambitious overall results, if they are able to discriminate and make local compromises. In the context of contemporary Africa, Catherine Boone developed a similar insight, although she did not discover formal institutions or explicit rationalizations as we find them in the prioritization schemes of imperial China (Boone, 2012). No state exercises total control over its society and therefore faces tradeoffs, as well as resource limitations. Seeking homogenous control for the sake of homogeneity is a waste of resources. For example, maximizing tax revenues implies that the state should act like a price-discriminating monopolist, charging each citizen his reservation price. As we will see in chapter 4, this is precisely what the Chinese state is good at. The more general point is that selective deployment of power resources is what makes the state strong. The geo-strategic logic of empires routinely makes such choices: Would we say that the British Empire was weaker than the French one, just because the French achieved more uniform control? Once we appreciate the extraordinary advantages of differentiated governance, we can also see that Chinese state strength does not radiate out from Beijing, but is built on a strong, local basis. The unevenness of Chinese state strength across is in fact China's greatest asset. The tendency to differentiate has been inherited from China's imperial past. Chinese Emperors and their courts thought hard about strategic choices and were acutely aware of the merits of differentiated governance.

State-builders face tradeoffs between exercising uniform control over their territory versus focusing on priority areas. Ruling large expanses of terrain, imperial Chinese statecraft deployed power resources sparingly, explicitly defining administrative priorities for county-level jurisdictions. Supported by a variety of primary evidence from the Qing dynasty, a central finding is that even

when priorities were biased, outdated and manipulated, they had tangible effects on local state presence. Routine counties tended to have smaller governments with less competent magistrates, whereas priority counties typically had bigger governments and magistrates chosen in a deliberative yet corruptible process. Separating distinct bureaucratic worlds, an administrative rift ran through the Chinese empire. Man-made spatial organization crisscrossed provincial boundaries and defied center-periphery divides. The construction of the empire's mental map and the resulting "one empire, two systems" demonstrate the merits and vicissitudes accompanying the still ongoing Chinese practice of differentiated local government.

State-builders in China, like state-builders anywhere, seek standardization (Scott, 1998). Uniform institutions, ideology and ritual are highly desirable because uniformity fosters the political unity of the state, thereby empowering central authority. Yet the ideal of a state that is equally powerful throughout its territory is utopian. Most states achieve far less convergence than they aspire to. Their jurisdictions exhibit deeply rooted local characteristics and traditions. Thus, state-building success is not only a question of how much territory is successfully brought into the ambit of the fully governed realm, a popular definition of state strength in political science (Soifer, 2008); it is also a question of how well states manage differences and deal with the impossibility of evenly penetrating the entirety of their geographic expanse. The state-building literature gives scant attention to sub-national variation (Ziblatt, 2009), let alone rulers' strategic adroitness in coping with such variation, with notable exceptions (Boone, 2012). This chapter presents the case of late imperial China as a corrective. It draws attention to the fact that effective state-builders skillfully manage limited power resources that in practice only allow for selective territorial control.

Chinese state builders handled territorial rule in a pragmatic way, refraining from pushing too hard for standardized control of their vast and diverse realm. Multi-ethnicity posed one major ob-

stacle to standardization (Elliott, 2001). More generally, in the area of ideology and ritual, behind a thin veneer of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, the imperial state tolerated a wide array of local beliefs and customs (Sutton, 2007). This chapter shows how the diversity of local governance challenges factored into strategies of administration under the Qing (1644-1911), China's last dynasty and one of its longest-lasting. Faced with the impossibility of covering the entirety of the realm with one uniform blanket of government, Emperor Yongzheng (1722-1735) developed an intricate and formalized system to prioritize some local jurisdictions over others, attaching combinations of four post designations to all the county-level jurisdictions. The ability to resist the impulse for standardization, creating regulations to differentiate its administration and economize the deployment of administrative resources, was a powerful instrument in the toolbox of Chinese governing techniques and remains a continuing source of Chinese state strength. Although differentiation was a central feature of Qing local administration, Western scholars have barely ventured beyond G. William Skinner's preliminary exploration of post designations (Skinner, 1977; Guy, 2010). Historians have been more concerned to decipher the functioning of "the typical county" (Qu, 1962; Watt, 1972), than to analyze differences among counties. East Asian scholarship investigated the institutional origins and the dynamic arithmetic of the differentiation system (Liu, 1993; Masui, 1999). Two questions, fundamental for understanding Chinese state-building, have largely been overlooked: First, how did Qing rulers determine their priorities? Second, what difference did priorities make on the ground? This chapter offers answers to each question in turn. Part I investigates the origins of governing priorities, resulting in a useful yet defective mental map of the empire. As part II shows, a county's priority status had important implications for local state presence.

The challenges of selecting local officials in imperial China bear a striking resemblance to the challenges of managing personnel in China today. In the absence of democratic elections, the

fundamental task of appointing capable and loyal officials while avoiding corruption remains unchanged. Nowadays, China's priority counties are referred to as "the 100 strong counties". The Communist party's Organization Department appoints particularly competent and reliable cadres as party secretaries of these counties. Prefectural departments seek to staff priority counties with their own officials, rather than with officials from outside the prefecture, to secure their authority. Cadres who perform well in priority counties have a good chance of being promoted to responsible provincial government positions. As in imperial China, the priority of a county is determined based on four separate components, although instead of Chinese characters, letters are used, as in U.S.-style credit rating systems, complete with an outlook. Governance problems remain similar, and so do the statist solutions to solve them. It is no coincidence that the Organization Department, alongside books on party organization, publishes research on imperial-era personnel administration (An, Zuozhang, 2011). Then as now, central authorities carefully define their priorities.

Before moving to the argument, a word about the empirical evidence to be employed in this chapter. In part, the argument is based on evidence on decision making at court and regulations that shaped local administration across the empire. In order to understand not only the rules, but also the practice, the chapter moves from central to local politics, in the process becoming more selective in its evidence. Despite advances in digital technology, it is still extremely time-consuming to reconstruct the careers of local officials and to trace changes in post designations over two centuries. Therefore I limit myself to the 107 counties of Shandong province, a well-studied and diverse set of counties, sufficient to uncover a disjunction between rules and practice. While provincial-level politics in Shandong are special in that they revolve around the Grand Canal, the majority of its counties do not border the canal. A representative sample of counties, disjointedly spread throughout China, would have prevented the study of the counties in relation to their spatial

neighbors. While specific findings, such as the exact timing of when priorities were adjusted, do not apply to other provinces, local institutional dynamics were similar throughout China: Far beyond well-known legal differences (Brunnert and V.V.Hagelstrom, 1960(1911), priority counties were distinct from routine counties in both the intensity and the quality of government.

## 9.1 Institutionalizing Governing Priorities

G. William Skinner's macro-regional approach suggests that geographic factors beyond the control of state builders largely explain the reach of the Chinese state. Topographically determined drainage systems constituted physiographic macroregions, which in turn shaped socio-economic macroregions. Macroregions were highly stable over time and lent a distinctive spatial structure to the Chinese polity. If Skinner is right, the Chinese state was strong at its cores and weak in its peripheries (Skinner, 1985). Yet state builders are not always slaves to geography. The Grand Canal epitomizes how Chinese state builders reconfigured the empire's political geography in defiance of natural drainage systems. As this chapter will demonstrate, the allocation of personnel indicates that the priorities of imperial rulers could differ starkly from what one would expect under the macro-regions paradigm. In many cases, the court sought to establish a robust civilian presence in peripheral counties, if their vital importance to the empire and the challenges arising from the local population were deemed to warrant such presence. The history of Chinese state building is at least in part a history of state builders overcoming geographically pre-determined patterns.

To see the sharp contrast between state building along macro-regional patterns versus state building against macro-regional patterns, consider the two maps. Figure 9.1 depicts macro-regional cores and peripheries of parts of China. Figure 9.2 shows a political map of the empire, representing the court's administrative priorities. Comparing the two maps, one notices that the expected

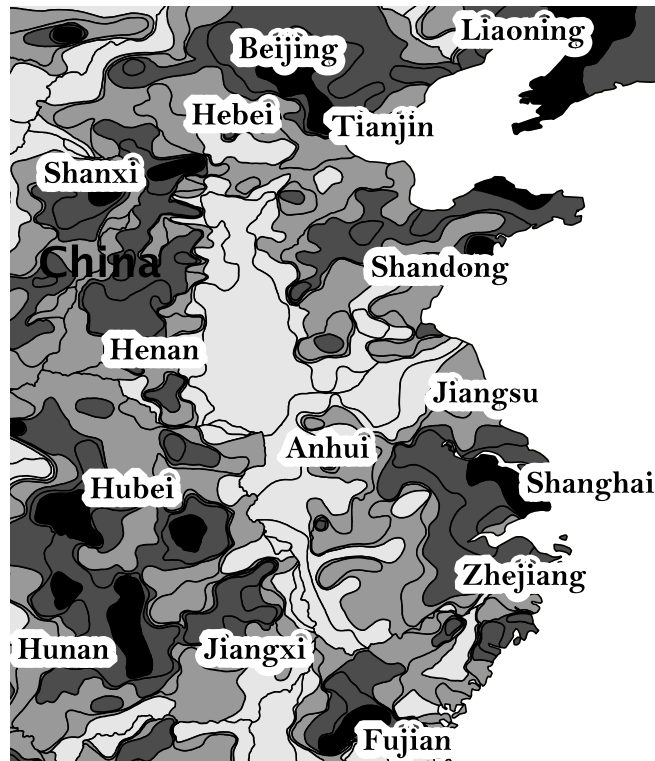


Figure 9.1: Map Showing Socio-Economic Macro-Regional Cores.

Note: Dark areas are cores and light areas peripheries. Author's Map. Data from G. W. Skinner, Zumou Yue and Mark Henderson. 2013. "China-CPZ (Core Periphery Zones)". <http://hdl.handle.net/1902.1/20640> Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies.

congruence between macro-regional systems and governing priorities is tenuous. For instance, the vast, light-colored area extending between Northern Anhui, Henan and Shandong (see figure 9.1) is the peripheral Huaibei area, known for its rebels (Perry, 1980). Yet in contrast to what one would expect from the macro-regional approach, the Qing court did not simply abandon this area. To the contrary, county boundaries were redrawn in the aftermath of major Nian Rebellion and an unusual cluster of a dozen or so counties were designated as high priority, precisely because of rebellious populations. The following sections analyze why Qing rulers decided to formally evaluate their realm, determine priorities and act upon them. This act of strategic prioritizing redeems human agency in the construction of China's imperial map and is a reminder that political geography was not merely the result of predetermined topology.

### **9.1.1 Rationalizing the Personnel Appointment System**

Emperor Yongzheng was the first Qing ruler to institutionalize governing priorities. Carefully designed and highly formalized, the system carried the imprint of its rational-bureaucratic founder (Huang, 1974). Seeking to thoroughly evaluate all local positions in the empire, the project reflected this emperor's ambitious vision of a proto-modern, strong imperial state (Thornton, 2007). From the start, governing priorities were a tool for personnel selection, since Emperor Yongzheng saw capable local officials as the key to improving local government (Wang, 2007). Although he doubted the efficacy of selecting officials through the examination system, Yongzheng could not simply impose new appointment criteria for all local positions. Such a move would have alienated the gentry class, who saw it as their right to be appointed to office, even after a long wait, once they had passed the imperial examination. The post designation system was a way to rationalize the selection procedure of officials for localities that were of vital importance to the empire.

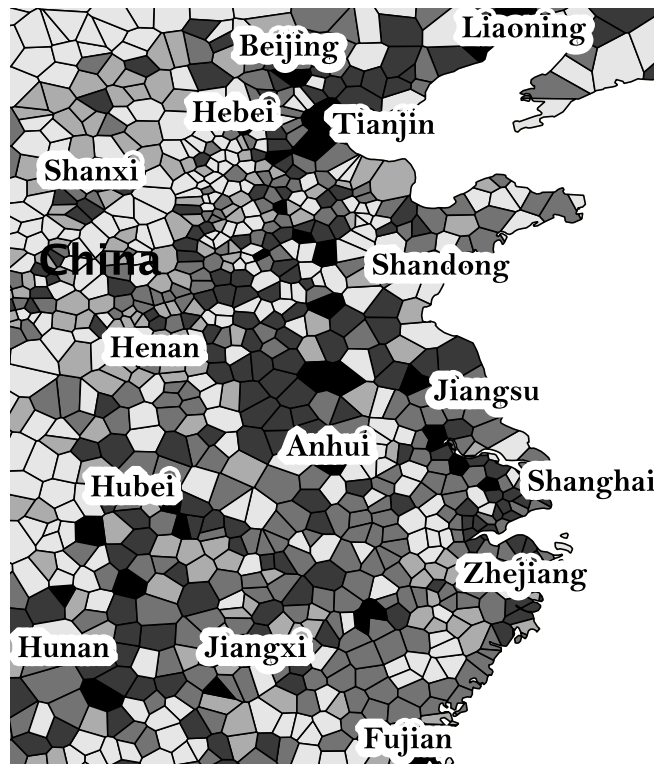


Figure 9.2: Map Showing Governance Priorities of the Qing Court (19th Century).

Note: Black are top priority counties (4 post designations) and the lightest grey are routine counties (no post designations). County boundaries are approximated as Thiessen polygons, derived from the location of county seats. Author's map. Data from Yue Zumou, G. William Skinner and Mark Henderson. 2007. "ChinaW Dataset: Nineteenth-Century Cities, Yamens, and County-level Units." [www.fas.harvard.edu/~chgis/data/chgis/downloads/v4/datasets/](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~chgis/data/chgis/downloads/v4/datasets/). Harvard-Yenching Institute.



When Yongzheng ascended the throne in 1722, the magistrate appointment system was in crisis. After the establishment of the Qing dynasty in 1644, posts had been filled in an ad-hoc manner, flexible enough to reserve posts in strategic and unsettled localities for officials known to be loyal to the new Manchu rulers. In the case of Shandong, at the time 25% of all district magistrates were bannermen or people from Manchuria (I and Fogel, 1981). During Emperor Kangxi's reign (1661-1722), formal yet inflexible regulations came to determine personnel selection: The Board of Personnel kept lists of degree holders, office purchasers and officials up-for-promotion, who were assigned to their posts by drawing lots. The procedure was bound to result in mismatches between officials and their posts. Mismatches in vitally important locales could have deleterious repercussions for the empire as a whole. In exceptional cases (e.g. Palace Museum, 402004677), governors asked permission to handpick officials—a cumbersome procedure that required the emperor's approval and could not fully resolve the problem of novices administering vitally important jurisdictions.

Yongzheng responded to this urgent functional need by setting aside priority posts, to be exempted from the mechanical appointment procedures of the Board of Personnel. Henceforth the provincial governor would appoint county magistrates to these localities. The first round of exemptions came in 1723, marking certain localities along waterways, the empire's lifelines, especially key stations along the Grand Canal; a second round of exemptions marked counties along the seashore as priority counties (Regulations and Precedents of the Qing 大清會典則例1764, 8:39 and 8:45). The fact that Yongzheng adopted these measures less than a year after ascending to the throne suggests that court officials had been considering such exemptions before, but found no support from Kangxi, who had been a staunch defender of standardized operating procedures and legal principles (Huang, 1974). Even if Kangxi's approach had the advantage of curbing court

intrigues and factionalism, such indiscriminate bureaucratic procedures could hardly do justice to the diversity of the empire.

### **9.1.2 Toward a Mental Map of the Empire**

Which counties were most in need of carefully chosen magistrates? Since it was not politically feasible to abandon the established job lottery system altogether, the empire needed to carefully weigh its priorities. Marking counties along the seashore as priority counties was a contestable choice, since many of them did not fit conventional notions of important counties. Yongzheng needed less ad-hoc criteria to reliably target important counties. Functional needs to classify counties had arisen before, so the court could draw on institutional solutions from previous dynasties. The Tang Dynasty (618-907) had categorized counties according to population size as top 上, middle 中 and low 下. The Ming dynasty (1368-1644) had ranked counties based on tax revenues (Nimick, 1999). In this tradition, Yongzheng ordered provincial governors to determine the degree of importance of local positions, including the almost two thousand county magistrate posts.

Shortly thereafter, we see a rare case of bureaucratic innovation that can be traced to the creativity of a single individual: Jin Hong, the inventor of the post designation system, who had recently been appointed Provincial Administrative Commissioner of Guangxi province. His position was far away from the levers of power, but came with an important prerogative. Jin Hong could memorialize directly to the emperor, the seal of his memorial could only be broken in the presence of Yongzheng himself. Inspired by this prospect Jin sent a series of bold memorials to Beijing soon after taking office. When Jin Hong's memorials arrived in the capital, newly compiled lists of importance ratings had already begun trickling in from throughout the empire, such as one from Shandong in January 1728 (LKSS, 1:39, p.561). Yet Jin Hong's ambitious plan so impressed

Yongzheng that he suddenly changed course, moving from the four-letter scale of important ratings to the more complex system of post designations.

Concerned about the frequent mismatches between local officials and their posts, Jin Hong had suggested flagging particularly challenging counties, using one or several of four post designations as labels. In his enthusiastic endorsement, Yongzheng expressed regret that importance ratings had been assigned in an arbitrary manner and instructed the Board of Personnel to study how post designations could be used in the future as a basis for importance ratings. Slow to respond, the Board rolled out the post designation system in 1732 (Liu, 1993, p.183). Characteristically for the Qing state, the outdated institutions, including waterway tags, seashore tags and importance ratings, were not abandoned but gradually incorporated into the new system. This reform process left a long paper trail in the archives, indicating that the post designation system had become the standard to which previous priority markers had to adjust (e.g. Forbidden City 02-01-03-03942-008).

What kinds of counties deserved priority? The priority of a county was reflected in the number of post designations, to be assigned following Jin Hong's definitions:

CHONG 衝(thoroughfare): places at busy highways. FAN 繁(troublesome): places with numerous and complex official business. PI 疲(wearisome): places prone to tax arrears. NAN 難(difficult): places where the population is wicked, where customs are violent and where cases of theft are numerous. (Palace Museum, 402008352)

These definitions struck a cord with Yongzheng, because the four terms concisely reflected familiar concerns in the area of personnel selection and promised to put the importance ranking on a more objective footing. As social scientists familiar with the treacherous intricacies of coding schemes, we may find these designations overly ambiguous. Yet in practice, officials in China

shared an understanding as to what each of the tags meant, far beyond Jin Hong's initial definitions. As in other bureaucratic fields, miscommunication was rare despite the technical and definitional challenges (Metzger, 1973). When governors transferred an official to a priority position, they often elaborated on the nature of the post, going well beyond the mere post designations. These descriptions reflect a shared understanding of post designations, indicating that there was a broad consensus among Qing bureaucrats on what kind of county deserved special attention.

Similarly, when provincial governors argued for adjustments of post designations, they included passages describing why the county could be categorized under the suggested designation. In 1782 a governor of Shandong memorialized

I investigated Ziyang County in Yanzhou Prefecture. Originally the county was assigned a CHONG and FAN, and was a post of middle importance with the magistrate appointment privileges going to the Board of Personnel. The county is the most important place next to a prefectural seat. Military forces are stationed there. Relations between the soldiers and the civilians are complicated and must be appropriately controlled at all times. Moreover, customs are rough and violent. Tax arrears. Lots of official business. There are two rivers flowing through the county. Maintaining embankments, dikes and bridges is not easy. A busy road passes through the county. Postmasters are stationed in Xinjia and Changping, and their unfailing supervision is of strategic importance. (Palace Museum, 403042055)

On the one hand, reasons for assigning post designations were diverse. The problem of civil-military relations evidently critical for Ziyang County was not widely shared by other counties. But the prevalence of violent customs and the challenge of maintaining hydraulic works and imperial lines of communications were among often-cited reasons for why a post should be considered important.

Skinner suggests that we cannot take the post designations literally, because they leave out a “secret strategic component”. His conjecture is based on the observation that the fit between post designations and importance ratings was less than perfect (Skinner, 1977, pp.317 ff.). In reality, such inconsistencies are satisfactorily explained as the result of a simple numerical incompatibility: The number of post designations put counties into five groups (between zero and four designations), but the importance scale had only four levels, leading to ambiguities (Zhang, 2012). Even more mundane, surviving files of the Imperial History Office reveal the difficulty of keeping accurate records. For Caozhou Prefecture, a compiler recorded a C-tag instead of a P-tag, a mistake that was caught (Palace Museum, 2050000414). Other mistakes lived on and found their way into more authoritative compilations (Liu, 1994). Skinner ascribed too much rationality to government behavior. Inconsistencies reflected bureaucratic imperfections rather than grand strategy.

The existence of a secret strategic component also appears implausible for substantive reasons. Post designations were assigned in a decentralized way. To keep the system consistent and operational, field administrators had to be informed of its fundamental operating principles. Security secrets would typically be revealed in the inner court communication system, especially in palace memorials to the emperor (Bartlett, 1991). Both in the inner and outer court communications, we find much discussion of post designations, but no indication whatsoever of any hidden component. We also need to take into account that the system was designed to guide civilian personnel appointments and as such would not have been focused on military defense, as Skinner suggests. Finally, to judge from the imperial rescript on the memorial by Jin Hong, the grand purpose of the system was not to obscure and hide, but rather to illuminate and make transparent the empire’s governing priorities, so as to allow a clear, rational assessment of where scarce bureaucratic resources should best be deployed.

### 9.1.3 Governing Priorities: Dynamics of Change

Priorities needed to be adjusted over time. Qing officials recognized that updating was necessary and that poorly updated priorities would be detrimental for local government. The Shandong Governor expressed this consensus when he memorialized to the throne in 1782, using a set of highly standardized and widely used phrases:

Among the 110 districts, departments and garrisons [in Shandong], there are many where local conditions in the past and local conditions today are not the same. The importance ratings of such positions should be adjusted. One should go with the times and make changes. For the sake of good government. [...] If we swap importance ratings [in the way outlined above], each place would end up with an appropriate label, human resources would be allocated according to local conditions and it would be to the benefit of local administration. (Palace Museum, 403042055)

Governors in other places made similar assessments, even if the transformations of the physical and human geographic conditions in Shandong may have been more radical than elsewhere. The dramatic shift in the course of the Yellow River and the drastic decline of the Grand Canal, as well as imperialist intrusion along the coast were obvious transformations, which presumably should have been reflected in shifting governing priorities. But in reality, institutional change was slow.

To analyze shifting priorities, I have assembled an events database recording instances of post designation changes in Shandong. I identified changes by comparing different editions of the frequently updated Lists of Official Positions (also called Red Books), recently collected in a multi-volume compilation (JSL). To determine timing, I used archival records on post designation changes supplemented by the Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty. For many shifts in governing priori-



Figure 9.3: Slow Institutional Change in Shandong (1748-1911)

ties, this methodology allows for determining an exact year of change. For other shifts, I can only give a range, which on average is four years. The greatest uncertainty concerns the twelve years between 1748 and 1760, as well as the earliest years of the system, when post designations were not yet recorded in the Lists of Official Positions.

The number of counties for which the provincial governor held appointment privileges varied over time (figure 9.3). It included counties with three or four post designations, as well as counties for which the governor held appointment privileges by virtue of a river tag or maritime tag. The number of priority counties had been continuously expanding since 1730 and reached a peak in 1800, when 39 counties fell under provincial jurisdiction, reflecting an expansion of the power of governors in the second half of the 18th century. By contrast, the stasis in the 19th century indicates that governors had lost interest in expanding formal appointment powers since they had alternative ways to dominate local appointment procedures (section 5 below). Over the entire time period from 1720 to 1912, institutional change was gradual and slow.

Figure 9.3 is a balance sheet. It misses cases where post designations were updated by swaps: Downgrading a previously important county and at the same time upgrading a previously unim-



Figure 9.4: Three Episodes of Adaptation in Shandong (1748-1911)

portant county. Counting all adjustments (figure 9.4), we find that there were three bursts of adjustments. Upon closer inspection of changes since 1820, we discover how transient most of these changes actually were. Out of all 30 adjustments, only ten were permanent. The bulk of changes were later reversed. Two-thirds of all changes since 1820 reflect such forth-and-back scenarios. From 1820 to the end of the Qing dynasty, only the post designations of six counties were altered permanently, in four cases involving a downgrading of the county from priority to routine county. Jiaozhou was among these four downgraded places, despite the fact that Jiaozhou Bay during the 19th Century turned into the frontline of colonial expansion and trade in Shandong. The third wave of adjustments around 1834 represents transient changes, and the few permanent changes are problematic, as they ignored the colonial challenge.

In sum, by the early 19th century, governing priorities had ceased to adjust to rapidly evolving local conditions. As a result, they were increasingly out of sync with China's socio-economic realities. For Shandong, the most striking mismatch was the high priority continuously accorded to counties along the Grand Canal, at a time when this region had turned into a hinterland (Pomeranz, 1993). Yongzheng's proto-modern attempt at institutionalizing priorities for China's civilian gov-



ernment came with a formidable disadvantage. Once formalized, priorities became sticky and hard to change. Frozen in time, the institution took on a life of itself. Modernizing institutionalization had the unintended side effect of bureaucratic stagnation.

#### **9.1.4 Corrupted Priorities and the Empire's Faulty Mental Map**

Governors and their entourage played an important role in defining local governing priorities. Not the court in Beijing, but the field administration had sufficient information to assess the shifting importance of counties. Would governors advocate changes with the best interest of the state at heart, or would they exploit the asymmetric distribution of information? Governors sought to secure as many positions as possible, but officials at the Board of Personnel knew how to protect their turf and prevent priority inflation. More importantly, for the sake of their own careers, governors were well advised to have capable officials administer vitally important counties. If incompetent magistrates were in charge of, say, regulating water levels of the Grand Canal, a governor could not put his heart at rest, because he himself would be held responsible if transportation routes to Beijing were interrupted as a result of local mismanagement. To gain appointment powers over such vital localities, governors had reason not to misrepresent the importance of counties in their jurisdiction. In this sense, governors had incentives to truthfully report governing priorities.

But governors also faced disincentives, because the imperial personnel system was a quagmire of corruption. Government positions were legally up for sale through the central authorities in Beijing (Zhang, 2010). For provincial governments, without special permission it was illegal to sell offices. Yet when Beijing gradually divested itself of appointment powers, which came to rest with provincial governments, money sought to buy access to power in the provinces. This is the institutional background of an extortion scheme which led to the dismissal and death sentence of

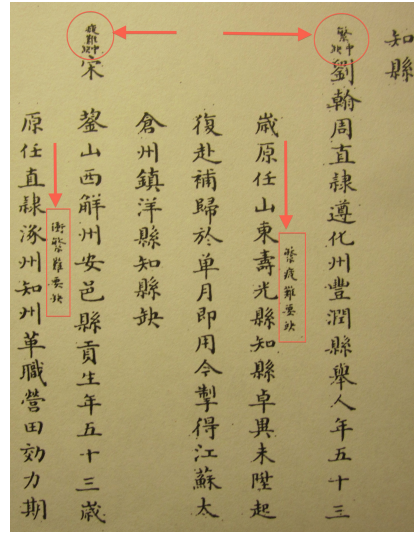
Shandong Governor Guo Tai 國泰 in 1782. R. Kent Guy has demonstrated that the scandal was closely connected to the governor's appointment prerogatives (Guy, 2010, pp.192-198). The Chen Juecheng case shows the quid pro quo, as money was paid in return for positions. For his promotion to the magistracy of Pu County, after seeing the emperor, Chen needed an endorsement by the governor and entrusted 1000 taels of silver to the prefect of Jinan, who acted as the middleman, bought a jade table plaque and delivered it to the provincial governor (Yu and Zhang, 1994, p.2465). Guo Tai memorialized the throne to suggest Chen as Pu County's magistrate, making a careful argument that Chen was the right person for the job (Palace Museum, 022811). Chen then paid 1000 taels of silver in cash, euphemistically referred to as a "fee to support the masses" (Yu and Zhang, 1994, p.2446). The governor knew how to use his power in an openly transactional manner to extract money from Chen.

Provincial office sales had repercussions on the post designations. Some counties at the heart of the corruption scandal had been raised to priority status after Guo Tai became Shandong's Surveillance Commissioner in 1770. The magistracy of Pu County, which Chen bought, had been elevated to priority status in the 1770s. Guo Tai not only sold offices, but also changed post designations, hoping to gain appointment privileges over desirable positions that would sell at a higher price. As soon as Guo Tai arrived in Shandong as a provincial judge, a wave of memorials from Shandong asked for the adjustment of post designations. Once Guo Tai was promoted to provincial governor, he asked to turn Gaotang County into a priority post (Palace Museum, 029516). At that point, the Board of Personnel faced him down, calling upon the emperor to intervene. Henceforth, Guo Tai was allowed to upgrade counties only while downgrading others (Palace Museum, 026062). Guo Tai's modus operandi was to upgrade counties in wealthy areas along the Grand Canal and downgrade counties with a seashore tag in the then less affluent Eastern part of the province.

The long-term distortive effect of Guo Tai's manipulations on the governing priorities in Shandong was considerable. Fifteen adjustments of post designations are linked to Guo Tai's tenure in Shandong, largely explaining the second wave of adjustments in the 1770s (compare figure 9.4). Even if the highly disruptive White Lotus rebellion of 1764 may have justified more attention to Liaocheng prefecture (Naquin, 1981), it is hardly plausible that the area permanently needed particularly qualified magistrates for half a dozen counties, all within a short distance of each other. Moreover, upgrading could be radical, as in the case of Pu County, which went from no post designations to three post designations. It appears that Guo Tai concentrated priority counties in Liaocheng, not only because the area was unusually wealthy, but also because he could then run his extortion scheme through one or two loyal prefects, instead of involving prefects throughout the province. Since many of Guo Tai's adjustments were never cancelled after his fall from power and execution, his operations distorted the empire's map of governing priorities for the remaining 150 years of Qing rule. The court in Beijing perceived its realm through biased lenses.

## 9.2 A Governance Rift Dividing the Empire

The priority map was not an empty letter. It guided crucial government decisions and had far-reaching effects on local administration. Prominent documents of the Qing dynasty refer frequently to post designations, indicating that at the time administrators and historians alike recognized post designations as an essential tool of Qing statecraft. The geography section of the Qing Dynastic History (Draft Version), for example, began the entry for each county with its post designations. Even more telling, since the mid-18th century the empire's frequently updated List of Official Positions began each entry with the jurisdiction's designations. Since these lists were compiled for the practical needs of officials, the inclusion of post designations reflects their relevance for



Source: GYLL vol.24, p.136.

Figure 9.5: Post Designations in Board of Personnel Files (1804)

routine bureaucratic life. The most tangible evidence that the importance ratings were on the minds of officials in their day-to-day decision-making comes from Board of Personnel files. In these files one discovers post designations noted in the margins in small script. For example, the files documenting monthly appointments regularly provide post designations for each position filled. Occasionally, memorials to the emperor include post designations, written between the lines of the main text (Forbidden City 02-01-03-08323-011). Far from being an obscure typology of interest only to imperial geographers in an ivory tower, post designations were heavily used by administrators, especially at the Board of Personnel.

### 9.2.1 Appointment Procedures for County Magistrates

Misled by Qing legal regulations, as opposed to bureaucratic practice, a scholarly consensus has endorsed John Watt's view that "the appointments to the great majority of the district posts were under the sole management of the central authorities" (Watt, 1972, p.48). According to Watt, the Board of Personnel made appointments to 944 districts, that is, about three-quarters of the total,

| month      | Jiaqing 3 (1798) | Jiaqing 4 (1799) | Jiaqing 5 (1800) |
|------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1st month  | 0                | N/A              | 6                |
| 2nd month  | 7                | N/A              | 20               |
| 3rd month  | 8                | N/A              | 8                |
| 4th month  | 6                | 6                | 5                |
| 5th month  | 6                | N/A              | N/A              |
| 6th month  | 9                | N/A              | 3                |
| 7th month  | 7                | 6                | 8                |
| 8th month  | 6                | 4                | N/A              |
| 9th month  | 5                | 8                | 1                |
| 10th month | 4                | 5                | 4                |
| 11th month | 13               | N/A              | 5                |
| 12th month | N/A              | 7                | 12               |
| YEARLY SUM | 71               | 36               | 72               |

Table 9.1: Magistrates Assigned Through the Monthly Lottery (by month, 1798-1800)

each month compiling a list of 23 individuals and then drawing lots to assign these individuals to districts throughout the empire. In theory, the monthly lists could match the number of job vacancies only if magistrates on average served for three and a half years. In reality, the system could not have functioned as commonly believed, since the appointments through the monthly lottery fell far short of the number of vacancies. First, magistrates on average served less than three and a half years, as they were often afflicted by disease, required to go into mourning or otherwise induced to end their term prematurely. Second, according to the records of the Board of Personnel, on 27 rounds of monthly selections around the year 1800, the monthly procedure on average did not assign 23 individuals, but fewer than six (table 9.1, GYLL, vol.23). At this rate, the Board of Personnel would make 79 appointments per year. But if the tenure of a district magistrate lasted at most three and a half years, there were at least 370 vacancies to fill every year. Thus, at most 21% of the appointments to the districts were through the Board of Personnel and its monthly selections.

This agrees with an analysis provided in 1899 by the British Consul-General Byron Brenan. In

contrast to the well-known account of Chinese institutions by Brunnert and Hagelstrom from the Russian legation, the British Consul-General describes not administrative law, but administrative practice and provides extraordinarily rich detail, including tidbits such as the corrupting influence on officials-in-waiting stemming from their local female domestics. According to Brennan, “some officers get their appointment direct from Peking, but more frequently they are sent to one of the provincial capitals to await a vacancy” (Brenan, 1899, p.3). Similarly, based on a late-Qing commentary, Pierre-Étienne Will suggests that “in the nineteenth century at least”, the lottery assigned each official not to a county, but to a province, effectively delegating personnel appointments at the district level to the provincial governor (Will, 2002, pp.112 f.).

To grasp procedural practice at a time when the post designation system had become a well-established standard, let us focus on the year 1800, the year after the death of Qianlong, who had taken over from Yongzheng in 1735 and had actively managed the post designation system. In that year, 27% of all appointments were transfers of magistrates to priority districts and 21% were assignments by the central lottery. To find out how the remaining 52% appointments were made, I investigated the 107 county magistrates serving in Shandong at that time. The Shandong Gazetteer provides almost all their names (Sun, 1915). A variety of sources help us to identify their paths to office (Academia Sinica, Palace Museum, Forbidden City). We find officials who had been assigned to their posts through the lottery. We find others whom the governor transferred from other district magistrate positions. But most strikingly, a large and diverse set of appointment procedures fits neither category. The one procedure that stands out for its frequency involves the policy of Great Selection (*datiao yideng* 大挑一等). Under this policy, provincial degree holders were selected for the fast track to a county magistrate position. The fast track began with an imperial audience. Then the individuals on the fast track drew a lot that assigned them not to a

specific county, but to a province. While waiting in the provincial capital for an appointment, they carried out ad-hoc assignments, thereby gaining experience and proving their talent. At his own discretion, the governor could then memorialize the court to propose the transfer of the official to a proper position.

By 1800, most appointments were no longer dependent on a random lottery, but on the provincial governor's decision. Did the importance ratings guide his exercise of discretion? Did governors feel committed to the rule that magistrates of priority counties must have previously held an official position? Or were governors content to dispatch officials who had proven their qualities on assignments during their time as officials-in-waiting in the provincial capital? Given how far the appointment system had moved away from the initial institutional setting of the early 18th century, whether post designations continued to affect local government at the beginning of the 19th century is an empirical question to which I turn next.

### **9.2.2 Job Experience Upon Assignment to a Priority Position**

To illustrate that routine counties compared to priority counties were at a disadvantage in receiving experienced magistrates, consider Juye County. In 1769, the county lost its priority status. Henceforth, routine selection procedures came to determine the local magistrate with a set of characteristic problems. For example, in 1800, at the monthly lottery outside Tian'anmen Gate, a certain 40-year-old Ma Qipeng from Sha'anxi received an assignment to Juye. Notes on the margins of this lottery record confirm that the county at the time was PI-NAN of middle importance. Ma Qipeng had been allowed to participate in this lottery, because he had bought office under the Regulation for the Aftermath of the Incident in Sichuan and Hubei and had paid extra to be eligible for an expedited process. At the time, the Board of Personnel was under pressure to assign 157

individuals who had bought a district magistrate office under the same regulation (Zhang, 2010, p.64, p.105 and appendix). Juye's new magistrate Ma Qipeng did not hold any imperial degree and had no prior experience as an official. While his later promotions suggest that he eventually turned out well as an administrator (Academia Sinica 115653-001), at the time of his arrival in Juye the selection of Ma Qipeng was certainly a risky one. The fact that a perfect stranger was taking over a county along the Grand Canal might have given the governor cause to petition, in the same year, to have appointment privileges for Juye returned to the province.

We find numerous examples of inexperienced officials filling routine posts, as well as of experienced officials filling priority posts. But there are also examples of experienced officials filling routine posts and inexperienced officials filling priority posts. To study the connections between post designations and the prior experience of magistrates upon taking office, I return to the 107 county magistrates in Shandong of the year 1800 and calculate how many years passed from the official's first appointment to a magistrate position. Ideally, one would subtract sick leaves and mourning periods, but the records do not consistently provide such detail. While a surprisingly large 32% share of the magistrates in priority positions did not have any prior experience as magistrates, the share of novices among the officials taking up routine county positions is much higher, namely 72% (see table 9.2). The relationship between the number of post designation tags and the years of prior experience of new officials taking up office at the post is more loosely correlated than one might think. Magistrates taking on a post in a county with three designations on average had 4.6 years of prior experience, less than magistrates taking on a position with two post designations, who on average had 5.5 years of experience. Priority ratings did tend to keep out novice officials, but the relationship between post designations and prior experience was far from mechanical and calls for further exploration.



| experience         | no tags | one tag | two tags | three tags | four tags |
|--------------------|---------|---------|----------|------------|-----------|
| number of counties | 38      | 11      | 23       | 30         | 5         |
| no experience      | 25      | 8       | 14       | 9          | 1         |
| 1 year             |         |         |          | 3          |           |
| 2 years            |         | 1       |          | 1          |           |
| 3 years            |         |         |          | 3          | 1         |
| 4-6 years          | 2       |         | 1        | 5          |           |
| 7-9 years          | 2       | 1       | 2        | 2          | 2         |
| 10-12 years        | 1       |         | 2        | 1          | 1         |
| 13-15 years        | 1       |         | 2        | 2          |           |
| more than 15 years | 2       |         | 1        |            |           |
| unclear            | 5       | 1       | 1        | 4          |           |
| average experience | 3.8     | 1.9     | 5.5      | 4.6        | 7         |
| share of novices   | 66%     | 72%     | 60%      | 30%        | 20%       |

Table 9.2: Experience of County Magistrates (Shandong, 1800)

The example of Gaoyuan county, a routine county without any post designation, helps to explain why it is hard to discern any clear correlation between the number of post designations and the years of experience. In 1800, the acting magistrate of Gaoyuan county died of illness. Although the county was under the jurisdiction of the Board of Personnel, the governor suggested assigning the position to an official awaiting re-appointment (Academia Sinica 001370-001). This official was none other than Wang Daoheng, at the time a well-known administrator, who had been serving in Shandong since 1757, with only minor interruptions. Born in the early 1730s, he was close to 70 years old when appointed to Gaoyuan. Previously in his career, he had held very responsible positions, including departmental magistrate positions in Dezhou and Jining, both with three tags. He was remarkable for filling in wherever the governor needed a local administrator, known as an official who “temporarily takes care of vacancies” and who thus was not bound by the rule to complete three years of service before moving on to a new position (Forbidden City 02-01-0307750-010). In the archives and in local gazetteers of Shandong, we find dozens of positions that Wang Daoheng filled in Shandong throughout his career. Halfway through his career a memorial describes

him as “mature, experienced and working earnestly”. He served until 1809, when as an old man he asked to be granted sick leave from his assignment in Yidu after 52 years in the service of the Qing dynasty (Forbidden City 02-01-03-08784-017). Officials late in their career were given routine counties because, though experienced, they were considered no longer robust enough for the truly demanding positions. As the quantitative evidence confirms more systematically, routine counties hosted both the least experienced officials and experienced but elderly officials. Thus, routine counties were most likely to be governed by officials whom Beijing deemed less effective in tackling local challenges.

### **9.2.3 The Deliberative Process Leading to Priority Appointments**

In addition to keeping novices away from the most sensitive magistracy positions, the reformed appointment procedure to priority posts approximated a deliberative process, as in a rational bureaucracy. To be sure, human discretion also brought corruption, influence peddling and bureaucratic politics, so we should not idealize the reformed system. But there were some checks and balances. Moreover, provincial administrators had a strong interest in the smooth functioning of the lower level hierarchy. When Yongzheng and Qianlong gave appointment privileges to governors, they apparently expected the benefits of rationalization to outweigh the damages of corruption. The case of Yutai County epitomizes the deliberative process that preceded appointments to priority posts. In 1800, the county magistrate position was vacant, since its incumbent had been impeached for irregularities discovered during the triennial inspection. Shandong’s Governor asked to fill the vacancy by transferring the magistrate of Jinxiang County to Yutai County, but the Board of Personnel did not approve, pointing out the candidate’s insufficient job experience. Shandong’s Governor then turned to the Administrative Commissioner and the Surveillance Commissioner of

the province to work out a solution. Recognizing that Yutai was an important CFN county along a waterway, they argued as follows:

According to precedence, the position should be locally filled by making a transfer from another county. But among the district magistrates in our province, if we exempt those who are disqualified for disciplinary reasons, as well as those who are now serving in another priority post, there is no official who would be appropriate for the locality in question. At present, there simply isn't anyone who fulfills all the requirements expected by precedent. But we found an assistant magistrate, who in this position has already served for more than five years. (Forbidden City 02-01-03-08400-024)

The report, later endorsed by the governor and sent to Beijing, goes on to describe the experience and the personality of this candidate, who eventually received the position.

The case demonstrates that approval from Beijing was more than a mere formality, especially in cases where the suggested candidate did not fully conform to prevailing standards. Emperors forwarded memorials to the Board of Personnel, which competed with provincial governments over local appointment powers. The outcome was not a foregone conclusion; even if the majority of transfer proposals were approved, governors needed to keep in mind the possibility of being denied. This explains the elaborate memorials justifying the governor's choice. While an inflexible and mechanical process determined the appointment of magistrates in routine counties, in priority counties the provincial governor stood at the beginning of a genuinely deliberative appointment process.

The case also shows that the appointment procedure allowed for exceptions. This was important, because otherwise the pool of potential candidates from which the governor could choose would have been extremely small. In a province like Shandong with 107 counties, out of which

31 were priority counties, the pool consisted of three people per position, in theory. Realistically, the pool was much smaller: Some officials had not completed three years of service, others were not physically fit or were away during mourning periods, and yet others were under impeachment. The governor had less discretion than the term “appointment privilege” seems to imply. In reality, governors routinely memorialized Beijing to seek exceptions from the many rules. Instead of simply managing lists of lottery candidates, the Board had to decide when to grant exceptions and when to insist on enforcing precedents. As human decision-making replaced the lottery, not only the governor, but also the Board of Personnel saw an increase in its power. Finally, the participation of Administrative and Surveillance Commissioners in the selection procedure was the norm. When governors sent memorials concerning county magistrate appointments, they highlighted the participation of the two commissioners and occasionally of other officials as well. The Provincial Administrative Commissioner in particular had first-hand experience from many counties, because he conducted audits and investigations. For example, when a magistrate died in office, the Commissioner spent time checking accounts to uncover the reasons for the official’s death. Given these duties, the two commissioners brought substantial local knowledge into deliberations on personnel selections.

#### **9.2.4 The Size of Local Government**

The size of local government varied drastically. While most counties operated with a handful of officials, some county governments were much bigger. Yanggu county had a big government, where the county magistrate could rely on a dozen subordinate officials: Apart from his assistant, there was a Confucian Scholar in charge of education, along with a sub-director for schools. An inspector took care of petty professions. The county office had its own physician. There were supervisors of

Buddhist and Daoist priests. Three officials were in charge of the complex system of sluice gates, which made the county indispensable in the geography of the empire. Even in the absence of formal rules stipulating the number of officials in a priority county, post designations guided the everyday decision-making by officials in Beijing and in the provinces, who allocated bureaucratic resources to localities depending on their priority status. Priority labels thereby affected the size of local government.

The presence of just a few more officials stationed in a county made a significant difference, because subordinate officials were key agents of local government. I define “subordinate officials” as the group of individuals holding official positions below the magistrate-level, yet still formally part of the state apparatus. Little is known about these subordinate officials, because historians have focused either on the preeminent figure of the magistrate or on clerks and runners (Reed, 2000). According to conventional wisdom, the only significant local official was the magistrate, while his official subordinates were few, ineffective and insignificant (Qu, 1962, pp.9-13). But this view is questionable. First, the number of subordinate officials was substantial and their responsibilities were critical. On average, a magistrate had at his disposition at least 3.4 subordinate officials (Watt, 1972, p.15). Many of them held so-called “educational posts”, but their function was broader than the title suggests. For example, the principal of the geomancy school, or Yin-Yang School, was at the same time the inspector of petty professions (Hucker, 1985, entry 8007), including itinerant fortune-tellers, wizards, priests, street performers, mid-wives, firecracker makers and musicians (Brunnert and V.V.Hagelstrom, 1960(1911, p.430), in short, all sorts of potential trouble-makers. Many gazetteers list a supervisor of the Daoist priesthood, who kept a watchful eye on Daoist activities; thereby exercising social control over a segment of society known for its potentially regime-threatening secret societies (Liu, 2010).

|                         | Enxian | Tancheng | Guantao | Zhanhua | Dingtao |
|-------------------------|--------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Post Designation        | CFPN   | CFN      | CF      | N       | none    |
| Magistrate              | 3.0    | 3.3      | 3.4     | 2.4     | 3.0     |
| Assistant Magistrate    | 4.4    | 5.9      |         |         |         |
| Registrar               | 8.8    |          | 4.8     |         |         |
| Sub-District Magistrate |        |          |         | 5.8     |         |
| Jail Warden             | 6.0    | 8.4      | 6.1     | 7.2     | 5.3     |
| Post Master             | 6.6    |          |         |         |         |
| Director of Schools     | 5.7    | 6.5      | 10.1    | 7.6     | 7.4     |
| Sub-Director of Schools | 3.0    | 5.9      | 5.7     | 8.3     | 6.9     |

Method of calculation: Divide the number of years covered by the gazetteer by the number of individuals listed for each post. Since some individuals might be omitted, these numbers should be considered as upper bounds. Gazetteers from the series “Zhongguo Fangzhi Congshu”, Taipei, Chengwen Chubanshe.

Table 9.3: Average Length of Tenure of Officials in Five Selected Counties (19th Century).

As table 9.3 indicates, unlike clerks and runners, subordinate officials were rotated among counties and therefore formed part of a county’s “expat community”. They would surely have self-identified as outside officials close to the magistrate, and would have felt distant from local runners and even the local elite. Since their tenure was longer than the tenure of a magistrate, they could brief a newly arrived magistrate on local politics and intrigues. In cases when the magistrate had just passed the imperial exam and had no prior experience in administration, the role of the subordinate officials was critical. Subordinate officials played a key role in the socialization process of a new official into the imperial bureaucracy. Assistant magistrates were especially close to the magistrate. They could be received in audience by the emperor, and could be promoted to a magistrate position. The court in Beijing and the emperor himself dealt with issues pertaining to subordinate officials. In the Palace Museum collection of secret palace memorials, reserved for the most vital communications, we find no fewer than 722 memorials concerning assistant magistrates. One such memorial from 1764, for instance, proposes stationing the hapless assistant magistrates of Yishui County in a vast, bandit-infested mountainous area (Palace Museum, 403021340). Subordinate officials were pivotal agents of local government.

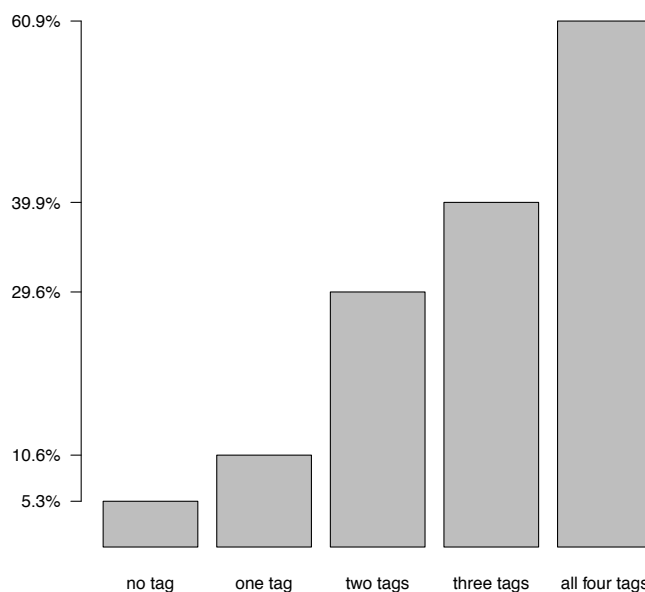


Figure 9.6: Proportion of Counties with an Assistant Magistrate (1899)

The Imperial History Office compiled a list of changes in personnel assignments during the Qianlong era (Palace Museum, 211000105). Without exception, all reassignments of assistant magistrates in Shandong followed the post designations. Assistant magistrates left posts with two or fewer tags and were reassigned to posts with three or four tags. The magistrate of Leling County (2 tags) lost his assistant, who was instead reassigned to Huimin County (3 tags). The assistant magistrate from Zouping County (1 tag) was transferred to Changqing county (4 tags) on a busy North-South highway. The assistant magistrate from Huang County (1 tag) moved to En County (4 tags). In 1768/69, Juye County lost not only one post designation (2 tags remained), but also its sub-district magistrate. Instead, at the same time, a sub-district magistrate was assigned to Heze County (3 tags).

To confirm the hypothesis that county governments with more tags were bigger, I used the Qing Statutes to identify counties that had an assistant magistrate at the end of the Qing Dynasty (Statutes of the Qing 大清會典1899, 5:3a to 5:5a). By that time, post designations had shaped

the allocation of personnel for two centuries. Altogether, the Qing court dispatched assistant magistrates to 347 counties. As it turns out, the higher the priority of a county, the more likely it was to have an assistant magistrate. The likelihood of an assistant magistrate ranged from 5% in routine counties to 60% in top priority counties. Among counties with two tags, 30% had an assistant magistrate (figure 9.6). Every additional tag mattered. The higher a county was on the list of governing priorities, the greater the presence of civilian administration.

### **9.2.5 Conclusion**

China's imperial rulers defined territorial priorities, flagging jurisdictions that deserved special state attention. These priorities then came to define imperial state presence in each locality. As a first approximation, one could describe this as a "one empire, two systems" approach, differentiating between priority and routine counties. Priority counties tended to be situated along important travel routes with lots of official business and known for a difficult population that was slow to pay taxes. Appointments to priority posts were the result of a rational-deliberative process, whereas in routine counties magistrates were chosen by a mechanical process that left much to sheer luck. But the system was more complex than this binary suggests. The intensity of state presence, measured as the likelihood of having an assistant county magistrate, increased with each additional priority marker, allowing for five importance levels. Priority markers even provided personnel planners with guidance as to the nature of local challenges.

These findings have direct implications for research on Qing local administration. One cannot evaluate routine counties and priority counties on the same terms. Attempts to describe a typical, or even representative, county administration are problematic. If one asks whether local government during the Qing dynasty was "big" or "small", one must at the very least distinguish the vast



majority of routine counties from the smaller, yet important set of priority counties. Averaging out differences between the two kinds of counties, one may end up with a statistical artifact that bears little resemblance to most counties as they actually existed. Moreover, computing averages obscures a key feature of Chinese statecraft, historical as well as contemporary: The lack of uniformity is not just a bureaucratic imperfection, but reflects a strategy of differentiated government.

The evolution of the post designation system is largely consistent with views of China's imperial China's bureaucracy as highly institutionalized, undergoing modernization in the 18th century and then backsliding in the 19th century. Yet categories of modernity fail to fully capture the complexity of the process. Assigning priorities is a form of modern simplification in the sense of standardizing extremely diverse local government challenges. Acting on priorities by differentiating governance challenges is a form of bureaucratic specialization. Replacing the lottery that left personnel management to "divine will" by a deliberative process was "rational". At the same time, there is a flipside to bureaucratic modernization under the Qing. Un-Weberian corruption appeared when human discretion replaced mechanical and random selection. Although there were good political reasons for letting the defective traditional appointment system coexist with the more progressive method, this hybridity hindered rational personnel allocation. Institutionalization at the same time made the system unresponsive to new circumstances, raising the question why the court was unable or unwilling to reform. Finally, territorial priorities codified the status quo, subverting the modern ambition for uniform control. Emperor Yongzheng may have aspired to a more fully modern solution, but was notable for settling on a second best bureaucratic solution, given political and practical constraints.

Political scientists have explored state building with minimal attention to sub-national variation in the territorial reach of the state. Some authors have drawn our attention to the existence of

areas with a low state presence, also known as brown spots (O'Donnell, 1993), but we lack an analysis of how the location and extent of these areas may be a result of state builders' strategic calculations. Since power resources are limited and brown areas can never be fully eliminated, state-builders are well advised to identify places of vital importance for the state and at a minimum establish their presence there. In the case of China, we find conclusive archival evidence that central authorities made strategic decisions about how to deploy civilian state power most efficiently. The heterogeneity of Chinese local government was by no means an accidental result of forces beyond the control of the empire, but rather a consciously designed system that broke free from topographically predetermined core-periphery divides. From the perspective of the Qing court, the "one empire, two systems" solution promised to serve the Chinese state well in effectively administering the realm while preventing imperial overstretch.

Differentiated government based on priorities is a powerful tool of Chinese statecraft, deeply rooted in the bureaucratic tradition. It also is a hallmark of other empires, from the Roman Empire to the British Empire, which could only maintain their large size thanks to clearly specified priorities and a "politics of difference" (Burbank, 2010). Cases such as the Ottoman Empire highlight how a diverse multiplicity of administrative institutions and governance strategies can coexist within the same state (Barkey, 2008). Although in less diverse and smaller states a radical quest for uniformity would be less costly, even there state-builders deploy central state power strategically, as the rulers in medieval Japan, who weighed the tradeoffs before deciding which regions could be turned into feudal domains and which ones had to remain under direct imperial control (Hall, 1966). State-builders vary both in terms of the ambition for standardization and in terms of their ability to shape institutional diversity in their own interest, rather than living with historically pre-determined patterns. Compared to state-builders elsewhere, the Qing Court stands out for

explicitly recording its strategic calculus and for the unusually institutionalized process that led to the definition of fine-grained priorities.

Where did the Chinese state deploy its most potent administrative resources, and where was local government strong? The first counties that Yongzheng elevated to priority status were jurisdictions along important waterways, such as counties that were vital for maintaining the Grand Canal. This is reminiscent of Karl Wittfogel's thesis that hydraulic operations fostered strong states (Wittfogel, 1957). Yet the kind of hydraulic operations that made a county worthy of attention had less to do with irrigation and flood control, which Wittfogel highlights, than with operations to maintain long-distance communication and transportation infrastructure. That is, state-builders' governing priorities were geared not toward agricultural needs, but toward the needs of the centralized state. In addition, when counties with importance to the central state had hard-to-govern populations, state builders would not retreat. Instead, the local priority system enshrined the principle of deploying more resources precisely to places where tax collection was difficult, where the population was unruly and violence was customary. Bigger civilian local governments with experienced officials would be found in places considered as vital pillars for empire-wide communication and known for governability problems.

The reform of the personnel system, henceforth identifying and prioritizing the realm's vitally important jurisdictions, must be added to the list (Thornton, 2007, p.22, fn.2) of path-breaking administrative reforms by Emperor Yongzheng, which also includes new bureaucratic communication channels, the establishment of the Grand Council and ambitious fiscal reforms (Bartlett, 1991). Post designations were motivated by the ruler's concern with personnel policy, which also led Yongzheng to innovate in areas such as imperial audiences (Wang, 2007) and official sick leave (He, 2012). Yongzheng's reforms shaped the Qing bureaucracy for two more centuries. The priority

ratings even survived Qing rule. After the 1911 Revolution, the Nationalists not only continued assigning priorities, distinguishing among four classes of counties, but also expanded the implications of this classification. Governing priorities determined the size of local militias (German Foreign Ministry Archive, Tsingtau 20-1, March 5, 1932) and set standards for public goods provision (Hubei Archive, LS1-1-779). Under the People's Republic, the establishment of autonomous regions, the "third front" development strategy, the "one country, two systems" formula, the opening of special economic zones, and the geopolitical selection of key projects indicate that the delimitation of territorial priorities and the differentiation of local government remain hallmarks of Chinese governance in the 21st Century.

## Chapter 10

# Conclusion

China's authoritarian government has been successful in exercising authority over the vast East Asian landmass, partly because it was able to take advantage of the grassroots presence of its Leninist party organization. The one-child policy, one of the most ambitious policies of the 20th Century, could not have been so effectively implemented if it had not been for the rank-and-file party members, present in the villages and the factories throughout the country. While party members enjoy material privileges, they also help to overcome asymmetric information problems, thereby making tax extraction more effective. At times, precisely because party members are not merely faithful implementors, but also act on their own initiative, they turn the party state into a self-corrective institution. During the Cultural Revolution crisis, party members were important in preventing local governments' descent into anarchy. In the late 1950s, according to preliminary evidence, the most committed party members dragged their feet on implementing the disastrous Great-Leap Forward policies, thereby alleviating the still catastrophic famine. The geographic patterns of party membership are surprisingly persistent, today still resembling the patterns of 1949. These early patterns were determined by Japanese occupation but subsequently became

the basis for the uneven reach of the post-1949 state. “Differentiated governance”, a governance technique inherited from the pre-1911 imperial era, allows the Chinese state to make the best of the uneven reach of its power infrastructure, instead of evening it out at high political cost.

## 10.1 The Subnational Turn in the State-Building Literature

Harnessing the new possibilities that come with a sub-national comparative perspective on state building, this dissertation owes its findings to the empirical leverage gained by analyzing variation of state-building outcomes across subnational units, especially counties. In part, this is possible thanks to newly available data. For instance this dissertation, as far as I know for the first time, uses county-level mortality statistics of the Great Leap Forward famine, as well as unprecedented detailed historical information on local pathways of the Cultural Revolution. In part, the analysis owes to the subnational turn in the recent literature, contrasting with conventional approaches to the state, which revolve around unitary nation states as points of reference and thereby succumb to the whole nation bias (Rokkan, 1969). Most states are much stronger in some parts of their national territory than in others. The degree of political order varies not only among countries, but also within the borders of a single country, from one province to the next, from one county to the next, and arguably even from one neighborhood to the next. Differences within countries can be greater than differences between countries, and are of utmost consequence for the lives of ordinary citizens, especially in non-OECD countries.

Over the past fifteen years or so<sup>1</sup> comparative political scientists have become increasingly interested in the subnational (Tsai, 2009). Political scientists followed the lead of other disciplines, such as history, which had been moving beyond the nation state for a while.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, by

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Snyder’s 2001 article marks a conscious and decisive turn to within-country comparisons (Snyder, 2001).

<sup>2</sup>For example, one historian suggested that history is to be rescued from the nation (Duara, 1995).

paying attention to the subnational, researchers increase the number of observational units and gain empirical leverage (King, 1994). The civil society literature spearheaded the subnational turn in the larger field of political science (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, 1993) and has been at the forefront ever since (Tsai, 2007; Rithmire, 2014; Singh, 2010). By contrast, the state-building literature still stands as one of the last bastions resisting the subnational turn, and for no good reason. There is a strong conceptual commitment to a unitary state, with occasional attention to center-periphery divides; even subnational variation is studied through cross-country comparisons. For instance, the literature on Latin America has identified zones that lie beyond the reach of the state, called the “brown areas” (O’Donnell, 1993). Instead of explaining why some areas are more brown than others, important scholarly work explores why some countries have more “brown areas” than others (Soifer, 2006).

There have been exceptions<sup>3</sup>. In studies of European states, Daniel Ziblatt analyzes variation in state capacity, both through the lens of election fraud (Ziblatt, 2009) and public goods provision (Ziblatt, 2008). In the Africa field, Catherine Boone finds explanations for why the hold of the state over some rural communities is so much stronger than over others (Boone, 2003). In the China field, an increasing number of studies analyze sub-national variation in state-building outcomes and the uneven strength of the central state over different areas of its territory (Remick, 2004; Sheng, 2009). This dissertation fully adopts the subnational mode of analysis, in chapter 4 even turning to the smallest possible micro-level, zooming all the way down to the individual household. The subnational turn in the state-building literature can be fruitful, even at an extremely high resolution, and reveals patterns that are far more complex than conventional ideas of center versus periphery would suggest.

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<sup>3</sup>These include a series of subnational studies appearing in *Studies in Comparative International Development*, especially contributions to a special issue on infrastructural power (vol.43, no.3/4, fall/winter 2008).

No one has a more vital interest in illuminating the origins of the party state's resilience than the leaders of the CCP themselves. Like comparative political scientists, influential thinkers in the service of the party state have derived their insights from *cross-national comparisons*. In particular, CCP leaders have identified crucial areas in need of reform by drawing lessons from a self-reflective comparison between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union (Shambaugh, 2008). However, as far as I can tell, the party's strategists are not yet putting much effort or yielding much insight from systematic *subnational comparisons*. To be sure, the adoption of policies after prior testing in experimental points (Heilmann, 2011) involves a subnational comparison between treatment group and control group. Yet the party state's think tanks have not begun to leverage fully the rich information contained in the variation of political outcomes within China.

Subnational analysis almost invariably involves creating political maps. In the process of constructing such maps, one is confronted with the complex interplay of physical topography, socio-economic geography and political spaces. One approach to analyzing the interplay begins with a linear causal chain adopted by scholars such as Karl A. Wittfogel, G. William Skinner and Jeffrey D. Sachs: Topography determines socio-economic patterns, which in turn lead to particular political outcomes. The findings of this dissertation are at odds with implications typically derived from such a linear approach, as well as with some of its fundamental assumptions. As for typical implications, the center/periphery approach suggests that state strength decreases with distance from Beijing, or from macro-regional cores. Yet as chapter 4 demonstrates, distance is a double-edged sword. The state is not necessarily exercising most authority over the populations at close range, because these populations are also better able to capture the state to promote their own interests. More fundamentally, the linear approach is problematic since the Chinese state is viable precisely because it breaks through physiographic regions and reshapes the political geography, as shown in



chapter 9. In the past, while drainage basins were important, the man-made Grand Canal reshaped the topography in ways that altered the presence of the state as well as economic networks. The strength of party organization is indirectly linked to topography -because Japanese occupation to some extent followed railroads whose paths were designed with topography in mind-, but that human geography was more directly at work. In short, a political map of China incorporates both physical and human geography. While the dissertation has not in any conclusive way specified the relative importance and the interaction between the two, it has shown that human geography rivals and sometimes supersedes physical geography. The study of China's political map needs further exploration and promises to continue to be a fruitful undertaking.

## 10.2 Historical Transmission and Watershed Events

The dissertation also advances the historical turn in political science.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, political science has never ignored history. Classic works on the origins of dictatorship and democracy by Barrington Moore (Moore, 1966), on social revolutions by Theda Skocpol (Skocpol, 1979) and on civic traditions in Italy (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, 1993) are all historically grounded. However, Gary King's move to unify methodology (King, 1998) and more stringently design social inquiry (King, 1994) at first reduced political scientists' historical imagination, because of methodological difficulties in dealing with time dynamics.<sup>5</sup> The historical turn salvages a hallmark of the discipline by bringing the historical richness of earlier studies back into today's more methodologically rigorous political science. Driving the historical turn are attempts to find more methodologically satisfying ways to deal with dynamic processes, including but not limited to path-dependency and event-sequencing

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<sup>4</sup>Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Ziblatt have identified a "historical turn in democratization studies" (Capoccia and Ziblatt, 2010), but the trend might in fact be even broader.

<sup>5</sup>Gary King himself recognizes this difficulty: "The range of 'reasonable' specifications increases vastly when data have time series properties" (King, 1998, p.167).

(Pierson, 2004; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003). It is easier to verify that historical legacies still have a significant impact on contemporary outcomes than to numerically describe parameters of dynamic institutional change. The party growth model developed in chapter 7 to study the convergence of party membership patterns is such a method, making use of substantive information on recruitment processes for the sake of an effective quantitative analysis.

When tracing historical causation a fundamental question is how far one should go back in time; unless one is prepared to revisit prehuman times like Francis Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 2011). Depending on the specific research questions at hand, one will have to use different methods for locating the relevant watershed event that changed the course of history enough to stand at the beginning of a consequential causal chain. Searching for the historical origins of China's crimson and pink areas, this dissertation identified the late 1930s and early 1940s as the critical time period. The fact that the party was only founded in 1921 suggests that the origins of the uneven party presence lie in the 20th century. Moreover, the rapid membership expansion during the Second Sino-Japanese War suggested that this period was the CCP's formative period. Finally, the geography of party strength is sufficiently different from the reach of the imperial Chinese state that it did not seem promising to go further back in time. Beyond the specifics of this case, one might conjecture that it is the arrival of modernity -defined as the mobilization of a large share of the population in politics- that changes the political map in a lasting way. To be sure, there is much debate as to when exactly political mobilization arrived in China, but Japanese colonization certainly is one plausible answer. In short, looking for watershed events, which define the beginning of a distinct chain of events, the onset of modernity is a possible starting point, because henceforth, as Samuel Huntington argued (Huntington, 2006 (1968)), new kinds of institutions are needed to achieve order in a highly mobilized society.

The second fundamental question in historical arguments concerns transmission mechanisms. Recognizing the importance of explanatory variables that date far back in history, such as the effect of a locality belonging to the Confederacy during the American Civil War on voting patterns today (Valentino and Sears, 2005), political science begins to address questions of transmission. Is the effect entirely direct or can one identify a mediator that clarifies the causal pathway? This dissertation identifies the Leninist party organization as being at the heart of historical transmission mechanisms. Recruitment procedures, information requirements and incumbents wary of sharing their power with newcomers tend to prevent convergence and a more uniform presence of the party. While not ruling out other transmission mechanisms, such as the inheritance of political attitudes from one generation to the next within families, organizational and political dynamics of party membership recruitment forge a particularly strong link between the present and the past. By contrast, the CCP's base area legacy stands on much shakier ground, because revolutionary legacies are more malleable and interpretable in ways that might even work against the party. The dissertation suggests that one should expect other membership-based organizations, such as church communities, neighborhood associations and labor unions, to forge similar links between the present and the formative moment of such organization - and provides a method for studying this process.

Occasionally, the search for transmission might not be very enlightening, when the dynamics of isomorphism are at work. For instance, the return of imperial techniques for ruling the country -such as the technique of differentiated governance presented in chapter 9- owes not so much to transmission through formal institutions, since the formal institutions of the Qing Empire were shattered in 1911. Instead, post-Communist borrowing from the past primarily occurs as a result of isomorphism: Institutions today develop features similar to institutions in the past because they

face similar challenges. Chinese rulers govern a large, diverse realm, recruiting their agents without elections. It is not surprising that, after a lapse of 100 years, the civil service exams have returned, along with regional quotas, lists of open posts and sophisticated schemes of corruption. Some of this revival may be inadvertent, but much of it is conscious borrowing. Not only do officials from the Organization Department in conversations half-jokingly identify with officials from the imperial Board of Personnel, but even the in-house publisher of the Organization Department endorses this comparison, by publishing research on the Board of Personnel (An, Zuozhang, 2011). As Chinese leaders grow increasingly critical of “Western” models and “Western” institutions, one can expect bureaucrats to turn increasingly to China’s imperial past in search for “Eastern” models and “Eastern” institutions. From the viewpoint of isomorphism, whether the Chinese polity in the future will look more Chinese or more similar to other polities around the world will depend on the extent to which challenges faced by Chinese state-builders are peculiarly Chinese or basically post-modern challenges faced by other state-builders around the globe.

### **10.3 Party-Based Authoritarianism, Party-Based Democracy?**

Contrary to the conceptual gulf that separates research on authoritarian parties from research on democratic parties today, in the 1950s and 1960s political scientists made a point to study authoritarian parties alongside democratic ones (LaPalombara and Weiner, 1966). The insights gained from studying the CCP are first and foremost applicable to other authoritarian parties, including the CCP’s closest cousins in Vietnam and North Korea, even if the CCP stands out as a particularly effective authoritarian party. In democratic systems party members serve very different functions, such as mobilizing voters at the grassroots level during election campaigns. While some parties are innovative in deploying their party members in unusual ways, such as the

environmental activism of some Green Party members, observing the decline in traditional forms of political participation through parties in most advanced democracies (Pharr, Putnam and Dalton, 2000), reflected in declining party membership (Scarrow, 2000), authors have even gone so far as to ask: “Do political parties still need members?” (Hooghe and Dassonneville, 2014) In that sense, we might be witnessing a historical reversal: Party members of authoritarian parties are becoming more significant political actors compared to party members of democratic parties.

Observing that many citizens stick with the same party for their entire lives and that geographic patterns of party membership are stable over time, political parties -both authoritarian and democratic ones- strongly link political communities to their history. It is an empirical question how much the political map of a country is shaped by contemporary socio-economic realities, by political attitudes transmitted from generation to generation and by historical events that are transmitted through formal institutions, especially membership-based institutions such as parties. The degree to which parties are in decline and party membership becomes more fluid, one may conjecture, is an important determinant of the degree to which historical influences on a country’s political map remain strong. To test this conjecture, future work could use the empirical tools developed to quantify the half-life of history in the Chinese case, apply them to parties and other membership-based organizations in democratic countries, and gauge the disappearance of history effects and national convergence on countries’ political maps.

Historically, the Chinese state has relied on non-state agents, distinct from bureaucrats, to govern at the grassroots level. In pre-modern times the local gentry, consisting of the numerous imperial degree holders either waiting for or having retired from official positions, along with local clerks and runners, filled the void left by a county government staffed with a handful of officials. Nowadays, although the presence of formal bureaucracy has increased markedly, the state relies on

party members to support governance at the grassroots level. What options might post-CCP state builders face? It is certainly possible that a post-Communist state would cut down on its ambitions for the grassroots level, or alternatively, that the state would seek to expand its bureaucracy all the way down to the grassroots level. Either of these courses of action would be a drastic break with the past, comparable to the Meiji restoration when the Japanese state for the first time expanded its centralized bureaucratic power to the local level, instead of following “Confucian” ideals of self-regulating and autonomous local communities. Short of such a sharp historical break, this dissertation suggests that post-Communist Chinese state-builders are likely to support their authority at the grassroots either through corporatist arrangements with local elites or through the deployment of other parties, maybe even democratic ones, as vehicles for state action.

## Appendix 1:

# Party-Versus-Bureaucracy Model

The party-versus-bureaucracy model is designed to rigorously establish under what conditions it is advantageous for a principle, like China's central leadership, to employ two agencies, the state bureaucracy and the party hierarchy, instead of amalgamating the two. It build on a game theoretical model known as the multi-task principle-agent model.

### Orthodox Multi-Task Model with One Agent

Bengt Holmstrom and Paul Milgrom have formulated a principal-agent model, where the agent must work on two related tasks (Holmstrom and Milgrom, 1991). Their model, along with the simplified notation used by Bernard Salanié (Salanié, 1997) provide the framework for the following analysis. The goal of this subsection is to find out how many benefits the principal can expect in the standard multi-task scenario. In the following subsection, I derive the benefits in an alternative scenario, with two separate agents working on the related tasks. Subsection three compares costs and benefits in the two different scenarios.

The principal observes only his payoff. His payoff, apart from transfer payments made to the

agent, is the sum of two random variables  $X_1$  and  $X_2$ , with expected probability equal to the efforts  $a_1$  exerted by the agent on task 1 and the efforts  $a_2$  exerted by the same agent on task 2.

$$x_i = a_i + \epsilon_i \quad (10.1)$$

The asymmetric information problem occurs, because a disturbance  $\epsilon_i$  obfuscates the signal. The characteristic multi-task problem arises, because the disturbances are not always independent of each other, the covariance being  $\epsilon_{12}$ .

The agent receives wages  $w$ , which are a linear function  $\alpha_1 X_1 + \alpha_2 X_2 + \beta$  of the signals  $X_i$  observed by the principal. As a result of exerting efforts  $a_i$ , the agent incurs cost  $C(a_1, a_2)$ . The agent has an exponential utility function

$$-\exp(-r(w - C(a_1, a_2))) \quad (10.2)$$

If the agent is rewarded for the two tasks under such a setting, the optimal wage contract is chosen so as to maximize the overall expected surplus, under the incentive constraints.

$$Overall\ Surplus_{jointly\ rewarded} = a_1 + a_2 - C(a_1, a_2) - \frac{r}{2} \alpha' \Sigma \alpha \quad (10.3)$$

$$\alpha_1 a_1 + \alpha_2 a_2 - C(a_1, a_2) \quad (10.4)$$

## Multi-Task Model with Multiple Agents

Up to this point, the analysis has strictly followed the paradigmatic version of the multitask principal-agent model. Let us now modify the original model by introducing multiple, separately rewarded agents. The principal receives the same payoffs as in 10.1. To reflect the division of labor



between the agents, each agent is rewarded only for the outcome pertaining to one task. This means that the principal commits himself -through the wage contract- to ignore the outcome of task 2, even if it provides indirect information about the performance of agent 1. It is this commitment to ignore some of the signals, which drives the result and improves the outcome. For agent  $i$  the linear wage function is

$$\alpha_i X_i + \beta \quad (10.5)$$

Notice that the optimal arrangement might neither be a complete pooling of the tasks, nor a complete separation of tasks. Under certain conditions, it could be that the optimal arrangement falls in between jointly rewarding the two agents and separately rewarding the two agents, so that one would need to optimize the weights put on each signal in the linear wage function. However, since the modest goal of this analysis is to show that the separation of tasks can be more advantageous than the pooling of tasks, there is no need to study intermediate cases. The simplifying assumption is closer to the kinds of arrangements found in the real world and it allows for straightforward, clear-cut comparisons of the conventional solution to multi-task models and the multi-agent solution to the multi-task model. Thanks to the simplification, the exact conditions, under which task separation is advantageous, are much more intuitive to interpret.

The agent receives an expected payoff with certainty equivalent

$$\alpha_i a_i + \beta - C(a_i) - \frac{r}{2} \alpha_i^2 \sigma_i^2 \quad (10.6)$$

In terms of benefits, the agent expects a bonus in proportion to his efforts  $a_i$  and a lump sum transfer payment from the principal  $\beta$ . On the downside, the agent suffers costs from investing

efforts  $a_i$ , as well as losses that reflect his uncertainty: After all, the output visible to the principal might not fully reflect the agent's efforts, because of the disturbance term  $\sigma_i$ .

As before, the solution of the multitask model requires maximization of overall welfare under incentive constraints. The incentive constraints remain unchanged, but the overall welfare function now is

$$\text{Overall Surplus}_{\text{separately rewarded}} = a_1 + a_2 - C(a_1) - C(a_2) - \frac{r_1}{2}\alpha_1^2\sigma_1^2 - \frac{r_2}{2}\alpha_2^2\sigma_2^2 \quad (10.7)$$

incentive constraints are identical to the original model.

### Is it Advantageous to Employ Two Separately Rewarded Agents?

We will now compare the two maximization problems, to identify the conditions under which it is advantageous for the principal to assign the tasks to two separately rewarded agents, instead of to just one agent. Since the incentive constraints are identical for the two organizational solutions, the key is to compare the expected total surplus with joint rewards (equation 10.3) to the expected total surplus with separate rewards (equation 10.7). The principal prefers to reward the two agents separately if and only if

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Overall Surplus}_{\text{jointly rewarded}} &< \text{Overall Surplus}_{\text{separately rewarded}} \\ \iff a_1 + a_2 - C(a_1, a_2) - \frac{r}{2}\alpha'\Sigma\alpha &< a_1 + a_2 - C(a_1) - C(a_2) - \frac{r_1}{2}\alpha_1^2\sigma_1^2 - \frac{r_2}{2}\alpha_2^2\sigma_2^2 \quad (10.8) \\ \iff C(a_1) + C(a_2) - C(a_1, a_2) &< \frac{r}{2}\alpha'\Sigma\alpha - \frac{r_1}{2}\alpha_1^2\sigma_1^2 - \frac{r_2}{2}\alpha_2^2\sigma_2^2 \end{aligned}$$

The right hand-side of 10.8 is always positive. The left-hand side reflects synergy effects  $\Omega$  between the two tasks:  $C(a_1) + C(a_2) > C(a_1, a_2)$  means that the costs of two people engaging the

tasks separately are greater than the costs of one person taking care of both tasks all by himself. The greater the synergy effects from having one person take care of both tasks, the higher the bar for splitting up the task and assigning it to two different agents.

We know that the principal will assign the riskier task to the less risk-averse agent, because the principal must pay transfers and is affected by overall welfare. Without loss of generality, it is then possible to say that  $\sigma_1 > \sigma_2$  and  $r_1 < r_2$ , to interpret the right-hand side of equation 10.8, which we can rewrite as

$$\Omega < \frac{r - r_1}{2} \alpha_1^2 \sigma_1^2 + \frac{r - r_2}{2} \alpha_2^2 \sigma_2^2 + r \sigma_{12} \alpha_1 \alpha_2 \quad (10.9)$$

As this equation shows, the added value of employing two agents increases if the two agents are of different types *and* if the two tasks are different. If the two sets of agents have the same level of risk adversity  $r = r_1 = r_2$ , or if the uncertainty of the signal adjusted by a scaling factor  $\alpha_1 \sigma_1 = \alpha_2 \sigma_2$  is identical between the two tasks, then two terms on the right-hand side disappear, as shown in equation 10.10. In short, the more different the two agents and the two tasks, the more likely the principal is to employ distinct agents.

Finally, even if the two agents or the tasks are identical, it might still be advantageous to employ multiple agents. To see this, assume identical agents (or alternatively identical tasks), so that the condition of equation 10.9 simplifies to

$$\Omega < r \alpha_1 \alpha_2 \sigma_{12} \quad (10.10)$$

The remaining term in equation 10.10 points to the third critical factor, namely the precise nature of the asymmetric information problem, captured by  $\sigma_{12}$ , the correlation of the noise of signal for

task 1 and noise of the signal for task 2. If the noise is negatively correlated, the two signals are complementary and in conjunction provide the principal more reliable information for distributing rewards or meting out punishments. By contrast, if the variable  $\sigma_{12} > 0$ , the principal faces the characteristic challenge of strategic situations resembling the multitask model.

## Appendix 2: Party Growth Model

The following pages present the party growth model underlying the analysis of party membership convergence carried out in chapter 7. Consider a jurisdiction at time  $t$  with  $M_t$  party members. The number of new party members that can be won is a function of the number of existing party members  $F(M_t)$ . Assuming that in each period a constant fraction  $x$  of the membership dies, is purged or otherwise exits the party, the dynamics of the growth process can be written as

$$\frac{\nabla M_t}{\nabla t} = F(M_t) - xM_t \quad (10.11)$$

The change in members is the balance between entries and exits; if entries equal exits, the party growth has reached a plateau called steady state. Henceforth, the fraction of party members in the community  $\frac{M_t}{P_t}$  is referred to as party strength. To simplify notation, we suppress subscripts and write partial derivatives to time, such as  $\frac{\partial(M_t/P_t)}{\partial t}$  with a dot as  $\dot{M}/P$ . If population growth is linear, then the change in party strength can be written as

$$\dot{M}/P = f(M/P) - (x + n)(M/P) \quad (10.12)$$

where  $f(m_t)$  describes the increase in party strength as a function of the existing number of party members and  $n$  is population growth. Assume that the expansion of the membership base follows a standard Cobb-Douglas production function of the form

$$f(M/P) = a(M/P)^b \quad (10.13)$$

with  $0 < b < 1$ . Production of new members is a strictly increasing function of the existing membership, that is, the more members a party already has, the easier it is to expand it to one additional person (first derivative positive). This increase is much steeper when a party has only a few members, but turns flatter when the party already has many members and saturation sets in (second derivative negative). These typical growth dynamics observed in accumulation processes in economics, as well as in the natural sciences, seem reasonable in the political domain as well: The more members an organization has, the easier it is to attract additional members; and these “economies of scale” are stronger with small organizations than with large ones. Methodologically, this assumption is appealing, because it allows for a broad range of possible growth dynamics. The limiting case of  $\lim_{b \rightarrow 0}$  describes a situation where the expansion of the party is (almost) independent of the number of existing members. The other limiting case of  $\lim_{b \rightarrow 1}$  describes a case where the ability to attract new members increases proportionally to the number of existing members, resulting in a rapid (almost infinite) escalation of party membership. Plugging the production function into equation 10.12, and with the additional notational convention  $m = \ln(M/P)$ , we yield

$$\dot{m} = ae^{m(b-1)} - (x + n) \quad (10.14)$$

The party growth model possesses a steady state, defined as a situation  $\dot{m} = 0$ . When the steady state is reached, party strength reaches a plateau and ceases to increase. The absolute number of party members continues to grow, but only fast enough to offset population growth and the regular loss of party members. The zero growth condition implies that party strength in the steady state is a constant

$$m^* = \frac{1}{b-1} \ln\left(\frac{x+n}{a}\right) \quad (10.15)$$

The fraction  $\frac{-n-e}{a}$  reflects the fact that final party strength in the steady state depends on how the speed of growth compares to the rate of exits from the party and to population growth. From this perspective, the unusually large share of party members in the population of the former German Democratic Republic could be due to demographics: Even if the Communist party grew at ordinary rates, over time a shrinking population drastically increased party membership per capita of population (Malycha and Winters, 2009).

The concise formulation of the party growth model in equation 10.14 poses a twin analytical challenge. First, the marginal change in party strength  $\dot{m}$  is a mathematical construct that cannot be directly observed; thus its parameters cannot be empirically determined. Second, it is a non-linear differential equation, which is hard to handle. Therefore, we will linearize the equation, using Taylor series expansion “around” the steady state as an approximation. Mathematically speaking, the approximation is valid only “close to” the steady state, but for all practical intents and purposes, economists have found the approximation perfectly acceptable to analyze economic growth dynamics. In particular, after linearization, it is straightforward to transform the model into an equation that can be estimated empirically. Approximating equation 10.14 with Taylor

series to the first differential yields

$$\dot{m}(m) \approx \dot{m}(m^*) + \frac{\partial \dot{m}}{\partial m}(m - m^*) = \dot{m} + a(b - 1)e^{m^*(b-1)}(m - m^*) \quad (10.16)$$

Replacing  $m^*$  in the exponent using steady state equation 10.15 yields a linear differential equation

$$\dot{m} = \lambda(m - m^*) \quad (10.17)$$

with  $\lambda = (1 - b)(x + n)$ . This linear differential equation can be transformed into a version whose coefficients can be empirically estimated. Rearranging terms, multiplication by  $e^{\lambda t}$  and finally integration with respect to time leads to

$$\int e^{\lambda t}(\dot{m} + \lambda m)dt = \int e^{\lambda t}\lambda m^* dt \quad (10.18)$$

$$\Leftrightarrow e^{\lambda t}m = m^*e^{\lambda t} + b \quad (10.19)$$

$$\Leftrightarrow m(t) = e^{-\lambda t}b + m^* \quad (10.20)$$

This equation expresses party strength as a function of time. To specify arbitrary integration term  $b$ , we make use of an initial condition. If we know  $m(0)$ , this implies  $b = m(0) - m^*$ , so that

$$m(t) = e^{-\lambda t}m(0) + (1 - e^{-\lambda t})m^* \quad (10.21)$$

The logarithm of party membership at time  $t$  is the weighted average between initial party membership and party membership in the steady state. If  $\lambda < 0$ , then as time goes by, the influence of initial party membership recedes at rate  $\lambda$ , and the influence of the steady state increases accord-



ingly. In other words,  $\lambda$  indicates the speed of convergence. The more negative  $\lambda$ , the greater the speed of convergence.

The conventional approach presented here is an approximation using Taylor series. An exact solution of the differential equation 10.14 is possible. For notational simplification, the yearly decrease in party penetration as a result of population growth and exiting members is written as  $d = n + x$ . With the help of inverse functions, the solution is

$$m(t) = \frac{1}{1-b} \log\left[\frac{1}{z} - (a - e^{z*(bt-t-C+bC)})\right] \quad (10.22)$$

It would also be possible to estimate the five coefficients  $a$ ,  $b$ ,  $n$ ,  $x$  and  $C$  contained in this equation, but interpretation would be cumbersome and -at least in the present algebraic form- of less substantive meaning: Coefficients  $a$  and  $b$  would indicate the shape of the underlying Cobb-Douglas function, but only indirectly indicate the steady state and the convergence rate. Coefficients  $n$  and  $x$  would be of little interest, because they are directly observable at the aggregate level: Between 1956 and 2010 China's population has increased more than twofold by the factor 2.13105, implying an annual population growth rate  $n$  of 0.01411. The average annual rate of exits  $x$  was 0.01157. Therefore the analysis proceeds using the approximation.

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CRD 1: Upon return to Shandong, a military leader reports from the conference. 濟南軍區李水清副司令員轉達中央首長重要指示和中央辦的毛澤東思想學習班山東班的總結. [Li Shuiqing, vice-commander of Jinan military region, transmits instructions from central leaders and a summary about the Shandong section of the centrally managed Mao Zedong thought study group.] October 20, 1969. 37 pages. Reproduced by the revolutionary committee of Huimin prefecture.

CRD 4: Self-critique by the secretary of Shandong’s top rebel Zhu Wen 朱文, made at the occasion of a Mao Zedong Study Group organized by the central government to illuminate the

situation in Shandong province. 對王效禹在山東搞獨立王國，對抗中央，反對毛澤東思想幾個主要問題的解開 [Revealing important issues concerning Wang Xiaoyu's scheme of an independent kingdom in Shandong and his opposition to Mao Zedong thought].

CRD 11: Centrally issued document announcing a policy reversal concerning Wang Xiaoyu. 中共中央文件，中發（69）25號，中央對王效禹，楊得志，袁升平三同志的報告的批示. [Central Committee Document, Centrally Issued (1969) no.25, instructions by the central government on the report submitted by the three comrades Wang Xiaoyu, Yang Dezhi and Yuan Shengping], May 25, 1969.

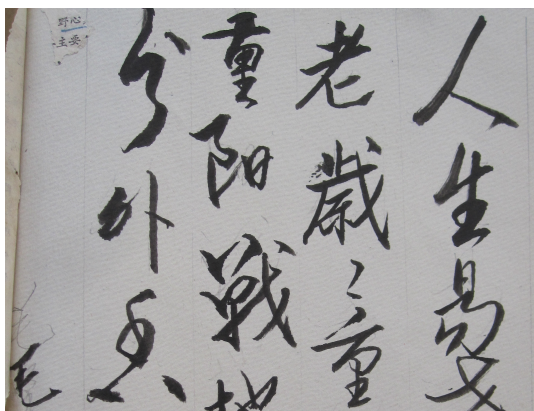
CRD 18: This document is a speech by 王澤恩, made at the occasion of a Mao Zedong Study Group organized by the central government 徹底揭發批判王效禹派「工宣隊」進佔省生產指揮部所犯的嚴重錯誤 [All the way reveal and criticize the serious errors committed by the “Workers Propaganda Troupe” sent by Wang Xiaoyu to occupy the provincial production headquarters].

CRD 31: Zhang Shi 張石. 鋼鐵長城下的蛀蟲：從臨沂問題上看王效禹反對人民解放軍的滔天罪行 [The moths under the strong Great Wall: From the Linyi's problem seeing the heinous crimes against the PLA committed by Wang Xiaoyu]. Zhang Shi had served as an embedded journalist during an intervention in Linyi.

CRD 50: Handbill found at a flea market, dated January 22, 1967. 中央文革小組康生等三同志和我們的談話 [Our conversation with three comrades from the Cultural Revolution Small Leading Group, including Kang Sheng].

CRD 55: 中央首長接見山東辦領導小組時的重要指示 [Important instructions by central leaders at a meeting with the small leading group of the Shandong section].

CRD 85: 中央首長接見山東省領導小組時的重要指示 [Important instructions on the occasion of central leaders meeting with the small leading group of the Shandong section].



(a) This (cropped) calligraphy “identifies” the original owner of documents CRD 1 to CRD 36, acquired through a middle-man in Jinan and related to a high-level conference on the situation in Shandong in 1969. Very likely the original owner was himself a participant.



(b) This photo “identifies” the collector of documents CRD 450 to CRD 480, acquired through the online platform kongfz.com. The collector lives in the countryside in the Northwestern part of Shandong and may have inherited the material after the death of a former rebel.

Figure 10.1: Exemplary Sources of the Cultural Revolution Documents

CRD 321: Investigation report on the party secretary of Yichang (Yang Chunting), dated August 1967. This report assembles a variety of documents.

CRD 323: Protocol of meeting by central leaders with people from Guangxi and Tibet province. August 5, 1968.

CRD 401: Detailed account of events in Linyi, including personal background of victims of June 1969. January 1, 1970.

CRD 453: 王效禹，孟慶芝復辟資本主義的專政工具——“棒子隊”罪惡累累必須徹底揭發批判 [Wang Xiaoyu and Meng Qingzhi’s instrument for bringing back capitalism: The “stick troupe’s” crimes must be fully exposed and criticized].

CRD 457: This document, on Wang Xiaoyu’s career and private life, is a joint report made on the occasion of a Mao Zedong Study Group organized by the central government to illuminate the situation in Shandong province. 揭開王效禹在省檢察院的罪惡活動看他是個什麼人 [Understanding the type of person Wang Xiaoyu is by revealing his evil criminal activities at the

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CRD 464: 王效禹派「工宣隊」去省生產指揮部奪權的嚴重錯誤必須痛加批判 [One must strongly criticize the severe mistake of Wang Xiaoyu sending a “Workers Propaganda Troop” to seize the power of the provincial production headquarters.]

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CRD 473: 徹底戳穿王效禹奪省革委組織大權的罪惡陰謀 [All the way expose the evil scheme behind Wang Xiaoyu's taking over the organization powers of the provincial revolutionary committee].

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