

Dethroning the Mao-Era Elite*

Using *Organizational Histories* to Illuminate Cadre Management

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Abstract

Using a novel dataset of cadres at the central and local levels, we show that the most lasting, thoroughgoing personnel changes in the PRC's history occurred at the start of the reform era. Whereas discussions of momentous personnel changes in China tend to gravitate towards the Cultural Revolution, Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign, and a litany of Mao-era purges, the long-term effects of these events on the composition of bureaucratic leadership pale in comparison to those undertaken at the start of the reform era. Most notably during the 1982–1984 administrative reforms, the newly installed reformist leadership at the center undertook a wholesale transformation of the Chinese political elite, ushering out Mao-era elites and replacing them with younger, professionalized cadres. We are able to show this early and extensive departure of Mao-era elites from leadership positions using a novel dataset of over 70,000 bureaucrats. Gleaned from organizational histories and yearbooks, this new dataset extends from the central level to the township level and from the founding of the party to the present, opening the door to much deeper insights into temporal and geographic variations in cadre management.

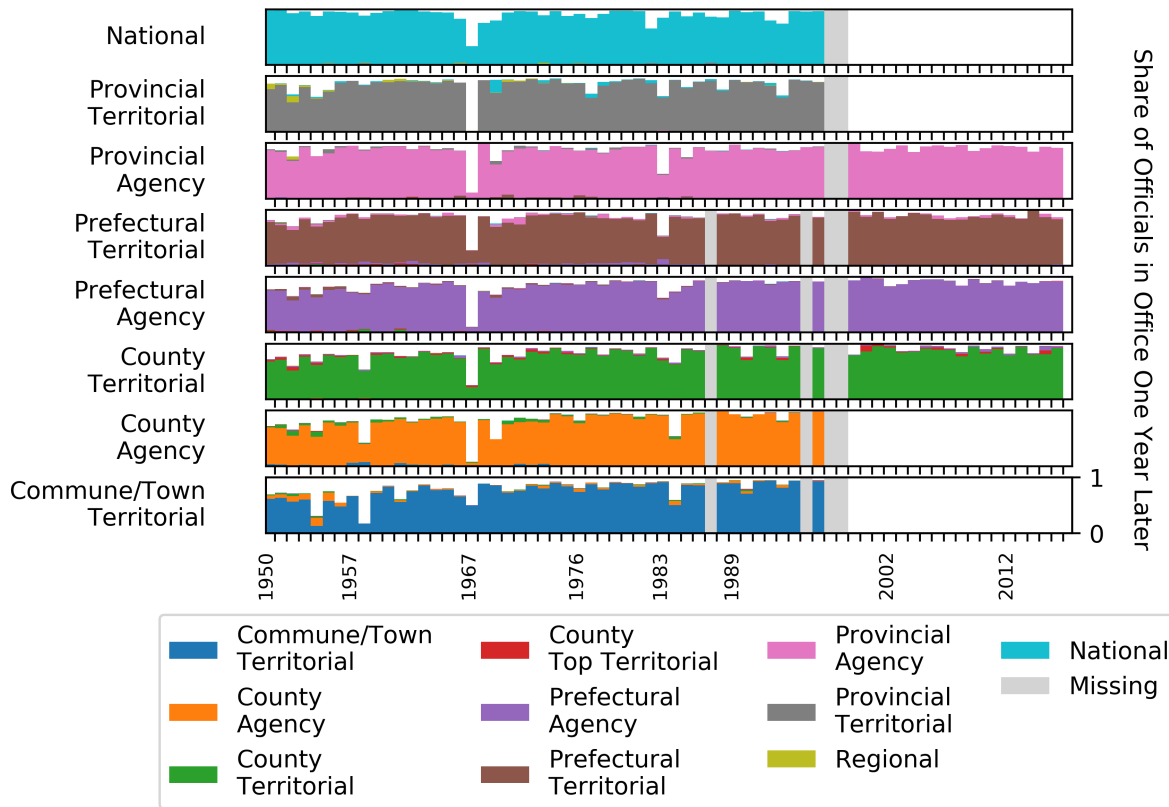
The largest and most abrupt changes in the staffing of the PRC bureaucracy occurred during the reform era, not during the Mao era. Students of Chinese elite politics have commonly identified the power seizures of the early Cultural Revolution, as well as the Mao era campaigns of the 1950s, as key moments of tumult in the Chinese bureaucracy. More recently, Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption campaign has been described as a shock to the bureaucracy.¹ Our new dataset of cadres allows us to systematically quantify the effects of these and other events across different levels of the Chinese bureaucracy, comparing the effects of such diverse means of bureaucratic transformation as power seizures, purges, anti-corruption campaigns, and retirement policies. We find that two elite transitions at the start of the reform era had by far and away the largest long-lasting effects on cadre composition. Whereas 1950s purges and today’s anti-corruption campaign are barely detectable, and many of the cadres removed in the Cultural Revolution power seizures returned to office in the 1970s, those removed in the early 1980s and early 1990s never returned to political office.

In this paper, we introduce an organizational dataset including all cadres who have held certain leadership positions. While coarser than the biographical datasets of leaders’ personal characteristics that have become common in the field, such an organizational dataset facilitates novel comparisons of bureaucratic composition over time. Indeed, by looking more narrowly at who held which jobs in the bureaucracy, we have been able to collect a vast dataset of over 70,000 officials, spanning from the founding of the Party in 1921 into the 2010s and including central and provincial leaders, as well as local officials down to the township level in Shanxi 山西 Province.

Using this organizational dataset, we are able to compare the relative effects of major historical events on bureaucratic composition. We find that many of the most widely studied and debated events in the history of the Chinese Communist Party brought few changes to the staffing of the sprawling Chinese bureaucracy. The largest instantaneous shock to the system was, as we would expect, the power seizures of the Cultural Revolution (see Figure 1). But the effects of these power seizures on bureaucratic composition

¹ [MacFarquhar, 2016, Wedeman, 2016, Manion, 2016]

Figure 1: Cadre Exits from Leadership Positions

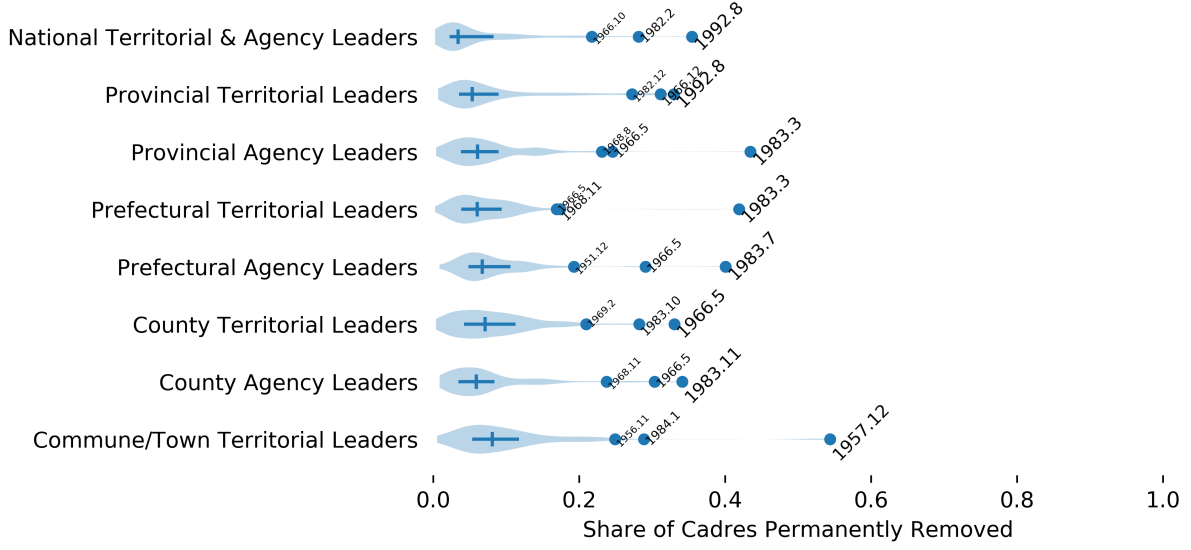


were substantially undone before the end of the Cultural Revolution. Rather, it was the 1982–1984 administrative reform 机构改革 undertaken at all levels of government by order of the new reform leadership at the center, as well as a more targeted 1992–1993 leadership reshuffle focused only on the central and provincial levels, that *permanently* changed the makeup of the Chinese bureaucracy.

Both the 1982–1984 administrative reform and the 1992–1993 leadership reshuffle resulted in the exceptionally abrupt removal of Mao-era elites from leadership positions. In this paper, we focus on the 1982–1984 administrative reforms, as these reforms were unique in simultaneously replacing a large share—25% to 50%—of leading cadres at each level of the Chinese bureaucracy (see Figure 2). At all levels of the hierarchy, elderly cadres were retired, the few remaining young Cultural Revolution recruits were shunted aside, and a loyal “third echelon” 第三梯队 of youthful national leaders was pulled up through the ranks.

Since the 1980s, a small but insightful literature has developed on this elite transfor-

Figure 2: Final Cadre Exits from Leadership



Notes: The horizontal line in each violin plot represents the interquartile range for permanent cadre exits from our dataset for twelve-month periods from the founding of the PRC to the end of our dataset. The vertical line represents the median. For each level of the hierarchy, the three outliers with the highest share of cadres permanently removed are plotted. For example, if the furthest outlier is 1992.8, it means that the twelve-month period in which the highest percentage of cadres at that rank left office never to return was from August 1992 to July 1993.

mation in the 1980s. Careful work by Hsi-Sheng Ch'i and Hong Yung Lee underlined the systematic efforts of national leaders to organize authoritarian succession and transform the cadre body.² These broad analyses of cadre policy in the 1980s have tended to emphasize the new recruits brought in by the elite transformation. Another literature has focused on the plight of Mao era elites, most notably Melanie Manion's work on retirement and several contemporary pieces on party rectification, all suggesting that Mao era elites slinked off into the sunset quite slowly.³ Combined, the literature draws a picture in which reform era elites joined the ranks in the early 1980s, but old, Mao era elites left only gradually throughout the 1980s.

We build on this work in two respects. First, our data shows that the elite transformation of the early 1980s stands out for its hierarchical breadth and for its sheer scale as a *uniquely* transformative event in the PRC's bureaucratic history. Second, we show that the elite transformation was in fact not gradual. Mao era elites exited leadership, and

² [Chi, 1991, Lee, 2018]

³ [Manion, 1993, Johnston, 1987, Dittmer, 1991, Forster, 1986]

reform era elites entered, during the Party-organized, top-down administrative reform of 1982–1984. This humble sounding reorganization entailed by far the largest leadership turnover of the reform era; it is rivaled in the history of the People’s Republic only by the power seizures of the early Cultural Revolution. Transformation of the leadership was thus quite far along by 1984. The imposition of leadership change across all levels of the party-state facilitated the sluggish retirement of the elderly and purging of those implicated in the Cultural Revolution: they were no longer leaders, merely cadres.

To show this rapid, wholesale exit of Mao era elites from leadership roles, we exploit a previously under-explored data source to compile a comprehensive dataset of cadres in leadership positions at the national level, as well as in Shanxi 山西 province. Drawing from *Organizational Histories* 组织史 and yearbooks 综合年鉴, our organizational dataset includes career information on over 70,000 officials across a wide spectrum of party-state work units at the national level and, in Shanxi province, from the provincial level to the township level. Our data spans almost a century, from the founding of the party to the present day. The broad hierarchical span of our data enables us to examine personnel changes across different bureaucratic levels; its long duration makes it possible to compare the personnel effects of the many and varied campaigns the CCP has undertaken over the years.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. We first introduce our data sources, with a particular emphasis on how the relatively underutilized *Organizational Histories* can improve our knowledge of elite politics. Next, we draw on our data to lay out a revised understanding of how the reformist regime managed the Mao-era elite during the 1980s, before outlining how our findings differ from the literature on the retirement reform and Party rectification. We then turn to the military, where we identify a pattern of frequent personnel turnovers, often preceding major changes in civilian administration. Lastly, we conclude by discussing possible avenues for future research.

1. Data and the Study of Chinese Elite Politics

The study of Chinese elite politics has gradually expanded its focus from the pinnacle of power in Beijing to incorporate chief executives at the provincial, municipal, and even county levels. This transition has been accompanied by a shift from richly informed but narrow qualitative studies of elite interaction to a sustained community effort to develop a simple, quantitative model of elite promotion.⁴ To this end, the field has come to revolve around biographical datasets of *the jobs certain elites have held* and their personal characteristics, suitable for the longitudinal study of individual careers. But major promotions in the Chinese bureaucracy are rare (see Figure 1). In this paper, we introduce an organizational dataset of *the elites who have held certain jobs*, suitable for the longitudinal study of bureaucratic composition.

While biographical data on Central Committee elites and local leaders has provided insights into elite recruitment, comparisons across the political hierarchy have been undermined by the very different ways in which scholars of central and local elite politics have defined their subjects. At the central level, elites have been conceived of quite broadly, incorporating the several hundred members of the Central Committee and studying their composition back to the founding of the Party. At the local level, the vast majority of studies have considered only party secretaries and government chief executives (that is, two officials per locale), with more ambitious researchers looking as far as provincial party standing committees⁵ or municipal and county bureau chiefs;⁶ almost uniformly, such studies have been restricted to the Reform era.⁷

A major contribution of this project is the introduction of a database that uses a single standard for collecting data across the hierarchy (from the national to the township

⁴This literature has tended to feed into a debate over whether cadres are promoted based on economic performance [Li and Zhou, 2005, Landry, 2008, Lü and Landry, 2014] or factional ties [Shih et al., 2012] or some combination of the two [Landry et al., 2018].

⁵See [Shih and Lee, 2020] for a dataset that spans 1993-2015 and [Bulman and Jaros, 2020] for one that covers 1996-2013.

⁶Zhou Xueguang and colleagues have collected data on the county and prefectural bureaucracies, but only after 1990; see 周雪光、艾云、葛建华、李兰、卢清莲和赵伟。中国地方政府官员的空间流动：层级分流模式与经验证据。《社会》2018年（第38卷）3期，页1-45.

⁷Bo Zhiyue's study on provincial leadership teams dating to the beginning of the PRC is a notable exception [Bo, 2002].

level) and across time (from the founding of the CCP to the present). To do so, we draw on the detailed lists of leading cadres published in *Organizational Histories* and local yearbooks (see Figure A5). These include information not only on leaders of geographic units but also on their deputy leaders *and* leaders and deputy leaders of various party and government departments, bureaus, agencies, and offices. To emphasize the diverse patterns of cadre management evident at different levels of the hierarchy, we sometimes divide results between the provincial, prefectural, county, and commune/township levels; within each geographic unit, we further divide cadres between “territorial leaders”—party committee members, government chief executives, and top military brass, as well as their immediate deputies—and “agency leaders”—agency directors and deputy directors in the party, government, military, and social organization systems.

The compilation of these *Organizational Histories* was a sprawling project initiated by the Central Organization Department in December 1984. The project took from 1984 to 1999 to produce 3,076 volumes.⁸ *Organizational History* books were published by locales across China beginning in the early 1990s, listing all leading cadres in the locale and its immediately subordinate geographic and functional units from the founding of the Communist Party in 1921 through 1987. Second editions were published including data through 1997, after which some but not all jurisdictions continued publishing *Organizational Histories*. Fortunately, many prefectures (as well as the provincial authorities) that chose not to continue publishing *Organizational Histories* did begin to publish comprehensive yearbooks, which often include a listing of all leading cadres in each subordinate geographic and functional unit. In Shanxi Province, these sources list cadres in party, government, the military, and social organizations. Each book lists leaders at two levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy: that is, a county-level *Organizational History* will list the county’s leaders and deputy leaders; the leaders and deputy leaders of the county’s various bureaus, commissions, and offices; and the leaders and deputy leaders of each commune, dispatched district, or town(ship) under the county’s jurisdiction.

⁸李锐, 《李锐口述往事》, 香港: 大山文化出版社, 2017年版, 页476. The Organizational History project involved a huge amount of work: the editors estimated that they consulted 7,360,000 volumes of archives, conducted 1.7 million interviews, and held over 40,000 meetings (《中国共产党组织史资料》第八卷, 中共党史出版社, 2000年, 页4).

The sheer scale of data made available through these analog records is alluring, but a comprehensive digitization project is beyond our means. We therefore collected personnel records from the nineteen-volume national *Organizational History*, which includes senior provincial leaders as well as national ministerial leaders. Hoping to put the recent anti-corruption campaign into historical context, we chose to explore the local bureaucracy by focusing on a key target of that campaign, Shanxi 山西 province. We will publish the national dataset concurrently with this paper; the Shanxi provincial dataset will follow thereafter.

We combine *Organizational Histories* and yearbooks to construct a database of leading cadres, the jobs they held, and the years in which they held them. This allows us to construct a bare-bones resume for each of 73,726 cadres, listing all the leadership positions they have held.⁹ Notably absent are their educational attainments, the dates of their birth and passing, and any jobs they held outside of leadership—or even any positive identifier that can be used to address the rare cases in which two cadres have the same name.¹⁰ The data, therefore, caters to investigations of cadre tenure and removal, as well as transfers between and within bureaucratic systems 系统.

⁹Our dataset includes data from the center, the provincial level, from eight of Shanxi’s eleven prefectures (excepting Jincheng, Jinzhong, and Yangquan), and from each of Yuncheng’s thirteen counties, districts, and county-level cities. All data extends from the establishment of local party branches in the 1920s to 1987, except as follows:

Table 1: Geographic Units with Abnormal Temporal Coverage

Unit	Dates
中央	1949-1997
山西	1949-2017
大同	1922-1987, 2006-2017
吕梁	1923-1987
临汾	1924-1987, 2000-2017
太原	1924-2016
长治	1926-1997, 2000-2018
运城	1926-1997, 2001-2017
忻州	1926-1987
运城新绛县	1927-1998
雁北	1936-1987

We also include a very small smattering of data (fewer than 250 observations) collected through internet sleuthing for the field armies stationed in Shanxi, with partial coverage for the years 1949-2002.

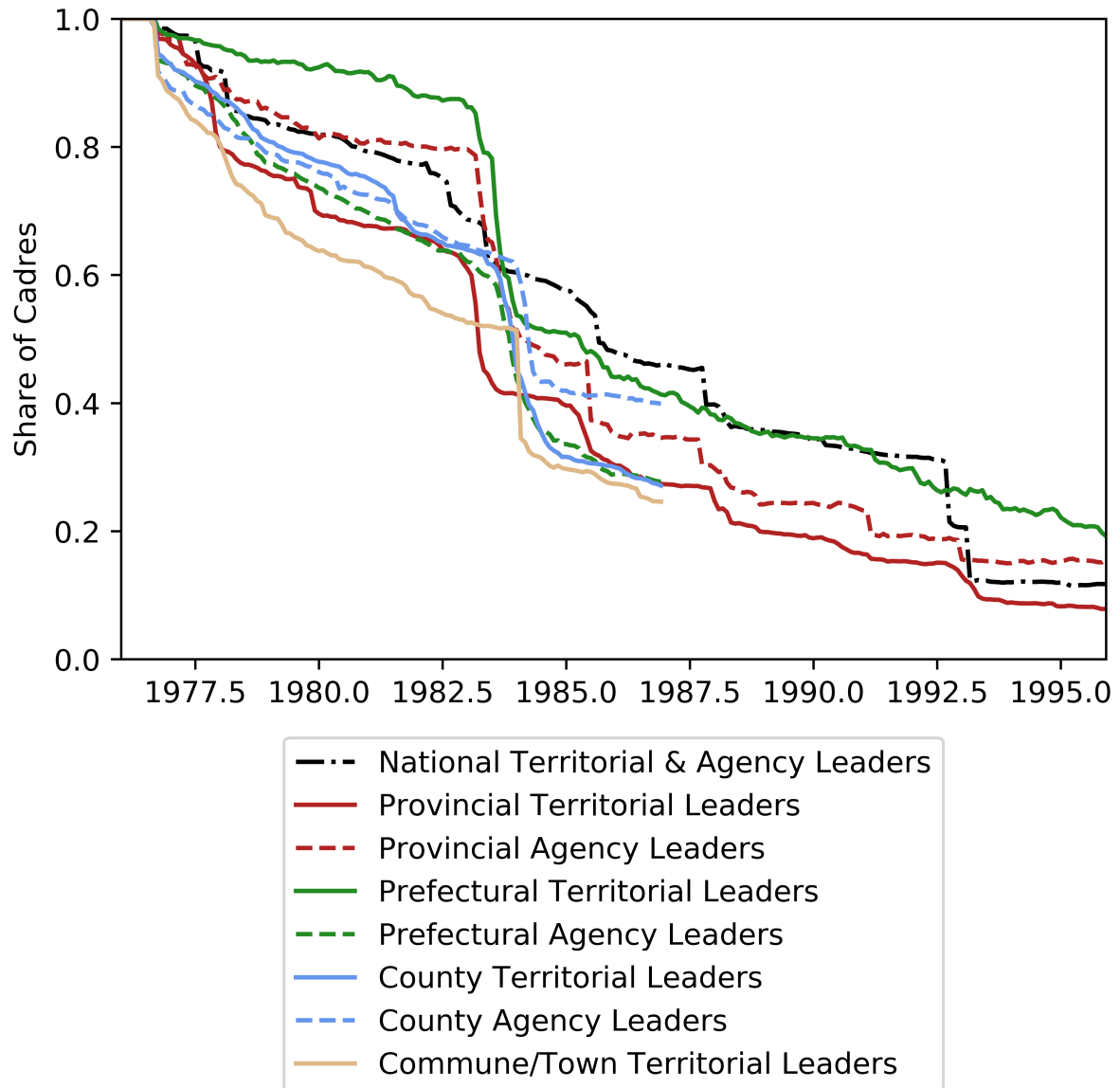
¹⁰To minimize the impact of cadres with the same name, most analyses in this paper exclude cadres whose length of tenure exceeds 55 years and whose retirement date is strictly later than 1992, the year in which the Advisory Commissions of elderly cadres disbanded. The sole exception is Figure 1, which includes all data.

There are, of course, tradeoffs between the biographical and organizational approaches to data collection. Biographical data has given us greater insight into the personal characteristics of leaders: their birth year, their hometowns, their educational backgrounds, their gender and ethnicity, and their early work experiences. The high cost of collecting such data, however, makes it very difficult to collect at a large scale; a dearth of public records makes it impossible to collect such data for low-ranking officials today or even relatively high-ranking ones in earlier years. Organizational data, such as Zhou Xueguang's and ours, gives only a comprehensive listing of officials in the organization at any given time. Such data incorporates some biographical information—it allows us to populate a truncated resume of all the jobs an official has held above a certain rank, in given jurisdictions—but lacks information about cadres' backgrounds. Hence while suitable for studies of collegial overlap (the 同事 aspect of the 同乡、同学、同事 model favored in studies of factionalism), our dataset's real advantage is for the study of the composition and evolution of bureaucratic leadership rather than the study of individual career trajectories.

2. Dethroning the Mao-Era Elite

While personnel changes in the military began in the late 1970s and tentative efforts were made to remove Cultural Revolutionaries from the civilian bureaucracy beginning in 1976, the wholesale removal of Mao-era elites from leadership positions was wrapped up in a package of campaigns and reforms, peaking from 1982 to 1984, that ushered in a new generation of leading cadres. This package of campaigns and reforms entailed the abrupt removal and replacement of Mao-era elites from leadership positions through the 1982–1984 administrative reform, followed by their gradual removal from the cadre body later in the decade through a retirement reform and a Party rectification campaign. We first discuss the removal and replacement of Mao-era elites from leadership positions through the Party's routine organizational apparatus; we then leverage this history to explain why previous scholarship has found the the retirement reform and Party rectification to

Figure 3: Share of Cadres with Leadership Experience during the Mao Era



be, respectively, so gradual and ineffectual.

2.1. Cadre Policies in Early 1980s

The coordinated replacement of local and agency leaders by the Party organizational apparatus during the administrative reforms was the primary means by which Mao-era elites exited leadership roles. Indeed, as Hong Yung Lee notes, the transformation of the bureaucracy—the replacement of revolutionary cadres with “party technocrats”—was accomplished through organizational means after the senior leadership reworked the

criteria for cadre selection,¹¹ a departure from the erstwhile prevalent strategies of purge and revolution. The result was a precipitous decline from 1982 to 1984 in Mao-era elites as a share of incumbent cadres, clearly visible in Figure 3.

The cadre policy of the 1980s had its roots in Deng Xiaoping's return to power. Beginning at the Third Plenum, his rising influence made reform the central program of the Deng era, and cadre policy was put to work in the service of reform. Deng highlighted the importance of creating a generation of leaders to ensure the implementation and success of reforms, an idea strongly supported by Chen Yun.¹² Deng initially characterized "qualified cadres" as the "young, educated, and professionalized" (年轻化、知识化、专业化) in an expansive speech on political reform delivered at the August 1980 Politburo Meeting. This speech drew strong resistance from conservative elements in the Party.¹³ By December 1980, Deng had adjusted, adding "revolutionary" (革命化) as a fourth criterion.¹⁴

As Hsi-Sheng Ch'i has argued, the senior leadership was consciously undertaking a holistic process of authoritarian succession.¹⁵ The establishment of selection criteria served a three-pronged strategy in which younger cadres would be systematically promoted, problematic cadres would be excluded from leadership, and elderly cadres would leave leadership, albeit with targeted exceptions.

Indeed, in May 1983, Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang vividly described the project as one of constructing a "third echelon:" the senior-most leaders such as Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun were the "first echelon;" while those working on the "front line" such as Hu Yaobang and Premier Zhao Ziyang belonged to the "second echelon;" the "third echelon" referred to a much larger group of qualified young cadres who would take charge of all subordinate posts. To select such a large cohort of new leaders, the Central Party Organization Department established a Young Cadres Bureau 青干局, ranking at the

¹¹ [Lee, 2018, 228-234].

¹² Deng raised the topic while inspecting Shanghai and Shandong in July 1979. At the Fifth Plenum in February 1980, Chen Yun emphasized to the newly established Central Secretariat that an important task for the Party was to "select qualified young cadres at all levels." See 《陈云文选》, vol. 3, pp.269-270.

¹³ See [Vogel, 2013, 553-557].

¹⁴ [Lee, 2018, 232-233]

¹⁵ [Chi, 1991, 44]

deputy ministerial level. The Young Cadres Bureau ultimately groomed about a thousand young leaders based upon Deng's four criteria for cadres;¹⁶ most of them—such as Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping—rose to the pinnacle of power.¹⁷ The same strategy of organizational reproduction was followed at lower ranks.

2.2. Politically Unreliable Elements: Cultural Revolutionaries

The selection of new leading cadres was challenging. The criteria set forth by Deng ruled out aging elites from the early Mao era, but a large number of the Cultural Revolution leaders were young, educated, professional, and—by Maoist standards—amply “revolutionary.” Fortunately for the new reform leadership, there were not many of these Cultural Revolutionaries left in power by 1982. As Figure 4 shows, cadres who had first entered leadership positions between the early Cultural Revolution and the 1971 Lin Biao Incident amounted to only a trifling percentage of cadres in office at the end of the Cultural Revolution. Except at the national and commune levels, these veterans of the early Cultural Revolution were at all times after the Cultural Revolution far fewer in number than cadres who had served—either as newly minted leaders or as rehabilitated old ones—during the latter part of the Cultural Revolution. However, a quite high percentage of early Cultural Revolution cadres remained in office during the late Cultural Revolution, even when they constituted a very small share of incumbent cadres.¹⁸

Immediately after the “Gang of Four” was arrested, on October 6, 1976, Marshal Ye Jianying called for a nation-wide campaign to “clean out” major followers of the “Gang of Four.”¹⁹ From 1976 to 1978, a nation wide 揭批查 campaign was carried out and nearly 30% of the first provincial party secretaries were replaced, a significant uptick in turnover

¹⁶ 阎淮, 《进出中组部》, 明镜出版社, 2017年版, 页187

¹⁷ 李锐, 启用一代新人, 《人民日报》, 1982年12月22日; 崔武年, 《我的83个月》, 香港: 高文出版社, 2003年版, 页11-12; 杨敏, 第三梯队名单建立前后, 《中国新闻周刊》, 2014年第33期. According to Li Rui, Chen Yun preferred to select “princelings” for the Third Echelon. See 李锐, 选拔第三梯队的有关回忆, 《炎黄春秋》, 2016年第1期.

¹⁸ See Figure A10. This is possible because the party-state apparatus was simplified dramatically after the 1967 power seizures, with the normally endless list of government agencies reduced to a mere handful; as a result, there were simply fewer mid-to-high-ranking leaders during the early Cultural Revolution.

¹⁹ 杨继绳, 《天地翻覆——中国文化大革命史》, 香港: 天地图书出版社, 2016年版, 页1018

from previous years.²⁰ Deng ended the 揭批查 campaign at the Third Plenum in 1978. Our data shows that this campaign dramatically reduced the share of early Cultural Revolutionary elites remaining in office at the provincial level. Below the provincial level—and even at the center—the bulk of Cultural Revolution cadres who made it to 1976 survived onward to 1980.

Even if these surviving Cultural Revolutionaries were young, educated, professional, and revolutionary, Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping were dedicated to keeping precisely these cadres out of leadership—indeed, it may have been their single biggest concern. To that end, the leadership developed a new category: the “Three Types of People” 三种人, namely rebels who seized power and committed “evil” acts, those with seriously factional mindsets, and those who had participated in Cultural Revolution violence and property damage.²¹ As early as 1980, Deng had described these cadres as a “time bomb” for the Party—the “most dangerous” people who were waiting for the right opportunity to come back to power.²² In 1981, Chen Yun underscored that the Three Types of People must “absolutely not” (绝不) be elevated to leadership positions—“not a single one.”²³ During the State Council’s administrative reforms in 1982, Zhao Ziyang hammered home the point: the Three Types of People must absolutely not be promoted, not a single one. Those already in leadership positions must be resolutely removed.”²⁴ And by the end of 1982, the Party issued a detailed announcement about “cleaning out the Three Types” from leadership positions.²⁵

Nor were Cultural Revolutionaries the only problem troubling the leadership. Emphasizing the need for the expeditious implementation of local administrative reforms in early 1983, General Secretary Hu Yaobang complained that “The resistance facing our reforms is still not small. The resistance to reform does not come from grassroots cadres,

²⁰ [Bo, 2002]

²¹ The Three Types of People evolved from the Four Types of People current in the late 1970s, which listed altogether different categories [Leese, 2020, 452].

²² 邓小平, 当在组织战线和思想战线上的迫切任务 (一九八三年十月十二日), 《邓小平文选》第三卷, 人民出版社, 1993年, 页37

²³ 成千上万地提拔中青年干部, 《陈云文选》, vol.3, p301-302

²⁴ 赵紫阳, 《关于国务院机构改革问题的报告》, 1982年3月2日, 在第五届全国人民代表大会常务委员会第二十二次会议上, 页200.

²⁵ 中发【1982】55号, 《关于清理领导班子中“三种人”问题的通知》.

but rather from some leadership cadres, from stubborn conservative forces.”²⁶ In Shanxi, Governor Wang Senhao 王森浩 clearly stated that Shanxi’s administrative reform should “absolutely prevent...those against the Third Plenum’s line entering into leadership.”²⁷

2.3. Out with the Old Cadres

The removal of these problematic cadres was wrapped up with the retirement from leadership positions of elderly cadres. This cleansing of the ranks—and their replacement with younger, more educated cadres—was accomplished through the Party organizational apparatus under the canopy of the 1982–1984 administrative reforms. In Shanxi, the evaluation and selection of cadres started in October 1982, one month after the Twelfth Party Congress was held, working downwards from the provincial level to the prefectural and county levels, including agency leadership at each level. This reform restructured most leadership teams 领导班子, making them much younger, more educated, and smaller. For example, among the 57 provincial departments and bureaus, the number of leaders decreased 41%; the average age of the new leadership teams was ten years younger, and the percentage of leaders holding college degrees rose from 14% to 46%.²⁸ Similar things happened at the prefectural level. Among the 11 prefectures, the total number of prefectural leaders decreased from 196 to 91, while college-degree-leaders jumped from 4% to 36%.²⁹ Much the same happened across the country.³⁰

Smaller, younger leadership teams necessarily meant fewer elderly leaders. New leadership teams were organized under guidelines that set upper age limits. These often alluded to flexibility in exceptional circumstances, but not always: instructions for the prefectural administrative reform in February 1983 declared that “cadres over the age limit should be retired according to the regulations.”³¹

²⁶ 胡耀邦同志在广东视察期间的谈话纪要（一九八三年二月六日至十四日） in 《中共重要历史文献资料》 汇编 第二十八辑 内部政策文件性史料专辑 第六十一分册 “中央对广东工作指示汇编”【一九八三年 — 一九八五年 · 上】（中共广东省委办公厅 · 1986年5月） pp. 13-14

²⁷ 王森浩, 《关于省人民政府机关机构改革情况的报告》, 1983年9月20日, 在山西省第六届人大常委会第三次会议上的讲话, 页21

²⁸ 卢功勋, 《回顾与思考》, 中央文献出版社, 2014年, p. 303-304.

²⁹ 卢功勋, 《回顾与思考》, 中央文献出版社, 2014年, p.305-306.

³⁰ [Lee, 2018, 255-256].

³¹ 《中共中央国务院关于地市州党政机关机构改革若干问题的通知》. See, as well, 《关于国务院机构改

Efforts to remove the elderly and the politically problematic from leadership positions resulted in a complicated pattern of personnel departures.³² An unusually high rate of departure is evident across all ranks and across all entry cohorts, but it is especially pronounced at higher levels in the administrative hierarchy. At the provincial and prefectural levels, pre-1949 revolutionary cadres had remained in office at relatively high rates before 1982; during the administrative reform they were removed from the provincial and prefectural levels, but largely allowed to remain at the center. Mao-era cadres who had entered office after the founding of the PRC but before the Cultural Revolution were rapidly removed at the central and provincial levels, but at lower rates among the top prefectural and county leaders. What early Cultural Revolution cadres remained were aggressively removed from territorial leadership roles at all ranks above the commune, although some were allowed to remain in leadership positions in the communes (now townships) and at county agencies. Those who had initially taken leadership positions only in the late Cultural Revolution, however, fared relatively well; sometimes better, indeed, than those who had taken positions immediately afterwards.

The administrative reform, then, did not target the Mao-era elite alone. Almost across the board, it resulted in cadres leaving office earlier than had been the norm in preceding years. Cadres who had entered leadership roles during the Mao era, up through the early Cultural Revolution, left office significantly faster than we would expect for cadres of their seniority and survived at a rate much lower than post-Mao cadres. At the provincial and prefectural levels, as well as among top county leaders, this resulted in the very rapid removal of almost half the stock of Mao-era elites from office.

Reform leaders at the center had tried to target particular types of cadres for removal,

革问题的报告》和《中共中央国务院关于县级党政机关机构改革若干问题的通知》。

³²Figure A9 shows the varying degree to which the personnel changes wrought by the administrative reforms were concentrated on Mao-era elites. Each line represents the share of cadres from a given entry cohort who have not yet made their final exit from leadership roles for the years 1982-1986. Because cohorts naturally age out of the cadre body, and because this natural exit process exhibits a distinctive and decidedly nonlinear pattern, we include the interquartile range for “survival” of cadres with the same number of years of service as a reference point. (We calculate this separately for revolutionary cadres and those whose careers began after 1949, due to the rapid rate at which cadres left office prior to 1949.) This allows us to differentiate the effects of the administrative reform on cadres who entered leadership roles at different stages of CCP history, without biasing the results by grouping cadres into more coarse temporal buckets.

not only the elderly but especially those associated with Cultural Revolution violence. The disproportionate removal of these categories—and indeed the almost total removal of the few remaining cadres who had so much as held office during the early Cultural Revolution—reflects the reformers’ success in reshaping the bureaucracy during the 1982–1984 reforms.

3. Putting Retirement and Rectification in Context

Only after their removal from leadership were Mao-era elites gradually retired or purged from the party. As this paper quantifies, by the time the administrative reforms had trickled down to the county level in 1984, Cultural Revolutionaries and much of the rest of the Mao-era elite had been removed from leadership. However, the literature on the Party’s efforts to deal with stubborn Cultural Revolutionaries and elderly cadres focuses on the mid-1980s, not the early 1980s. This literature misses the mark: by emphasizing the Party’s efforts to, respectively, expel and formally retire these cadres, it overlooks their removal from positions of power in the early 1980s. It is nonetheless worthwhile to briefly review the very different fates these two groups met.

Following the administrative reform at each level,³³ the Party launched a rectification campaign. Formally begun in October 1983,³⁴ its central task was to “purify the organization.” According to Bo Yibo 薄一波, leader of the Party Rectification campaign, the key was to “clean out” the “Three Types of People.”³⁵ The campaign culminated in the formal exclusion of a small handful of people from the Party in 1987.³⁶

Researchers in the 1980s sought to understand why an initially energetic rectification campaign that at one point sought to totally “negate the Cultural Revolution” appears to have been set aside unfinished. Keith Forster attributes the most vigorous peaks of the rectification campaign’s attacks on the Cultural Revolution to the refusal of some cadres

³³In two exceptional counties in our dataset (Ruicheng and Yongji), Party rectification occurred concurrently with the administrative reform on an experimental basis.

³⁴See 《中共中央关于整党的决定》.

³⁵薄一波, 《整党是关系我们党的兴衰大事》, October 16, 1983, p.6; 薄一波, 《关于整党联络小组的工作》, December 17, 1983, pp.10-12.

³⁶ [Leese, 2020, 458-470].

to accept that *all* Cultural Revolution factions, and not only rebel factions, were wrong.³⁷ Lowell Dittmer then argues that such attacks on factionalism proved too much of a Pandora's box, motivating the party leadership to set the issue aside altogether.³⁸ Looking at rectification in the military, Iain Johnston suggests that the dearth of explicit party expulsions during the rectification campaign covers for the selective demobilization of units in which major problems were uncovered during rectification.³⁹

Our data suggests that very few cadres who had held leadership positions during the Cultural Revolution remained in any leadership capacity in 1982, let alone after the administrative reforms, which explicitly demanded the exclusion of Cultural Revolution troublemakers and anti-reformers from leadership positions. Indeed, personnel turnover in the military was especially early and thoroughgoing. From this perspective, the rectification campaign looks less like an abortive purge and more like the mopping-up operation of a victorious reform faction. Indeed, central leaders such as Chen Yun and Bo Yibo had repeatedly related the administrative reform to the cleaning out of the Three Types, an effort to ensure that the newly selected leaderships at all levels would not be infiltrated by any of the Three Types.⁴⁰ As Secretary of the Party Secretariat Hu Qili told the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee, "The 'Three Types of People' are very dangerous, but there won't be many of them. Especially after the administrative reform and the restructuring of the leadership teams, the provincial Party committee should be aware of how many of these types are at the provincial, municipal, and prefectural committees and above."⁴¹ The leaders clearly saw this round of Party rectification as a mopping up campaign.

Research into the retirement reforms of the 1980s has focused on the role of social

³⁷ [Forster, 1986] See also Li Rui's speech at the departmental/bureau level cadre meeting in Hunan in May 1983. 李锐, 《清除'左'的影响和克服派性》, 1983年5月21日, 《李锐文集——起用一代新人》, 香港: 香港社会科学教育出版有限公司, 2009年第1版, 页41-43

³⁸ [Dittmer, 1991, 35]

³⁹ [Johnston, 1987]

⁴⁰ See Chen Yun's speech at the Central Work Conference in June 1983 and at the Second Plenum of the 12th Party Congress in October 1983; Bo Yibo's several speeches at various venues in December 1983, February 1984, May 1984, July 1984, December 1984, and so forth.

⁴¹ 胡启立同志在广东省常委会议上的讲话(一九八四年一月十一日) in 《中共重要历史文献资料》汇编 第二十八辑 内部政策文件性史料专辑 第六十一分册 "中央对广东工作指示汇编"【一九八三年 一九八五年·上】(中共广东省委办公厅·1986年5月) pg. 95

enforcement. Melanie Manion’s work on cadre retirement wrestles most explicitly with policies to push out a broad cross-section of Mao-era cadres.⁴² She contends that the Party center constructed a norm of retirement by leaning progressively more heavily on elderly cadres to retire, turning to automatic (mandatory) retirement in 1988 only after compliance was already very high. While Manion’s formulation of norm building is by no means voluntaristic, placing substantial emphasis on the role of social enforcement, it characterizes the Party as initially creating incentives for social enforcement rather than directly mandating retirement or enforcing it through its power to appoint officials. Our paper provides a context for understanding why the Party would rely on norms. We show that Mao-era cadres were replaced in leadership positions *en masse*, sometimes in the face of binding age restrictions on leadership positions. The retirement of Mao-era cadres from leadership positions, then, appears to have been accomplished by the handiwork of the Party organizational apparatus. This, in turn, led to many outright retirements: in the first five months of the provincial administrative reforms, the number of retirements were twice those *in the preceding five years*.⁴³ While others may have remained employed as cadres for several more years, the Party leadership generally declined to appoint them to leadership roles.

4. Purging the Military, Early and Often

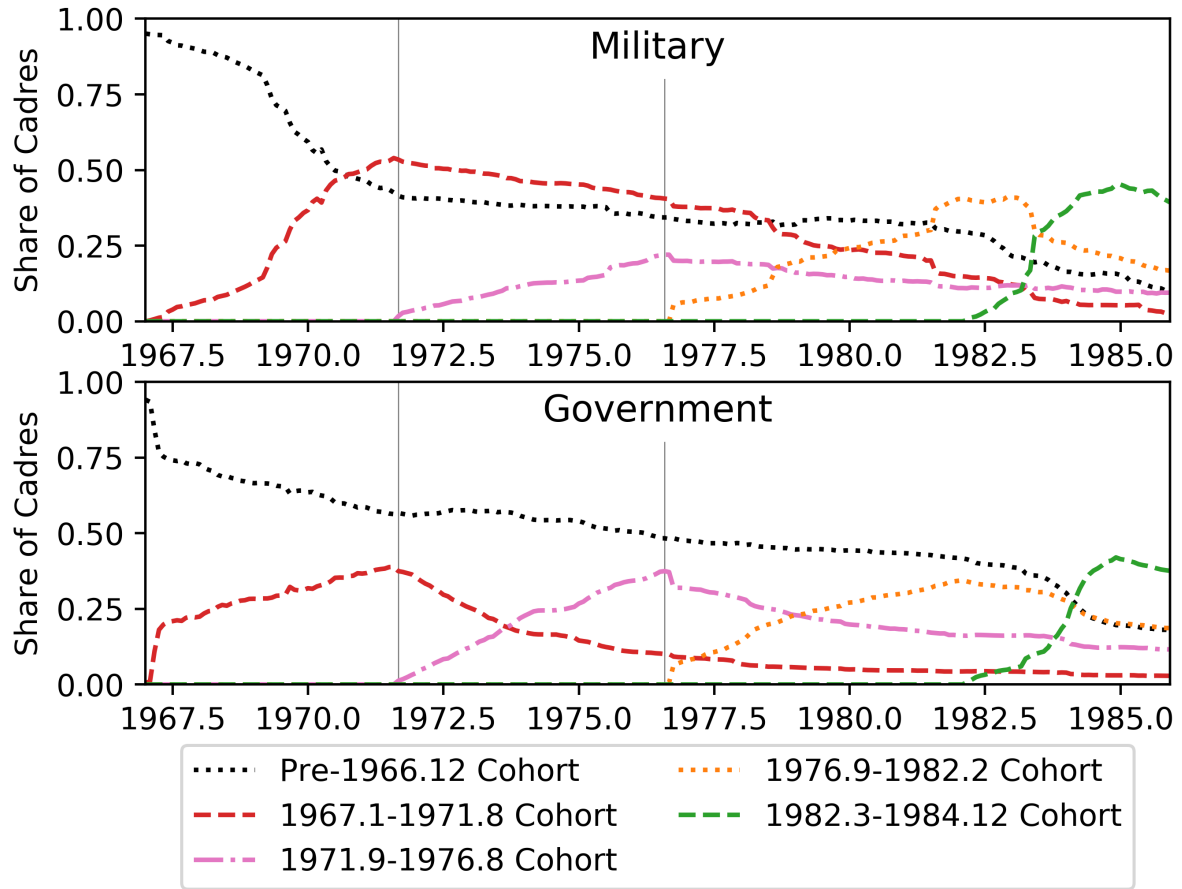
While the removal of civilian Mao-era elites was most pronounced during the 1982–1984 administrative reforms, a complete understanding of their removal requires consideration of the several military purges and personnel reshuffles that predated the changes in civilian leadership. While the ascent of Lin Biao’s supporters and the military takeover of local governments has received attention in studies of the early Cultural Revolution, and scholars have looked in detail at the downsizing of the military in the mid-1980s, little attention has been paid to the shifts in military personnel that occurred in between. Those

⁴² [Manion, 1993]

⁴³ Data for nine provincial-level units, see 《九省市老干部工作座谈会纪要（一九八三年四月九日）》. Manion attributes this uptick in retirements in 1983 to early retirements that were discouraged under the retirement policy [Manion, 1993, 81-83].

Figure 4: Share of Military and Government Leaders by Cohort (1967-1986)

The first gray line marks the Lin Biao Incident (September 1971). The second gray line marks the death of Mao Zedong (September 1976).



changes in military personnel mark a pattern that continued into the early 1990s: military leadership experienced significant turnover more often than civilian leadership, and each major change in civilian leadership followed a major change in military leadership.

The frequency and extensiveness of these shifts in military personnel can be seen clearly in the first panel of Figure 4. The first of these military personnel shifts occurred in 1969, as Lin Biao prepared to succeed Mao Zedong. While a significant share of pre-Cultural Revolution military leaders at the center and in the military regions were replaced during Lin Biao's ascendancy, this entirely new cohort of military officers came to dominate the local military leadership at the provincial level and below (see Figure A7). At these lower levels, almost one-third of military leaders were concurrently holding government posts in the month before Lin Biao's death in September 1971. As Figure A6 shows, they were quickly pushed back into the barracks, but these same military officers remained the

predominant “faction” in the local military leadership until well after the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress in December 1978.

Indeed, Deng’s effort to reshape the army during his brief return to power in 1975⁴⁴ appears to have had little impact. It was not until just before the start of the Sino-Vietnamese War that a significant cohort of post-Cultural Revolution military officers entered leadership, and then only at the prefectural level and below; this cohort did not constitute a majority of local military leaders until 1981, when major personnel changes were implemented at local military outposts on the eve of the administrative reforms. These officers, in turn, were quickly swapped out for yet another set of military leaders during the administrative reforms.

Local military leadership was characterized by a more tumultuous series of large-scale personnel transformations than local government leadership, where pre-Cultural Revolution recruits remained a major force right up until the 1982–1984 administrative reforms (see Figure A8). Most importantly for our understanding of the fate of Mao-era cadres, military leaders who had taken office during the Mao era remained a majority in the localities until only 1981 (early 1983 at the provincial level). Government leadership, on the other hand, was dominated by Mao-era officials until more than two years later at each level of the administrative hierarchy above the commune.

5. Conclusion

Although few early Cultural Revolutionaries were in leadership roles by the early 1980s, the overwhelming majority of local leaders and senior bureaucrats were Mao-era elites. The administrative reform of 1982–1984 changed this, removing Mao-era elites *en masse* from all levels of government, clearing the way for economic reforms that leaned heavily on the mobilization of local cadres. This administrative reform—much more far reaching than its humble name suggests—has been treated in studies of how new, younger recruits made their way into the bureaucracy, but has been largely absent from research into how

⁴⁴ [Vogel, 2013, 97-103]

Mao-era elites were removed from power. Instead, scholars have tended to focus on the more gradual retirement reforms and Party rectification campaign to explain the removal of Mao-era elites. Our findings show that these later efforts to manage Mao-era elites followed the 1982–1984 administrative reform, which had removed a large number of cadres from leadership positions. Crucially, it was the removal of Mao-era elites—at the local level in 1982–1984 and at center in 1992–1993—that constituted the single largest removal of cadres from leadership positions in the history of the PRC.

In addition to shedding new light on our understanding of China’s elite transformation in the 1980s, our *Organizational History* data provides an important new evidentiary foundation for expanding the research agenda for Chinese elite politics, party history, and major political events. Early studies of leadership politics centered on top leaders of the CCP and the power dynamics among those top leaders, debating, for example, between an “all-powerful” top leadership model⁴⁵ and an “embattled” model for top leadership politics.⁴⁶ More recent work has fed into a protracted debate over the relative importance of factionalism and performance in the promotion of provincial and sub-provincial territorial leaders. The inclusion of agency leaders in the *Organizational History* data allows us to expand the scope of elite politics studies yet further, to include sectoral as well as territorial leaders. The broad time period covered by the data, moreover, permits the investigation of organizational stability in the face of China’s frequent—and sometimes intense—political campaigns. Indeed, the data invites us to compare the relative importance of patterns of organizational behavior and the particularistic and factional decision-making so widely studied in the existing literature on elite politics.

⁴⁵ [Teiwes, 1990, Gao, 2000]

⁴⁶ [MacFarquhar, 1974]

A. Appendix

Figure 5: Sample Selection from *Organizational History Book*

(四十七)中国人民建设银行夏县支行(1981.8~1987.10)

行	长	(未任)	
副	行	长	周管银 (1981.8~1984.7)
			卢恩福 (1984.7~1987.10)
调	研	员	周管银 (1984.8.5~1987.10)

(四十八)中国人民保险公司夏县支公司(1984.10~1987.10)

1984年10月31日,中国人民保险公司夏县支公司成立,属中国人民保险公司运城地区分公司领导。

经	理	(未任)	
副	经	理	张运生 (1984.10.31~1987.10)
			杜雪晶 (女,1984.10.31~1987.10)

Figure 6: Military-Government Overlap and the September 1971 Lin Biao Incident

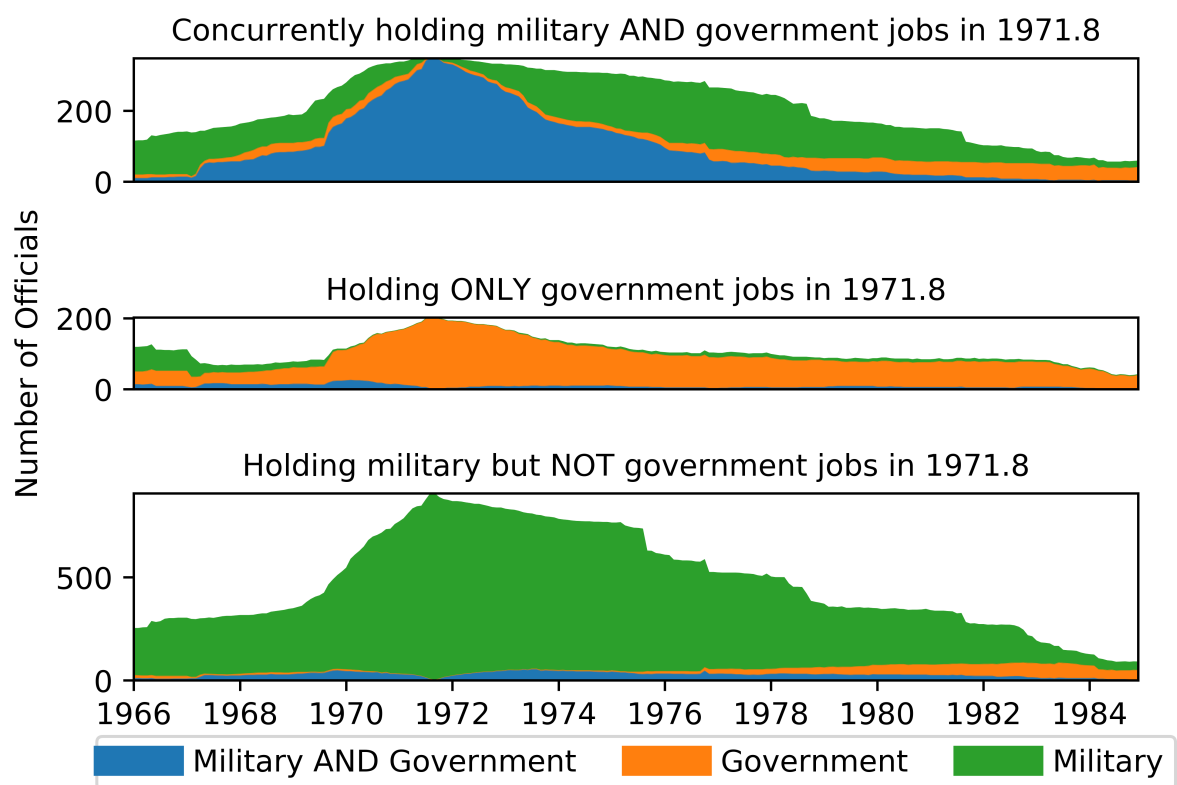
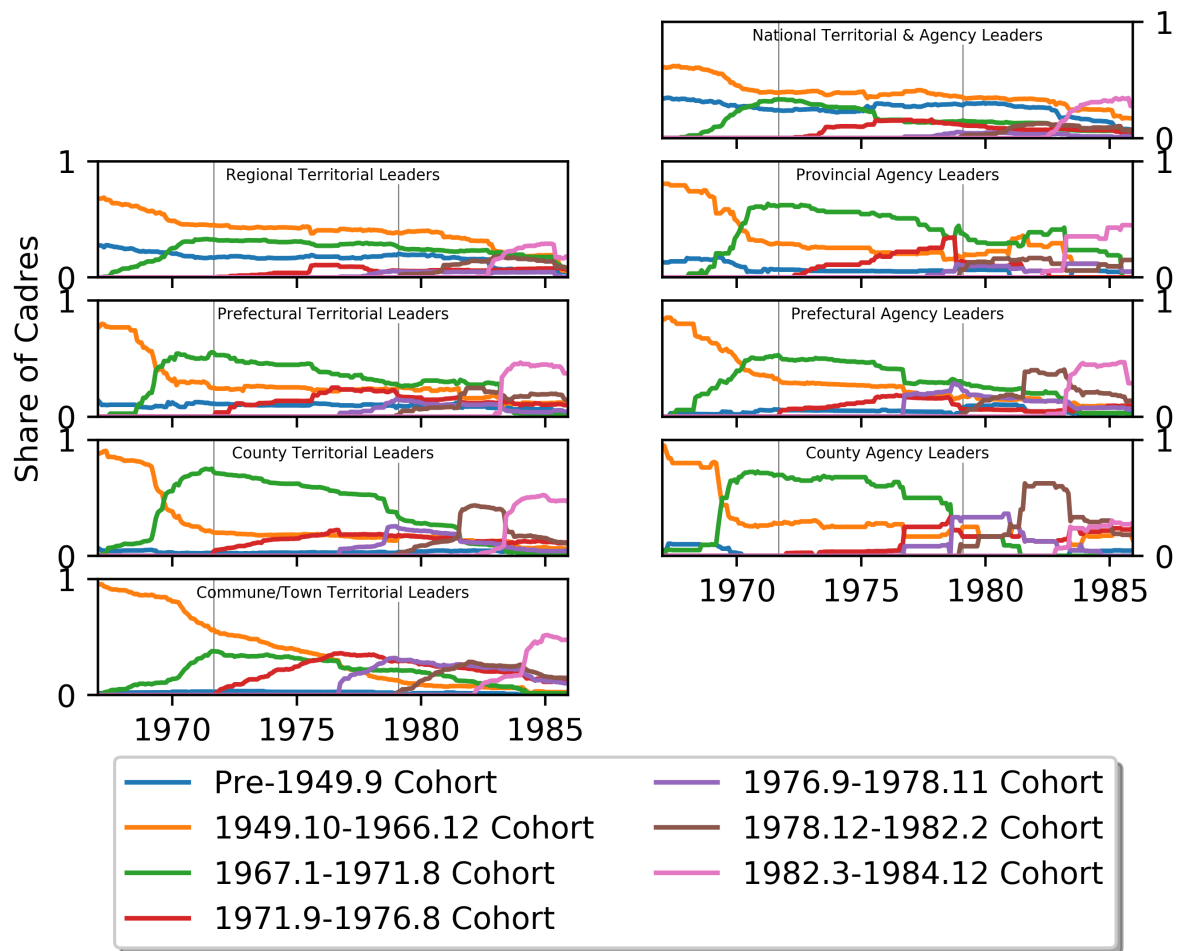
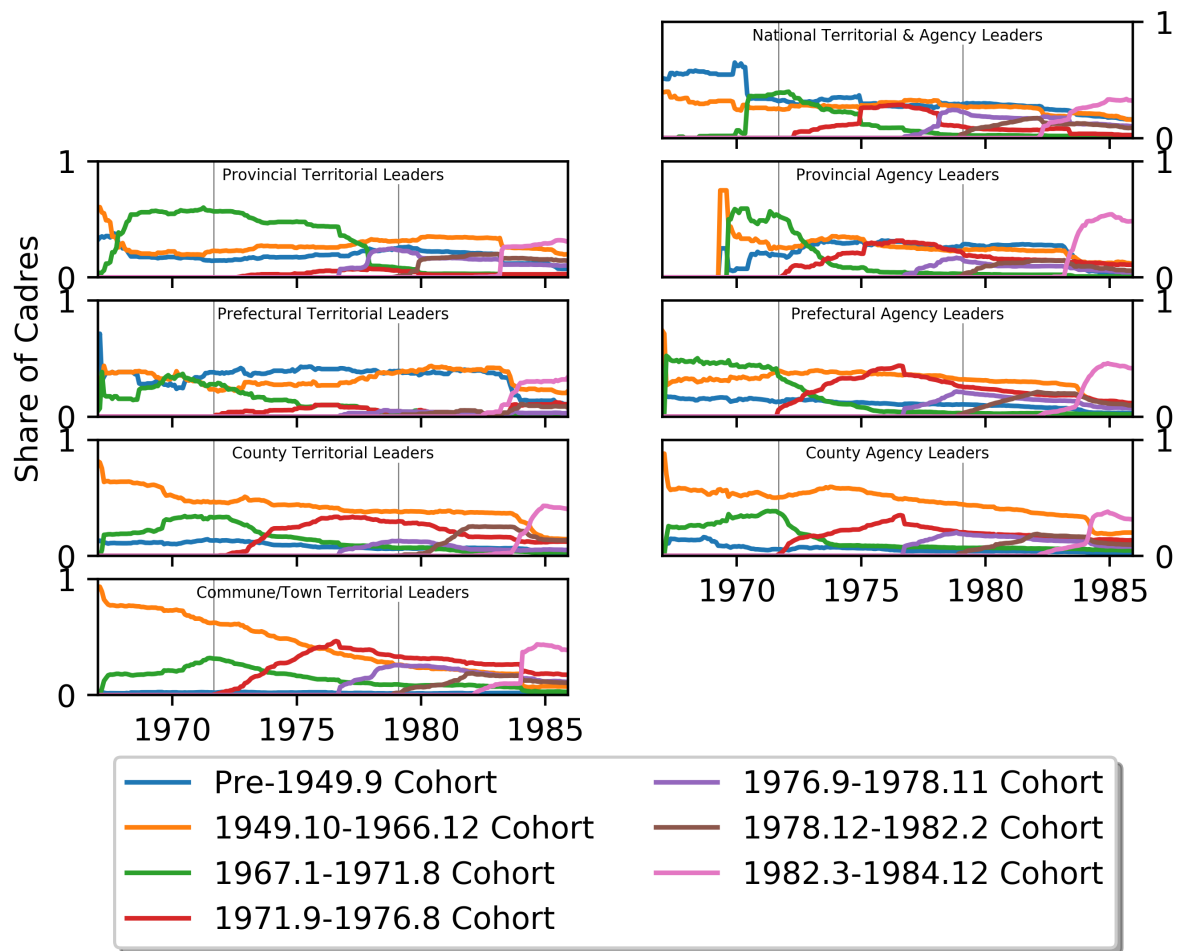


Figure 7: Share of Military Leaders by Cohort (1967-1986)



The first gray line marks the Lin Biao Incident (September 1971). The second gray line marks the Sino-Vietnamese War (February 1979).

Figure 8: Share of Government Leaders by Cohort (1967-1986)



The first gray line marks the Lin Biao Incident (September 1971). The second gray line marks the Sino-Vietnamese War (February 1979).

Figure 9: Share of Cadres with Present or Future Leadership Roles, by Year of Entry

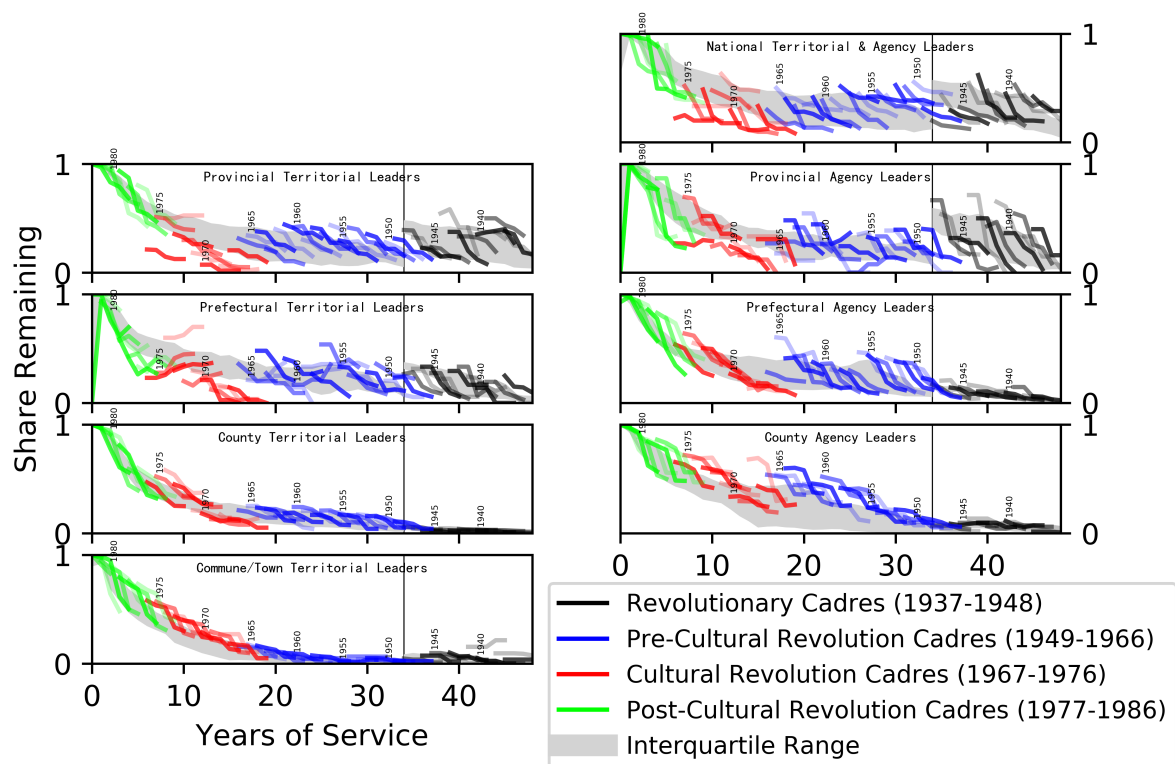
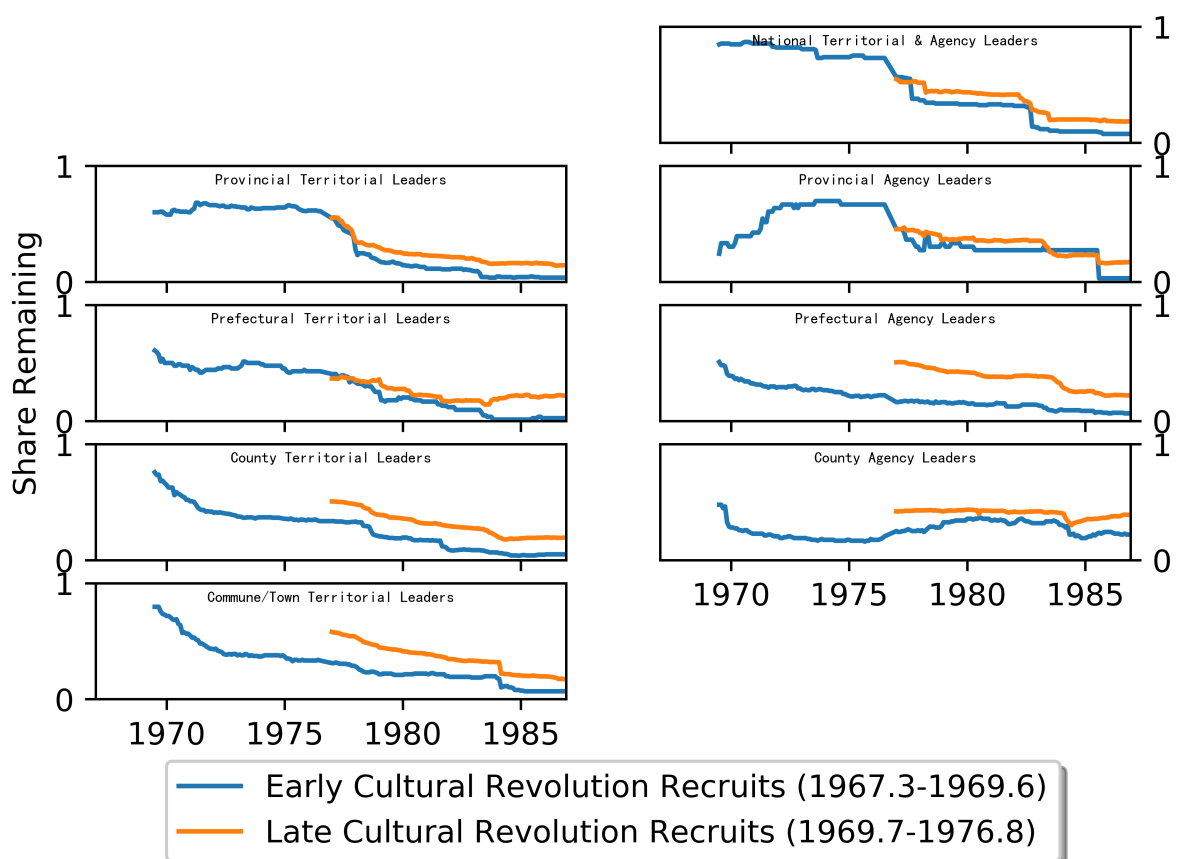


Figure 10: Share of Cultural Revolution Cadres Remaining in Leadership



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