Reinventing the Party-State:

An Anthropological Study of Cadre Training, Cadre Careers and the Communist Party in Contemporary China

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Cadre training, cadre careers and the changing composition of China’s political elite

As this book has shown, training and education of cadres are essential elements of China’s cadre management system. The recruitment, promotion, placement, assessment, further education, remuneration and discipline that shape the careers of Chinese cadres are all punctuated by frequent participation in a plethora of training courses specifically designed for the political and professional needs of cadres. Equally important, the pursuit of educational qualifications, from middle vocational all the way to doctoral degrees, and public examinations for specific posts increasingly determine the twists and turns of an individual’s career.

In this final substantive chapter I will analyse some of the many connections between cadre training and education, the cadre management system, cadre careers and, ultimately, the composition of China’s ruling elite. I will first discuss expectations, experiences and opinions of cadres about the role of education and training in their own work and career development, followed by a discussion of the fit – or the lack thereof – between the realities of cadres’ daily work and the party’s requirements and ambitions. I will then turn to an analysis of the career paths of leading cadres in Yunnan, and the impact that recent reforms in cadre management had at the time of my fieldwork in 2004 and 2005. In the final section I will turn to the implications of the rise in the status of professional training and qualifications and the composition of China’s cadre corps. Although I do not believe that professional, less ideologically committed cadres necessarily spells the death of socialism, the emergence of such a stratum of expert cadres nevertheless has profound implications for the relationship between the party, the administrative system and individual cadres. Furthermore, the prioritization of professional qualifications and knowledge also potentially increases the tension between expert cadres and the more traditional kinds of cadres who in many places are still the backbone of the party’s rule. The current very heavy emphasis on and investment in cadre training, I argue, are in part intended to resolve the ago-old Maoist problem of the tension between expertise and ideological merit. Training attempts to instil socialist virtues into professional experts, while raising the educational and professional qualifications of more traditional cadres.

Cadre training and education: expectations and experiences

The good sides of coming here to the provincial party school are, first, your thinking and ideology undergo a definite change; second, you learn about new circumstances and information; third, you make new friends and these new relations will help you in your work later on. And the standpoint of some of the teachers is also worth taking note of. All five times that I have
received training were arranged by the organization department … It is a requirement of the job … The most valuable aspect of studying is that, although we study in our spare time when we are working (literally, when we are at lower levels, zai xiamian), this is not as systematic. But up to now there has been nothing that’s been taught here that I didn’t already know. It’s just that they teach more systematically and completely here.¹

The informant who I am quoting here tried to give a positive but realistic picture of what training at party schools meant for him as a party member and a career bureaucrat. His comments fairly represent the sentiments and opinion of the majority of cadres who I interviewed. However, having said that, among my informants a range of opinions was represented. A few informants thought that the training they received at party schools was useless, often because they were not fully committed to their official duties anyway, or because they very frequently had been through many similar training classes in the past, or else because they attended a course at a low level school with bad or uninteresting instruction. At the other extreme were those informants who just had been promoted to their first leading cadre position. They tended to be extremely positive about their training, especially valuing the ‘theoretical’ parts of the curriculum: their eagerness to become a good cadre translated effortlessly into a desire to immerse themselves into the policies, laws and ideology that together constitute ‘theory.’

None of the informants questioned the importance and use of ideological knowledge. They all believed strongly in the necessity to study ideology in order to build their ‘party spirit’; at the same time, they not necessarily treated this ideology as something that they had to believe in at a fundamental and deeply personal level. Time and again, ideology was presented as useful and important. Ideology was knowledge that had to be studied, understood and learned in order to do their job in the way that the party expected and demanded. In other words, ‘theory’ in the context of cadre training and administrative work is an adaptable framework of ideas that guides the generation of bureaucratic action. Theory is a pragmatic and organizational ideology that is neither simply learned theoretical knowledge nor a deeply felt individual belief or set of shared cultural assumptions. Instead, it operates in between these two extremes, and can best be characterized as a habitual disposition that, paradoxically, is deliberately acquired and maintained. In this context discussions about the truth or falsehood of this ideology were completely pointless. Leading cadres are professionals who are paid to believe the most recent version of the party’s orthodoxy as far as it is necessary to understand and produce the language of the administration and to carry out their job according to the wishes and desires of ‘higher levels.’

The importance attached to theory, ideology and up-to-date knowledge was borne out by the results of the questionnaire survey of cadre-students at the

¹ Interview 29, 16 April 2004.
Yunnan Provincial Party School in 2005. Respondents were asked which aspect of their training course they valued most and which they valued least. The most useful aspect of the course was judged as ‘latest knowledge’ (38 per cent) followed by ‘basic theory’ (26 per cent), ‘the ability to carry out one’s job’ (19 per cent), and ‘administration according to the law’ (13 per cent). Cadres clearly first and foremost expected to be informed on recent developments, policies and research in China and abroad. However, perhaps most telling about these findings is the fact that, despite the central leadership’s commitment to the rule by law, cadres at the Yunnan Provincial School still ranked legal knowledge much lower than its supposedly old-fashioned Leninist counterpart ‘basic theory’ (see table 1). Conversely, when asked which aspect of the course they found the least useful, only 8 per cent of respondents answered ‘basic theory’, again attesting to its perceived relevance. Contrary to what teaching staff at this school and many others routinely said in interviews, computer use, electronic government and public relations skills were deemed to be the least useful (table 2).

**Table 1**

**Opinion on most useful part of course**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic theory</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latest knowledge</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to carry out one’s job</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration according to the law</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image building</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic government skills</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table total</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Yunnan Party School student survey 2005

**Table 2**

**Opinion on least useful aspect of course**

<table>
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<th>Total</th>
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4
Source: Yunnan Party School student survey 2005

The emphasis on theory, knowledge, study and learning not only reflects a blend of Leninist democratic centralism and a technocratic commitment to modernization and ‘scientific’ rule, but also reveals a certain continuity with China’s Maoist past. Mao, perhaps more than any other revolutionary Communist leader in China, believed in the power of ideological study in shaping ‘correct’ thinking. Yet the end product of Maoist and contemporary ideological study could hardly be more different. The current pragmatic, bureaucratic and unreflective quality of ideological commitment contrasts sharply with the revolutionary zeal cultivated and expected of cadres and activists during the heydays of Maoism in the 1950s and sixties. This pragmatic quality of ideology often revealed itself in the remarkably bland statements informants came up with when asked what the party’s ideology meant for them personally. To quote the same informant that I started this section with again:

I became a party member in 1986. At the time I was deputy head of a middle school. To be precise, my understanding of the party was insufficiently deep, I myself found that I was only just qualified. At the time, people mobilized me to contribute my wisdom and ability to the country. Nowadays, my understanding of how to be a communist party member in reality means to do some things for the masses, to restrain yourself, a plain and simple ideology. I have also studied some theory myself.²

Clearly, despite very frequent training at party schools, years of active duty have rubbed the edges of this informant’s personal version of socialism, leaving only a general commitment to public service. Yet this is not to say that ideology is therefore unimportant, and the survey revealed that cadres themselves certainly did not think so. The emphasis on learning and knowledge in official discourse as the key to responsible and modern rule had spilled over in my informants’ attitude to the education or training they received at party schools. Indeed, the value of knowledge has become so deeply ingrained in China’s cadres that almost all informants expressed the need and relevance of education and training, not only

² Interview 29, 16 April 2004.
to gain promotions or to better understand central policy and ideological developments, but also genuinely in order to do their job better. Central stock phrases were routinely invoked to express the hope and expectation that education and training would help them deal more ‘scientifically’ with the often intractable problems of local administration. Yet when pushed for examples of the use of the knowledge gained during training, replies were not terribly convincing.

Six months after I started working in a township I came up against the following issue. A few years earlier, land had been appropriated to build a new road, and some money was still owed to the local people. Because of the financial difficulties of the local government, there were insufficient funds for full compensation as a lump sum, so the government came up with a compensation scheme with annual payments of twenty per cent, resulting in full compensation in five years. Yet in January of this year [2004, FP], due to financial difficulties, although the county once again could only repay ten per cent, they had not informed the local people who were living along the road. So a misunderstanding arose among the people, they found it hard to accept that the standard of repayment had been lowered, saying they did not insist on the money, but that they demanded a statement. We began compensation work in the morning and had to persist until the afternoon when the people finally gradually began to understand. The masses agreed that the compensation fund would be taken away, but stated that they wanted to raise the situation with the higher authorities. In this matter, I think that is was not good that we did not give prior notice to the people of the lower standard of compensation, but only dealt with it afterwards; I also felt that I lacked the work methods to convince the masses. In the end, we had to work through our own relatives. We used family and personal connections to resolve the contradictions, and only gradually was the problem resolved. I very much need thought work methods, I need to improve and update my knowledge.\(^3\)

On the whole, cadres are very appreciative of the opportunity for training at a party school, which to them is also a way to understand better what the most recent political trends are at higher levels. However, quite often cadres were more than a little impatient with the limits of party training. It was often felt that many teachers had little to say about the practical aspects of leadership and administration, and often could not sufficiently relate the contents of a lecture to the issues and problems that their students would have to face again upon return to their job. However, this problem had just as much to do with the very nature of party training as with the quality of teachers. As we have seen, despite the profession of the unity of theory and practice, cadre training first and foremost remained a matter of the transmission and imposition of orthodoxy. Teachers were under constant scrutiny by a hierarchy of party institutions that started with

\(^3\) Interview 6, 4 April 2004.
the school’s educational affairs bureau and ultimately ended with the Politburo in Beijing: they simply cannot stray from the party line in their recommendations and suggestions.

Cadres at party schools respond to training like critical consumers. Such an attitude implies a certain passivity and deliberate lack of full involvement: cadres expect to receive a systematic treatment of the most recent and important ideological, policy and legal trends. Despite all the recent talk on innovative and interactive teaching methods in cadre training, this attitude of cadres translates in a clear preference for traditional teaching methods, especially lectures and seminar classes. In the 2005 survey of cadre-students at the Yunnan Provincial Party School, lectures as a method of training was consistently regarded as the best teaching method irrespective of gender or rank. Of the 350 respondents, 184 (38 per cent) identified lectures as the best method, followed by seminar classes (105, or 31 per cent) and case analyses (86, or 25 per cent). Exceptions were cadres of the lowest (fuke, or deputy section) and the highest (zhengting, or full provincial department) rank present at the school. Among those with fuke rank, 46 per cent found seminar classes the most useful. Those of the highest zhengting rank found case analysis (50 per cent) or simulation exercises (50 per cent) the most useful form of training and lectures the least. Except zhengting cadres, all ranks clearly found simulation exercises the worst method (table 3).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ opinion on teaching methods</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Yunnan Party School student survey 2005

Training at a party school is not only valuable because of the formal teaching provided. Indeed, many informants mentioned that the opportunity to mix with a variety of other cadres was equally as important. Trainees value the opportunity for formal and informal discussions with other students, and learning from each other is often more important than learning from teachers.

My training class has seventy-three students. There are many opportunities for socializing and discussion. Everybody is from different work units and
areas, so we can draw on each others’ strengths and complement our weaknesses in conversations and discussions, increasing the depth of our reflection on issues. This kind of socializing is rather informal, and I also talk with students of other classes, but not as much as with students from my own class.

Formal discussions take place regularly, usually at least once a week in the afternoon when there are no lectures, and are organized by the groups (zu) that make up a class (ban). Classes and groups play an important role in the life of students at the party school. Each class has assigned to it a teacher who acts as the head of class (ban zhuren). The head of the class is responsible for communication between the school’s administration and the students, organizing events, keeping student attendance at lectures and ultimately reporting about student performance. Unlike class monitors, the head of a group is one of the students and the events organized by the group have to do just as much with formal learning as leisure activities, such as sports matches, trips, or simply just meals outside the school. Very importantly, the classes and groups coincide with the temporary party branches and small groups that tie all party members among the students and staff into the party hierarchy under the school’s party committee. The branches and groups play a role in study and leisure activities, and in party organizational and investigation work. From the students’ perspective, the blending of the formal and informal in the functioning of temporary party branches and groups adds an important dimension to party membership, driving home the message that party membership is important if one want to be a fully functioning member of the administration. At the party school, cadres learn (again) that the party is more than a professional organization, but a way of life that quite deliberately blurs the distinction between the public and the private.

With the exception of just a very few students, all informants reported having an extensive network of acquaintances among their fellow students.

I speak with other students but do not make many friends, friends are too precious, friendship must follow from the feelings of the two people involved. I frequently interact with people from my own class and also often from my own home area … That’s because they are laoxiang (people from the same area) with a common language and similar opinions about issues. There are frequent common activities, such a trips or ball games. In addition, I also have acquaintances from other areas. My own class has 21 students, they all have the same profession and the all take the same classes. After graduation, I will stay in touch with some of my fellow students and other acquaintances, both from my own area and from other prefectures in Yunnan.

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5 Interview 3, 3 April 2004.
As this informant suggests, even more important than the social activities organized by classes and party branches are the many forms of socializing that take place outside formal settings. Socializing with people outside one’s class often takes place on the basis of common area of origin or ethnicity. In at least one case, these networks had attained a considerable degree of formality.

I have contact with students from my own prefecture and county and in my own class. Although the students in my class are not from the same minority, we are very tolerant of each other. If you do many things together you get along without constraints. I already knew the students from my own prefecture because I met them in the course of my work. One from among the students from my prefecture who was already here is responsible, he is called ‘director’ (lishi). He is responsible for registering the students from our prefecture, getting people together and setting up leisure activities in order to promote the bond (ganqing) between them.\(^6\)

Networks and social activities on the basis of common origin at the school play an important role in reinforcing and extending the hierarchically embedded communities of cadres that, as we will see in the next section, are an important component of the CCP’s mode of governance at the local level. This function is likely the reason that such networks and activities are tolerated at party schools. Although area of origin and ethnicity are accepted aspects of the social life at school, the party also is concerned that they could undermine the solidarity of all cadres and the role of the party as the core of cadre identity. Cadres should remain principally party cadres and not become local leaders with an independent power base. Activities of party branches are therefore promoted. In fact, at the Yunnan Provincial Party School it was formally forbidden to organize sports teams on the basis of ethnicity.\(^7\) Party branches were the preferred principle in setting up teams, although sometimes teams were drawn from students from the same area of origin.

Study or training at the party school is a valuable opportunity to socialize with people from other areas as much as one’s own. These people may not be immediately relevant to one’s work now, but could become important contacts after a future promotion and appointment at a higher level. This aspect of cadre training is brought out in especial sharp relief at smaller local party schools where the quality and relevance of instruction often leaves something to be desired. As we saw in chapter 5, in my own fieldwork the Honghe Prefectural Party School was the clearest example of a troubled local school, and several students and teachers who I interviewed there minced few words. One seasoned teacher presented a particularly candid assessment of the attitude of students and the quality of instruction, and it is worth quoting him at some greater length.

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\(^{6}\) Interview 6, 4 April 2004.

\(^{7}\) Interview 8, 4 April 2004.
In my opinion it is possible to raise [students’] professional capacity, but it is very hard to solve ideological problems. Some leading cadres suffer from the Chinese official’s mentality of only thinking about their own department, and they still believe in fate, relying on the outcome of fortune-telling to determine their enthusiasm for study. They lack the attitude of serving the people, serving the tax payers ... Students on main training courses do not have to sit an examination, and students on main courses for young cadres only have to cultivate their relationships with their teachers and fellow students, because getting a good evaluation is all they need. More than half of the students on main courses ask for leave all the time ... In class mobile phones ring constantly, and each time you ask them to shut off their mobiles only a few students genuinely comply ... Question: why do students cultivate relationships? Answer: To recommend each other for promotions and to help each other get transferred to good departments and areas. Some cadres say that relationships are a production force (guanxi shi shengchanli). If it were proper public relations it would indeed be a productive force, but for some cadres using connections in reality is a private transaction. Question: so what is the use of cadre training in such a situation? Answer: Because of these problems the centre has initiated a transformation of work style, and as a result a considerable number of changes have emerged in cadre training work ... Informal organization in the main courses comes about because of professional or personal needs. Of course there are also students who demonstrate a good attitude (biaoxian), but they are a minority. Once the management system has been improved it will be better. Originally management was already very strict, but then it loosened up, causing the problems mentioned above. We do have a system, but it is not strictly enforced. The system is stuck on walls, spoken about, and then locked away in a drawer and not put into practice.  

This unflattering picture painted of cadre training at local party schools is at odds with the genuine enthusiasm that I encountered among many students at the provincial school in Yunnan. However, the attitude of students in Honghe highlights the fact that cadre training at all party schools serves an important function, no matter how good or bad the teaching is. At the end of the day, at all schools cadres attend the short-term training because they have to, whether or not they appreciate the training they receive. Even at the worst schools cadres will pick up updates on current policies and legislation, and often gain from the discussions in class. They may also very well gain from training in certain skills, in particular the use of computers. However, like with so many other courses and schools around the world, the most important gains of education are not in the curriculum, but in the experience. Cadre training is an experiential realization of the belonging to the party or state apparatus. It is thus a form of socialization and exercise in community formation in which even boredom and wasted time serve a function: it makes cadres feel they are different, set apart from the public, and

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8 Interview 76, 1 December 2004.
are special in their belonging to something most people are excluded from. Equally important, in cadre training students learn as much from other students as from their teachers, and the relationships formed during training are an important lubricant of the administrative system. Much time during training courses is spent talking, smoking, eating and drinking and playing sports with other cadres, establishing and cultivating relationships that may not only help getting transferred to a good job, but also make the solution of some future problem at work perhaps only one mobile phone call away. Non-vocational political training is especially well suited for this, because only here cadres meet others that are not normally employed in their own specialized area. In this sense, the very lack of substance and generality of ideological training allows cadres from across the administration to meet, live, work, eat and drink together.

Viewed from this angle, party schools are much more than the austere guardians of ideological orthodoxy and party discipline. Party schools are, in fact, rather similar to households. As Janet Carsten has shown, the materiality, co-residence and commensality of households not simply reflect but actually produce kinship relations (Carsten 1997). Similarly, cadre training at party schools supplements and reinforces the formal structures of the party and government. Ideological training gives cadres a common language and a set of tasks. These in turn facilitate the growth of informal communities of cadres that shape cadre careers and lubricate the functioning of the institutions of governance.

Cadre careers

The career of many leading cadres in Yunnan at the provincial level or below follows a well-established pattern. Initially, cadres are recruited into the administration as high school or university graduates, often after working for a period of time in a non-administrative career such as teaching. Identified as people of promise, these bright young graduates one day are invited over for a conversation at their local (county or urban district) organization department. Starting them initially in non-leading cadre positions, the organization department subsequently selects some of them for the crucial career step of promotion to the lowest rung on the leading cadre hierarchy (i.e. deputy section (fuke) level). The organization department then rotates them in several jobs at that level before promotion to full section (zhengke) level.9

When I interviewed He in 2004 he was a full-time second year master’s student of economics at the Yunnan Provincial Party School. In 1992 he had graduated from Yunnan Normal University. In that year, a total of 26 students from his native county in Kunming city graduated from Yunnan Normal University. At the time, the local Communist Youth League needed

9 Stig Thøgersen’s 2004 research in Xuanwei county in eastern Yunnan corroborates this pattern and several other findings from my own research reported on in this section and the next (Thøgersen 2008).
new cadres at the township level and recruited four people from among these 26 graduates. He was one of them. His post as a youth league official in a township and his second appointment in the county organization department were at ordinary cadre level, but in 1998 he was promoted to fuke rank, taking up the post of party secretary of a township discipline inspection committee. In 2000 he was promoted to zhengke rank and was given the job of party secretary of the county’s youth league.  

Such posts at zhengke level give cadres the opportunity to demonstrate their worth at directly executive responsibility, usually culminating in a stint as full head or party secretary of a town or township. If successful enough, these cadres are then slated for further promotion to deputy office (fuchu) and full office (zhengchu) rank, at which point their career management is taken over by the organization department of the prefecture. For a selected few, this pattern eventually repeats itself with promotion to deputy department (futing) and full department (zhengting) rank and management by the provincial organization department. At each level, a cadre usually serves in several posts of the same rank; only in exceptional circumstances is a cadre made to serve more than two terms (each previously three years and currently five years) in the same position.

During an individual career, changes in rank are usually upward, although downward mobility (demotion) also occurs. In the 2005 survey, we asked about jobs and ranks in the five-year period before the survey, and analysed the impact of background variables, including gender, age and education, on the chance (or technically odds, with odds of 1 being neutral, a figure below 1 indicating negative odds, and a figure above 1 indicating positive odds) of being promoted or demoted, defined as the difference in rank between the first and the last job in that period.

**Figure 1**

**Odds of rank mobility by gender, age and education**

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10 Interview 17, 10 April 2004.
As we can see from figure 1, the most salient finding was that women were more likely to remain at the same rank in the five-year period than men, while conversely men were more likely to be promoted: the chance (odds) of a promotion for a woman in our sample during the five-year period was 62 per cent less than that of a man,\textsuperscript{11} translating in 32 per cent of women and 51 per cent of men gaining a promotion. The percentage of demotions in our sample was much smaller than that of either promotions or no change, and was about equal for both sexes (15 per cent for men and 12 per cent for women).

Second, education has a positive impact on a cadre’s career prospects. Interestingly enough, the impact of a pre-university ‘vocational’ (\textit{zhongzhuan} or \textit{dazhuan}) degree is considerably stronger than that of a university degree. Having a vocational degree increases the odds of a promotion by 70 percent, a university degree a mere 20 per cent.\textsuperscript{12} This confirms that, in Yunnan at least, having a vocational degree is now almost a prerequisite for an official career.

\textsuperscript{11} This result is statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.
\textsuperscript{12} However, it should be emphasized that these results are not significant at the p<0.05 level, most likely indicating that education only has a supplementary impact in explaining the odds of promotion. The lack of statistical significance indicates that the result could have been a matter of mere chance, and is a common issue with small sample sizes.
whereas a university degree will definitely help, but is (not yet) uniformly expected.

Third, among men, the more upwardly mobile gender, promotions are much more common early on in their career. As is shown in figure 1 above, the odds of promotion are actually 25 per cent less for the 40-44 cohort than for their juniors, and only recover somewhat to 7 per cent for the oldest two cohorts (45-49 and 50+). In the youngest age group (younger than forty years old), 59 per cent of respondents (N = 161) had gained a promotion. Conversely, in the middle age group (40-44 years old), only 42 per cent had been promoted in the five years previously. This finding confirmed the impression from several interviews, when respondents complained that it was extremely difficult to gain a promotion beyond a certain age. Due to the age restrictions imposed on promotions, cadres who had not made it to chu level at forty or so should realistically no longer expect a rank promotion. The bottleneck created by these restrictions is a strong source of dissatisfaction among cadres, who feel that they still have their best years ahead, yet are not given the chance to realize their potential. The same bottleneck effect was not apparent among women in our sample, which may, among other things, have been caused by the fact that women were much less likely to be promoted in the first place.

However, even for the relatively few who make it through the career bottleneck by gaining a promotion to chu or even ting level and see their career develop well into their early or even mid-fifties, career progression eventually plateaus at a particular level. A tell-tale sign of this is when a cadre after a few years at a particular level fails to gain appointment to a ‘number one’ post (yi ba shou), usually the head or party secretary of a particular area (i.e. township, county, or prefecture). When further promotion is not an option, the individual will continue to receive new postings as head or party secretary of bureaus at the same level in the area under the jurisdiction of their organization department. At some point,

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13 However, as with education, these results are not statistically significant at the p<0.05 level.
14 Later on their professional life, chances of promotion among our respondents increased again, with 50 per cent of the forty-five to forty-nine year old and a full 61 per cent of those of fifty and over having experienced promotion. However, this finding means little, as most of the older respondents would have been from the classes for the highest ranking cadres at the school. In other words, they would have been mostly those cadres in these age categories who already had made the crucial promotion from chu to ting level, while the ones who had not made that promotion would be much less likely to return to the party school for retraining. This is a clear case of sampling on the dependent variable. Given that the same selectivity also applies to at least some respondents in the younger age cohorts in our sample, the drop in promotions among the forty to forty-five year olds is even more remarkable.
15 Interview 29, 16 April 2004.
an appointment to a post without direct executive responsibility, for instance in the local people’s congress or people’s consultative conference, is usually the signal that a particular individual should prepare for retirement, usually at the age of sixty, serving out his or her days at the current bureaucratic rank and jurisdiction.

At the earlier stages of a career, a certain degree of specialization is not uncommon, although even then the first few posts often have very little to do with the newcomer’s educational background or previous work. It is striking that many mid and late career cadres are used for their general leadership qualities rather than their specialist knowledge or experience, particularly once a cadre has served a stint in a ‘number one’ post and thus has proven his or her political in addition to merely professional credentials. Many cadres are moved freely between different functional areas of the administration (propaganda, economic management, finance, education, rural affairs, and so), often requiring substantial training and on-the-job learning each time they take on a new post. Furthermore, organization departments treat all parts of the administration as one chessboard. At different times, cadres may work stints in posts in the party, the government, the people’s congress, the people’s consultative conference, the judiciary, or mass organizations (principally the youth league and the women’s federation).

These findings from the interviews are confirmed by analysis of our 2005 survey. By comparing the first and last employment in the five-year period before the survey, we calculated the odds that respondents had moved between a party, government, people’s congress, people’s consultative conference, mass organization, service organization, or state enterprise. While the majority (about 60 per cent) of both men and women had stayed in the same part of the administration (which we will refer to as ‘unit’ below), the chance of cross-unit mobility rose markedly with age. Over 70 per cent of women and 50 per cent of men of fifty years and older worked in another part of the administration at the end of the five year period than where they had started out. In figure 2 we present the odds ratio for crossover of units. Women have a 9 per cent increased likelihood of a cross-unit shift during the five-year period when compared against men. Increasing age is associated with increasing probability of cross-unit shift (the results show a 46 per cent excess at age 40-44, 82 per cent at age 45-49 and a 3.6 fold excess at 50 or over.

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16 For a similar conclusion regarding provincial leaders, see Bo 2002, pp. 116-117; for township cadres, see Thøgersen 2008: 418.
17 For completeness’ sake, we also included ‘joint venture’ and ‘private enterprise’ as options in the survey, but only one respondent reported having moved to a joint venture and none to a private enterprise, which is obviously to be expected of a sample of cadres at a party school.
18 However, only the last of these is statistically significant at p<0.05.
From these findings we conclude that, at the level of governmental practice, there continues to be a very deliberate lack of separation of powers, despite elaborate institutional arrangements that might give another impression. This also is a vivid testimony of how cadre management is a key manifestation of the party’s exercise of its leading role across all formal institutions of governance, including, of course, the party itself.

When I interviewed Li at the Yunnan Provincial Party School in 2004 he was fifty-four years old. He was undergoing his eighth training stint at the provincial school since his appointment in 1983 as head of his home county in Dehong prefecture. Li originally had only received lower middle school education because of the Cultural Revolution, but as a member of the Achang minority, a few years later he had been given the chance to study Chinese language and literature for two years at the Yunnan Minority Academy. After graduation in 1975, Li was allocated to work in his county as party secretary of a village office (cungongsuo) and then as a journalist before his first leading cadre posting as deputy head of the county propaganda department. In 1983, Li was promoted again and served three terms as head of the county. According to Li, his chief responsibility in this post was to ensure ethnic stability, as most of the people in the county were, like he himself, from the Achang minority. However, his abilities must have been greater than that, because in 1993 he was appointed county party secretary, which is fairly unusual in minority areas where this post tends to...
be given to an outsider and member of the Han majority. In 1995, he was promoted to deputy head of Dehong prefecture, serving seven years in this post before being moved to the post of deputy head of the prefecture’s people’s congress.\textsuperscript{19}

The career of cadres I encountered at the Yunnan Provincial Party School started at the earliest in the very last years of the pre-reform era. Their background and outlook is therefore different from the first cohort of local leaders in China with direct personal experience with the pre-1949 revolution or the earliest stages of socialist transformation. They are also different from many local cadres who were recruited in the heyday of Maoism in the sixties and early seventies. The latter often were poorly educated, having been selected more for their ‘redness’ then their ‘expertise’.\textsuperscript{20} As Andrew Walder has shown, in the post-Mao years education has become the most important determinant of recruitment into both the party and the cadre ranks (Walder 2004: 201-5). In my research even cadres from minority areas who had been given special allowances in their recruitment and promotion had at the very least a lower middle school and usually a middle vocational degree upon recruitment. Nevertheless, despite the emphasis on formal education, surprisingly many cadres interviewed were from a relatively modest background, usually children of local cadres or school teachers, rather than middle class professional backgrounds where one might expect a very heavy emphasis on educational achievement. This was also reflected in the 2005 survey. Almost forty per cent of the fathers of respondents were or had been cadres, while more than a quarter of the fathers and almost forty per cent of the mothers were villagers. Clearly, the cadre corps in Yunnan province tends to be a relatively closed elite with new recruits coming mainly coming from rural backgrounds. We should, of course, not over-interpret the relatively modest number of cadres from working class or middle classes, which after all are still relatively small in a poor province like Yunnan. However, at the very least it is clear that there is, as yet, not a tendency of middle class urban children to break into the administrative elite.

\textbf{Table 4}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Father’s and mother’s most recent occupation before retirement}
\end{center}

\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
\hline
\textsuperscript{19} Summarized from interview 15, 8 April 2004. \\
\textsuperscript{20} On the transition between cadre cohorts, see Lee 1991. In the eighties, the pre-reform generations were rapidly eased aside. For instance, Xueguang Zhou, using survey data from 1987, found that political cadres already had higher educational levels than ordinary, non-political administrators (Zhou 1995: 458). Richard Madsen captures the difference between the two cohorts well by calling the former ‘Communist gentry’ and the latter ‘Communist rebel’; see Madsen 1984, chapter 9, and Chan, et al. 1992. \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Father's Occupation</th>
<th>Mother's Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villager</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Yunnan Party School student survey 2005

In my own fieldwork, the younger generation of this type of cadre from rural cadre or school teacher backgrounds were particularly well represented among the full-time degree students resident at the Yunnan Provincial Party School, many of whom were also from a minority background. To such cadres, recruitment in the administration was a highly prized opportunity for upward mobility, including the opportunity to live in the county town. This holds in particular if the new recruit was from a relatively remote or deprived area – of which there are still plenty in Yunnan – where alternative career opportunities in entrepreneurship and business are often still very limited. Such cadres identify very strongly with the administration and the party, and often find it inconceivable even to think about possible career opportunities outside of the administration. Being a cadre to them is more than just a calling, job, or career. Being a cadre, particularly a leading cadre, informs almost everything that they do and think in a way that runs much deeper than explicit ideological indoctrination. Yet this is not the same as being a loyal instrument that simply and unquestioningly does what the party tells it to do. In interview and informal conversations, leading cadres displayed a keen knowledge of how to strike a fine balance between going along with the wishes and commands of ‘higher levels’ (shangmian) and exercising their own judgement. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous chapters, such a ‘unity of theory and practice’ is in fact what the party expects from its leading cadres. Rather, the almost complete assimilation of their role as leading cadres often expressed itself in an almost offhand acceptance that they had given up to the party the independence to make their own choices about their career. Serving the party as a cadre is not so much an ideological commitment or calculated career move, but a habitual orientation that deeply moulds one’s sense of personhood.

My future plans? Whether you are promoted or have to stay where you are, when you are a communist party cadre there is little point in thinking about that. You just put all your energy in the actual job you have to do and gain the support from the masses and recognition from the organization.
department. As for the issue of promotion, that is decided by the organization department.\textsuperscript{21}

In this quote, it is particularly telling that the standard Maoist reference to ‘the masses’ is immediately followed by and thus in effect glossed as ‘the organization department’, or, in other words, the local party committee. To leading cadres, the local party committee is not only the concrete manifestation of the party and its power to discipline, reward and punish, but also the focal point of a local community of cadres of their own rank. This is not only true of ranked cadres in a post within the central administration of their own area, for instance as head or party secretary of a government bureau. Cadres who have been posted to serve in a subordinate area away from the central administration behave very much like expats. Their spouse and child often continue to live in their flat in the central town or city, with the cadre on such an outside posting commuting back and forth on a weekly or sometimes even a daily basis.

In an earlier publication, I showed that there are interlocking localist and hierarchical dimensions to cadres’ sense of belonging (Pieke 2004a: 529-30). Cadres are recruited from among the best and brightest in an area, and for them, serving the party includes service to their native place. Furthermore, serving the party means to work and often live together with other cadres of equal rank and from the same place: from the perspective of cadres, the party and its administration are not faceless institutions, but a community of peers of equal rank serving in and largely from the same jurisdiction. Yet this community and jurisdiction are at the same time embedded in a larger jurisdiction one bureaucratic level higher: townships are part of a county, counties are part of a prefecture, and prefectures are part of a province. Not only does this higher level place its own cadres in the top positions in the localities that fall under its jurisdiction (minimally the party secretary, full head and head of discipline inspection) to serve as its eyes, ears and hands. Just as importantly, ambitious local cadres hope and expect that, one day, they will be promoted, leaving their local area and its community of cadres, to become a member of that larger, but otherwise very similar jurisdiction and community. Because a cadre’s original area is a part of, and hierarchically subordinated to, this new jurisdiction, cadres who are promoted in a sense never really leave their native area, but simply see the area they belong to expand first to include a county, then a prefecture and ultimately a whole province.

However, we should be careful here not unduly to simplify matters. At each level and locality the cadre corps does not simply consist of people who have all made their careers at lower levels in the same area, eventually earning a promotion to a job at a higher level of the administration. Although most likely the majority of cadres in a locality share such a background, they are, as we just observed, supplemented by non-local cadres of senior rank who occupy a handful of key positions in the party and its administration.

\textsuperscript{21} Interview 29, 16 April 2004.
posts in the locality. These non-local cadres have been appointed by the organization department to serve as the agents of the higher level administration, and serve for only a limited, fixed term after which they leave for posts elsewhere and are replaced by fresh appointees.\footnote{In 2006, article 5 of the Temporary regulations on the avoidance of posts for party and state leading cadres (Dang-zheng lingdao ganbu renzhi huibi zanxing guiding, 6 August 2006, online at news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2006-08/06/content_4926400.htm, checked 1 July 2008) for the first time formally and officially forbade leading cadres, including minority cadres, to serve in their own native area. Until then, the People’s Republic of China had not had a strict ‘law of avoidance’ like Imperial China that forbade government magistrates to serve in their native place. However, administrative practice already strongly discouraged native place service for the most senior officials, and especially the party secretary. Even at the provincial level, for the whole period of 1949 to 1998 only one quarter of first party secretaries and thirty-eight per cent of governors were provincial natives (Bo 2002: 45).} A further third group of cadres at a particular locality and level are younger ones who as a rule are better educated and are considered more promising. These cadres have been recruited to start their career directly at this level eventually to take them at least one and possible two or more hierarchical levels higher. David Goodman’s research on elites in Shanxi province has shown that the mix between external appointees, entrenched local cadres and fresh, upwardly mobile recruits destined for bigger and better jobs elsewhere can vary very considerably depending on bureaucratic level and locality. This factor is very likely to have implications for cooperation (or the lack thereof) between hierarchical levels and is an important factor in the well-documented variability in central policy compliance between different areas in China (Goodman 2001).

With the connection between areas and hierarchy the party’s orchestration of cadre careers achieves a powerful fusion of habitual localism and universalism. As they move up the hierarchy, cadres continue to be local cadres, rooted in their own native place, but the logic of promotion and job rotation expands, translates and co-opts their loyalties and attachments to more encompassing areas and larger communities of cadre-peers: promotion quite literally expands cadres’ horizon of their service to the party. During my fieldwork at local party schools in Yunnan I was in an excellent position to observe this process in action. Cadres who are trained or educated at a party school are all drawn from the jurisdiction of the administration that the school belongs to. As we have seen in the previous section, to these cadres their stay at the party school helped them not only to strengthen and broaden personal connections with cadres from their own locality, but also to get to know cadres from other areas in the school’s jurisdiction. Discussion sessions, extracurricular activities organized by the school’s temporary party branches, and informal leisure activities all help cadres to build a broad range of informal ties that are both the lubricant and glue of the administration. Crucially, these ties are not only with the cadre community in their
area of origin, but also with the much larger community one tier up in the hierarchy. It is in this respect that cadre training makes perhaps it greatest contribution to the party’s rule. Training at party school helps cadres not only in their current job, but, if and when they get promoted, also in their future one, reinforcing and creating the hierarchically nested administrative communities of cadres that are the backbone of the Chinese administrative system.

However, it would be a mistake to think that individual leading cadres are completely passive and subject to the whims and fancies of the organization department and other departments of their party committee. Cadres are career bureaucrats who are as a rule highly motivated and ambitious to move up the ladder as fast as possible. In the literature on Chinese politics and the organizational role of the party, much emphasis has been put on the role of individual connections, factionalism and ‘principled’ particularism (Domes 1884; Nathan 1973; Teiwes 1993; Walder 1986); in fact, the concept of ‘faction’ is one of the principal tools of the China watcher’s trade. Several times in conversations and interviews during my research allusions were made to the importance of connections to secure desirable appointments. However, never was I given specific examples of people or ways in which such practices might work. Instead, when talking about what drives appointment decisions and cadre careers, informants always spoke of the party, higher levels, or the organization department without ever attaching to any of these a specific face or name. Time and again, interviewees professed to be largely powerless in influencing anonymous decision makers higher up in the bureaucracy on the future direction of their career.

In part this no doubt was caused by the constraints of interviews taking place in party schools. I simply was not in the best position to ask the right questions in this regard, and informants were most certainly not prepared to own up to illegal actions that they spent much time on denouncing during cadre training. The constraints of my fieldwork were such that in no way I would like to argue that the long-standing issues of favouritism, nepotism and factionalism are unimportant in the functioning of the Chinese bureaucracy, let alone the more recent problems with the purchase and sale of official positions (mai guan mai guan) and election fraud (la piao hui xuan). Another explanation may be the fact that the impact of ‘connections’ on cadre careers is not only a matter of straightforward nepotism, but is part of the institutionalized patronage of the CCP’s ‘neo-traditional’ nature rule (Jowitt 1974; Walder 1986). A party secretary who grants promotions to subordinates rewards professional performance and loyalty to political associates rather than simply favouring his personal friends. As long as such promotions follow the established procedures, neo-traditional blending of procedure and patronage are simply part of normal bureaucratic practice. In sum, my interviews suggest that the party’s grip on cadre appointment and the old nomenklatura system, whereby leading appointments are made at the next higher level,

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23 I will briefly discuss these issues in the concluding chapter.
although it may not stop nepotism at the local level, nevertheless prevents it from dominating the appointment process.  

Although my interviews only provide limited evidence of the direct use of connections for career advancement, many cadres had much more to say about two other ways to further their career beyond simply doing their job well, namely gaining further educational degrees and participating in training, and signing up for the public selection and examinations for specific jobs. The emphasis on examinations and formal education has had a very substantial impact on Chinese cadres, not only making the bureaucracy much more of a meritocracy than in the past, but also giving individual cadres ways to gain at least a measure of control over their own career. The proliferation of correspondence, part-time and full-time courses specifically designed for cadres documented in this book has enabled millions of cadres to gain the degree they need in order to earn the promotion they crave. My interviews are replete with examples of cadres who enthusiastically profess the use and importance of degree work in order to get ahead. However, even here the hand of the organization department continues to be felt. Although cadres on correspondence degree courses sign up for these courses themselves, my interviews with full-time or part-time students on regular degree courses show that the latter are in great part merely another tool to manage the careers of promising local cadres.

Chen Jihong is a native of remote Diqing prefecture, which a few years ago renamed itself Shangri-la in the hope of attracting more foreign tourists. Chen’s mother and father are both teachers at a village primary school. His brother is a farmer and his sister a teacher at a middle school. Chen graduated from the Yunnan Agricultural University in 1993 majoring in rural  

It is also very likely that in this regard there is an important difference between the dynamics of careers at the local level compared to the centre. The higher up the hierarchy one gets, the more cadres become ‘politicians’ and the less mere ‘administrators.’ Consequently, the careers of cadres of ministerial rank and higher are likely to be determined less by measurable performance and more by political reliability and loyalty. The very nature of the Chinese political system makes this a necessity. Leading cadres at local levels are subordinate to the party committee and organization department at one level higher. At the top, there is no higher administrative level. Career decisions are made by a small group of senior and current leaders who use the administrative organs of the Central Committee and State Council and election in the National People’s Congress to appoint their supporters to positions of power around them. For a detailed discussion of the procedures and practices concerning top-level appointments at the 2002 sixteenth National Party Congress, see Bo Zhiyue 2006: 55-77. Admittedly, this is entirely to be expected since many of my interviewees were involved in degree study themselves and can be expected to emphasise this point.
studies, and was allocated the job of secretary to the people’s congress in a township in his native area. Chen joined the party in 1995. Later the organization department transferred him to the office of the people’s consultative conference in the county where he eventually became deputy head. At the time of interview, Chen was a full-time student of economics at the Yunnan Provincial Party School. He was selected onto this course by his organization department. The department also determined that he should study economics. The organization department receives a certain number of quota places each year and selects from among promising young cadres of deputy section rank with minimally a BA. The department usually identifies candidates by looking at the list of cadres in the area who have signed up for a party school correspondence course. According to Chen, studying full-time is a valuable opportunity to ‘recharge the batteries’ (chongdian), as it allows students to study much more systematically. Full-time study is also much more prestigious than a correspondence degree. Finally, students on full-time courses continue to receive their salaries, in addition to getting reimbursed most of the costs of study. Chen said that he also had toyed with the idea of signing up for a master’s course at a regular university, but realized that his English is too deficient to make that an option, and for his future career as a cadre it does not matter that he won’t have a recognized degree anyway.\(^{26}\)

**Cadre recruitment and appointment**

The large-scale provision of degree education to cadres has had more profound implications than merely raising the educational standard of the bureaucracy. In their study of cadre career mobility, education and party patronage, Bobai Li and Andrew Walder draw the important conclusion that the provision of adult education at party schools and elsewhere has enabled the CCP to avoid the technocratization of the regime’s administrative elite, or, if I am allowed to extend their argument somewhat, what Robert Michels long ago called the ‘iron law of oligarchization’ (Li and Walder 2001: 1404; Michels 1915). Instead of increasingly recruiting highly educated graduates into the elite, the party focussed on young prospects with the right revolutionary credentials (class, party membership) subsequently educating them further: education thus was not a precondition but a consequence of elite status.

Although this pattern of cadre recruitment and education continues to apply, in recent years it has been threatened (or at least supplemented) by radically different policies for the recruitment and appointment of cadres. For instance, discontinuing the Correspondence Academy at the Central Party School is a clear indication that the party is rolling back its decades-long reliance on the recruitment of cadres with modest backgrounds, and is stepping up the emphasis on achieved education as a precondition (and no longer a consequence) of

\(^{26}\) Interview 30, 17 April 2004.
recruitment. Likewise, the introduction since the late nineties of democratic elections and public examinations for leading cadre positions has opened up further avenues for ambitious individuals to boost their career; potentially, they have profound implications for the composition of China’s administrative elite. However, examinations and elections do not entail that the party has relinquished control over the management of leading cadres. After a public examination, the proposed appointment still has to go through rigorous investigation by the organization department and subsequent approval by the party committee. The cooptation of election, public selection and examination of cadres is, in fact, a prime illustration of one of the main themes of this book, namely how seemingly neoliberal changes have been incorporated in the neo-socialist Chinese party-state that continues to be based on Leninist principles, and it therefore important to dwell on this in some more detail.

Since 2001, inner party democracy has become an increasingly important element in the party’s neo-socialist strategy, a process that culminated at the Seventeenth Party Congress in 2007. As a result, the meaning of the existing term ‘election system’ (xuanjuzhi) in cadre appointments has started to expand, not only including the formal election by party congresses or people’s congresses (Manion 2000), but also the increasingly rigorous procedures whereby a party committee or the standing committee of a people’s congress selects candidates for either direct appointment or subsequent formal election by the party congress or people’s congress. In the past, selection by party committees or standing committees tended to be dominated by a few or even just one powerful member, usually the party secretary. To counter this very common practice, in 2004 the party centre issued a document that required party committees and standing committees to select candidates by a formal vote (piaojuezhi), thus in theory giving all members of the committee equal power. These more recent forms of democratic appointment therefore do not amount to full democratic elections, but merely entail a more rigorous, transparent and competitive process whereby party committees select candidates for leading positions. However, public participation in the nomination and even election of candidates is not ruled out, and experiments along these lines are likely to expand in the immediate future. Although there is as yet little documentation available, elections by party committees reportedly can involve vigorous campaigning by competing

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27 The document in question is ‘Methods for plenary sessions of local party committees of putting to a vote designated candidates and recommended candidates for principal positions in the leadership group of party committees and governments at the lower level’ (Dang de difang weiyuanhui quanti huiyi dui xia yi ji dangwei, zhengfu lingdao banzi zhengzhi niren renxuan he tuijian renxuan biaojue banfa), issued in April 2004 by the Central Administrative Office (Zhongyang Bangongting), summarized in ‘Reform of the cadre personnel system has yielded new results’ (Ganbu renshi zhidu gaige qude de xin chengguo), Dangjian yanjiu zongheng tan (Talks about research on party building), Beijing: Dangjian Duwu Chubanshe, 2004, pp. 117-8.
candidates, also involving sometimes very considerable expenditure on gifts and entertainment of members of party committees, ways of canvassing votes (lapiao) that are a familiar aspect of elections in many democratic countries.\(^\text{28}\) No doubt, this democratic turn in the CCP has been inspired by the success of the elections of village committees since the eighties and nineties (Alpermann 2001; Jakobsen 2004; O’Brien and Li 2006; Pieke 2004b), and more recently the elections of urban neighbourhood committees and even township heads.\(^\text{29}\) Elections, so the party has come to realize, help the party increase its legitimacy and grip over local administration at the expense of local bosses who use cadre positions to build up their own powerbase and fortune. Democracy has become a way to increase the transparency and accountability of the administration, thereby strengthening rather than weakening the rule of the CCP.

As Stig Thøgersen has pointed out, direct elections put the prospects of career advancement on a radically different footing than the existing meritocratic system, and cadres often treat them with hostility. However, another new way of selecting candidates for posts, namely the introduction of competitive and open selection procedures that involve written and oral examinations, does exactly the opposite, formalizing and pushing meritocratic appointment even further (Thøgersen 2008: 418-23). Yet, as we shall see, incumbent cadres are not necessarily less hostile. Deng Xiaoping already in 1980 called for the use of examinations to select and promote cadres, when he said that examinations could provide ‘a sort of light ladder so they can come up more quickly, skipping some rungs’ (Deng Xiaoping 1984: 306). However, only in the nineties were serious steps taken to realize this, initially in section 9 of the 1993 *Temporary regulations on national public servants*, later followed by more elaborate regulation. When discussing selection by examination, both official sources and cadres themselves often invoke the

\(^{28}\) See for instance Niu Ansheng, ‘The appointment system and the election system’ (Weirenzhi yu xuanjuzhi), *Lilun dongtai* 1751 (10 August 2007), pp. 13-20. For some details on experiments with such appointments in Changzhi city in southern Shanxi, see ‘Reform of the cadre system must hold firm to principles – an interview with, Lü Rizhou, deputy head of the Shanxi Provincial People’s Consultative Conference’ (Ganbu tizhi gaige bixu jianchi yuanze, kuoda minzhu – fang Shanxi sheng zhengxie fuzhuxi Lü Rizhou), *Lilun dongtai* 1736 (10 March 2007), pp. 1-10.

\(^{29}\) For instance, in 2005 Sichuan province announced that all members of party committees in villages, towns and townships henceforth would be appointed by means of direct elections after experiments in 2004 that already saw 45 town and township party secretaries appointed through direct elections; see ‘Complete public nomination and direct election of town and township party secretaries in Sichuan’ (Sichuan xiangzhen dangweihui shuji quanmian gongtui zhixuan), *Dangjian yanjiu zongheng tan* (2005) (Talks about research on party building), Beijing: Dangjian Duwu Chubanshe, 2006, pp. 221-2. For a detailed study of one such election of township leaders in Sichuan in 2006, see Thøgersen, et al. 2008.
parallels with the old imperial examination system.\textsuperscript{30} It thus does not take all that much interpretive liberty to see that the party consciously seeks to tap into the memory of the imperial examinations to reinvigorate its right to rule: cadres who have been selected by examination are likely to command a culturally sanctioned legitimacy and authority far greater than the old, secretive and authoritarian nomenklatura appointments system.

In 1995 and again in slightly altered form in 2002 the party issued the \textit{Regulations on the work of selection and appointment of party and government leading cadres} that provide the regulatory framework for examinations and public selection in cadre appointments.\textsuperscript{31} Initially, examinations were used to select cadres in non-leading positions (referred to as ‘public servants exams’ (gongwuyuan kaoshi, or gongkao). In Yunnan, this was put in practice in 1995. Between that year and 1998, unified provincial examinations were organized. Those who passed the exam were given a certificate that entitled them to apply for civil servant positions in the province. This turned out to be unsatisfactory, because the content of the exams was not specific to the requirements of particular jobs. In 1998, the province shifted to competitive examinations for specific positions. Since then, each year individual government departments submit their hiring plan to their personnel office. These plans are then checked by the government staff department (bianzhi bumen) before the posts are advertised for examination. The examinations are held twice a year in January and August. A minimum of three candidates have to sign up for a particular post before the examination can take place. The great advantage of the examination method is that it has broken down regional boundaries, making it possible to recruit from a much larger pool and thus ultimately to hire better personnel.\textsuperscript{32} In late 1999, the Centre took the much more daring step of using examinations for the selection of leading cadres as well, referred to as ‘open selection and competitive appointment by examination’ (gongkai xuanba jingzheng shanggang kaoshi), or ‘open selection’ (gongxuan) for short.\textsuperscript{33} Examinations for leading

\textsuperscript{30} Interview 49, 11 December 2004.
\textsuperscript{32} Interview 49, 11 December 2004.
\textsuperscript{33} The use of public selection and examinations are provided for in section 9 of both the 1995 and the 2002 versions of the \textit{Regulations on the work of selection and appointment of party and government cadres}. According to article 49 of the 2002 \textit{Regulations}, ‘public selection’ (gongkai xuanba) refers to external recruitment, whereas ‘competitive appointment’ (jingzheng shanggang) is limited to the relevant work unit or bureaucratic ‘system’ (xitong). Further elaboration on the provisions in these regulations is given in the ‘Notice on the progress with the work on the public selection of leading cadres’ (Guanyu jin yi bu zuohao gongkai
cadre positions are intended to assess the candidate’s ability for leadership work and solving concrete problems: their focus is testing the ‘ability and quality’ of leading cadres. Public examinations were in the first instance presented as just one of the methods for the selection of leading cadres in local party, government and ‘other leading posts suited to public selection.’ However, this was quickly expanded to include positions at the centre up to the department (si) and office (chu) level.


35 Section 9, article 49 of the ‘Regulations on the work of selection and appointment of party and government leading cadres’ (Dang-zheng lingdao ganbu xuanba renyong gongzuo tiaoli), promulgated on 9 July 2002, online at www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/16/20020723/782504.html, checked 30 June 2008.

36 Appendix 2: Explanation of the Circumstances Surrounding the Redrafting of the “Trail outline of the examinations for the nationwide public selection of party and government leading cadres” (Fulu er: Guanyu << Quanguo gongkai xuanba dang-zheng lingdao ganbu kaoshi dagang (shixing)>> xiuding gongzuo qingkuang de shuoming). In Central Organization Department (Zhongyang Zuzhi Bu), Outline of the examinations for the public selection and competitive appointment of party and state leading cadres (Dang-zheng lingdaoganbu gongkai xuanba he jingzheng shanggang kaoshi dagang). Beijing: Dangjian duwu chubanshe, 2004, p. 45.
My own interviews and conversations in Yunnan revealed that there are in fact two rather different types of examinations. The first consists of an organization department or personnel bureau publicly advertising one or more posts in their jurisdiction to be filled by public examination. Candidates are invited to sign up for an examination set specifically for one or more posts. All candidates, quite often more than one hundred, first sit a written examination. The ten per cent or so who are allowed to pass are then called for an oral examination conducted by a panel of internal members and outside specialists. The panel then forwards between one and three names to the organization department for investigation, after which the party committee makes the ultimate decision.

Since 1995, the scope of the examination method for the appointment of leading cadres has been expanded to include a very substantial number of leading appointments across the bureaucracy at the county, prefecture and provincial levels. In Yunnan the first examination for seventeen posts at the deputy provincial department level (futingji) was held in 1996. After 1997, the scale of such examinations was gradually expanded. In 2000, the Yunnan provincial organization department opened up a total of thirty-five positions, again at the deputy provincial department level, to open selection by examination. In 2004, eight candidates from outside and fourteen from inside the province were selected through open examination or application, again at the deputy provincial department level and including posts in functional units and mass organizations. By means of the examination system, candidates from universities in Beijing or with foreign Ph.D.s have been offered three-year renewable contracts for jobs such as deputy dean of Yunnan University, deputy head of the provincial education department, or the deputy head of the provincial legal office. However, at the time of my interview (December 2004), only three candidates had accepted the offer, and it was expected that some of the positions could not be filled.

According to section 3 of the 1999 Notice on the progress with the work on the public selection of leading cadres, the number of eligible candidates should be at least ten times as many as the number of posts advertised, while the number of candidates admitted to the oral exam should five times as many as the number of posts. Finally, the number of candidates forwarded to the organization department for investigation should around 3 times as many of the number of posts. In my own experience, posts are often advertised individually, with an exam specifically set for each.

Interview 49, 11 December 2004. Functional organizations (shiye danwei) are those parts of the state sector that fall between administrative organs (xingzheng jiguan) and economic enterprises (qiye), such as hospitals, schools, research institutions, the media, and organizations responsible for welfare, housing, sports, utilities and so on (Lam and Perry 2001). Mass organizations are largely leftovers of Maoist governance that function as the link between the administration and
After the national Notice on the progress with the work on the public selection of leading cadres was issued in 1999, examinations in Yunnan were extended to the lower level of deputy office level (fuchuji) posts.\(^{39}\) Public selection was originally only used for posts of deputy (fu) head, never the full (zheng) head of a department or government, as an obvious safety measure to avoid the appointment of cadres too junior and inexperienced to be trusted with overall and final responsibility for decisions.\(^{40}\) Although this still is the case with most appointments in Yunnan, it is not in fact required by the national regulations.

I encountered a rather different type of examinations while interviewing at the Yunnan provincial party school. Several students on one of the school’s novice training courses (a requirement for cadres who have made a promotion to a higher rank) had sat the first open provincial examination in 2002. This exam was not intended to fill one or more specific posts, but to create a general ‘talent reserve pool’ (variously referred to as houbei xuanren, houbei ganbu, chubei rencai) of cadres qualified for appointments at the deputy provincial department level (futingji). Those who passed the examination were not immediately given a job, but would only be appointed if and when suitable jobs became available. In total, more than three thousand people signed up of whom 1,420 passed, including members of the democratic parties or those without any party membership, and people from both inside and outside Yunnan. Although the main objective was to give bright younger people a chance, only those who already had held a post at the full office level (zhengchuji) or with at least three years of experience at the deputy office level (fuchuji) were qualified to sit the examination.\(^{41}\)

Examinations for either specific posts or for entry into a talent pool provide bright, young and ambitious cadres with a faster career track than the normal patient promotion from one rank to the next. It also gives ambitious cadres more independence in planning and promoting their career, instead of simply having to wait for the next assignment from the organization department. Yet these examinations nevertheless mainly function as an additional mechanism for the party and the state to manage the careers of cadres rather than being a fundamentally different approach. Candidates who have signed up are first screened, and only those who meet certain qualifications are eligible to sit the exam. As these qualifications include having worked as a cadre of a certain rank sectors of the public, such as the Women’s Federation, the Youth League, or the official unions.

40 ‘Notice on the progress with the work on the public selection of leading cadres’ (Guanyu jin yi bu zuohao gongkai xuanba lingdao ganbu gongzuo de tongzhi), Document no. 3 (1999) of the Central Organization Department, section 2.
41 Interview 10, 5 April 2004, and interview 49, 11 December 2004.
for a minimum number of years, and often in a specific area of expertise and/or location, only those people who are already in the system can participate.

However, although the exams are thus often limited to those cadres who would normally have been considered by the organization department or personnel bureau in a particular area anyway, this does not always have to be the case. Indeed, the stated purpose of open selection is to improve the composition of the leadership team, or to fill vacancies that would otherwise be hard to fill or that require scarce expertise. Particularly those parts of China that find it difficult locally to recruit adequately qualified cadres are now free to open up their examinations much more widely, creating the first beginnings of a regional or even national job market for administrative talent.

Selection and appointment to leading and non-leading cadre positions by public examination have spawned a genuine examination craze. Candidates spend weeks, if not months with thick textbooks and manuals and in tutorial classes organized either privately or by the organization department in charge of the examination. These books and classes take them through the curriculum set for the exams and prepare them for the questions they might face in the interview. In fact, one of the stated objectives of public selection is to encourage cadres to study as a normal part of their life. For this reason, in 2004 the time between the announcement of a vacancy and the exam was shortened from a month to just ten days, giving candidates less time to bone up for one specific examination.43

The topics covered in the examinations are nationally unified. The examination consists of a written general examination, a further written examination specific to the job(s) to be filled, and an oral examination. Although the topics should be adapted to the requirements of the position, they nevertheless have to be drawn either from the pool of questions currently in use for the national examination, or from a pool of questions approved by the provincial organization department.44

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42 ‘Temporary rules on the work of public selection of party and government leading cadres,’ article 5.
44 ‘Temporary rules on the work of public selection of party and government leading cadres,’ article 16. In 2000, the contents of the leading cadre examinations were specified in Trail outline of the examinations for the nationwide public selection of party and government leading cadres (Quanguo gongkai xuanba dang-zheng lingdao ganbu kaoshi dagang (shixing)). In 2004 the Central Organization Department promulgated a new, final version of this document, which was given the status of law. Apart from a general expansion of the number of topics, the new Outline of the examinations for the public selection and competitive appointment of party and state leading cadres (Dang-zheng lingdao ganbu gongkai xuanba he jingzheng shanggang kaoshi dagang) also has a completely new section on the ‘Three Represents’, the new ideological orthodoxy since 2000. In light of experiences in the first years, the outline now
The new examinations for leading cadre positions reflect the Communist Party’s continued Leninist understanding of the role of cadres. With the party’s self-ascribed transition from a revolutionary to a ruling party this is now expressed in a language that may seem less politicized that the ‘red’ versus ‘expert’ dichotomy in Maoist times. However, the ambition remains fundamentally the same. The party wishes to create a new cadre of leaders whose ‘quality’ is high in two respects: equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to manage an increasingly complex administration, and ideologically committed to the party and its mission.

Public examinations are thus an additional tool for the party to fine-tune and broaden the scope of the recruitment, deployment and promotion of its personnel. In most cases, it can hardly be argued that the examinations have suddenly opened the door to an administrative career to people that previously would not even have entertained the idea. Instead, examinations give ambitious people who are already part of the local pool of cadres a way to speed up the progress of their career, and a sense of autonomy and pride in their individual achievement.

Until last year, Zhang was the head of a township. In 2003, the prefecture opened up thirty deputy office level positions and three full office level positions for public examination. After the first round in 1997, 2003 was the second time that public examinations for office level posts had been held in the prefecture. According to Zhang, this method is gaining recognition because it is a step in the direction of a scientific, standardized and systematic procedure. The thirty positions had been advertised on the Internet, but only cadres already employed within the prefecture could apply. In the end, more than 1,900 people applied and only two posts could not be filled because they received less than ten applications. Zhang signed up for the post of deputy head of the prefecture’s united front department. Originally, he had not planned to sign up because he was too busy at work, but then thought about it and figured the post of deputy head of the united front department suited his background as a university graduate and experience with work in the people’s consultative conference and the also emphasises more the ability to deal with real problems over simple memorization and reproduction of facts, and aims better to assess a candidate’s suitability for leadership. The general section on the examinations consists of five parts, namely theory, general knowledge, policy and law, problem solving and composition. Unsurprisingly, theory on the examination is weighed very heavily in favour of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory and the Important Thought of the ‘Three Represents.’ It also features a section on Party history. However, the other sections on the exam are much less ideologized and include national defence, foreign relations, the economy, law, management, science and technology, and general history.
organization department. In total, 118 people registered for the post. Eventually, Zhang was selected to take up the post, initially on a probationary basis.\(^\text{45}\)

The continued role of the party is equally clear in the case of examinations not for specific posts but for the creation of a talent pool of ‘reserve cadres.’

Chen graduated in archaeology from Peking University in 1886 and was allocated a job at the Yunnan Provincial Museum, where in 2003 he was made deputy head. In 1998, he was promoted to associate professor; he is currently preparing his application for promotion to full professor. In 2002, he took and passed the first provincial examination for deputy department (futing) reserve cadres. At the time of the interview, Chen was participating in the seventeenth training class for deputy department reserve cadres, a class that included many of the examination’s successful candidates, in preparation for active duty. As a reserve cadre, he was not immediately allocated a job at the appropriate rank, but continued in his old job at the museum, waiting for the provincial organization department to find him a suitable position.\(^\text{46}\)

Only for a very limited number of posts, particularly ones that are hard to fill because they require specific qualifications or experience that are in short supply, are examinations opened up to applicants from outside the area, although even then usually only cadres of a specific rank and experience are eligible to enter.

Wang is originally from Inner Mongolia where his last post before he moved to Yunnan was head of a prefectural bureau. He has two BAs, one in mechanical construction and the other in industrial management, and worked as a teacher before joining a prefectural policy research office, which was his stepping stone into administration. In 1999, he signed up for the public selection of the position of assistant to the head of a prefecture in Yunnan, one of a total of twenty posts the prefecture opened up for national recruitment. The head of the prefectural organization department in Inner Mongolia was unhappy about him leaving, but in the end agreed. The post of assistant to the head of a prefecture is not part of the normal administrative setup (bianzhi) and is also not something that is likely to be a permanent feature of the prefecture’s government. Nevertheless, he is still eligible for promotion if he gains the recognition of the higher level; if not, he will at least be eligible for another post at the same level; in fact, he could have become the head of a prefectural bureau already three years ago.\(^\text{47}\)

\(^\text{45}\) Summarized from interview 78, 1 December 2004.
\(^\text{46}\) Summarized from interview 10, 5 April 2004.
\(^\text{47}\) Summarized from interview 13, 7 April 2004.
In our 2005 survey, only 58 of 251 respondents in the previous five years had been appointed to a position by means of public examination, competitive selection, or direct recruitment, rather than the more traditional methods of formal election or appointment by a party committee or people's congress. However, these new ways of personnel recruitment and management nevertheless convey a powerful message, particularly when they are taken in conjunction with other changes in cadre recruitment and management discussed in this book, such as the emphasis on formal education as a precondition of appointment at a particular rank, the shift at party schools from non-recognized to recognized degrees, and the strengthening and diversification of cadre training. Appointments and promotions will increasingly be based on an individual's excellence at learning, rather than habitual commitment to the local party apparatus, years of dedicated service and job performance. Selection will reward the ability to study and to pass examinations, rather than solely depend on the opaque internal procedures of the organization department and party committee. Cadres can play a more proactive role in the progression of their career than in the past, and increasingly are rewarded for doing so. Waiting for the organization department's next assignment alone will no longer be enough: cadres will have to seek admission to relevant degree programmes, prepare for examinations and be on the lookout for job openings inside and increasingly also outside their own place of residence. In short, a local, regional and even national administrative job market will begin to supplement (but not replace) the party's Leninist methods of cadre management.

Under the impact of these changes in cadre recruitment and promotion, gradually a new type of leading cadre is beginning to populate the Chinese administrative system at the provincial and sub-provincial level. These cadres are characterized by a very high level of education, strong professional skills often obtained during previous employment in other areas or even altogether outside the administration, and fast-track promotion or even initial entry by means of public examination. Such cadres not necessarily feel an unquestioning, life-long, localized and habitual loyalty to the party and the administration. These cadres' commitment to the party has been carefully crafted: it has been learned from books and at cadre training classes and is conditional on their success as career bureaucrats. This is how one of such cadres looked at his commitment to the party:

In 2002, Chen joined the party. 'In the past I did not have the opportunity because my father had a bad class label, but later my understanding changed, because the party’s policies have relaxed. In 2001 I applied for membership and in 2002 I became a probationary member. In the past, the party’s goals were straight Communism, very distant. Nowadays their goals are very realistic. Some are long-term, while others are more immediate and concrete goals. Our country’s development is based on the idea that we have to build a relatively fair society. During my studies here at the party school, reading Capital has had a big impact. The development of man takes place over three stages, and our goal is to realize the comprehensive development of man. Although at the present stage this is not complete, we
are working towards it. An ideal society will not become reality overnight, so we have to be more concrete and proceed step by step. Our goal is to realize a relatively free life for people. At the present stage we have to balance fairness and efficiency. We first talk about efficiency and only then about fairness. Too much emphasis on fairness will impede development. Development is a tool, people’s happiness is the aim … It would not be right if China were to leave the Communist Party, but it is also would not be right if the Communist Party would not reform and not keep up with the times … Now that the Communist Party is the ruling party its ruling force not only comes from the workers and peasants, but includes the whole Chinese nation.”

This new type of cadre is a professional whose ultimate loyalty is to his or her own individual career, a career that she or he continues to promote independently from the plans that the organization department may have. This new type of expert cadre is in many respects similar to – and should perhaps be considered simply a part of – the rapidly growing stratum of career professionals in China (Cucco 2008; Hoffman 2006). Although in most cases their career plans do not extend beyond the limits of the administration, one informant who had already severed such local ties when he moved from Inner Mongolia to Yunnan (see above), seriously contemplated a lateral move into career outside public administration.

At the time of the interview, Wang participated in a training class at the provincial party school, but admitted that he was not very interested and spent most of his time reading other books, mainly on law as he was preparing for a judicial exam. He did not plan to be a civil servant for the rest of his life: ‘When you are a civil servant, you are not the master of your own time and there is little that you actually accomplish.’ He reckoned that he could try his hand at another profession, and studying law meant that he was going with the trend of governmental rule by law.

State employees and university graduates seeking employment in the private sector is a well-established pattern that in nineties was often reported on as the ‘going to sea’ (xia hai) phenomenon. However, currently something more radical is happening. First of all, the more conditional commitment of the new expert cadres means that specifically leading cadres are also no longer bound to a life-long administrative career. Second, the administration is not simply being drained of talent, but is itself becoming an active player in the emerging labour market for professionals. Paradoxically perhaps, the party gradually has come to accept that, in order to realize its vision of itself at the head of a modern and professional administrative system, it will have to be prepared to allow market competition between administrative areas and with other organizations in the public and

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48 Summarized from interview 10, 5 April 2004.
49 Summerized from interview 13, 7 April 2004.
private sector. Increasingly, the language and practices of (limited) contractual obligations enter the very core of the Communist Party’s leadership, supplementing the (open-ended) Leninist principles of party spirit and party discipline.

It is very tempting to emphasize the implications of the rise of this new type of leading cadres. Yet however profound these may be, their progress depends in large measure on central policy making and thus the vagaries of continued political support. Furthermore, the more radical implications of the reform of cadre appointment and promotion will only gradually emerge, and the great majority of cadres that I interviewed in 2004, including many younger ones, still were of a more conventional kind. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we should be careful not to overstate the dissatisfaction and potential for conflict between what we could call ‘conventional’ and ‘expert’ cadres. By the 2000s, the earlier and much more divisive conflict between Maoist cadres appointed in the 1950s and sixties on the basis of their political credentials and Dengist meritocratic cadres already had been unequivocally decided in favour of the latter. All cadres I interviewed had gained the educational degrees required by their rank and post; they were career bureaucrats who believed that promotions had to be won by performance, education and knowledge rather than political virtue. Furthermore, ‘conventional’ and ‘expert’ should be treated more as Weberian ideal types than categories of real flesh-and-blood cadres. Most cadres who I interviewed shared characteristics of both types. On the one hand, they all emphasized the importance to their career of gaining higher degrees, and of study and knowledge more generally. On the other hand, the career and ambitions of most were strongly rooted in their belonging to their local administrative hierarchy and community with little evidence of a more proactive, individual approach.

The changing composition of China’s local administrative elite

In The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power, Konrád and Szelenyi contend that after the 1956 uprising in Hungary, the communist party and the administration gradually recruited larger numbers of members and cadres from middle class and intellectual backgrounds, leading to the formation of a dual elite of both political loyalists, who not necessarily possessed high educational and professional qualifications, and professional experts, who not necessarily strongly believed in the party’s communist ideology (Konrád and Szelenyi 1979). In the nineties and early 2000s, in the sociological and political science literature a debate ensued on the possible relevance of this dual elite model for contemporary China. Was China’s administrative elite simply becoming a technocracy (Lee 1991; White 1998), or, alternatively, had two different career paths emerged (Dickson and Rost Rublee 2000; Walder, et al. 2000; Zang 2001a; Zang 2001b; Zhou 1995), or were political loyalists upgrading their educational qualifications while the administration also recruited larger numbers of college graduates?
It is not my intention here fully to enter the debate, which has become very technical and requires survey data and quantitative skills that greatly surpass the limits of my own modest survey and analytical abilities. I would like to limit my involvement to just a few observations. The first is that my survey data do not reveal any correlation between an ‘expert’ mode of appointment to a position (public examination, competitive selection, direct recruitment) and class (defined as either father’s or mother’s occupation). Clearly, new methods of appointment no doubt have increased the opportunities available to certain types of cadres, but have not (yet) led to a qualitatively different recruitment base for the Yunnan administrative elite. Second, educational requirements are clearly becoming much more important, but, and here I agree with Walder, these are being met both by recruiting new cadres with the needed qualifications and by providing opportunities for further education of existing cadres. Third, the huge emphasis on cadre training that we have documented in this book is in large part a very deliberate effort to counter a tendency towards the growth of a dual elite: for political loyalists training provides the professional expertise they lack, while for expert cadres training immerses them in political orthodoxy. This effort may or may not, in the long term, be successful, but it does show that the potential elite’s bifurcation, in the eyes of China’s rulers at least, is a real issue.

The changes in the Chinese administrative elite are more profound than these rather bland observations would suggest. As I have tried to show in this chapter, gauging the technocratic or dual nature of the administrative elite is not only a sociometric but also an ethnographic issue. From the evidence of my fieldwork it seems unlikely that the changes in the cadre management system will result in the full and sudden replacement of one type of cadre by another; however, I have found some real changes in cadres’ attitudes and above all career strategies. Very likely, the party will in the future recruit some of its leading cadres fully from outside the administration; they, and new recruits fresh out of university or graduate school, will be less likely to think of an administrative career as a lifelong commitment that is hierarchically rooted in a particular locality. Yet the majority of cadres already in post will simply try to adapt to the new ways and criteria for promotion. It is exactly in these gradual changes in career strategies that I believe the reforms will have their most profound impact. Some of those who would have made a successful career in the past will find their ambitions thwarted, while others who in the past would have had little prospect may find their star rising. Selection by examination and an emphasis on study and formal degrees reduce the career prospects of cadres who have patiently worked their way up from modest appointments in township administrations. One informant with many years of experience as township and county party secretary in one of Yunnan poorest regions expressed this tension in his frustration with appointments gained by bookish upstarts; he had little faith in their ability to weather life in the trenches.
Gaining promotion through examinations is one aspect of the reform of the cadre system, but involves only very small numbers, less than five per cent of all cadres … The examination and approval and the investigation they have undergone are quite strict, [but] cadres who have sat the examinations are very different in their way of thinking than the cadres who were originally in post. Reality has proven that a part of them are not up to the requirements of their post.50

In this context it is important to note that many of my informants felt ill-prepared for the new challenges of the reforms. Several had tried to enrol in a degree course at a regular university, but had either failed to gain admission or else were unable to complete the degree. In some cases they subsequently elected the second-best option, namely to study for a non-recognized correspondence or residential degree at a party school. Others had registered for public examinations, but had not been selected from among the sometimes several hundred hopefuls. Yet others said that they had considered degree work or examinations, but had given up the idea before they even started. They often thought that they would not have the time outside their busy work schedule, or else felt that they lacked the qualities to be successful, often turning instead to other, more conventional way of getting ahead.

Hu has considered signing up for the public examination for a suitable post himself, and would welcome the greater mobility and competition that this would bring, but in the end has not done so. Instead, in 2002 the Kunming city organization department selected Hu for a place on the full-time economics course at the provincial party school. After graduation later this year, Hu expects that the organization department will allocate him a new position commensurate with his educational background, work experience and special strengths.51

Cadres such as Hu have a lot to thank the party for and understand how important the strides are that the party has made since its near-demise during and immediately after the Cultural Revolution. To such cadres, their entire professional personhood is tied up with their local status of cadre and service to the party. With the reforms, the move away from promotions on the basis of political attitude to merit created a broad base of support for the party among its personnel at the sub-provincial level, many of whom were from a relatively modest background and had been recruited from among the best and brightest in their area. The fusion of localist loyalties with universalist commitment to the party, backed up by a bureaucratic ethos of hard work, commitment and impersonal service explain much of the resilience of the CCP’s rule, even during its bleakest period in the late eighties and early nineties.

50 Interview 29, 16 April 2004.
51 Interview 17, 10 April 2004.
However, as we have seen in this section, the recent rise of a new and much more heterogeneous stratum of expert cadres introduces an element of strain in the party’s established local model of governance that is set gradually to become more acute. At this point, it might also be useful to add a few comparative comments on higher levels of the administration. My own research project of the administrative system mainly focussed on leading cadres at the township, county and prefectural level. Although I do not have systematic information on cadres at the provincial and central level, essentially the same procedures and practices are at work that determine the course of an individual career. Most cadres at the central level, for instance, seem to have started their careers as recruits either in centrally administered state enterprises, government or service agencies, party departments, or the army, or else in higher level provincial posts. Subsequent appointments and promotions rotate cadres to other posts at the same and higher ranks until ultimately their appointments qualify them for election to the Central Committee or State Council. As Bo Zhiyue has shown, in the pursuit of their career provincial and central cadres are acutely aware of the importance of educational qualifications. Like local cadres, they enrol in part-time degree courses at universities or party schools to obtain the higher degrees they need for promotion, usually in social science or humanities subjects more directly relevant to administration. As is to be expected, abuses of power and status are not uncommon. Busy leaders with little time or inclination to study dispatch a subordinate to take classes and sometimes even sit examinations, while others resort to the outright purchase of real or counterfeit degrees. These problems notwithstanding, formal education evidently is as important, if not more important, a factor in the careers of cadres at the centre as for local cadres (Bo Zhiyue 2006: 80-87).

Bo also observes that since the nineties degree holders in the humanities and the social sciences have become more prominent at the expense of scientists and engineers. This again resonates strongly with my observations at the sub-provincial level, where party schools exclusively offer degrees in the social sciences and the humanities, while my informants held degrees in a broad range of disciplines with no particular bias toward the sciences or the social sciences. To Bo himself this is ground to argue that the central leadership has evolved from the technocracy that it arguably was in the nineties (Bo Zhiyue 2006: 98-107). Although Bo may be right on strictly definitional grounds (formally, a technocrat is an expert in engineering or the sciences who puts his skills and knowledge to the solution of political problems), which is why I have used the term ‘expert cadres’ rather than ‘technocrats’ in this chapter. However, to me this merely reveals that the regime’s understanding of which skills and knowledge are needed for leadership have evolved. What is more important is the continued value given to expert knowledge and formal education.

Although the eventual replacement of more conventional and locally rooted cadres clearly is the intention of reform, it may very well be that policy makers at the centre in Beijing are insufficiently aware of (or at least attuned to) the
potential dangers of this strategy. By design, the new expert cadres share the background characteristics of their superiors in the centre and may be more inclined to comply with the wishes of a centre that has become increasingly impatient with what it perceives as the intransigence and incompetence of local cadres. In this sense, the recent reforms of cadre management reflect the much more general drive to centralize government, especially since 2002, without, however, a clearly defined vision of a new role and structure for local government. No doubt, there is much wrong with local government that delivers too little and quite often openly preys on the local population. However, simply to blame this on the low ‘quality’ of local officials might be politically expedient, but largely misses the point. Many of the chronic problems of local government are structural. The Chinese state continues to be highly decentralized, which gives local government at the same time too much to do and mainly local sources of revenue to pay for it. Local officials, especially in poorer areas, therefore have to scramble for resources not only for the many functions and services they have to deliver, but also often simply to pay their own salaries. In the absence of a fundamental reform of local government, simply replacing local cadres with better qualified – and possibly more pliant – experts is unlikely to make much difference.

52 In the late nineties and early 2000s in particular, the central government embarked on a systematic campaign against the ‘peasant burden’ deriving from taxes and levies from local government, culminating in the very popular abolition of the agricultural tax on 1 January 2006. The most systematic account in English of the argument of the predatory nature of local rural government is given in Bernstein and Lü 2003.
Chapter 7
Conclusions: cadre training and the future of party rule

Cadre training, the party-state and anthropology

One of the most striking aspects of cadre training and education is how much it is suffused with a discourse on (if not an obsession with) modernity. At the most general level, this takes the familiar shape, common to all reform policies and a linear descendant of the CCP’s May Fourth roots, of an unchallengeable belief that China should progress from a state of backwardness and weakness to one of strength and modernity. Of course, the reforms also buy off political discontent with the material fulfilment of the consumerist desires of middle class life, but the key of the success of the reforms is that they have delivered, or promise to deliver, the completion of China as a modern nation – strong, unified and prosperous – that will at last right all the wrongs that China suffered in the course of 150 years of humiliation since the Opium War in 1840. What makes this discourse on modernization irresistible to almost all Chinese is that differences in modernity also imply and justify inequalities in status and power: the discourse on modernity not only liberates, but also locks its subjects into a hierarchical vision of the world. The hierarchical nature of the Chinese concept of modernization entails that modernity is always elsewhere: modernization means trying to improve one’s place on the ladder of modernity by trying to become like other, more modern places, people, institutions, or nations.

‘Quality’, as the measure of modernity, provides a convenient discursive shorthand for modernity that collapses a range of dimensions of inequality (power, location, bureaucratic status, education, and civilization to name only the most common ones) and issues (for instance environmental pollution, water shortage, disease, poverty, corruption, illiteracy, infanticide, migration) into just one variable. This not only has the advantage of simplicity, but also puts the blame for backwardness squarely on the poor and downtrodden rather than the structural factors that produce and reproduce inequality and exploitation. This truncated analysis in turn points to a clear and unambiguous course of action: in order to solve China’s problems, the quality of its population quite simply has to be improved. That, in turn, can only be done by modernizing each and every aspect of China’s troubled society and culture. Obviously, this modernizing will have to be done by those who are already the most modern, who in turn must be those people and institutions that are the most powerful, most centrally located, best educated and most civilized, and have the highest status. The discourse on quality and modernization is ubiquitous in the field of cadre training. Poor areas are deemed poor in part at least because the quality of their cadres is lacking, and the intransigence and autonomy often found among local cadres in these
areas is simply a remnant of traditional thinking that has to be erased. The remedy is obvious. The quality of the cadres in poor and remote areas such as Yunnan province will have to be raised by educating and training them better, which not only means making them more like cadres in other developed places, but also strengthening their ideological and organizational ties and loyalties to the centre.

The design and methodology of my project make that my research has little to say about the impact that cadre training may have on the actual functioning of the administration. Does cadre training and better education make cadres less corrupt, more efficient and more amenable to the centre? Are they more modern managers and better communists? Is China becoming a better and more humanely governed society that guarantees its people freedom and prosperity? These are important questions that I hope will guide future research on Chinese administrative innovation. However, an exclusive focus on just these intended outcomes would, in many ways, be missing the point. Following Foucault’s lead in his discussion of the failure of the modern prison system, James Ferguson observed that the routine failure of rural development projects to produce ‘development’ masks the other things that such projects equally routinely do achieve: an expansion of the bureaucratic state and the de-politicization of politically contentious issues such as unemployment, failing services, and poverty (Ferguson 1990: 254-6).

The ethnographic approach in this book – viewing the party-state just like any other aspect of society, namely a specific way of being with other people – has made it possible to discover many unintended effects of cadre training and education. This study has viewed the life of cadres within the institutions of the party-state as the immersion in a specific culture and a way of becoming a specific kind of person. Party schools are one of the key sites where cadres are steeped in the power cult and the cult of eliteness of the CCP. At party schools and other sites of cadre training, cadres acquire the necessary ideological and habitual commitment to the party and its mission, become part of networks and informal communities of fellow cadres, are trained in the professional skills and knowledge needed to run complex organizations, imbibe the formal and informal social skills and life style that come with power and position. Most importantly, they learn that they are different from – and indeed better than – ordinary Chinese. This latter lesson is also not wasted on the outside world, where the seclusion of party schools and lack of knowledge about what is going on there greatly add to the mystique of cadre power. Returning with knowledge of the latest policies and ideologies from the centre, cadres have in a very real sense recharged their ‘party spirit’, exercising power nor simply as one-dimensional administrative post holders, but as members of a ruling elite and the embodiment of the party’s organizational charisma.

Cadre training at party schools creates the personal and professional qualities needed of a cadre. Training achieves this not merely by the content of its
teaching, but more importantly also by engineering a transformative experience of seclusion, study, reflection and residence at the school. In this sense, the work that cadre training does is rather similar, at least functionally speaking, to undergoing a rite of passage. As Victor Turner has shown, rites of passage create a separate liminal sphere set off from the structure of normal life in which the participants are stripped of their normal roles in preparation for the new roles that they will assume upon the completion of the ritual (Turner 1974). Cadre training at party schools likewise takes place in such an ‘anti-structural’ environment separate from normal life. At a party school, students are supposed to forget about their position, rank and normal obligations and privileges of family and work. Immersion in the Marxist classics serves a conversionary purpose: students will (again) discover the absolute, scientific truth of Marxism. After completion of their training, the students are supposed either to take on new, more responsible positions or to assume their old ones with a reinvigorated party spirit and a more and better set of skills. It is this transformative quality of cadre training at party schools, preserved from the CCP’s long tradition of cadre training, that continues to set it apart from mere professional or corporate training. Cadre training at party schools does not simply produce better administrators, it creates Leninist party cadres and Marxist believers.

Cadre training at party schools not only creates or reinforces the official reading of the party-state’s power cult that is prescribed by the centre’s many policies, meetings and documents, but also more local and informal aspects that are every bit as important to survival in the party-state’s labyrinthine institutional environment. In particular, during their stay at a party school, cadres get to know other cadres of similar rank from a wider administrative jurisdiction than the township, county, or prefecture that they work in. This experience creates a sense of belonging to a community beyond one’s immediate peers of the higher-level administrative jurisdiction. Translating formal vertical and horizontal administrative lines of command into human relationships, these experiences are a vital preparation for a promotion to a higher rank and appointment to a job in the administration one level up. In humanizing impersonal bureaucratic structures, such relationships also reproduce the delicate balance between localist particularism and centralist universalism that has been a long-time characteristic of the Chinese party-state. Many times cadre localism has proved to be a stumbling block for ambitious central initiatives. However, the roots of local cadres in the area where they were recruited and their embeddedness in a local administrative community equally often have helped the party-state survive in times of upheaval if not near-anarchy at the centre.

At the level of fully intended outcomes, too, our investigation of cadre training has revealed much more than a straightforward effort to upgrade the administrative elite in contemporary China. Training continues to put a heavy emphasis on ideology, fostering a detailed understanding and conformity to the requirements and ‘spirit’ of the party centre. Cadre training expresses the party’s insistence that cadres retain their role as a Leninist elite and moral vanguard. Just as long-
serving cadres are given the opportunity through training and education to become better educated and better equipped for leadership, so are highly educated new recruits required to study and ultimately internalize the ideology of the organization that they have signed up to serve. Cadre training is thus the party’s chief instrument to avoid that cadres become a-political technocrats who simply put their education and skills to the solution of administrative problems. However, the suffusion of such training with party ideology and the very fact that training is an unavoidable requirement the CCP imposes upon all cadres, party members or not, also reinforces the taken-for-granted acceptance among cadres of the role of the CCP as the ruling party.

This in itself is not new: from the party’s earliest beginning, ideological training was used to forge ideological and organizational commitment to the party. However, for the first time in the CCP’s history, this commitment can (or perhaps simply must) now exclusively be learned in the artificial context of training and study, with ‘practice’ for new recruits being limited to study tours to factories or farms, the revolutionary tourism at the three new cadre academies, discussions about specific cases during training sessions, or at best an assignment to a temporary adjunct post in a local government. In addition, formal instruction to forge ideological commitment and conformity is increasingly assigned to specific institutions. The proliferation of non-ideological training programmes at schools and universities in China and abroad and the rise of individualized ‘à la carte’ training leave ideological study and immersion in the party’s revolutionary tradition to party schools and the national cadre academies. There is every chance that the reliance on separate arrangements and institutions devoted to different aspects of training may in effect ghettoize ideological training, a minor requirement that has to be fulfilled rather than an intrinsic element of an integrated training package that includes all aspects of what it takes to be a good cadre.

The specialization of different aspects of training is largely intentional. Since the year 2000, policy making has reflected the centre’s impatience with conventional training at local party schools. Strengthening or establishing central institutions and the creation of a market for cadre training have been the main alternative approaches, in line with the more general project of the neo-socialist rebuilding the party-state. As we have seen in this book, the strengthening, centralization and marketization of cadre training have many consequences. The attention lavished on cadre training in recent years that has been documented in this book goes well beyond any practical use that such training might have. The expenditure for cadre training has risen sharply not only in order to pay for better instruction, but also because training has become an item of conspicuous consumption, a way of rewarding cadres for their services and reinforcing their sense of being special and privileged. Well-funded party schools have become a powerful symbolic tool to assert the vitality of a reconstructed socialism and more generally the new administrative ethos that undergirds the CCP’s claim to be China’s legitimate ruling party. Central schools for cadres (the National Academy...
of administration, the Central Party School and the four new cadre academies in Shanghai, Yan’an, Jinggangshan and Dalian) are flush with central funds. Other parts of China have also invested heavily in their local party schools, particularly at the provincial level and in large cities. This is most clearly the case with the party schools in Shanghai and Shenzhen. The ostentatious modernity of the party schools there and their role as hosts to pilgrimage-like study tours of cadres from all over China serve not only as a constant reminder that they are the developmental model for the rest of China, but also as their recognition of the fact that their new wealth and stability hinges on continued socialist rule at the centre.

Marketization and centralization of cadre training have led to a proliferation and diversification of courses, exchanges, schools and programmes, and a general blurring of the boundaries between cadre training, other forms of training and regular secondary and tertiary education. In addition, Chinese governments and departments in search of ever more excellent and prestigious training programmes increasingly send their cadres abroad for exploratory trips, short training courses, and even longer exchange visits or degree programmes. The commercialization of cadre education and training in China is beginning to produce some clear winners. A handful of well-endowed, prestigious and strategically located party schools and cadre academies have availed themselves of the opportunities to offer degree courses and training programmes that attract cadres from across the country. In addition, just as regular universities and schools have entered the market for cadre training, so have the prestigious and rich party schools used their competitive advantage to offer courses to a range of other customers, including businesspeople and even foreign students. Increasingly, cadre training has become just one of many services that educational institutions offer, whether they are party schools, universities, or other secondary and tertiary schools.

In this book, I have looked beyond the relatively narrow scope of cadre training itself, documenting new avenues for cadre recruitment and promotion as a vital component of the neo-socialist project that are creating the beginning of a regional or even national talent and job market. In the past, assignment to a top post in a subordinate locality, demobilization from the army, or state job allocation after graduation from university were the only regular ways that outsiders got jobs and residence outside their native area. Currently, candidates for many jobs are recruited through open examination, advertisement and competitive application. As a result, younger cadres with excellent educational and professional qualification are beginning to look for professional jobs in China’s burgeoning private sector; regional administrations and administrative departments find that it has to compete with other regions and departments and the private sector and to attract talent, particularly for positions that require a great deal of professional expertise. As these trends gain momentum in the years to come, we should expect an increasingly unified public-private market for professional talent to grow, enabling the richest areas to attract the best
administrative talent, thereby even further increasing their advantages over poor and remote areas. At the same time, the life style and career expectations of professionals inside and outside the state sector will increasingly become similar, further encouraging the formation of an integrated middle class that includes professionals, managers, educators and private entrepreneurs.\footnote{Sociologists in China such as Li Qiang at Tsinghua University and Li Peilin at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences have for several years already researched and debated the likelihood and extent of class stratification along the lines of developed capitalist countries. Given the continued importance of Marxist class analysis, this debate has been constrained by the fact that critics of the regime might use sociological evidence of the rise of class strata as argument that the CCP has finally sold socialism down the river. Western studies on this issue are only just beginning to emerge, for instance Goodman 2008; Tomba 2004.}

Despite the trend toward marketization of recruitment in the party-state, I have shown that the CCP’s local organization departments and party committees retain control over these new-style appointments, and that job entry exams often are only open to local cadres of a specific rank. Currently, we are clearly in a transitional phase that retains much of the old cadre management system. Despite many changes, the localism of cadres fundamentally remains untouched and local governments continue to have to rely on their own, local revenue base. It would therefore be a mistake to conclude that the marketization and centralization of the neo-socialist project are now complete. Across China, the more traditional ‘honeycomb and web’ pattern of hierarchically arranged decentralized local governments remains strong. Local administrations continue to be dominated by local cadres whose careers depend on their ability to balance the demands of higher levels of the administration with local interests and sensitivities. Neo-socialist state building is, at present, still only making limited inroads in traditional administration.

Despite the persistence of the traditional autonomy of local governments, poorer regions of China already run the risk of lagging further behind in terms of governmental capacity: they simply cannot afford the expenditure needed to upgrade their administrative infrastructure. Prefectural and particularly county party schools are often neglected and face financial difficulties similar to those in many other local government departments. These schools are the intended losers in the harsh market environment for higher education of which cadre training is becoming a part. However, commercialization of cadre training and central support and training provision apparently have not progressed far enough that local administrations feel they can do without their party school. For the moment at least, small local schools and their traditional courses continue to linger on shoestring budgets. The central emphasis on cadre training and reform of the cadre system is still caught between centralization and neo-socialist marketization on the one hand and the traditional autonomy of local governments
on the other. Only economically successful areas can actually afford to buy into the central government’s vision of modern socialist governance, in addition to their competitive advantage on the emerging labour market for administrative talent mentioned earlier. The widening gap between rich and poor areas in China is therefore about more than economic growth and wealth alone: there is a real risk that poorer areas cannot partake in China’s new, glossy socialism, and will not only economically, but also politically and administratively be left behind. In the absence of major budgetary transfers, the current limited neo-socialist rebuilding of the party-state translates poverty into governmental incapacity, thereby exacerbating rather than diminishing the gap between China’s rich and poor areas.

The future of party rule and divergent socialisms

Over the last twenty-five years China has overcome the contradiction between a capitalist economy and socialist governance, giving rise to the neo-socialism documented in this book. However, the conclusion that socialism in China is evolving into a robust form of governance that is qualitatively different from what preceded it should not make us ignore that fact that many weaknesses still remain: neo-socialism very much is a work in progress. Indeed, the very continuation of the rule of the CCP itself should not be taken for granted lest the party finds ways and means to address these issues. Several of these problems have been discussed in this book: the incomplete reform of local government and the consequent autonomy of local cadres; the increasing gap in governmental capacity between rich and poor areas; the technocratization of the cadre corps and the untested quality of cadres’ learned commitment to the party’s ideology and rule. In addition, two others in particular should also be mentioned.

First, corruption. As Dali Yang points out, especially since 1998-1999, corruption has been battled on a number of fronts. Some of the most prominent culprits (and especially those who politically had fallen out of favour) have been exposed and mercilessly persecuted in anti-corruption campaigns. Much more importantly, the institutions of the party and the state that are supposed to combat official corruption have been strengthened and made more independent from the organizations and people that they are supposed to oversee (Yang 2004: 223-35). I would, in fact, interpret the latter as a prominent aspect of the neo-socialist state-building project. As the state’s general capacity to control local administration increases, we should also expect its ability to contain corruption to improve. However, I also must agree with Melanie Manion that the current dual party-government institutional setup in anti-corruption work precludes a truly effective approach (Manion 2004: chapters 4 and 5).

Either way, it is unlikely that the battle against corruption will be won any time soon. Although neo-socialist state strengthening provides better instruments to contain more familiar forms of corruption in which official position is used for self-enrichment, it also encourages new forms of corruption in which wealth is used to
obtain official position. In the nineties the practice of buying and selling cadre positions, including leading cadre positions, became increasingly widespread (Burns 2006: 51; Yang 2004: 182). According to He Zengke, a prominent researcher at the CCP’s Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, a key liberal think-tank, ‘buying and selling of official positions’ (mai guan mai guan) became widespread in the nineties, and has more recently become endemic. No longer are posts ‘retailed’ individually, but are often ‘wholesaled’ by the hundreds, usually shortly before the party secretary who controls official appointments leaves office. Furthermore, while risks are still very low, prices have gone up, also because in cases that were investigated public funds now amount to 90 per cent of the money used to buy positions (He Zengke 2005: 368). According to He, the main reason behind the endemic nature of this phenomenon is the continued opacity of the appointment system that gives the local party committee and especially its secretary ultimate control over official appointments in his jurisdiction. He boldly concludes that until the principle of party control over appointments is relinquished, the problem of buying and selling official positions will not go away.

The centre is well aware of this problem, presenting the neo-socialist changes in appointments and promotions that were discussed in chapter 6 of this book (public selection, examinations, elections) as solutions. However, these changes are unlikely fully to solve the problem as neo-socialism itself fuels the problem. Neo-socialism is premised on maintaining the Leninist principle of party rule, and remedies can only amend but not abolish the control of party committees over leading appointments. Furthermore, neo-socialist changes have much increased the attraction of official positions. Not only are official perks and salaries now much better than five or ten years ago, but many opportunities for self-enrichment continue to exist, either legally or illegally. Lastly, the attractiveness


55 A glance into the details of cadre income is given in a research report from the Fujian organization department, published in 2003 in the China Investigation Report. The report looked in detail at the legal and illegal sources of income of cadres. Even when limiting itself to legal sources, the report showed that there existed very wide discrepancies between different departments within the same
of official positions coupled with the increased scope given to formal elections within party committees is giving rise to corrupt strategies of canvassing votes associated with elections the world over. Although outright vote buying does not (yet) appear to be widespread, candidates reportedly often spend very considerable sums of money on gifts, banquets and other ways that are (just) within the rules to curry favour with their selectorate or electorate; indeed, it seems only a matter of time before reports will reach us on similar practices in the much publicized public elections in townships and villages.

A second and to my mind equally important danger to the neo-socialist project is the party’s tendency to revert to an old-fashioned totalitarian response when it feels threatened by external forces. Since 1989, the CCP actually has made very considerable progress in dealing with popular protest and freedom of expression as government no longer aspires to control all thoughts and actions of the population. However, there are still certain boundaries that cannot be transgressed and, if that happens, the reaction can often been extremely harsh. More importantly, the party itself sometimes does not seem fully to trust the efficacy of its newer and more sophisticated forms of political control, reverting to a siege mentality in which all hostile forces are lumped together and uniformly excluded: Muslim, Tibetan, or Taiwanese separatists, independently organized religions, Chinese dissidents and foreigners calling for democracy and human rights. Recent examples that come to mind include the repression of the Falungong in 1999, the SARS crisis in 2002 and, as this book goes to press in 2008, the government’s jittery reaction to the Tibetan riots just a few months prior to the Beijing Olympics in the summer of 2008. As the global recession deepens in 2009, the already very frequent protests of jobless workers and landless peasants are bound steeply to increase, further testing the party-state’s neo-socialist resolve.

Fortunately, until now such episodes have been relatively short, but serve as warnings to foreign observers and the Chinese population alike. Despite several decades of administrative reform, the CCP itself still has far to go in evolving into a fully neo-socialist ruling party. Widely reported steps have been taken to administration, revealing that these departments were using much if not all of their discretionary incomes (for instance levies, fees, and business ventures) to top up the nominal salaries of their cadres. In Fujian’s Putian prefecture in the year 2000, the departments dealing with mineral extraction had the lowest average annual income (5,722 yuan), while the departments in field of finance and insurance had the highest (12,957 yuan). Depending on the job, already in the early 2000s being a cadre could therefore be a financially rewarding proposition even without the expected income from whole illegal sources. In more recent research, Christine Wong reached identical conclusions (Wong 2008).

56 Conversation with Chinese researcher based in Hong Kong, 7 November 2008.
broaden the party membership, including private entrepreneurs. More recently, in
the run-up to the seventeenth party congress in October 2007, there has been
much talk about intra-party democracy. In order to avoid potentially very
damaging totalitarian relapses, the party will have to continue to take such steps
that will help it shake the hermeticism of its socialist past, ultimately becoming a
pluralist arena of political debate and competition among a diverse elite
composed of leading cadres, prominent intellectuals, high-level professionals and
entrepreneurs. However, such a change runs the obvious risk of jeopardizing the
party’s organizational integrity and myth of Leninist infallibility, thus potentially
undermining the very essence of the neo-socialist project. However, if past
experience is anything to go by, the leadership will probably not want to think in
such stark terms. Instead, it will opt for a strategy of small-scale experiments and
incremental changes, pragmatically progressing and retreating as the political
realities of the day dictate, without working from a clear blueprint for a radically
different long-term future.

China’s current trajectory of neo-socialist development combines many
contradictory elements: reaffirmation of the Leninist organizational discipline,
creation of a modern governmental bureaucracy, and neoliberal marketization all
unfold in parallel. Despite their apparent incompatibility, these elements do add
up to a society that not only works, but also has managed to steer a consistent
course of unprecedented social, economic, cultural and administrative
modernization. As I have pointed out repeatedly in this book, these contradictions
are hardly an ideological issue: the point is not that capitalist avariciousness and
individualism might necessarily undermine socialist collectivism and
egalitarianism. By now, the CCP has shed its commitment to revolutionary
transformation to the point that there is no perceptible ideological difference with
neoliberal prescriptions for market-driven economic development. This is not
simply a matter of the increasing vacuity of socialism as a political ideology.
Socialist rule and neoliberal economic development have not merely come to
tolerate and complement each other. I concur with David Harvey that in China
neoliberal principles and practices are both predicated on and support the long-
term sustainability of the Chinese party-state (Harvey 2005). Not only has
successful capitalist development replaced revolutionary transformation as the
party’s mission, legitimizing and enabling continued Leninist rule. The CCP has
also nurtured markets and patterns of globalization that have penetrated the very
core of the party-state itself. What has emerged in China is an organizational and
ideological fusion and synthesis of socialist and neoliberal principles.

As the general conclusion that follows from my work on the specifics of cadre
training it might be good to dwell on this a bit more. As pointed out in the
introduction to this book, it is almost customary to identify the party’s power
monopoly as the source of contradictions, an anachronism that will inevitably be
swept aside by the force of historical necessity. However, in this book I have tried
to approach the issue from the opposite direction, starting from the mounting
evidence from research on contemporary China that the CCP’s continued hold
on power is not the problem that has to be solved, but the reason for China's remarkable combination of sustained rapid economic growth and political stability. This in turn points to the conclusion that the operational question should not be what is wrong with CCP governmentality, but rather what it is that the CCP has been able to bring to the table that has helped it to transform China.

The answer, in my opinion, is not hard to find: it is quite simply the continued organizational (rather than ideological) credibility of CCP's Leninist leading role in society. As the undisputed ruling party, the CCP continues to draw on the 'charismatic impersonality' of Leninist party organizations (Jowitt 1992). As the infallible source of absolute truth, the party has an unchallengeable and almost mystical ability to resolve contradictory trends and objectives by relating them to an unquestioned final and overriding mission and desire, no matter how vaguely defined. However, this organizational charisma is not simply a given quality that the party can draw upon at will. At the root of its survival as a Leninist organization lies the party's almost uncanny ability to learn from its mistakes and act upon itself and its ideology. Approaching revolution and later rule as a learning process has given the party a virtually unique capacity for renewal, change and reinvention. Despite totalitarian appearances, the CCP in the course of its history has gone through many brushes with near-extinction – more often than not self-inflicted – each time to re-emerge with a clearer vision of how to tackle the many challenges that lie ahead. Perhaps the most unexpected aspect of China's rise after the 1989 debacle has been the party's success in re-establishing its leading role, not by suppressing all dissent or disagreement, but quite the contrary by allowing a remarkable scope of debate in society and within the party itself. In terms of political reform, the last 15 years have seen remarkable proposals, experiments and legislation to strengthen the party's popular appeal and the administration's accountability and its base in the rule of law; anything, in fact, that does not call for open and direct multi-party elections.

It would be a mistake to dismiss the party's willingness to experiment with novel ways of reinventing its Leninist organizational charisma as merely desperate attempts of a regime that refuses to face up to the historical necessity of a full democratic transition. The party's success has not happened despite its socialist heritage, but thanks to it. The party's survival is predicated on its Leninist charisma which in turn needs ideologically prescribed goals. In other words, the key to the party's ability to renew itself and its charisma is its skill to redefine its mission to change China, creating a moving target that always is many years away. The party may have shed its revolutionary pretensions, but it still genuinely believes that it is the sole transformative agent that will bring to China deliverance from poverty and foreign humiliation. After the eventual failure of planned state socialism, the party fully bought into the neoliberal belief in the transformative power of the market, government streamlining and contemporary global modernity. However, unlike many other developing countries, the party's continued rule has enabled it to do this on its own terms, rather than those of western powers, international organizations and multinational corporations. It is
here that the full implications of neo-socialism become clear. The Chinese Communist Party has not simply borrowed neoliberal techniques of governance and market transition as adjuncts to continued socialist rule. The irony of neo-socialism is that it fully has incorporated the neoliberal reinvention of the economy and society in its recipe for China’s future modernity. As such, the success of the neoliberal project in China is as much predicated on the continued rule of the party as neoliberalism has become a vital source of the renewal of the Party’s Leninist organizational charisma. Far from being at odds with each other, under neo-socialism Leninism and neoliberalism have indeed become one.

With the maturation of the symbiosis of Leninism and neoliberalism in the last twenty years, the party has felt increasingly secure in its ability to strengthen its hold on power in the context of capitalist economic development. It is here that the success of the efforts at modernizing the cadre system may have had their most important impact. The massive investment in cadre training and education that have been documented in this book have given China a corps of cadres that are incomparable to their predecessors of twenty years ago in terms of their educational qualifications, managerial skills and understanding of China and the world. At the same time, they continue in time-honoured Leninist fashion to be the loyal instrument of the party rather than politically neutral professional administrators, like civil servants in Western democracies. The continued heavy emphasis on political theory in the revamped cadre training and the role of party committees in decisions on appointments, promotions and demotions despite innovations such as elections and public selection of cadres are intended to guarantee that this continues to be the case. Neo-socialist reform of the cadre system has put the party’s Leninist leading role in society itself on a more solid footing. This has given the party the administrative capacity, expertise and most importantly the confidence in the long-term viability of its rule needed to endorse experiments with further forms of participatory government and rule by law that are being proposed by intellectuals and advisors both inside and outside China. Perhaps counter-intuitively, a strengthening of the CCP’s rule enables further political reform in the direction of a more pluralistic and consultative form of benign neo-socialist dictatorship, while at the same time making the emergence of a full-blown multi-party democracy less likely.57

I would like to end this book with a few comments on the broader comparative picture that the CCP’s neo-socialist reinvention fits in. It has become fashionable to point out that capitalism is not a one-size-fits-all economic model, but evolved the world over into very different systems of social and economic organization. In the recent literature on ‘varieties of capitalism’ (Crouch 2005; Hall and Soskice 2001) the ‘Confucian’ capitalisms in East Asia (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) play a paradigmatic role (Redding 1993). I would argue that contemporary mainland China is not simply a case of yet another East Asian

57 Mark Leonard reaches a similar conclusion based on quite different material, namely his interviews with prominent intellectuals in China (Leonard 2008: 81)
‘divergent capitalism’, but also the most important and most successful example of the *divergent socialisms* that have emerged from the ashes of the apparent uniformity of Cold War socialism, in Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa.

Almost twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it has become clear that for more than fifty years the Cold War had blinded our vision. The bipolarity of that period made us forget that liberalism and socialism share the same roots in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment; in fact, I would argue that one cannot be a socialist without being a liberal, just as one cannot be a liberal without also being a socialist. Both are a vision to set humanity free from the yokes of serfdom, absolutism and exploitation. Just as socialism not necessarily entails a negation of the market, so does liberalism in fact wish to set free and enfranchise both poor and rich. Both liberalism and socialism present paths to the equality, freedom and prosperity of a truly modern society that are in many ways complementary. With the benefit of hindsight, exclusivist readings of the two major ideologies of the twentieth century really started when Marxism arrogated the monopoly over socialism, turning a humanist ideology of liberation into the pseudo-science of class warfare, and opening the door to the increasingly totalitarian, violent and paranoid delusions of radical German communism, Leninism, Stalinism and Maoism. Ultimately, human life, freedom and happiness no longer counted; all that mattered was the vacuous concept of “the revolution.” Their antagonist language and practice alienated increasingly large numbers of potential sympathisers to a more humanist understanding of socialism, forging a grand alliance in the western world of capitalists, the middle class and the working class that rallied around new, and equally combative and exclusivist readings of liberalism. The stage was set for a cold war so intense and absolute that, by the end of it, we had forgotten what history could be like without it. In the East, all we could see was postsocialism; in the West, history was thought to have reached its final conclusion.

In actual fact, of course, history has moved on. Despite globalization, the universalist pretensions of the neoliberal world order are being challenged in sites across the world both large and small. What emerges are a myriad of unorganized and messy new recombinations of bits and pieces of liberal and socialist ideas and practices. State socialism as an economic system may indeed be largely dead and buried, but socialism as a political system and ideology continues to morph and change in all kinds of societies, and will be highly relevant to the many challenges that will face humankind in the twenty-first century. Just in the last few years we have seen the reinstatement of Keynesian economics and the interventionist state under pressure of the 2008 global financial crisis on the grand stage of international economic policy making, the first hesitant and selective engagement with the liberal world order in North Korea and Cuba, the neo-socialisms of China and Vietnam, the revolutionary socialisms of Nepal and India that now rule very substantial parts of both these countries, and the populist socialism of Chavez in Venezuela. The grand project
of liberalism and socialism that started in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe to bring a freer, fairer and more prosperous life continues.
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