

From Selection to Election? Experiments in the Recruitment of Chinese Political Elites

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Are elections playing an important role in Chinese politics today? The simple answer is no. Is China gradually moving from selection to election in the recruitment of political elites? That is a more difficult question to answer. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is certainly unwilling to give up its monopoly on political power. Chinese leaders continue to claim, explicitly rather than implicitly, that the CCP is entitled to make all of the country's most important personnel appointments. But since the late 1990s, especially in recent years, the Chinese authorities have experimented with some electoral methods in the selection and confirmation of Party and government officials at various levels of leadership. With a focus on both intra-Party elections and people's congress elections, this article offers a preliminary assessment of elections in China—their significance, limitations, and impact on the Chinese political process.

It is extremely unusual in China for candidates who are vying for elected posts to openly engage in campaigning, lobbying, public debates, personal attacks, and vote buying.¹ However, that is exactly what happened recently—not among political elites in Beijing but in a documentary film covering the election of student leaders at a primary school in Wuhan. In this newly released, award-winning film, *Please Vote for Me (Qing wei wo toupiao)*, director Chen Weijun meticulously documented the entire two-week-long campaign and election process, featuring a trio of third-graders chosen by their teacher to run for the position of class monitor.² The film revealed the motivations, behaviors, and various kinds of “dirty tactics” used by schoolkids in campaigning. The children involved, of course, were heavily influenced by the adults around them.

The phenomena explored in this documentary film may or may not be indicative of the future trajectory of Chinese politics. It is also important to note that these dirty tactics do not necessarily bear any relevance to the behavioral patterns exhibited by the upcoming generation of Chinese elites. What this episode does show is that the idea of elections has gradually and quietly penetrated Chinese society, even directly affecting the lives of school children.

During the past decade, grassroots elections, or more precisely village elections, have regularly taken place in China's 680,000 villages.³ In addition, elections have occurred more regularly at high levels of leadership. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has adopted or consolidated some electoral methods to choose the members of the Central Committee and other high-ranking leaders. Under the official guidelines of the

CCP Organization Department, major personnel appointments are now often decided by votes in various committees rather than solely by the committee's Party chief.⁴ In the past two years, the term "decision by vote" (*piaoju*), has frequently appeared in Chinese discourse on political and administrative reforms.

Taking the Elections in China Seriously

A potentially far-reaching development as regards the use of elections to select political leaders occurred recently in Shenzhen, a major city in the southern province of Guangdong. The city leaders announced that they would have a multi-candidate competition for the posts of mayor and vice mayor. In May 2008, the authorities in Shenzhen posted on the municipal government website a draft of the "Guidelines for Government Reforms in Shenzhen for the Short-Term Future."⁵ The guidelines specified that delegates of the district or municipal people's congress in Shenzhen would elect heads of districts and bureaus through multi-candidate elections. As part of the process, all candidates would offer their statements of purpose and participate in public debates. According to these guidelines, within three years this same method will be applied to the election of mayor and vice mayor in Shenzhen, a city of 10 million people.⁶

The Chinese media have reported widely on the specifics of these guidelines, often stating that with this "political breakthrough," Shenzhen will likely add to its status as China's first special economic zone the designation of the country's first special political zone (*zhengzhi tequ*).⁷ At this point, Shenzhen has already initiated the process of conducting elections in accordance with the guidelines. In May 2008, the city elected the new Party secretary of Futian District and the head of the Shenzhen Municipal Office of High Technological Development, with two candidates vying for each post. In addition, several other heads of bureau- and district-level leadership in Shenzhen were elected, with two or three candidates competing for each position. Wang Yang, Politburo member and Party secretary of Guangdong, has been known for his push for political reforms and "thought emancipation" since he arrived in the province as Party chief in December 2007.⁸ Most recently, Wang called for more competition on the part of candidates and greater choices for voters in these elections in Shenzhen.⁹

It should be noted that the Chinese Communist Party is not interested in giving up its monopoly on political power to experiment with multiparty democratic competition. Chinese leaders continue to claim, explicitly rather than implicitly, that the CCP is entitled to decide on major personnel appointments within the government. The defining feature of the Chinese political system has been, and continues to be, its Leninist structure, in which the state operates as the executor of decisions made by the Party. Although from time to time some top Chinese leaders have called for greater separation between the Party and the state and for more political participation from the public and social groups, the main objective of Chinese authorities has been, and is, the consolidation and revitalization of the Party leadership rather than the revision of the Leninist party-state system. The new catchphrase of the Chinese leadership under Hu Jintao is "enhance the governing capacity of the ruling party."

Huang Weiping, director of the Research Institute of Contemporary Chinese Politics at Shenzhen University, was involved in drafting the aforementioned guidelines on Shenzhen governmental reform. He recently offered a comprehensive explanation of the Chinese authorities' position on the relationship between selection (*xuanba*) and election (*xuanju*). According to Huang, China is not going to replace selection with election in the choice of its political elites. As he noted, "selection is a principal system (*da zhidu*) while election is a periphery mechanism (*xiao zhidu*). The latter is supposed to supplement the former."¹⁰ In his view, public participation in elections could make up for the deficiency or inadequacy in the purely Leninist personnel appointment system.

One should not, however, conclude too quickly that elections in present-day China are nothing but "political shows" to improve the image of the Chinese leadership. The Chinese leadership's growing awareness of the need for elections is only partly driven by their concern for political legitimacy in this one-party state. The implementation of elections, one can argue, is a result of the transition in the Chinese political system from an all-powerful single leader, such as Mao or Deng, to a system of collective leadership, which has characterized both the Jiang and Hu eras. A review of the transformation of Chinese elite politics under these four top leaders is quite revealing.

Mao wielded enormous power as a godlike figure. His favorable words and personal endorsement were often the sole basis for the career advancement of many senior leaders. Deng Xiaoping, too, was a leader of monolithic proportions. Largely because of his legendary political career and his formidable patron-client ties, he was able to maintain his role as China's paramount leader even when he did not hold any important leadership position following the Tiananmen incident. On the other hand, both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao are technocrats who lack the charisma and revolutionary credentials of Mao and Deng, but who have broad administrative experience and are good at coalition-building and political compromise. Thus, the selection of political elites under these two men has been based largely on factional balance of power and deal-cutting.

In general, the nature of collective leadership prevents the emergence of a new paramount leader and inhibits any single individual from completely controlling the political system. Consequently, the rules of the game in Chinese elite politics have changed; elections have increasingly become a new way for the CCP to attain the "mandate of heaven." The desire of Hu Jintao and other top Chinese leaders for the mandate explains why, in June 2007, they conducted a straw poll among several hundred ministerial and provincial leaders as well as their superiors in an effort to "gauge their preferences for candidates for the next Politburo and its Standing Committee."¹¹

More specifically, greater attention should be given to intra-Party elections and the elections of people's congresses. As for intra-Party elections, one may reasonably assume that the greatest challenge to the rule of the CCP comes not from outside forces but from forces within the Party. In the era of collective leadership, factional tensions and competition will likely make intra-Party elections both increasingly transparent and dynamic.

The election of deputies of the people's congress at various levels of government is certainly not new in the People's Republic of China (PRC). But for a long time the Chinese public has been cynical about the role of the people's congresses. With a few exceptions, there has not been any real, open competition for the seats of the congress.¹² This, however, may start to change in the near future for two reasons. First, three decades of market reforms have not only brought forth a wealthy entrepreneurial elite group and an ever-growing Chinese middle class, but have also created many less fortunate and increasingly marginalized socioeconomic groups. These less fortunate classes are growing ever more aware of the importance of being represented in the decision-making circles, including those of people's congresses. Second, China confronts many daunting challenges, including economic disparity, employment pressure, environmental degradation, the lack of a social safety net, and growing tensions between the central and local governments. There is no easy solution to any of these problems, and Chinese leaders have different views and policy preferences for how to deal with them. In recent years, the people's congress has become one of the most important venues for policy debates. This trend will further enhance the public participation in, and demand for, more genuine and fair elections in the people's congress at various levels. Any serious effort to move toward competitive elections in China may release long-restrained social tensions and quickly undermine the CCP's ability to allocate social and economic resources.

The above observation makes clear that both intra-Party elections and the elections of the people's congress deserve substantial scholarly attention. The information about types, procedures, and results of these elections is valuable for China analysts. Such information may reveal some important tensions and trends in Chinese politics. Intra-Party democracy is, of course, not true democracy, but it may pave the way for a more fundamental change in the Chinese political system. In the absence of a broad-based and well-organized political opposition in the PRC, it is unlikely that the country will develop a multi-party political system in the near future. This fact actually makes the ongoing experiments such as intra-Party elections and competitive elections for the people's congress even more significant.

Assessing Intra-Party Elections

According to the terminology employed by the Chinese authorities, intra-Party democracy refers to five types of elections: direct elections, indirect elections, multi-candidate elections, single-candidate elections, and preliminary elections.¹³

- A direct election (*zhijie xuanju*) is an election in which eligible members vote for their candidates directly.
- Indirect election (*jianjie xuanju*) refers to an election in which all eligible members first vote for their representatives or delegates, who will then later vote for candidates in the Party Congress.
- Multi-candidate election, or a "more candidates than seats election" (*cha'e xuanju*), refers to an election that has more candidates than the number of seats available. For example, if the Party authorities plan to form a 12-member party committee, they

may place 15 names on the ballot. The three people who receive the lowest number of votes will not become members of the committee.

- Single-candidate election (*denge xuanju*) means that the number of candidates equals the number of seats. In other words, there is only one candidate on the ballot for that position. The candidate will be elected if he or she receives more than 50 percent of the votes. Some Chinese critics believe that the single-candidate election is, in fact, a selection or a confirmation of the appointments made by the Party authorities rather than a meaningful electoral competition.¹⁴
- Preliminary election (*yuxuan*) refers to an election in which eligible members first confirm the candidates on the ballot before casting their votes.

At certain levels of CCP leadership, only one of these different sorts of election methods is employed. At other levels, multiple methods may be used together. For example, direct elections are usually used in the grassroots party organizations such as village Party branches. The CCP members vote directly to elect the Party secretary and committee members of their Party branch. In 2008, about 2,000 town-level Party committees in the country also conducted direct elections.¹⁵ The other four kinds of elections are, in fact, all used in the National Congress of the CCP.

The National Congress of the CCP, which has convened once every five years since 1977, is the most important political convention in the country. There are two kinds of delegates: invited and regular. The 17th Party Congress held in 2007, for example, had a total number of 2,270 delegates, including 57 invited delegates and 2,213 regular delegates. These 57 invited delegates were mostly Party elders who can be considered China's equivalent to the "super-delegates" of the United States' major political parties. Like the regular delegates, they were eligible to vote. The 2,213 regular delegates came from 38 constituencies. These included representatives from China's 31 province-level administrations, a delegation of ethnic Taiwanese, one from the central departments of the Party, one from the ministries and commissions of the central government, one from the major state-owned enterprises, one comprised of representatives from China's large banks and other financial institutions, and delegations from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and People's Armed Police. All 38 constituencies went through multi-candidate elections in forming their delegations, with the CCP Organization Department requiring that there be at least 15 percent more candidates on the ballots than the number of delegates making up the representative body headed to the congress.¹⁶ This was 5 percent more than was the case at the 16th Party Congress in 2002.¹⁷

The National Congress of the CCP elects the Central Committee (CC). In theory, the Central Committee then elects the Politburo, the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), and the general secretary of the Party. In practice, the members of these peak organs of the Party have always guided the selection of members to the lower-ranking leadership bodies, including the Central Committee, which in turn "approves" the slate of candidates for the Politburo and the PBSC. Thus, the notion that the Central Committee "elects" the Politburo is something of a fiction. The members of these decision-making bodies are generally selected by either the previous PBSC or some heavyweight political figures. Outgoing PBSC members often ensure that their protégés will have seats in the next Politburo or PBSC as part of a deal in exchange for their own retirement. For example, it was widely reported in the Hong Kong and overseas media that Zeng Qinghong was willing to vacate his seat on the 17th PBSC in order to let his three

protégés (Xi Jinping, Zhou Yongkang, and He Guoqiang) obtain membership in this supreme leadership body.

It would be wrong, however, to assert that there is no intra-party competition for Central Committee seats. Since the 13th National Congress of the CCP in 1982, Chinese authorities have adopted *cha'e xuanju* for the election to the Central Committee. The 2002 Party Congress had 5.1 percent more candidates than available full membership seats and 5.7 percent more candidates for alternate membership seats.¹⁸ In the 2007 Party Congress, the delegates voted to elect 204 full members from the total number of 221 candidates (8.3 percent more) on the ballot. As for alternate members, the delegates voted to elect 167 alternates from the total number of 183 candidates (9.6 percent more) on the ballot.¹⁹

Prior to these “more candidates than seats” elections, the CCP Organization Department also holds a preliminary election in each and every delegation during the Party Congress to confirm these two lists of candidates—one for full members and the other for alternates. If some candidates favored by the top leadership or designated Politburo members received a very low number of votes during the preliminary election in a given delegation, the top leaders would make an effort to persuade delegates in the delegation to change their minds before the formal election. In a way, this preliminary election not only helps prevent “big surprises” in the result of later elections, but also serves as a Chinese-style lobbying to ensure that those candidates favored by top leaders ultimately emerge victorious from the multi-candidate elections.

Despite efforts by the CCP authorities to control the results of these elections, delegates to the Party Congress sometimes decide to vote against the “Party line.” As a result, some candidates earmarked by top authorities to take on important positions do not get elected to the CC. For example, during the 13th Party Congress, Deng Liquan, a conservative hardliner and 12th Politburo member, lost a bid for reelection to the 13th CC.²⁰ Xiao Yang, former Party secretary of Chongqing, who was reportedly chosen by Deng Xiaoping and other veteran leaders to be a Politburo member on the 14th CC, did not even get enough votes for full membership on the CC. The strongest evidence of opposition to nepotism in the election of CC members is that a number of princelings (children of high-ranking officials) on the ballot for the CC did not get elected despite (or perhaps because of) their privileged family backgrounds. In the 15th Party Congress, for example, several princelings, including Chen Yuan, Wang Jun, and Bo Xilai, were among the 5 percent of candidates who were defeated. This despite the fact that all of their fathers had served as vice-premiers.

Complete information about who failed to be elected in these “more candidates than seats” elections is not made available to the public, but it is interesting to see the list of elected alternate members who received the lowest number of votes in the CC elections. According to CCP norms, the list of all of the full members of the CC is ordered by the number of strokes in the Chinese characters of their names, but the list of the alternate members is arranged in accordance with the number of votes they received in elections. Table 1 shows the alternate members who received the lowest number of votes in the Central Committee elections of the CCP from 1982 to 2008. All of them have very strong patron-client ties with top leaders.

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Table 1

The Patron-Client Backgrounds of Those Alternate Members Who Received the Lowest Number of Votes in the Elections of the 12th through 17th CCP Central Committees (1982–2007)

<i>Party Congress</i>	<i>Total number of alternate members</i>	<i>Alternate member with lowest number of votes</i>	<i>Patron-Client background</i>	<i>Position when elected</i>	<i>Highest position attained</i>
17 th (2007)	167	Jia Ting'an	Personal assistant to Jiang Zemin	Director, General Office of the Central Military Commission	Deputy Director, PLA Political Department
16 th (2002)	158	You Xigui	Bodyguard to Jiang Zemin	Director of the CCP Central Guard Bureau	Deputy Director, General Office of the CCP Central Committee
15 th (1997)	151	Xi Jinping	Son of Xi Zhongxun (Vice-Premier), personal assistant to Geng Biao (Minister of Defense)	Deputy Party Secretary of Fujian Province	Standing Member of Politburo, Vice President of PRC
14 th (1992)	130	Xiao Yang	Protégé of Deng Xiaoping	Party Secretary of Chongqing	Governor of Sichuan Province
13 th (1987)	110	Huang Ju	Chief of Staff to Jiang Zemin	Deputy Party Secretary of Shanghai	Standing Member of Politburo, Executive Vice-Premier
12 th (1982)	138	Wang Dongxing	Bodyguard to Mao Zedong	Vice President of the Central Party School	Vice Chairman, CCP Central Committee

Sources and Notes: The CCP Organization Department and the Research Office of the History of the Chinese Communist Party, comp., *Zhongguo gongchandang lijie zhongyang weiyuan dacidian, 1921–2003* [Who's Who of the Members of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committees, 1921–2003] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2004). For the 17th Central Committee, see www.xinhuanet.com.

Jia Ting'an, the alternate member who received the lowest number of votes in the 17th Party Congress, was a longtime personal assistant to Jiang Zemin. In the previous Party congress, the alternate member with the poorest score was You Xigui, Jiang Zemin's bodyguard. Xi Jinping, now the leading candidate to succeed Hu Jintao in the next Party congress, received the lowest number of votes among the 151 alternate members elected to the 15th Party Congress in 1997. Xi was not only the product of a high-ranking official family, but also served as personal assistant to former Minister of Defense Geng Biao. As mentioned earlier, Xiao Yang, a protégé of Deng Xiaoping, did not receive enough votes for a full membership seat at the 14th Party Congress election. He was then placed on the ballot for an alternate membership seat. Although he was eventually elected as an alternate member, Xiao embarrassingly received the lowest number of votes among those elected. The alternate member elected to the 13th CC with the lowest number of votes was Huang Ju, a prominent member of the so-called Shanghai Gang who later obtained a seat on the PBSC. Huang served as the chief of staff for Jiang Zemin when Jiang was the Party boss in Shanghai. The 12th Party Congress did not adopt the "more candidates than seats" election process. Thus, all candidates on the ballot were elected. In that election, Wang Dongxing, former bodyguard to Mao and former vice chairman of the CCP Central Committee, was at the very bottom of the list of alternate members in number of votes received.

Some other leaders with strong patron-client ties were among the 10 elected alternate members who received the lowest number of votes in recent Party congresses. They included princelings such as Deng Pufang, Wang Qishan, Lou Jiwei, and Qiao Zonghuai. Jiang Zemin's protégés Huang Liman and Xiong Guangkai and Hu Jintao's chief of staff, Ling Jihua, also scored very poorly in these elections. The results of all these elections seem to suggest that princeling backgrounds and strong patron-client ties, which likely helped accelerate political advancement early in the protégés' careers, may have become a political liability for them as they rose to the national leadership. Some princelings, however, later improved their popularity in elections by demonstrating their leadership capacity and good performance. For example, Wang Qishan took the post of acting mayor of Beijing in the peak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003. His effective leadership during the crisis earned him the reputation as the "chief of the fire brigade." In the Beijing municipal congress meeting in 2004, Wang was confirmed mayor of Beijing with 742 "yes" votes and only one "no" vote from the delegates.²¹

Intra-Party elections are, of course, often subject to political manipulation by the top leaders. For CCP members and delegates, the choices in the various kinds of intra-Party elections are still very limited. The fact that delegates to the Party congress often use their limited voting power to exercise "democratic rights" to block the election of leaders with strong nepotistic advantages may make the CCP authorities more cautious about democratic experiments. From the perspective of the CCP leadership, China's political reforms should be incremental and manageable in scale. Nevertheless, the Chinese authorities claim that there will be an ever-increasing number of candidates in future elections to the CC. Such a method may even apply to the formation of the Politburo in the near future. According to the Chinese leadership, these intra-Party elections are important components of political reforms designed to gradually make China's party-state system more transparent, competitive, and representative.

Rethinking the Election of the People's Congress

Elections in present-day China are not administratively neutral. The CCP strictly controls both the election organizations and the election process. Party chiefs at various levels of the administration often concurrently serve as chairmen of the election committees. There are, however, three separate organizational systems in charge of elections in the country, namely: the CCP organization departments in various levels of the Party committees, the people's congresses; and civil affairs departments in various levels of government.²² A comparison of the three shows that the election system of the people's congress is more institutionalized and more transparent than the CCP organization and civil affairs departments.

The five levels of the administration of the PRC—township, county, municipal, provincial, and national—all have their own people's congresses. Delegates for the people's congress are all supposed to be elected—via direct election for township-level and indirect election for the county-level and above.²³ As for the National People's Congress (NPC), its delegates are allocated according to the population of a given province. The province with the smallest population is guaranteed at least 15 delegates. Special administrative regions such as Hong Kong and Macau have their quotas of delegates, as does the PLA. Based on the 1995 census, every 880,000 people in a given rural administrative unit, and every 220,000 people in an urban area select one delegate to the NPC. In recent years, some public intellectuals and local officials, especially delegates from the rural areas, have been criticizing this bias in favor of urban areas.²⁴ In the elections for the delegates to the 11th NPC, some electoral districts—for example, the Zichuan District in Shandong's Zibo City—abolished the urban-rural differentiation. This was called one of the 10 biggest breakthroughs in the constitutional development of the PRC in 2007.²⁵ Since that time, some other counties and cities have begun to follow the lead of Zichuan District in their own local elections.²⁶

Like the National Congress of the CCP, the National People's Congress selects new leadership every five years at a meeting usually held in the spring of the year following the Party congress. The 11th NPC, which was formed in March 2008, consisted of 2,987 delegates. The 11th NPC also adopted the “more candidates than seats” electoral process in choosing the members of the Standing Committee (a total of 161 seats). There were 7 percent more candidates (a total of 173) on the ballot than there were seats.²⁷ In theory, NPC delegates are not only supposed to elect the members of their congress's Standing Committee, but are also entitled to elect the president and vice president of the PRC, the chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the chief justice of the Supreme People's Court, and the chief of the Supreme People's Procuratorate. They are also empowered to approve the premier as well as the other members of the State Council and CMC. In reality, however, all these candidates are nominated by the NPC Presidium (*zhuxituan*), which simply passes on the list of nominees designated for appointment by the Central Committee of the CCP to the NPC. None of these leadership positions is chosen through multi-candidate elections.

An interesting phenomenon is that the delegates of the NPC are now often voting

against some top leaders in the confirmation process, voicing their dissent about political nepotism or favoritism by certain senior leaders or factions. For example, the “Shanghai Gang,” the leaders who advanced their careers from Shanghai largely due to their patron-client ties with Jiang, usually scored very poorly in these elections.

Table 2 shows the results of the elections of the top two leaders of five national institutions elected at the 10th NPC and Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) held in 2003. Jiang Zemin and his protégés are indicated in boldface. Their scores are not nearly as impressive as those of their counterparts. While Hu Jintao lost only seven votes (four “no” votes and three abstentions) out of 2,944 valid votes at the 10th NPC for the confirmation of his presidency, Jiang received 98 “no” votes and 122 abstentions out of 2,946 valid votes in the confirmation of his chairmanship of the Central Military Commission. Zeng Qinghong received only 87.5 percent of “yes” votes—out of 2,945 valid votes, there were 177 “no” votes and 190 abstentions. Other longtime protégés of Jiang suffered similar humiliation, including Executive Vice Premier Huang Ju, who received an embarrassingly low number of votes in his confirmation as vice-premier of the State Council, and Jia Qinglin, who won only 88.5 percent of the votes for his position in the CPPCC election. Among the 29 ministers elected to the 10th NPC, Governor of the People’s Bank Zhou Xiaochuan, who was known for his strong patron-client ties with Jiang, received the lowest number of votes.²⁸ The overwhelming support for Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao as evident in the vote counts at the 10th NPC explains why they have been able to make remarkable socioeconomic policy changes, downplaying Jiang’s elitist approach in favor of their own populist agenda.²⁹

Table 2

Vote Counts of the Two Top Leaders in the Five National Institutions in the 10th NPC & CPPCC Elections (2003)

<i>Power Institution</i>	<i># 1 Leader</i>	<i>Yes vote (%)</i>	<i># 2 leader</i>	<i>Yes vote (%)</i>
PRC Presidency	Hu Jintao	99.8	Zeng Qinghong	87.5
State Central Military Commission	Jiang Zemin	92.5	Hu Jintao	99.7
State Council	Wen Jiabao	99.3	Huang Ju	91.8
NPC	Wu Bangguo	98.9	Wang Zhaoguo	99.2
CPPCC	Jia Qinglin	88.5	Wang Zhongyu	98.3

Note: The names of Jiang Zemin and his protégés appear in **boldface**.

Source: Originally viewed at <http://www.bbs.xilubbs.com>. Also see Cheng Li, “The ‘New Deal’: Politics and Policies of the Hu Administration,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 38, nos. 4–5 (December 2003): 329–346.

Table 3 (next page) shows the vote counts for the chairman, vice chairmen, and general secretary who were elected at the 11th NPC in March 2008. Hua Jianmin and Chen Zhili, two prominent members of the Shanghai Gang, received the highest numbers of “no” and “abstention” votes. In contrast, two vice chairmen with ethnic minority

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Table 3*Vote Counts for the Chairman, Vice Chairmen, and General Secretary Elected in the 11th National People's Congress (2008)*

<i>NPC Position</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>CCP</i>	<i>Total votes</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>Abstain</i>
Chairman	Wu Bangguo	CCP, member of Politburo Standing Committee	Yes	2,966	2,948	9	9
Vice chairman	Wang Zhaoguo	CCP, Politburo member; chairman, All-China Federation of Trade Unions	Yes	2,964	2,947	11	6
Vice chairman	Lu Yongxiang	CCP, president of China's Academy of Sciences	Yes	2,964	2,940	11	13
Vice chairman	Uyunqing	CCP, former governor of Neimenggu (Mongolia)	Yes	2,964	2,956	5	3
Vice chairman	Han Qide	Chairman, Jiusha Society; chairman, China Association of Scientists	No	2,964	2,950	9	5
Vice chairman	Hua Jianmin	CCP, former State Councilor, member of the Shanghai Gang	Yes	2,964	2,901	48	15
Vice chairman	Chen Zhili	CCP, former State Councilor, member of the Shanghai Gang	Yes	2,964	2,816	112	36
Vice chairman	Zhou Tienong	Chairman, Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Nationalist Party	No	2,964	2,934	20	10
Vice chairman	Li Jianguo	CCP, former personal assistant to Li Ruihuan	Yes	2,964	2,911	39	14
Vice chairman	Ismail Tiliwaldi	CCP, former governor of Xinjiang	Yes	2,964	2,957	5	2
Vice chairman	Jiang Shusheng	Chairman, China Democratic League	No	2,964	2,948	11	5
Vice chairman	Chen Changzhi	Chairman, China National Democratic Construction Association	No	2,964	2,941	13	10
Vice chairman	Yan Junqi	Chairman, China Association for Promoting Democracy	No	2,964	2,945	11	8
Vice chairman	Sang Weiguo	Chairman, Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party	No	2,964	2,935	18	11
General secretary	Li Jianguo	See above	Yes	2,965	2,932	25	8

Source: www.chinesenewsnet.com, 15 March 2008.

backgrounds, Uyunqing (a Mongolian) and Ismail Tiliwaldi (a Uighur), received the highest numbers of “yes” votes. Among these 15 vice chairmen, six were not members of the CCP. These leaders represent the so-called democratic parties (*minzhu dangpai*) in the PRC and they also received relatively higher numbers of “yes” votes.³⁰ These “democratic parties” are, of course, all too small to compete with, or challenge, the CCP in any meaningful way. As of 2007, the membership numbers of these parties ranged from 2,100 (the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League) to 181,000 (the China Democratic League). Their representation in the NPC is largely symbolic. Nevertheless, it is important to note that an increasing number of candidates who are not CCP members have recently participated in the people’s congress elections. In 2003, there were only about 100 candidates for the position of delegate at people’s congresses who were not designated by the local authorities. In 2007, the number of such candidates increased to almost 10,000.³¹

Jiang Zemin’s protégés fared as poorly in the election at the 11th NPC as they did in those at the 10th, again receiving the lowest number of votes in the confirmation of ministers of the State Council. It was reported in the Hong Kong and overseas media that, of the total of 2,946 valid votes, Minister of Education Zhou Ji had 384 “no” votes and Minister of Railways Liu Zhijun had 211 “no” votes. State Councilor Ma Kai also received 117 “no” votes. Their poor vote counts might be due partly to the fact that all three were known as Jiang’s protégés, and partly to the fact that the delegates were concerned about China’s educational problems as well as some serious train accidents that had recently occurred.³² Although these vote counts usually do not block the confirmation of the candidates, they might jeopardize some political leaders’ chance for further promotion. For example, the strong opposition to Ma Kai’s promotion expressed by the delegates and standing committee members of the NPC was widely believed to be the reason he later failed to gain a Politburo membership seat.³³ Consequently, he was not considered for a vice-premiership.

The growing importance of the people’s congress in the confirmation process has convinced some Chinese officials to try political lobbying. For example, in 2007, Li Junqu, assistant governor of Hebei Province, bribed several delegates of the provincial people’s congress in order to be nominated and confirmed for the post of vice governor.³⁴ Similarly, Li Tangtang, vice governor of Shaanxi Province, urged eight friends or colleagues of his to make phone calls and send text messages to 50 officials, asking them to vote for him. Although Li Tangtang did not bribe anyone, his lobbying activities were still considered illegal under CCP regulations. During the past two years, the CCP Organization Department uncovered 121 similar cases of political lobbying or other “wrongdoings” among officials at the county level or above.³⁵

Final Thoughts

Intra-party democracy is, of course, not real democracy. In terms of electoral competition for selecting state leaders, China still has a long way to go. Yet, the recent political experiments in both the CCP leadership and the people’s congresses are unlikely to be a

static phenomenon. Political lobbying and negative campaigns, which are now officially prohibited, will probably develop in the future given the introduction of limited political competition. Elections to the Central Committee are also likely to become more competitive as time passes. Over time, Chinese politicians will become more and more familiar with the new “rules of the game” in elite politics. As a result, the country may soon witness an even more dynamic phase in the evolution of Chinese politics. At the same time, the people of China may begin to ask why only the Party elites, and not the public at large, have the opportunity to enjoy “democracy.” They will likely call for more genuine and fair elections to select local government leaders, especially the delegates to the people’s congresses. To a certain extent, this process has already begun, and will undoubtedly have a profound impact on state-society relations in the country.

It is still too early to conclude that China is in the midst of a historic transition from selection to election in the recruitment of political elites. The Chinese political system is still predominantly a Leninist party state in which the CCP monopolizes all the most important posts in the government. Yet, the formats, procedures, and results of these limited and partially controlled elections are enormously valuable to our understanding of Chinese politics today. They not only reveal the factional tensions and behavioral patterns of the CCP leaders, but are also indicative of the policy orientation, public opinions, and political choices of the leaders in this rapidly changing country.

Notes

¹ The author is indebted to Yinsheng Li for his research assistance. The author also thanks Sally Carman and Robert O’Brien for suggesting ways in which to clarify the article.

² This documentary film has been widely viewed on YouTube. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Jkaij-51tU>.

³ See <http://www.ccdtr.org/index.php/docs/41>.

⁴ The CCP Organization Department, “Dangzheng lingdao ganbu xuanba renyong gongzuo tiaoli” [The regulations of selection and appointment of the Party and government leaders], 2002. See http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/18/content_695422.htm. For the updated Q & A made by the CCP Organization Department in 2005, see http://www.mot.gov.cn/zizhan/siju/renlaosi/zhengceguiding/lingdaoganbu_GL/kaoheyurenmian/200709/t20070920_401063.html.

⁵ Shu Taifeng, “Shenzhen Zhenggai toushi wenlu” [Experiments of political reforms in Shenzhen], *Liaowang dongfang zhoukan* (Oriental Outlook Weekly), <http://news.sohu.com/20080707/n257998881.shtml>.

⁶ Shenzhen’s total registered population is about 3 million, but the real number of residents including migrant workers totals 10 million. Some members of the provincial People’s Congress recently argued that every resident in Shenzhen above the legal age for voting should be entitled to vote, not just the registered residents. *Nanfang dushi bao* (Southern Metropolitan Daily), 13 August 2008; see http://news.southcn.com/gdnews/nanyuedadi/content/2008-08/13/content_4535126.htm.

⁷ See Liu Xiaojing, “Shenzhen ni tuixing shizhang cha’e xuanju waimei jianyi sheli zhengzhi tequ” [Shenzhen plans to select its mayor through a multi-candidate election: Foreign media suggest that the city become a special political zone]. *Guoji xianqu daobao* (International Herald), 20 June 2008, <http://news.sohu.com/20080620/n257623652.shtml>.

⁸ See Cheng Li, “Hu’s Southern Expedition: Changing Leadership in Guangdong,” *China Leadership Monitor* 24 (Spring 2008).

⁹ Shu Taifeng, “Shenzhen Zhenggai toushi wenlu.”

¹⁰ Quoted in Shu Taifeng, “Shenzhen Zhenggai toushi wenlu.”

¹¹ John L. Thornton, “Long Time Coming: The Prospects for Democracy in China.” *Foreign Affairs*, vol.

87, no. 1 (January/February 2008).

¹² One exception was the widely noticed election for the delegates for the Haidian District People's Congress in the early 1980s. See <http://www.66wen.com/03fx/shehuixue/shehuigongzuo/20061109/28740.html>.

¹³ See http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2007-10/08/content_6843377_6.htm.

¹⁴ Cai Xia, "Dangnei minzhu tansuo yu wenti" [Inner-Party democracy: Experiments and problems], <http://www.world-china.org/newsdetail.asp?newsid=2167>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2006-11/12/content_5319132.htm.

¹⁷ See http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-08/03/content_6470512.htm.

¹⁸ See <http://news.eastday.com/c/shiqida/u1a3177599.html>.

¹⁹ See http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-10/21/content_6918611_4.htm.

²⁰ Deng Liqun discussed this episode in his memoir, *Shi'erge Chunqiu: Deng Liqun zishu* [12 Years: Deng Liqun's Account]. Hong Kong: Dafeng chubanshe, 2006.

²¹ *Xinjing bao* (New Beijing daily), 23 February 2004, p. 1.

²² Li Fan, "Jianli gongzheng xuanju zhidu de zhongyao yihuan: Zhongguo xuanju zuzhi jigou de gaige" [A key in the establishment of a fair election system: The reform of China's election organizations]. *Beijing yu fenxi* (Backgrounds and Analysis), no. 152 (August 2008): 1.

²³ For details of the People's Congress elections at various levels, see http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-08/22/content_1039490.htm.

²⁴ For example, see Mo Jihong, "Zhubu jianli geng pingdeng de renda daibiao xuanju zhidu" [Gradually establishing a more fair and competitive election system for deputies of the people's congress]. <http://www.world-china.org/newsdetail.asp?newsid=2070>.

²⁵ See <http://news.sohu.com/20080317/n255736788.shtml>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ In the 10th NPC, there were 5 percent more candidates on the ballot than the number of seats up for election. See <http://news.sohu.com/20080317/n255736788.shtml>.

²⁸ In the total of 2,935 valid votes, Zhou received 163 "no" votes and 49 "abstention" votes.

²⁹ For a more detailed discussion of policy changes from the Jiang administration to the Hu-Wen administration, see Barry Naughton, "China's Left Tilt: Pendulum Swing or Midcourse Correction?" in Cheng Li, ed., *China's Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008, pp. 142–158.

³⁰ The Chinese authorities often claim that the PRC has eight other political parties, which are often collectively referred to as "democratic parties." These are: the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Nationalist Party, the China Democratic League, the China National Democratic Construction Association, the China Association for Promoting Democracy, the Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party, the China Zhi Gong Dang, the Jiu San Society, and the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League.

³¹ See <http://www.world-china.org/newsdetail.asp?newsid=2021>.

³² *Shijie ribao* (World Journal), 18 March 2008, p. A12.

³³ This was based on the author's interviews in Beijing in 2007 and 2008.

³⁴ See http://www.stnn.cc/ed_china/200712/t20071218_694717.html.

³⁵ See <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2007-02-05/152012234762.shtml>.