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Career Backgrounds of Municipal Party Secretaries in China: Why Do So Few Municipal Party Secretaries Rise from the County Level?

in *Modern China*

Genia Kostka, *Hertie School of Governance &
Yu Xiaofan*, *Frankfurt School of Finance and Management*

Abstract

This article examines the career backgrounds of municipal Chinese Communist Party secretaries between 1990 and 2011. Based on an analysis of 898 cadre biographies and 32 interviews with local government officials during 2011 and 2013, this article shows that the majority of municipal party secretaries had spent their careers working at the provincial and municipal levels, while only few advanced up from the county. Our analysis finds that obstacles hindering leading county cadres from rising to the upper ranks of the municipal apparatus include age and education restrictions; limited positions at the municipal level; the lack of networks linking to provincial leaders; and provincial leaders' appointment preferences. Limited career advancement opportunities for county cadres have important implications for understanding the incentive foundations of China's bureaucracy. With only slim prospects for leading county cadres to rise to top municipal positions, the political incentives outlined in the cadre evaluation system might not be as effective in steering cadre behavior as currently claimed in the literature.

Keywords: cadre management system, career advancement, county cadres, incentives, China

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The combination of China's strong growth with the survival of a one-party system has given rise to a sizeable literature examining China's approach to state-led development overseen by the Chinese Communist Party's bureaucracy. Institutions internal to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have been studied systematically to explain how an authoritarian political system like China's can be so resilient and effective in facilitating reform and development. Among different institutions embedded in the CCP, the party's cadre management system is seen as particularly important in contributing to the survival of China's one-party system (Edin, 2003; Huang, 2002; Landry, 2008).

A growing number of studies have analyzed the basis of cadre appointment and promotion decisions in China (Burns, 1987, 1994; Choi, 2012; Li and Zhou, 2005; Manion, 1985, 1993; Shih et al., 2010, 2012; Walder, 1995). Contrary to the conventional view that delivering economic growth is the most important criterion in promotion decisions, recent findings suggest that China's cadre management system does not in fact reward leaders with good economic performance in their municipality and nor does it penalize laggards (Landry, 2008). Instead, factional ties with various top leaders, educational qualifications, and provincial revenue collection have been identified as key factors in explaining promotion outcomes (Shih et al., 2012). While this recent work has significantly advanced our understanding of the determinants of cadre advancement in China, as yet very little attention has been paid to how leading cadres' career pathways shape their prospects within the party-government hierarchy. Using a new biographical database of 898 municipal party secretaries 书记, this article addresses this gap by examining the career trajectories of these leading cadres 领导干部.¹

An analysis of leading cadres' career backgrounds before being appointed a municipal party secretary helps to achieve numerous research objectives. First, municipal cadres are the

first group of leaders selected by provincial organization departments, and not by the center, under the “one-level down” appointment system. Since most previous work has focused on the appointment of provincial leaders (Choi, 2012; Li and Zhou, 2005), shifting attention to municipal leadership allows us to assess how appointment decisions are made at lower levels of China’s decentralized leadership selection system.² Our dataset also allows us to track leading cadre movements across vertical, horizontal, and regional levels, thereby shedding light on the career background of municipal party secretaries. In our study, vertical mobility refers to the extent to which cadres move up or down between different administrative levels. Horizontal mobility captures cadre movements across different party and government structures. Our regional mobility index looks at the number of provinces in which cadres have lived, studied, or worked.

The findings show that, before their appointment, municipal party secretaries typically move horizontally across different party and government bureaucracies and organizations, yet vertical and regional mobility are much less common. A close analysis of vertical mobility reveals that leading party-government officials mainly move from positions in the provincial government to the leadership of municipalities, but upward mobility, wherein county-level cadres are promoted to a municipality, occurs only in exceptional cases. The main obstacles hindering leading county cadres from rising to top municipal positions include age and education restrictions; the limited number of available spots at the municipal level; the absence of factional ties to provincial leaders as well as the appointment preferences of provincial leaders. These findings have important implications for understanding the incentive structure of China’s bureaucracy. With only slim prospects of rising to the upper ranks of the municipal apparatus, capable and eager mid-career county cadres might not be as responsive to political incentives

outlined in the cadre evaluation system as the literature has tended to assume. For such leading cadres, the provision of economic incentives such as wages, subsidies, and other material or social benefits are likely to elicit a higher degree of compliance.

Data Sources and Measurement

Our analysis draws on a database summarizing biographical information about municipal party secretaries as well as semi-structured interviews. We collected biographical data for 898 municipal party secretaries from 234 municipalities in 23 provinces, covering the period from 1990 to 2011. The database includes information about municipal party secretaries' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, birthplace, and formal education. It also tracks party secretaries' previous career positions prior to their appointment, including the location, length, and type of their first position as well as the five preceding work placements. Table A1 in the Appendix summarizes cadres' demographic details. We differentiate between two groups of municipal leaders: party secretaries (PS) who were appointed during the period 1993–2001 (*PS 93-01*) and those who were appointed between 2002 and 2011 (*PS 02-11*). The distinction between the two groups helps to grasp commonalities and differences between collective traits of different generations of municipal party secretaries. The year 2002 was selected as a turning point to mirror leadership changes at the national level in 2002–2003 with the new Hu-Wen administration after the Sixteenth Party Congress.³

To compile the database, we used two major sources: municipal government websites and the Renmin Wang website (www.people.com.cn). The provincial-level municipalities—Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing—are excluded from the database as they have a unique status thanks to their placement under the direct supervision of the State Council and

because they do not represent typical provinces with several municipalities (the unit of our analysis). Municipal party secretaries in Tibet, Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Hainan were also excluded since little or no public information on municipal leaders in these localities was available.

In order to categorize the career background of municipal party secretaries, we first analyzed the administrative level and the particular function of cadres' first entry-level position as well as their last five positions prior to appointment. Table A2 in the Appendix summarizes the different categories we used for coding (i.e., government-related, party-related, or functional departments—系统). As a next step, we categorized party secretaries' career background according to the administrative level in which they spent the largest portion of their career. The categorization is based on the highest number of years that a cadre spent at a particular administrative level over his or her last five positions. On average, a party secretary spent ten to twenty years in such a career track. For example, if a party secretary worked for three years as a deputy party secretary at the municipal level, four years as a vice-mayor at the municipal level, six years in a functional department at the municipal level, three years as an assistant to the governor at the provincial level, and one year in a functional department at the provincial level, then this would add up to thirteen years of municipal and four years of provincial-level work experience, and thus the cadre would be counted as having a municipal career background. This is, of course, only a snapshot but is, nonetheless, helpful to understanding where a cadre served the majority of his or her time during the last ten to twenty years before his/her appointment as a municipal party secretary. In addition to examining cadres' first entry-level position and their last five work placements, we also screened each cadre biography and noted whether a cadre worked previously at the town or county level in the course of his or her career. Since the group of cadres

who worked at the county level during the last five work positions accounts for 90 percent of all party secretaries with county-level experience (29 percent of the sample), our analysis does not lose much by focusing only on the last five work placements.

The coding of party secretaries' career path is challenging due to missing or incomplete biographical data and the common practice of cross-posting. Among the twenty-three provinces considered, the profiles of some party secretaries are incomplete. It was, for example, confirmed during interviews that Ji Youwei was the party secretary in Datong municipality before 2000, a fact that is also recorded in local gazettes. Yet, despite various research efforts, no public record of Ji Youwei exists. Many publicly available cadre biographies are also incomplete. For instance, only 815 of the 898 party secretaries have made public details of their previous work experience. Of these 815 party secretaries, twelve profiles do not record the corresponding time periods for the work position. These observations were accordingly dropped from the study.

Another challenge in coding arises from the common practice of cross-posting, whereby a cadre gets appointed to two or three government or party positions simultaneously, either in the same locality or between different administrative levels (Huang, 2002). In cases where cadres listed cross-postings on their CV, we studied each profile and identified the position with the main responsibilities and higher rank. For example, if a cadre held a post as a county governor or municipal mayor while simultaneously acting as the deputy party secretary of the same locality, we picked the role as the governor/mayor as the main work position as this post ranks higher than the local deputy party secretary position and comes with real daily responsibilities. In instances where a cadre worked as a municipal party secretary while also being a member of the standing committee of the province, we picked the work as a municipal party secretary as the main position because the cross-posting to the provincial level is often only a transitional role or

an opportunity for a cadre to lobby for his locality's or own interest, but the main responsibility remains the daily work as a municipal party secretary.

The analysis also draws on 32 interviews with party-government officials at the county, municipal, and provincial levels during 2011 and 2013. We interviewed cadres in Beijing and in four provinces (Hunan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Shanxi) to avoid biases based on regional appointment particularities. The interviews provided general information on local cadres' career trajectories and promotion opportunities and revealed additional information on barriers to leading county cadres rising to the top of the municipal party-government apparatus. We also distributed a structured questionnaire to our interviewees, asking specific questions on promotion barriers and how they affect cadre behavior.

Our analysis begins by outlining the main characteristics of party secretaries' vertical, horizontal, and regional mobility. We then analyze the direction of vertical mobility and show that it tends to point downward, from the provincial to municipal level. The discussion then turns to the limited upward promotion opportunities available to county-level cadres and offers some explanations for the existence of this glass ceiling. The subsequent section draws on interview data and summarizes the main obstacles that tend to prevent county cadres from rising to leadership positions at the municipal level.

Cadre Mobility: Vertical, Horizontal, and Regional

This section examines cadres' vertical, horizontal, and regional mobility prior to their appointment to the party secretary post. The "vertical mobility" index measures the extent to which cadres moved between different administrative levels (i.e., central, provincial, municipal, county, or township level) over the course of their past five work positions. For example, a party

secretary received 1 point if she or he worked at the same administrative level and 5 points if she or he worked at five different levels during the last five work appointments. The “horizontal mobility” index measures cadres’ experience in different departments or functions across different party and government structures over their last five work positions. A party secretary received 1 point if she or he always worked within the same function (e.g., same bureau) and 5 points if she or he worked in five different functions (e.g., four years as a deputy party secretary, five years in the organization department, four years in the propaganda department, three years in the economic commission, and six years as a county governor). Finally, the “regional mobility” index captures the number of provinces in which a party secretary has lived, studied, or worked. A cadre who was born, studied, and worked during the last five previous positions in the same province in which he or she was ultimately appointed to party secretary would receive a score of 0. By contrast, a cadre who is currently a party secretary in one province but whose birthplace, undergraduate and graduate university degrees, and place of work over the five previous positions were in a different province would receive a score of 8. The findings are summarized in Table 1. Party secretaries are more likely to move horizontally between different functions in the party-government apparatus instead of vertically across different administrative levels. Regional mobility is low; on average, most municipal party secretaries have lived, studied, or worked in just two different provinces. The three indices do not change much over time, though party secretaries appointed since 2002 have slightly higher vertical, horizontal, and regional mobility than their predecessors.⁴

Table I. Cadre Mobility Indices.

	Observations, <i>N</i>	PS total index	PS 93-01 index	PS 02-11 index
Vertical mobility index (min 1 to max 5 points)	813	2.06	2.03	2.07
Horizontal mobility index (min 1 to max 5 points)	813	3.07	2.98	3.11
Regional mobility index (min 0 to max 8 points)	850	1.21	1.10	1.26

Source. Party Secretary Database, 2013.

Vertical Mobility

A more detailed analysis of vertical mobility shows that, before their appointment, party secretaries mainly worked at provincial and municipal levels, while relatively few leading cadres had recent county-level work experience. Three-quarters of all party secretaries (78 percent) had previously worked at the municipal level in at least one of their five last work placements. Yet, it is also significant that roughly a quarter of all party secretaries (22 percent) had not worked at the municipal level during their last five positions before their appointment, but were sent down to the municipality directly from the provincial level. More than half of all party secretaries (56 percent) had worked at the provincial level in at least one of their five last previous positions, suggesting that possessing close links to decision makers at the provincial level may be very helpful in gaining appointment as a municipal party secretary. Finally, party secretaries who had worked at the county level in at least one of their five previous positions were rare, accounting

for just 26 percent of the total. Given that overseeing counties is an important task for municipal party secretaries, their limited work experience at the county level is surprising.

Horizontal Mobility

Among the different mobility indices, horizontal mobility is highest as promotion-hopeful cadres commonly go through different functional departments and bureaus within the party and government structures. Previous work experience in units with far-reaching influence, such as economics- and commerce-related bureaus, propaganda departments, and organization departments, is particularly common for municipal party secretaries. Among other benefits, establishing a footing in the personnel management bureaucracies, economic bureaus, or the propaganda bureaus might be an aid to building useful personal relationships needed to rise to the top of the municipal apparatus. Cadres also switched between party- and government-related positions, although more cadres switched from governmental units (e.g., Development and Reform Commission, Finance Bureau) to party-related units (e.g., Organization Department, Party Committee) than vice versa.⁵

Regional Mobility

The low regional mobility suggests that cross-provincial mobility is not a prerequisite for being selected as a municipal party secretary. Figure 1 decomposes the regional mobility index into its eight sub-categories: birth place, location of undergraduate and graduate university, and place of first, second, third, fourth, and fifth previous work positions. Thirty percent of leading cadres are party secretaries appointed in a different province than the one in which they were born. Most

commonly, cadres studied in a province other than the one where they worked as a party secretary: 36 percent of cadres obtained their undergraduate degrees in a province other than the one in which they held the party secretary position while 62 percent held graduate degrees from universities in another province. Regional mobility declines drastically once a person joins the civil service. While 11 percent of municipal party secretaries had their first of the five positions under consideration in another province, this share declines for the previous fourth, third, second, and last positions to 9 percent, 7 percent, 4 percent, and 1 percent, respectively.⁶ Low cross-provincial mobility among leading cadres indicates the provincial focus in appointment decisions and suggests that one of the much-vaunted hallmarks of China’s approach to reform—the sharing of local best practice examples and policy experiments at the county and municipal level across provinces—does not appear to be a priority in appointment decisions on municipal party secretaries.

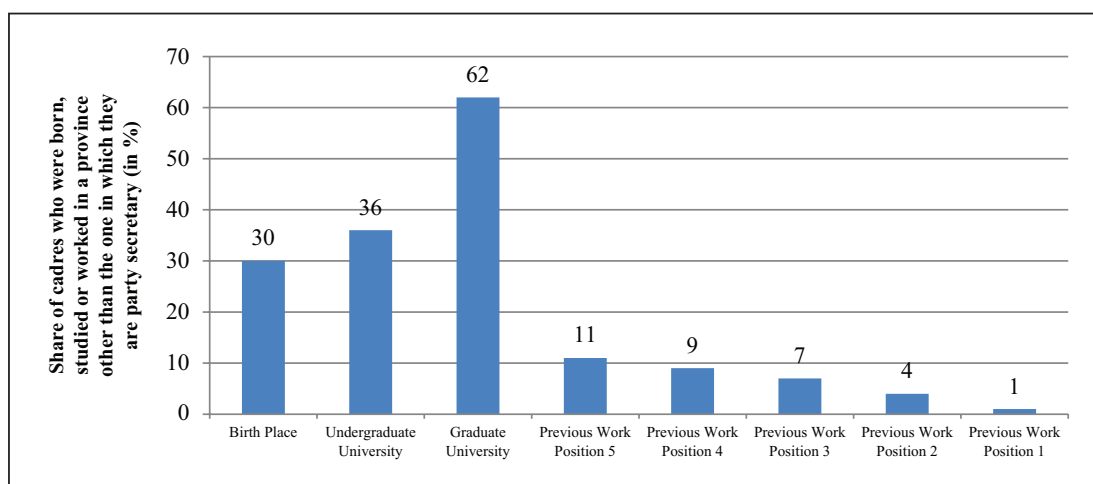


Figure 1. Regional mobility for municipal party secretaries (1993–2011).

Note. For each category, the total number of observations differs: birth ($N = 814$), undergraduate university ($N = 683$), graduate university ($N = 478$), previous work position 5 ($N = 766$), previous work position 4 ($N = 772$), previous work position 3 ($N = 788$), previous work position 2 ($N = 807$), and previous work position 1 ($N = 803$).

Source. Party Secretary Database, 2013.

To summarize this section of our analysis, we can say that many party secretaries in their last five working posts had moved horizontally between different functions in the party-government apparatus, but vertical and regional mobility was much lower. The results for vertical mobility are particularly interesting. We observe that cadres mainly moved between the provincial and municipal levels, and very few movements to and from the county level are recorded. The next section zeroes in on the features of downward mobility (e.g., moving from the provincial to the municipal level) and upward mobility (e.g., moving from the county to the municipal level).

Vertical Mobility: Downward and Upward Mobility

In order to unpack the issue of vertical mobility and to distinguish more clearly between downwardly and upwardly mobile cadres, this section first explores municipal party secretaries' first entry-level position after college or university and their five previous work experiences before their appointment. We then classify cadres' career backgrounds based on the administrative level in which they spent the bulk of their time in their last five positions.

The analysis of party secretaries' first entry-level position after college or university shows that the most common entry point into the bureaucracy was the provincial level. Among the cadres who directly entered a political position in the civil service system (321 cadres, or 43 percent), 7 percent started at the central level, 28 percent at the provincial level, 16 percent at the municipal level, 27 percent at the county level, and 22 percent at the town or village level. The remaining party secretaries (433 cadres, or 57 percent) started their careers in nonpolitical positions, such as working at a factory (37 percent), a school (39 percent), or in other

nonpolitical jobs (24 percent). Party secretaries who entered a political position at the county or town level (49 percent of 321 cadres) left their county position on average at the young age of 24.8 years. This suggests that cadres need to move early on out of a county in order to make it to a top municipal leadership position, allowing them sufficient time to cycle through different stations at the municipal and provincial level.

When examining party secretaries' last five work positions, it becomes clear that most cadres had spent the last ten to twenty years at the provincial or municipal level. Table 2 lists the positions party secretaries held immediately before their appointment. Seventy-four percent of all party secretaries came from different positions at the municipal level, while 25 percent were appointed directly from positions at the provincial level and less than 1 percent came from the county level. Almost half of all party secretaries acted as deputy municipal party secretaries prior to their appointment (47 percent). This shows that leading cadres could first learn about their future tasks and prove themselves before their skills were put to the test as the “number one hand” 一把手 in a municipality. Some party secretaries (15 percent) were also promoted directly from a functional department at the provincial level, indicating that work experience in the provincial capital is important for cadre advancement. Fourteen percent of cadres were already acting as a municipal party secretary in their previous position but in a different locality. This illustrates that party secretaries are frequently rotated to another municipality to serve again as a party secretary.⁷

Table 2. Party Secretaries (PS) WORK POSITION Before Appointment.

	PS total		PS 93-01		PS 02-11	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Central-level total	1	0.1	0	0.0	1	0.2
Provincial-level total	200	24.9	75	28.0	125	23.4
Provincial-level municipalities ^a	1	0.1	0	0.0	1	0.2
Province						
Party side	38	4.7	17	6.3	21	3.9
Government	40	5.0	16	6.0	24	4.5
Functional departments						
Public administration and law	18	2.2	7	2.6	11	2.1
Organization	10	1.2	5	1.9	5	0.9
Propaganda	31	3.9	7	2.6	24	4.5
Economics and commerce	30	3.7	11	4.1	19	3.6
Agriculture	21	2.6	6	2.2	15	2.8
Others	11	1.4	6	2.2	5	0.9
Municipal-level total	594	74.0	189	70.5	405	75.7
Provincial capital ^b						
Party side (deputy PS)	30	3.7	7	2.6	23	4.3
Government	9	1.1	4	1.5	5	0.9
Functional departments						
Public administration and law	2	0.2	0	0.0	2	0.4
Organization	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Propaganda	3	0.4	2	0.7	1	0.2
Economics and commerce	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
District	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Development zone	1	0.1	0	0.0	1	0.2
Municipality						
Party Secretary	110	13.7	35	13.1	75	14.0
Deputy PS	380	47.3	126	47.0	254	47.5
Government	58	7.2	15	5.6	43	8.0
Functional departments						
Public administration and law	1	0.1	0	0.0	1	0.2
Organization	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Propaganda	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Economics and commerce	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
County-level total	4	0.5	3	1.1	1	0.2
Enterprise	3	0.4	1	0.4	2	0.4
University	1	0.1	0	0.0	1	0.2
Total (N/A = 95)	803	100	268	100	535	100

Note. Appendix Table A2 further explains the classifications here.

a. Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Tianjin.

b. We divided the category “municipal level” into the provincial capital and other municipalities.

Source. Party Secretary Database, 2013.

As a next step, we investigated the career background of selected party secretaries. The categorization of party secretaries' career background is based on the administrative level in which they spent the largest number of years during their last five work positions prior to appointment as municipal party secretary. Among party secretaries, 2.7 percent spent most of their career at the central level, 32.3 percent at the provincial level, 56.1 percent at the municipal level (including 7 percent in the provincial capital), 5.4 percent at the county level, and 3.6 percent with a state-owned enterprise or a university.⁸ Figure 2 illustrates that the career backgrounds are largely similar between the two different generations of party secretaries. One difference is that, in the group appointed since 2002, the share of party secretaries with a county background dropped significantly from 9.8 percent to 3.2 percent. In other words, there are fewer and fewer municipal party secretaries who spent significant time at the county level.

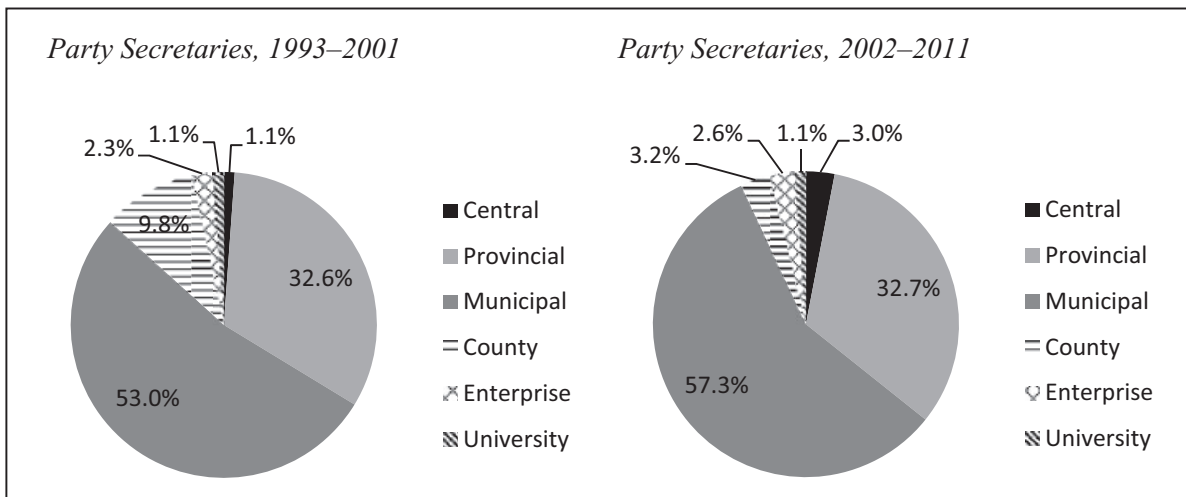


Figure 2. Career background of municipal party secretaries.
Source. Party Secretary Database, 2013.

We now consider how many party secretaries have held *at least one* position at either the provincial or county level. More than half of all cadres (56 percent, or 475 cadres) had spent time at the provincial level during one of their five previous work positions, suggesting that developing personal networks to provincial leaders can be important to climbing up the career ladder. Table 3 shows that the most common provincial-level positions held by future party secretaries were in the economics or commerce bureaus. The next most common trajectory was coming up through the government side, including the following positions: secretary general/deputy secretary general 省政府秘书长 of the provincial government, deputy governor 副省长 of the province, and assistant to the provincial governor 省长助理. The third most common type of experience gathered by party secretaries at the provincial level was in party-related positions, such as provincial party secretary/deputy secretary of the Communist Youth League, secretary general/deputy secretary general of the provincial committee, and head/deputy head of the general office of the provincial committee.⁹ In addition, 54 percent of all party secretaries (457 cadres) had worked in the municipal government in the provincial capital during at least one of their last five positions before becoming a party secretary.¹⁰

Table 3. Party Secretaries' (PS) Work Experience at the Provincial Level.

	PS total		PS 93-01		PS 02-11	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Province-level functions						
Party side	65	13.7	26	17.7	39	11.9
Government	80	16.8	21	14.3	59	18.0
Public administration and law	20	4.2	4	2.7	16	4.9
Organization	25	5.3	12	8.2	13	4.0
Propaganda	39	8.2	9	6.1	30	9.1
Economics and commerce	84	17.7	30	20.4	54	16.5
Agriculture	38	8.0	6	4.1	32	9.8
Others	124	26.1	39	26.5	85	25.9
Total (N/A=28)	475	100.0	147	100.0	328	100.0

Note. The analysis looks at the past five work experiences. Only the function where a party secretary spent most time at the province level is taken into account here.

Source. Party Secretary Database, 2013.

Compared to number of party secretaries with provincial work experience, there are significantly fewer municipal party secretaries with previous county-level work experience. In total, only 259 cadres (29 percent) had, at some point in their career, worked at the county level, while 639 cadres (71 percent) lacked any form of county work experience. Among the 29 percent (or 259 cadres) with county-level experience, 202 cadres had regular grass-root experience 基层经验 while the remaining 57 cadres were sent to the county temporarily in order to gain additional leadership experience. When looking at their last five work positions, 26 percent (or 235 cadres) of all party secretaries worked at some point in a county. As shown in Table 4, among party secretaries appointed since 2002, none had county-level work experience during their last or next to the last position before becoming a party secretary and a small minority had worked at the county level at some point in their prime career time (i.e., the last five work positions averaging approximately thirteen years prior to their appointment as party secretary at age 49).

Table 4. Cadres with County-level Work Experience.

Province	Total cadres	Previous work 1			Previous work 2			Previous work 3			Previous work 4			Previous work 5				
		Total	1993	2002	Total	1993	2002	Total	1993	2002	Total	1993	2002	Total	1993	2002		
Beijing	44				1	1							7	3	4	7	2	5
Chongqing	45				2	1							7	4	3	9	4	5
Guangdong	29												2	1	1	8	2	6
Henan	52												6	3	3	9	4	5
Inner Mongolia	37				3			3					2		2	3	1	2
Shandong	52				2	1		1	1				4	1	3	11	4	7
Shanghai	48				5	2		3	4				8	4	4	8	4	4
Shanxi	42			2	5	2		3	8				8	3	5	10	6	4
Sichuan	58	1	1	2	3	3		4	3				4	3	1	8	3	5
Tianjin	34				1	1		1	1				2	1	1	3	2	1
Yunnan	20			1	3	1		2	2				4	2	2	5	3	2
Zhejiang	52				6	3		3	7				14	7	7	13	5	8
Guangxi	55				3	1		2	2				4	2	2	9	3	6
Shaanxi	45				8	4		4	3				6	3	3	14	6	8
Shandong	47			1	1	1		1	1				9	3	6	8	3	5
Shandong	78				9	4		5	8				16	8	8	22	9	13
Guangxi	33								1	1			1	1		4	3	1
Guangdong	51				4			4	2				6	2	4	6	2	4
Henan	12				1	1		1	2				2	2		4	3	1
Guangdong	9				1			1	1				2	2		2	1	1
Guangxi	34	1	1	2	2	1		1	1				3	1	2	4	2	2
Shanghai	11				1			1					1					
Shandong	10	1	1	1	2	1		1	1				1	1		1	1	1
Total	898	3	3	0	63	27	0	36	57	61	118	57	168	73	95			

Source: Party Secretary Database, 2013.

In summary, vertical mobility mainly concentrates on cadre exchanges between the provincial and municipal levels. More than half of all the municipal party secretaries appointed by the provincial party committees and organization departments had previously worked at the provincial level and one quarter were provincial careerists, holding no recent municipal work experience. Notably, upward mobility from the county to the municipal level was much lower. Party secretaries who initially entered the civil service at the county level or below tended to move to the municipal or provincial level at a very young age. Of all party secretaries in the leadership database, just 5.4 percent were categorized as cadres with a county-level background and only 26 percent had worked at least once at the county level in one of their last five work positions. This is surprising since county governance is one of the core tasks of municipal leaders and one assumes that leaders with firsthand knowledge of the challenges faced by county leaders would be better positioned to perform this task. The predominance of previous experience at the provincial and municipal levels in the CVs of current municipal party secretaries indicates the limited opportunities for career advancement for leading county officials. Overall, there seems to be a glass ceiling for county cadres, for all except a precious few high-fliers who spend a brief period in sub-municipal positions before helicoptering into higher levels.

Glass Ceiling for Leading County Cadres

Secondary sources and anecdotal evidence from fieldwork provide further evidence of the limited career advancement opportunities for leading county cadres. According to a survey by Renmin Forum, 64 percent of the respondents stated that there is a large glass ceiling for leading cadres who work at the county level. Only about 10 percent of approximately 400,000 to 500,000

leading county cadres have the possibility of getting promoted (Renmin Forum, 2009).

Interviews conducted with leading county cadres during 2011 and 2013 further confirmed the difficulties that capable cadres at the county level face in trying to get promoted above the county. Each of the leading cadres interviewed agreed that there is a glass ceiling for county cadres. Informants estimated that only 10 percent to 40 percent of the most excellent county cadres deserving a promotion to a municipality actually received such a promotion. Interviews further revealed that among cadres selected for promotion to the municipal level, a few of them made it eventually to the post of municipal vice-mayor or municipal departmental head, but these leading cadres were almost never promoted to the top positions in a municipality (INT20).

Exceptional Cases

This section considers outliers in the party secretary database, i.e., cadres from the county level who did climb up the ladder and made it into the exclusive provincial-municipal club. One such figure is Zheng Xiaoming, who served as a party secretary of Shizuishan municipality in Ningxia from 1994 until 2002 and worked at the county level directly before his promotion. His case illustrates the importance of being promoted at a young age. After graduating from college with a major in farmland conservation in 1982, Zheng Xiaoming began work at the Bureau of Water Conservancy and Hydroelectric Power in Pingluo county in Ningxia. After only two years, at the age of 29, he was promoted to head of the bureau. In 1986 he was appointed deputy governor of the county and in 1989 he became the vice party secretary of Pingluo county. In 1991, at the age of 37, he was promoted to county party secretary, in which post he served until 1993. Next, he became a member of the municipal standing committee while, at the same time, continuing in his post as party secretary of Pingluo county. From 1993 to 1994 he studied at a Central Party

School and upon completion of his studies in 1994, he was selected as the new party secretary of Shizuishan municipality, where he served two terms, until 2002. From Zheng's career path it is very apparent that he did not stay anywhere for longer than two years, ensuring that he could advance to the municipal level quickly enough to make party secretary before the retirement age of 60. Within four years of starting his career as a civil servant, he was promoted to the county's leadership group 领导班子, all of which suggests that he must have had very strong supporters among municipal leaders with a say in county-level appointments.

Other exceptional cases where a cadre with a county career background rose to a municipal party secretary position can be found in Anhui (Anqing municipality) and Shaanxi (Yulin municipality). In both cases, administrative reforms helped county cadres to climb the ladder. In Anhui, Anqing municipality's party secretary Zhu Duwen (2008–till today) spent the majority of his early career in the county of his birth, Liu'an. After numerous career stops, Zhu was ultimately promoted to party secretary in Liu'an county in 1997. In 2000 Liu'an was upgraded from county to municipal administrative status 县改市. During the administrative reforms, Zhu was promoted from county-level party secretary to vice party secretary of Liu'an municipality. In 2001, he was appointed the vice party secretary of Anqing municipality and since 2008 he has been the party secretary of Anqing. It is likely that the upgrade of Liu'an county helped Zhu to step into the municipal-provincial circle.¹¹ The third exception, party secretary Liu Hanxing from Yulin municipality in Shaanxi, benefited from the same exceptional circumstances—he was once the party secretary of Yulin county, which was also upgraded to municipal status in the year 2000. As noted, these are the exceptional cases in our sample and, as a rule, county leaders are not in the running for municipal party secretary posts.

Barriers to Upward Mobility for County Cadres

The preceding analysis highlights the thickness of the glass ceiling above county-level leaders' heads and prompts the question: Why do so few municipal party secretaries rise from the county level? Based on the biographical analyses, interviews with cadres, as well as a short structured questionnaire filled in by our interviewees, we identified four main obstacles hindering county cadres' promotion to the upper ranks of the municipal apparatus: age and education restrictions; limited availability of spots at the municipal level; lack of network connections; and the appointment preferences of provincial leaders.¹²

Age and education restrictions

Two-thirds of all interviewees pointed to age and education restrictions as a key factor explaining why so few leading county cadres manage to rise to leading positions in municipalities. Cadres are often too old when they reach the deputy department rank 副厅长 and the full department rank 正厅级, which are the minimum ranks 级 necessary to be considered for a municipal party secretary post (INT21, INT23, INT29, INT31).¹³ According to numerous official documents published by the State Council and the Central Organization Department, the average age of county and municipal leading cadres at the time of promotion should be kept at around 45 years.¹⁴ Many provincial and municipal organization departments closely follow these guidelines and the stated maximum age requirement is usually around 45. Sometimes leading cadres keep applying for municipal posts until the age restriction prevents them from further trying to apply (INT23). This suggests that age restrictions might eventually constitute an important barrier but other factors hinder county cadres much earlier on from joining the provincial-municipal club.

Official documents also state that municipal party secretaries and mayors should hold at least a bachelor degree. This further excludes some leading county cadres from the potential pool of candidates for a party secretary post. A municipal deputy party secretary in Jiangxi noted that the current selection process for many municipal positions requires formal written exams, which poses another challenge for some leading county cadres:

Nowadays, there are more channels for leading county cadres to look for upward promotion opportunities as more municipalities use open selection and examination to search for candidates. However, the candidate must be good at taking written examinations and some county cadres fail during this round of selection. Especially for candidates who received less formal education it is difficult to advance to the next stage of the selection process even though they have lots of practical work experience at the county level. (INT31)

Formal written exams prevent county officials from being promoted rapidly to higher positions, which in turn prevents them from getting into the candidate pool for the post of municipal party secretary.

In summary, formal age and education requirements make it harder for county cadres to rise to top-level positions in the municipal party-government hierarchy because they must first be promoted through numerous grade levels and hold formal educational degrees.

Limited available spots at the municipal level

The limited availability of positions at the municipal level is the second most commonly identified barrier among informants. While there are many leading cadres at the county level, work opportunities at the municipal level are comparatively few. In 1998, of 5.3 million civil servants, the largest share worked at the county level (41 percent), followed by cadres working at the municipal level (22 percent) and townships (17 percent) (Burns, 2007: 9). Within this group, there were 508,000 leading cadres in China, of which 2,562 worked at the provincial level or above, 39,108 at the bureau or departmental level, and the remainder—the vast majority—at the division/county level (Wang, 2012: 98). In other words, a disproportionate share of leading cadres works at the division or county level in China, creating high competition for a very few slots at the municipal level (Ang, 2012; INT22, INT29). The competition is intense and “if one just does the numbers, one knows that the chances are very limited” (INT25) and “sometimes there are more than a thousand leading county cadres eligible for twenty municipal cadre posts” (INT27). This pyramidal structure means that there are very few opportunities for promotion to the municipal level. Moreover, even if county cadres get promoted to a position at the municipal level, their chances for further advancement at the municipal level can be limited. A county party secretary in Jiangxi pointed out that “some of these municipal positions are so-called empty places as there are no further development opportunities connected with these posts” (INT32). For example, a very capable county cadre did not accept a promotion to the municipal level because “there would be no further chances for career advancement for him after this transfer” (INT27).

Lack of networks

Weak personal ties to top municipal and provincial leaders constitute another important barrier. Our analysis of party secretaries' first entry-level position after college showed that unless county officials get promoted from the county to the municipal level at a very young age, they do not stand a good chance of ever climbing up the career ladder to a municipal party secretary post. To enter the municipal level very early on in their career helps build relationships both at the provincial and municipal levels and provides opportunities to gain work experience at more influential bureaus.

Most leading county cadres, however, never have an opportunity to work at the upper levels of government, and, as a result, they are usually not sufficiently close to decision-makers at municipal or provincial levels who hold power over appointments. With limited opportunities to build relationships with top municipal or provincial cadres, leading cadres at the county level have very limited chances "to be discovered" (INT24) and lack access to information on how best to qualify for a municipal party secretary position (INT26, INT28). A deputy party secretary in a county in Jiangxi also stressed that "the chances for county cadres to get promoted depend on contacts and networks to the municipal level. Over the last decade, communication and exchange between county and municipal cadres in my locality has worsened, which makes it harder for current leading county cadres to get promoted upward" (INT27).

Appointment preferences of provincial leaders

Finally, candidates for the position of municipal party secretary are identified and chosen by provincial organization departments and party committees. Provincial leaders who are in charge

of selecting a municipal party secretary also have incentives to pick someone with close ties to the province who can strengthen its linkage to municipalities and ensure that provincial interests are not sacrificed. Our analysis of cadres' career background shows that in many provinces there was a clear preference for candidates with a provincial career background: 32.3 percent of all the party secretaries worked for their majority of their career at the provincial level and 7 percent in the provincial capital. In provinces such as Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Gansu, and Yunnan, provincial leaders maintained a particularly tight provincial-municipal network as more than 60 percent of all the selected municipal party secretaries had spent the majority of their careers at the provincial level. According to a leading cadre in Inner Mongolia, a possible reason for keeping municipal party secretaries on a tight leash is that provincial leaders had poor experiences with cadres with county backgrounds who used their privileged positions to favor their old county colleagues in various ways (INT14). As such, provincial leaders preferred to keep county-trained cadres in the "second row" and instead appoint their own candidates as the number one who they expected would serve as a bridge between the province and the municipality.

Implications of Limited Career Advancement Opportunities

For county cadres, career advancement opportunities are highly significant. When asked to rank the importance of salary, bonus payments, promotion opportunities, high status, pension and health care, and other benefits (e.g., cars, banquets paid for with government funds), most cadres confirmed that promotion opportunities matter the most for the motivation of leading county cadres. Three-quarters of all interviewees stated that promotion opportunities at the county and municipal level were important motivators, while approximately half of informants stated that

salary, status, pension, and health care mattered. About a third of our respondents named bonus payments and other benefits, such as cars and dinners, as significant for their motivation. Given the stated importance of political promotions among respondents, the finding that there are, in fact, very limited career advancement opportunities for county-level leaders suggests that dissatisfaction and low motivation are common among county cadres in their mid-career stages. The following statement by an ambitious county official summarizes this attitude:

After graduation with a graduate degree from Taiyuan University, I started to work in my home county in Shanxi. After having worked here for eight years, I'm pretty disappointed. I work extremely hard and have fulfilled all the tasks in my annual cadre evaluation sheet, but I don't think I'll ever get promoted to the municipality. From my entire peer group, some of whom have been working for ten years in the same system 系统, none of us stands a realistic chance of getting promoted to the municipality. But we don't complain, because, as government officials, our living standard in the county is very comfortable. We not only get a wage but also receive lots of additional allowances, subsidies, and even a car. (INT3)

Dissatisfaction can be even higher for county cadres who have no further chances of getting promoted, which one respondent reported as adversely affecting their behavior and motivation (INT21). Such cadres often have “no incentive to do anything at the current position since they can no longer be promoted and just kill time” (INT24) and “some might even engage in illegal activities” (INT30). Interviewees suggested that more higher-ranked positions should be created

at the county level to motivate cadres closer to retirement (INT24, INT29). In addition, organization departments should abolish the age discrimination since the age of 45 is seen as a “perfect timing for leading cadres to work and contribute their rich experience” (INT26).

These results suggest that awareness of the limited opportunities for career advancement is critical for understanding county cadre behavior and incentives. While it is apparent that not all leading county cadres can be promoted upwards, it seems that, even for many capable and ambitious officials, upward promotion to the top of the municipal apparatus is effectively out of reach. China scholars have studied the cadre evaluation system in depth, assuming that cadres both want and are *able* to get promoted. The assumption in the literature is that cadres with outstanding performance evaluations will advance faster in China’s Leninist system than officials with mediocre performance evaluations. Our finding of the limited career promotion prospects for county leaders strongly calls the validity of this assumption into question. Instead, the slim possibilities of upward mobility might result in non-responsiveness to the political incentives written into the cadre evaluation system.

While political incentives might be less effective than previously thought, economic incentives, on the other hand, may, in fact, have a bigger role to play in incentivizing leading county cadres. Economic incentives refer to wage and bonus payments, administrative benefits (e.g., free transportation, entertainment, training, and travel), and other allowances for cadres (e.g., subsidies for housing, health care, retirement, and further education).¹⁵ County officials also have many opportunities to engage in rent-seeking activities and in embezzling public funds (Wedeman, 2004). Since leading county cadres face a political glass ceiling, at the peak of their powers they might have greater incentives to maximize income and financial rewards that come with being a leading cadre in a county (INT31). This is especially the case after passing the age

of 45, beyond which they have starkly limited promotion chances (INT30). If so, the importance of political incentives in the cadre evaluation system might have been overestimated. With the exception of the research by Whiting (2004) and Ang (2009), very few studies have analyzed the effect of economic incentives on local cadres' behavior. More research is needed to understand the weight and conditions needed to make certain political and economic incentives work.

Policy Responses

The glass ceiling for cadres at the grassroots level 基层 has been a focal point of public debate in recent years, especially since 2009.¹⁶ In response to cadres' grievances, by the end of 2009 the central government promulgated an "Outline of 2010–2020 Further Reform for Cadre Personnel System" 2010–2020 年深化干部人事制度改革规划纲要. The promulgation aims at 1) making selection and appointment of cadres more democratic; 2) ensuring fair and open competition for the appointment of cadres; 3) promoting a more scientific performance evaluation system for cadres; 4) providing more rotation; 5) increasing supervision and management of cadres; and 6) forming a cadre personnel system for government and public service.

In addition to national efforts, several provinces, such as Hunan, Guangdong, Hubei, Shanxi, and Jiangsu, have started experiments to ease the tension and implement some measures and policies to motivate leading county cadres. Many provinces such as Zhejiang and Guangxi use cross-posting as a means of offering leading county cadres some form of political promotion. By cross-posting leading county cadres to the municipal level, cadres often double as county party secretaries and members of the municipal party standing committee. Through such methods, organization departments can raise the rank of these cadres and bring them into the provincial political system without having to make new resources available for the secondary

positions (Chien, 2013). In 2009, other provinces, such as Hunan, promoted nineteen county governors to deputy department rank 副厅级, which is similar to the rank of a deputy head of a municipality. Among those nineteen county governors, sixteen stayed at the county level to continue a career as a county party secretary with a higher rank, and three moved up to the municipal government. Moreover, under current reforms to place counties' fiscal management under direct provincial control, various documents issued by the Central Organization Department have proposed that county party secretaries receive a higher political rank (Xinhua, 2009).

Provincial leaders in Guangdong are also making an effort to address the problems of the glass ceiling. Guangdong's reforms started with the implementation of the province-wide pilot program Democracy/Political Negotiation Measures for Guangdong Province in 2009.¹⁷ This pilot originated and was tested in Guangzhou but quickly spread all over the province. It allows the Guangdong Provincial Committee to first select the top five leading cadres working at every county or district level in Guangzhou and then to examine and vote on whether these leading cadres are qualified to be promoted directly to the full department rank 正厅级, the administrative level equal to that of a typical municipal party secretary. The first five county cadres selected in 2010 were promoted directly to the municipal level. This example illustrates that the glass ceiling is already perceived as a real problem in China and that some provincial pilot programs have been started to address the problem.

Conclusion

Using a new biographical database of 898 Chinese party secretaries appointed between 1990 and 2011, this article has analyzed their career backgrounds and mobility patterns. Before their appointment, municipal party secretaries frequently moved horizontally across different functional bureaucracies and organizations, but regional and vertical mobility was much lower. The findings show that very few of the cadres appointed to the top of the municipal apparatus had originally climbed up the ladder from the county level, which suggests that there is a thick glass ceiling above county-level leaders' heads. Based on thirty-two interviews with leading local cadres, the article has illuminated the reasons for the existence of this glass ceiling. Obstacles that stand in the way of leading county-level cadres rising to the upper ranks of the municipal apparatus include age and education restrictions, limited available spots at the municipality, weak network ties to provincial leaders, and provincial leaders' appointment preferences.

Awareness of the limited career advancement chances for leading county cadres is critical to gaining a more accurate picture of the true basis of cadre behavior and incentives. The current literature on cadre management in China has emphasized the importance of political incentives in steering the behavior of local party and government officials (e.g., Edin, 2003; Li and Zhou, 2005; Whiting, 2004). The general assumption is that cadres angle for promotion in one of two ways (or some combination of the two): either they receive excellent performance evaluations or otherwise set themselves apart from their peer group; or they foster close *guanxi* ties with their superiors and climb the ladder with the aid of these relationships. As a result, local cadres are generally understood as agents who try to qualify themselves for the next promotion by scoring highly in annual performance evaluations and by building good networks with their superiors.

Our key findings challenge this widely accepted image of the promotion-maximizing local cadre. Since only a tiny minority of leading cadres at the county level have a realistic chance of promotion to the municipality or beyond, the political incentives outlined in the cadre evaluation system might not be as effective in steering local cadre behavior as the literature has tended to assume. Of course, even leading cadres who have little hope of being recruited into the provincial-municipal team do, nevertheless, have some incentive to fulfill upper-level mandates since this is a game of both carrots and sticks and most want to avoid being fired or demoted. But, at the same time, our analysis shows that limited opportunities for career advancement can lead to non-responsiveness to political incentives, as well as high levels of frustration and resentment among capable and ambitious mid-career county officials. In such circumstances, cadres who perceive themselves as having been unfairly excluded from promotion opportunities may be more likely to use their positions of power to engage in self-maximizing behavior such as increasing their personal wealth, perhaps even by illegal means. For such cadres—who, as shown here, constitute the majority of leading cadres at the county level—political incentives are perhaps not upper-level leaders’ best means of guiding the behavior of lower-downs. Our findings suggest that economic incentives might play a more prominent role in incentivizing leading county cadres than previously thought. Future research in this area could profitably focus on analysis of the conditions under which political and economic incentives work as intended as well as the appropriate balance of these two incentive mechanisms in the cadre management system.

Appendix

Table A1. Basic Characteristics of Municipal Party Secretaries.

	PS total		PS 93-01		PS 02-11	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender						
Male	805	97	277	97	528	98
Female	21	3	10	3	11	2
Total (N/A = 72)	826	100	287	100	539	100
Ethnicity						
Han	789	97	274	98	515	96
Minority	27	3	7	2	20	4
Total (N/A = 77)	816	100	281	100	535	100
Age in years						
At term start	49.9		48.8		50.4	
At term end	53.3		53.0		53.5	
Tenure						
Years	3.8		4.2		3.3	
Tenure						
<1	19	3	7	2	12	4
1–3	217	35	89	29	128	41
3–5	229	37	99	33	130	41
>5	152	25	107	35	45	14
Total (N/A = 281)	617	100	302	100	315	100
Highest educational level						
PhD	95	12	23	8	72	13
Master's degree	426	52	120	43	306	57
Bachelor's	211	26	97	35	114	21
College	75	9	34	12	41	8
Others	8	1	3	1	5	1
Total (N/A = 83)	815	100	277	100	538	100
Bachelor's degrees						
Engineering	136	23	44	22	92	23
Natural science	60	10	27	14	33	8
Literature and history	125	21	44	22	81	20
Economics and management	111	18	24	12	87	22
Politics and public administration	90	15	32	16	58	14
Agriculture	41	7	15	8	26	6
Others	38	6	11	6	27	7
Total (N/A = 297)	601	100	197	100	404	100

(continued)

Table A1 (continued)

	PS total		PS 93-01		PS 02-11	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Master's degrees Engineering	28	6	6	5	22	7
Natural science	5	1	0	0	5	2
Literature and history	6	1	3	3	3	1
Economics and management	283	65	70	63	213	66
Politics and public administration	89	21	32	29	57	18
Agriculture	11	3	0	0	11	3
Others	11	3	1	1	10	3
Total (N/A = 94)	433	100	112	100	321	100

Note. We differentiate between two groups of municipal leaders: party secretaries who were appointed during the period 1993–2001 (PS 93-01) and those who were appointed between 2002 and 2011 (PS 02-11). Female party secretaries are significantly underrepresented: only 2.5% (or 21 cadres) of all municipal party secretaries appointed during 1990 and 2011 were women. Almost all party secretaries are ethnically Han; only 3.4% of appointed cadres have an ethnic minority background (although ethnic minorities account for 6–8% of the overall Chinese population). Party secretaries are on average 49.9 years of age when starting their position and 53.3 years of age at the end of their term, indicating that nearly all party secretaries are nearing retirement, which is mandatory at the age of 60. Party secretaries serve on average 3.8 years before moving on to their next assignment, 1.2 years less than the recommended tenure time for cadres in leadership positions. Shorter tenure cycles might result in party secretaries prioritizing short-term projects that deliver tangible results during their own tenure over projects with a longer time frame (Eaton and Kostka, 2013, 2014). Finally, most party secretaries claimed to have a four-year college degree or higher, with 64% holding an MA or PhD degree. The most popular undergraduate degrees are engineering (23%), literature and history (21%), economics and management (18%), and politics/public administration (15%). Among municipal party secretaries with an MA degree, more than 65% hold a degree in economics, followed by politics/political administration (21%) and engineering/natural sciences (6%).

Table A1 also highlights changes in the basic characteristics of party secretaries over time. Over the past two decades, the share of female party secretaries decreased from 3.5% during 1993–2001 to 2.0% during 2002–2011. In addition, when compared with the 1990s, party secretaries since 2002 are slightly older, more ethnically diverse, and have shorter terms in office. Party secretaries since 2002 have also received more formal education compared with their predecessors and the academic fields of their degrees have shifted. The share of party secretaries obtaining an MA or PhD degree increased from 51% (1993–2001) to 70% (2002–2011). Party secretaries' academic degrees are diverse, but cadres are increasingly better trained in economics and management. At the same time, MA degrees in public administration have declined in importance, with the share of public administration degrees dropping from 29% to 18% over the past two decades. This change in graduate degrees indicates the desire (or perceived need) of municipal party secretaries to be trained in economics rather than public administration.

Source. Party Secretary Database, 2013.

Table A2. Categorization of Career Backgrounds.

Category	Positions
Central-level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Secretary of the Work Committee of the Central Government Department (中央国家机关工委副书记) • Chairman of the National Youth Federation (全国青联主席) • Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League (共青团中央书记处常务书记) • Director of the General Research Division of the Research Office of the State Council (国务院研究室综合研究司处长) • Head of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League (共青团中央宣传部部长) • Secretary of the Secretary Department of the General Office of the CCCPC (中共中央办公厅秘书局正局级秘书) • Head of the Fourth Office of the Party Document Research Center of the CCCPC (中共中央文献研究室第四编研部主任) • Deputy Head of the Central External Propaganda Group (中央对外宣传小组副组长) • Head of the Research Office of the General Office of the CCCPC (中央办公厅调研室主任)
Provincial-level municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary of the Beijing Educational Work Committee (北京市委教育工委书记) • Secretary of Beijing Haidian District (北京海淀区委书记) • Secretary of Chongqing Wansheng District (重庆万盛区委书记)
Provincial-level Party-related side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vice Party Secretary (省委副书记) • Provincial Party Secretary of the Communist Youth League (共青团省委书记) • Head/Deputy Head of the General Office of the Provincial Committee (省委办公厅主任/副主任) • Secretary General/Deputy Secretary General of the Provincial Committee (省委秘书长/副秘书长)
Government-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Governor of the Province (副省长) • Assistant to the Governor of the Province (省长助理)

(continued)

Table A2 (continued)

Category	Positions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary General/Deputy Secretary General of the Provincial Government (省政府秘书长/副秘书长) • Head of the Office of Foreign Affairs of the Government (政府外事办公室主任)
Functional departments	
Public administration and law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Provincial Department of Supervision (省监察厅厅长) • Secretary of the Provincial Committee of Public Administration & Law (省政法委员会书记) • Secretary of the Provincial Committee of Discipline Inspection (省纪委书记) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Complaints (省信访局局长) • Head of the Provincial Police Bureau (公安厅厅长) • Head of the General Office of Supervision, Guangdong Province (广东省委办公厅综合督查处处长)
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary of the Provincial Bureau of Human Resources (省人事厅书记) • Head/Deputy Head of the Provincial Organization Department (省委组织部部长/副部长) • Head of the Provincial Office of Labor (省劳动厅人事处处长) • Deputy Head of the Provincial Bureau of Human Resources (省人事局副局长)
Propaganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Provincial Propaganda Department (省委宣传部部长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Culture (省文化厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Broadcasting & Television (省广播电视局局长) • Vice-secretary of the Provincial Ethnic Work Committee (省委民族工作委员会副书记) • Head of the Provincial News Publishing Bureau (省新闻出版局局长)
Economics and commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Provincial Business Bureau (省商务厅厅长) • Chairman of the Provincial General Trade Union (省总工会主席/副主席) • Head of the Provincial State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (省政府国有资产监督管理委员会主任)

(continued)

Table A2 (continued)

Category	Positions
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Trade (省贸易厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Committee of Economic Restructuring (省经济体制改革委员会主任) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Finance (省财政厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (省对外贸易经济合作厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Quality and Technical Supervision (省质量技术监督局局长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Industrial and Commerce (省工商局局长) • Head of the Provincial Committee of Economics (省经济委员会主任) • Head of the Provincial Committee of Development & Planning (省发展计划委员会主任) • Head of the Provincial Committee of Economics and Information (省经济和信息化委员会主任) • Head of the Provincial Light Industry Council (省轻工总会会长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Economic Restructuring (省体改办主任) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Merchants (省招商引资局局长) • Vice-secretary of the Provincial Bureau of Enterprise Trade Union (省企业工委副书记) • Assistant Inspector of the Provincial Economic Planning Commission (省计经委助理巡视员) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Price (省物价局局长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of SMEs (省中小企业服务局局长) • Head of the Research Department of the Provincial Economic Committee (省经委调研处处长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of TVEs (省乡镇企业局局长) • Head of the Provincial Committee of Development and Reform (省发展改革委员会主任) • Head of the Provincial Committee of Construction (省建委主任) • Head of the Provincial Department of Agriculture and Industry (省委农工部部长)

(continued)

Table A2 (continued)

Category	Positions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Agriculture (省农牧业厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Land Resources (省国土资源厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Committee of Agriculture (省农业委员会主任) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Agriculture and Forestry (省农林厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Grain (省粮食局局长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Water Resources (省水利厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Forestry (省林业厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Team of Rural Affairs (省农村工作领导小组组长) • Head of the Administration Bureau of the Committee of Huang He Water Resources (水利部黄河水利委员会黄河中游治理局局长) • Head of the Provincial Academy of Agriculture (省农业科学院院长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Agricultural Resources (省农业资源开发局局长) • Party Secretary of the Provincial Bureau of Ocean and Fisheries (省海洋与渔业局党组书记)
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Civil Service (省民政厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Transportation (交通厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Statistics (省统计局局长) • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Personnel & Labor Security (省劳动和社会保障厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Committee of Population and Family Planning (省人口和计划生育委员会主任) • Chairman of the Provincial Federation of Women (省妇联主席) • Deputy Head of the Provincial Bureau of Electronic Industry (省电子工业局副局长) • Deputy Head of the Provincial Bureau of Environmental Protection (省环境保护局副局长)

(continued)

Table A2 (continued)

Category	Positions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Provincial Bureau of Mining (省冶金厅厅长) • Head of the Provincial Rural Affairs Department of the Communist Youth League (共青团青农部部长) • Deputy Head of the Provincial Bureau of Machine Building and Electronics Industry (省机械工业厅副厅长) • Deputy Head of the Provincial Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resource Exploration (省地质矿产勘查开发局副局长) • Deputy Head of the Provincial Bureau of Ordnance Industry (省兵器工业局副局长) • Head of the Provincial Committee of Ethnic Affairs (省民委主任)
Municipal-level	
Party side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vice Party Secretary (市委副书记)
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Mayor (政府副市长)
Functional departments	
Public administration and law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary of Discipline Inspection (市纪委书记)
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Municipal Organization Department (组织部部长)
Propaganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Municipal Propaganda Department (市委宣传部部长)
Economics and commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Municipal Bureau of Construction (建委主任) • Head of the Economic Committee (经济委员会主任) • Head of the Economic and Trade Committee (经贸委主任) • Head of the Municipal Bureau of Industry and Commerce (工商局局长)
District Development zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party Secretary of Municipal District (区委书记) • Party Secretary of Municipal Zone of Economic & Technology Development (经济技术开发区书记)
Municipalities	
Party Secretary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party Secretary (市委书记)
Deputy Party Secretary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vice Party Secretary (市委副书记)

(continued)

Table A2 (continued)

Category	Positions
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor/Deputy Mayor of the Municipal Government (人民政府市长/副市长)
Functional departments	
Public administration and law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary of Discipline Inspection (纪委书记) • Secretary/Vice-secretary of Public Administration & Law (政法委书记/副书记)
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Municipal Organization Department (组织部部长)
Propaganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Municipal Propaganda Department (宣传部部长)
Economics and commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the Municipal Bureau of Foreign Business Investment (外商投资局局长) • Head/Deputy Head of Economic Committee (经济委员会主任/副主任) • Head of the Municipal Bureau of Ports (港务局局长)
County-level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party Secretary of County (县委书记) • Head/Deputy Head of County (县长/副县长) • Party Secretary of Municipal District (区委书记)
Enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party Secretary/Vice Party Secretary of Enterprises (企业党委书记/副书记) • General Manager (总经理)
University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party Secretary/Vice Party Secretary of University (大学党委书记/副书记) • Head/Deputy Head of University (校长/副校长)

Source. Party Secretary Database, 2013.

Table A3. Regional, Horizontal, and Vertical Mobility of Municipal Party Secretaries, 1993–2011.

Province	No. of observations	Regional mobility index	No. of observations	Horizontal mobility index	Vertical mobility index
Total/average	850	1.21	813	3.07	2.06
Hebei	43	1.40	41	3.07	2.15
Shanxi	42	0.90	42	3.26	2.24

(continued)

Table A3 (continued)

Province	No. of observations	Regional mobility index	No. of observations	Horizontal mobility index	Vertical mobility index
Inner Mongolia	29	1.14	29	3.17	2.00
Liaoning	49	0.76	48	2.90	1.85
Jilin	35	0.77	33	3.12	2.12
Heilongjiang	44	1.02	42	3.07	1.98
Jiangsu	45	1.20	45	3.20	2.02
Zhejiang	40	1.70	39	3.31	2.18
Anhui	51	1.18	45	2.91	1.98
Fujian	32	1.09	30	2.87	1.97
Jiangxi	20	2.15	20	2.90	2.15
Shandong	52	1.02	52	3.02	2.04
Henan	51	1.02	50	2.98	1.92
Hubei	43	1.09	41	3.17	2.12
Hunan	47	0.68	38	2.89	2.13
Guangdong	73	1.08	71	2.86	1.93
Guangxi	33	1.33	30	3.50	2.17
Sichuan	49	1.55	46	3.02	2.15
Guizhou	12	2.67	12	3.17	2.33
Yunnan	9	1.22	9	3.22	2.22
Shaanxi	32	1.84	31	3.29	2.26
Gansu	10	1.10	10	3.30	2.10
Ningxia	9	3.22	9	2.67	1.78

Source. Party Secretary Database, 2013.

Table A4. Second-Previous Position of Municipal Party Secretaries, 1993–2011.

	PS total		PS 93-01		PS 02-11	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Central-level total	9	1.1	2	0.8	7	1.3
Provincial-level total	221	27.7	80	30.2	141	26.5
Provincial-level cities ^a	2	0.3	0	0.0	2	0.4
Province						
Party side	45	5.6	16	6.0	29	5.5
Government	28	3.5	10	3.8	18	3.4

(continued)

Table A4 (continued)

	PS total		PS 93-01		PS 02-11	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Functional departments						
Public administration and law	9	1.1	3	1.1	6	1.1
Organization	15	1.9	8	3.0	7	1.3
Propaganda	31	3.9	8	3.0	23	4.3
Economics and commerce	53	6.6	23	8.7	30	5.6
Agriculture	26	3.3	6	2.3	20	3.8
Others	12	1.5	6	2.3	6	1.1
Municipal-level total	535	67.1	165	62.3	370	69.5
Provincial capital						
Party side (Deputy Party Secretary)	31	3.9	8	3.0	23	4.3
Government	9	1.1	3	1.1	6	1.1
Functional departments						
Public administration and law	1	0.1	0	0.0	1	0.2
Organization	2	0.3	0	0.0	2	0.4
Propaganda	2	0.3	1	0.4	1	0.2
Economics and commerce	5	0.6	0	0.0	5	0.9
District	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Development zone	4	0.5	1	0.4	3	0.6
Municipality						
Country-level Party Secretary						
Party Secretary	70	8.8	18	6.8	52	9.8
Deputy Party Secretary	340	42.7	104	39.2	236	44.4
Government	56	7.0	22	8.3	34	6.4
Functional departments						
Public administration and law	5	0.6	3	1.1	2	0.4
Organization	9	1.1	4	1.5	5	0.9
Propaganda	1	0.1	1	0.4	0	0.0
Economics and commerce	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
County-level Party Secretary	11	1.4	11	4.2	0	0.0
Enterprise	13	1.6	4	1.5	9	1.7
University	8	1.0	3	1.1	5	0.9
Total	797	100	265	100	532	100
Information N/A	101					

a. Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Tianjin.
Source. Party Secretary Database, 2013.

Table A5. Third-Previous Position of Municipal Party Secretaries, 1993–2011.

	PS total		PS 93-01		PS 02-11	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Central-level total	15	1.9	2	0.8	13	2.5
Provincial-level total	251	31.9	77	29.6	174	33.1
Provincial-level cities ^a	2	0.3	0	0.0	2	0.4
Province						
Party side	50	6.4	26	10.0	24	4.6
Government	30	3.8	8	3.1	22	4.2
Functional departments						
Public administration and law	12	1.5	1	0.4	11	2.1
Organization	13	1.7	4	1.5	9	1.7
Propaganda	36	4.6	9	3.5	27	5.1
Economics and commerce	59	7.5	19	7.3	40	7.6
Agriculture	24	3.1	4	1.5	20	3.8
Others	25	3.2	6	2.3	19	3.6
Municipal-level total	414	52.7	138	53.1	276	52.5
Provincial capital						
Party side (Deputy Party Secretary)	13	1.7	5	1.9	8	1.5
Government	12	1.5	3	1.2	9	1.7
Functional departments						
Public administration and law	3	0.4	0	0.0	3	0.6
Organization	4	0.5	2	0.8	2	0.4
Propaganda	6	0.8	1	0.4	5	1.0
Economics and commerce	8	1.0	2	0.8	6	1.1
District	13	1.7	4	1.5	9	1.7
Development zone	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Municipality						
Party Secretary	37	4.7	15	5.8	22	4.2
Deputy Party Secretary	217	27.6	71	27.3	146	27.8
Government	65	8.3	22	8.5	43	8.2
Functional departments						
Public administration and law	6	0.8	3	1.2	3	0.6
Organization	18	2.3	6	2.3	12	2.3

(continued)

Table A5 (continued)

	PS total		PS 93-01		PS 02-11	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Propaganda	7	0.9	3	1.2	4	0.8
Economics and commerce	5	0.6	1	0.4	4	0.8
County-level Party Secretary	68	8.7	30	11.5	38	7.2
Enterprise	26	3.3	10	3.8	16	3.0
University	12	1.5	3	1.2	9	1.7
Total	786	100	260	100	526	100
Information N/A	112					

Source. Party Secretary Database, 2013.

Notes

1. The term “leading cadres” 领导干部 refers to public or government employees at the division/county level or above who hold key positions in the party-government apparatus. In the following, the focus is on men and women who were appointed municipal party secretaries, a highly elite subset of leading cadres.
2. Landry’s work (2008) is one of the few studies that has looked at career trajectories of municipal leaders, but he only analyzed municipal mayors 市长, leaving unexamined the career trajectories of municipal party secretaries. Party secretaries are usually the most authoritative and influential leader within the municipal governance structure and, therefore, are important agents in shaping local regional development. As the number one in a municipality, they oversee and coordinate the implementation of provincial mandates, provide provincial leaders with information, and balance the different demands of the rural and urban counties (Chien, 2010).

3. The 1993–2001 period carries the unmistakable policy stamp of Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji, and the 2002–2011 period is characterized by the leadership headed by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. Given these different periods of national leadership, we assume that there are also changes in appointment patterns of municipal leaders. For example, one could hypothesize that during the state-led period during 1993–2001, more party secretaries with a background in state-owned enterprises were selected, while this might not have been the case for the most recent period.

4. Vertical, horizontal, and regional mobility among party secretaries differs across provinces. Table A3 in the Appendix lists the three indices for each province. Party secretaries in Gansu, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Sichuan, and Jilin had comparatively high levels of horizontal and vertical mobility. By contrast, party secretaries in Henan, Liaoning, Guangdong, and Anhui had relatively low levels. This suggests that many cadres in these provinces had worked in the same function and at the same administrative level before their appointment as municipal party secretary. Regional mobility among party secretaries also varies at the provincial level. In some provinces, the regional mobility index was low (e.g., in Hunan and Shanxi), while in other provinces it was higher (e.g., in Ningxia or Guizhou). The provincial variation in cadre mobility could be due to variations in provincial appointment and promotion practices or differences in regional culture and dialect, all of which can have an impact on the flow of human resources.

5. For example, analyzing movements between the first and second previous work position shows that more cadres switched from government functions to party functions: 47 cadres moved from party-related to government functions, while 55 switched from government to party functions. The switch between party- and government-related functions is also similar in movements between the second and the third previous work position: 24 cadres switched from

party-related to government functions, while 67 switched from government to party-related functions.

6. Although cross-provincial mobility is low, intra-provincial mobility is much higher. The share of party secretaries who worked in a different municipality in their fifth, fourth, third, second, and last previous work position were 82 percent, 76 percent, 78 percent, 65 percent, and 44 percent respectively. Only 22 percent of all leading cadres spent the last ten years before their appointment working in the same municipality where they would later get appointed as party secretary.

7. Tables A3 and A4 in the Appendix list additional details for cadres' second and third previous positions. Many cadres commonly worked in their second previous position as a deputy party secretary at the municipal level (42.7 percent), as a head of a functional provincial department (18.3 percent), or as a municipal party secretary in a different municipality (8.8 percent). Popular functional bureaus to gain experience and build networks include provincial bureaus dealing with economics and commerce (6.6 percent) or propaganda (3.9 percent). Common posts for the third previous post include working as a deputy party secretary at the municipal level (27.6 percent), as a head of a functional department at the provincial level (21.6 percent), or as a county-level party secretary (8.7 percent). Provincial bureaus related to economics and commerce (7.5 percent) and propaganda departments (4.6 percent) are again important stations for cadres' career advancement. A significant number of cadres (4.7 percent) were also already acting as a municipal party secretary in their third previous position.

8. Twelve party secretaries had worked as a party secretary or deputy party secretary in a state-owned enterprise for the majority of their career. Eight party secretaries had a working background at a university, of which three used to be the party secretary of a university, two the

deputy party secretary of a university, two the head of a university, and one the head of a university's office.

9. The share of leading cadres with provincial work experience varied across provinces, ranging from 28 percent in Guangdong to 70 percent in Ningxia. Moreover, a cadre's length of stay at the provincial level ranged from 2.7 years in Hubei to 6.2 years in Guizhou. These findings suggest there are significant variations in appointment practices and preferences at the provincial level. Future research is needed to better understand these patterns.

10. The importance of work experience and relationships in the provincial capital city seem to have increased over time: between 2002 and 2011, 57 percent of the party secretaries surveyed in this study worked in the provincial capital city, up from 49 percent between 1993 and 2001.

11. Recent research on strategic groups suggests that township-county cadres form a strategic group (Heberer and Schubert, 2012). Following this argument, one could argue that there is also a "strategic group" of municipal-provincial cadres.

12. Informants pointed out additional barriers as important, including gender, an unfair cadre evaluation system for leading cadres 领导干部考评, and cadres' personal preferences (i.e., not all capable county cadres want to get promoted to the municipality due to family reasons, lack of good schooling at the municipal capital, or cadres' personal preference for more implementation-focused work at the county level as compared to more macro-level work at the municipality) (INT21, INT29, INT31). Many county cadres did not consider cadre evaluations as a key factor influencing promotion decisions, because most leading cadres formally fulfill the required performance standards outlined in the evaluation sheets, making it no longer a tool for differentiation among the peer group (e.g., INT21, INT24, INT25, INT27, INT32). County

cadres criticized the current performance evaluation sheets for putting too little emphasis on practical work experience.

13. Leading county cadres must climb numerous ranks 级 before being promoted to top positions at the municipal level. The first level starts with promotion to deputy office rank 副处级 and then full office rank 正处级, where cadres are under the management of a municipal organization department. This is followed by promotion to the deputy department rank 副厅长 and finally full department rank 正厅级, where cadres fall under the management of a provincial organization department. See Servant Law of the People's Republic of China, April 2005 中华人民共和国公务员法 (www.gov.cn/flfg/2005-06/21/content_8249.htm). At each level, a cadre works in numerous different positions before being promoted to the next level (Pieke, 2009).

14. See, for example, the “Circular on Questions Regarding Institutional Reform of Counties” 中共中央、国务院关于县级党政机构机构改革若干问题的通知, released by the State Council in 1983, and the document by the Central Organization Department released in 2006 titled “Opinions Concerning the Enhancement of Team Building for County-Level Leaders” 关于进一步加强县（市、区、旗）党政正职队伍建设的意见.

15. According to a recent analysis of cadres' financial rewards at the provincial and sub-provincial level, basic wage payments 基本工资 accounted for only a third of cadre compensation, while administrative benefits and financial subsidies for retirement and housing took up the biggest share of cadre compensation (Ang, 2009).

16. There are numerous online debates on the issue of the glass ceiling for county officials. See, for example,

www.zhgpl.com/doc/1011/6/1/7/101161741.html?coluid=7&kindid=0&docid=101161741 and www.infzm.com/content/45151.

17. This latest reform is one of many in Guangdong, a province that has always been in the lead regarding administrative reforms. In 2008, the Guangdong Provincial Committee implemented a so-called “Interim Measures of Scientific Scoring System” for cadre performance, and in 2009 it published the “Democracy/Political Negotiation Measures” 广东省民主协商规程, 广东省市厅级领导班子和领导干部落实科学发展观评价指标体系及考核办法(试行).

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