

Public Nomination and Direct Election in China

An Adaptive Mechanism for Party Recruitment and Regime Perpetuation

ABSTRACT

This research takes the case of Public Nomination and Direct Election, currently being rolled out in the People's Republic of China, to explain the function of elections in China. We believe that the goal of implementing this election system is to increase the governing ability of the Chinese Communist Party, thus sustaining the survival of the party-state system.

KEYWORDS: PNDE, two-round election system, CCP Central Committee member, Party supervision of cadres, adaptation

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, numerous new regulations have emerged in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) political operations. Many scholars believe that this demonstrates the institutionalization of the CCP's political system.¹ A notable example of such regulations is the mechanisms for recruiting political elites. For instance, many new mechanisms were put in place during the selection of CCP Central Committee members (Zhonggong zhongyang weiyuan) at the Seventeenth National Congress of the CCP in 2007. Essentially,

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1. Frederik C. Teiwes, "Normal Politics with Chinese Characteristics," in *The Nature of Chinese Politics: From Mao to Jiang*, ed. Jonathan Unger (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), pp. 239–59.

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the PRC used an election method to carry out the selection of the Party political elite. But what role does such an election system play in the CCP's political system as a whole? Furthermore, what differences are there between the CCP's method and concepts of elections in Western countries? This research will seek to address these questions.

The significance that elections can have in terms of regime change is huge. Related literature focuses on levels of participation and competition to determine whether an election is truly functional in fairly determining elected officials or representatives.² In non-democratic countries, although elections may occur, they are often regarded as "limited elections," in which the ruling party employs certain methods to restrict competition or participation in order to ensure continued power.³ There are even some single-candidate elections, the purpose of which is simply an attempt to establish the legitimacy of rule.⁴ Related literature agrees on the same fundamental assumption: the purpose of elections should be to facilitate regime change. Non-democratic elections are, by this definition, meaningless.

However, our research posits that the CCP's definition of elections is intrinsically different from that of the West. From the perspective of Chinese culture, the term *xuanju* (translated as "elections") has historically referred more closely to "selection" than "election,"⁵ and this is now reflected in the CCP's system reform.⁶ The CCP hopes that the masses will convey their opinion,⁷ including which cadre is the most suitable for a post. However, the

2. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 4–6.

3. Larry Diamond and Ramon H. Myers, "Introduction: Elections and Democracy in Greater China," in *Elections and Democracy in Greater China*, eds. Larry Diamond and Ramon H. Myers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 5–6.

4. Paul Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes: Theory, Government, and Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 106.

5. Although Western-style elections are translated into Chinese as *xuanju*, from the perspective of historical Chinese culture the term refers more accurately to selection, and does not include allusions to the election of officials by the public. *Xuanju* is a shortened form of *xuan xian ju neng*, which can be translated as "select the worthy and choose the capable." This refers to the government recruiting officials known for morals and ability through a process of selection.

6. See Melanie Manion, "The Electoral Connection in the Chinese Countryside," *American Political Science Review* 90:4 (December 1996), pp. 737–38; idem, "Chinese Democratization in Perspective: Electorates and Selectorates at the Township Level," *China Quarterly* 163 (September 2000), pp. 764–82.

7. The term *qunzhong* can be translated as "the masses." However, in this election system, the use of "the masses" is perhaps misleading. Our understanding is that in this context it refers to relevant Party and government cadres. Thus, for the purposes of this research and to reflect the original ambiguity of the term, *qunzhong*—however few in number—will be hereafter referred to as "the masses."

use of such public opinion will be limited to providing a type of reference for the government when cadres are recruited.

He Baogang and Stig Thøgersen use the term “consultative authoritarianism” to refer to this manner of using public opinion to help the ruling system. They believe that soliciting public opinion can be helpful to the CCP regime without weakening party rule.⁸ To avoid selection of poor quality cadres, the upper echelons of the Party can better comprehend the abilities, integrity, and reputation of each candidate by consulting the results of election by the masses before making selection decisions. That is to say, in the CCP system, elections are simply a form of accumulating information, which can be presented to the upper levels of the Party for consideration when recruiting and replacing cadres.

This research will discuss this point in more depth by referring to the CCP’s mechanism of Public Nomination and Direct Election (PNDE, Gongtui Zhixuan) to explain the function of elections within the CCP’s political system. PNDE is perhaps the CCP’s most important election system to date. The current literature tends to discuss the regional level of the PNDE operations with particular reference to the selection of many township party secretaries.⁹ However, this research will instead discuss the use of PNDE at the central level. Although PNDE may be referred to differently at the central or regional level,¹⁰ the operational logic of the system remains the same.

We consider PNDE to be a two-round election system designed to choose candidates. Public Nomination is the first round, and Direct Election, the second. Both the regional and central levels employ this two-round system. The Party authorities first generate a name list of potential candidates, normally three times the number to finally be elected, which is reduced through two rounds of voting by the “masses.” Those candidates still remaining after the two rounds tend to be cadres of a higher ability or greater integrity. The Party will make the final selection from this list. Aside from enabling the maintenance of the principle of Party supervision of cadres, this system

8. Baogang He and Stig Thøgersen, “Giving the People a Voice? Experiments with Consultative Authoritarian Institutions in China,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 19:66 (September 2010), p. 676.

9. Tony Saich and Xuedong Yang, “Innovation in China’s Local Governance: ‘Open Recommendation and Selection,’” *Pacific Affairs* 76:2 (Summer 2003), pp. 185–208; Baogang He, *Rural Democracy in China: The Role of Village Elections* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 202–03.

10. For example, “Public Nomination” (Gongtui) broadly refers to nomination of basic-level cadres, but nomination at higher levels is called “Democratic Nomination” (Minzhu Tuijian). However, the basic meaning of the two terms is the same. In addition, PNDE is referred to by different names in different places. For example, some regions refer to the system as the three-ballot system (*san piao zhi*).

allows the CCP to appoint the most outstanding cadres to important posts, thus strengthening the regime's rule. The purpose behind the creation of the PNDE method is to sustain the perpetuity of the CCP's governing system: it is an adaptive mechanism designed to safeguard the CCP regime.

Because the CCP's political terminology is characteristically vague and ambiguous, this research will first provide a clear conceptual definition of PNDE for purposes of clarification. Secondly, through examination of the election process at the Seventeenth National Congress of the CCP, the procedural implementation of the PNDE mechanism will be discussed.¹¹ Finally, this research will debate the advantages and disadvantages of PNDE and the significance of the mechanism for the CCP regime.

HISTORY AND CONCEPT

The CCP's system for appointing cadres has evolved: nowadays, PNDE and selection by the Party have become the two major elements of the recruitment system. This study will look back over the historical development of the CCP recruitment system and clarify important related concepts.

Historical Perspective on the CCP's Recruitment System

At different points in time, the CCP has treated the appointment of cadres in different ways. Before the establishment of government in 1949, it was necessary to strengthen the efficiency and ability of the Party organization. As a result, the Party often nominated one candidate for each post and allowed the masses to symbolically vote in agreement. The first trace of competition between elites for the most important positions came around 1953. At this time, Vice Chairman of the Central Government Council Gao Gang attempted to lobby Party elites in the hope of contesting Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai's spots as party vice president and prime minister, respectively. But Mao Zedong did not approve of Gao Gang's methods, and once Gao had his position stripped, nobody dared attempt any kind of competition again.¹²

11. Central Committee membership has been chosen for case study because PNDE, to decide its membership, has been in place for many years and, to a certain extent, has already become institutionalized. Strictly speaking, the PRC has attempted to implement PNDE for Central Committee membership since the Thirteenth National Congress. However, PNDE for Politburo membership was only formally begun as a pilot program at the Seventeenth National Congress.

12. Author interview of Party School scholar, Tianjin, July 12, 2011.

After the political regime was stabilized, the first attempt to use competitive elections to select Central Committee candidates appeared at the CCP's Eighth National Congress in 1956. Under the direction of the two vice premiers, Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping, the CCP designed a form of "pre-selection" (*yu xuan*), which can be considered the predecessor of PNDE. This involved each region's delegation members (the masses) generating the name list of candidates and submitting it to the Politburo, which then decided upon the formal name list of 170 cadres for selection.¹³ This mechanism of pre-selection much resembles today's Public Nomination. However, at the Eighth National Congress there was nothing equivalent to Direct Election: the masses were limited to casting votes of approval for the 170 chosen candidates.

This pre-selection system had no opportunity to develop further and ended with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. After 1956, the CCP had begun to move toward consolidating absolute power, and all competitive election mechanisms were halted. The push for new election reforms only began after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. According to one scholar at the Party School, Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang implemented competitive elections to choose the Party committee members of the Central Party School in 1977. This involved the Party first putting forward a name list of potential candidates, followed by elections by all the School's Party members.¹⁴

Electoral system reforms were subsequently extended to a higher level. During the election of Central Committee members at the Thirteenth National Congress in 1987, aside from imitating the system of the Eighth National Congress—akin to Public Nomination—the CCP also introduced a form of Direct Election, in which the masses were allowed to carry out an election based on a formal candidate list. The mechanism used at the Thirteenth National Congress became the prototype for CCP cadre recruitment today.

Interpretation of "PNDE": A Two-Round Candidate Election System

From the historical development of election reform, it can be seen that on the one hand, the CCP aims to maintain full control over cadre recruitment, but on the other hand, it hopes that the best cadres can be appointed. This intertwining logic has led to the creation of a new method of recruitment in the CCP. He Baogang believes that the CCP recruitment system intends to

13. Shi Zhongquan, *Zhonggong Da Shi Shi* [The history of the CCP's Eighth National Congress] (Beijing: Renmin Press, 1998), pp. 120–32, 342–45.

14. Author interview of Party School scholar, Tianjin, July 10, 2011.

mix the two procedures of election and selection,¹⁵ the former to bestow the right of free nomination of candidates on the masses, the latter to guarantee the Party's power over the appointment of cadres.

PNDE embodies just such a system, and can be referred to as a "two-round candidate election system." In practice, under Public Nomination, the masses make nominations based on a list of candidates drafted by the Party.¹⁶ Those candidates receiving the highest number of nominations are put forward to the next stage of competitive election. As this effectively involves counting votes, it can be considered a form of election. Direct Election, in which the masses implement elections based on the candidate name list, is, of course, a form of election too. The CCP gradually reduces the candidate name list based on the results of two rounds of voting by the masses. Finally, the Party makes the ultimate selections from among the names on the list. This power is vested in the Party alone, and the so-called masses are no longer involved.¹⁷ The CCP is therefore implementing cadre recruitment reforms while retaining the notion of elite selection. PNDE—a two-round election by the masses—is merely a complementary initiative to allow the Party to select the highest quality candidates. The process of CCP recruitment can be divided into six stages, as seen in Figure 1 below.

Two key aspects of the PNDE process must be clarified. First, which posts are open to election? Western discussions of public election invariably refer to the direct election of government officials by citizens. However, a key distinction of Western elections is that the mechanism of PNDE only features at the stage of choosing candidates.

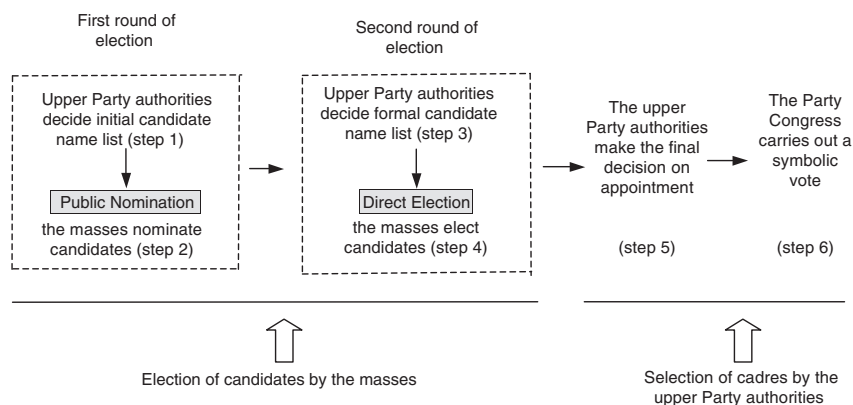
The second issue, perhaps even more important, is concerned with who carries out the election. This touches on the exact definition of "the masses." In the actual execution of this process, although it appears that the CCP has

15. He, *Rural Democracy in China*, p. 212.

16. The Party often restricts candidate qualifications in principle only. For example, in the 2003 election for the city mayors of Nanjing and Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province's Organization Department set three main restrictions on the candidates: they must be university graduates, less than 45 years old, and have previous work experience at the bureau director or vice director level. Shi Weimin, "Jiangsu sheng Nanjing shi, Xuzhou shi 'gong xuan' xianji guojia jiguan lingdao ren yuan diaocha baogao" [Investigative report of national organization leadership at the county level in Nanjing and Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province], in *Zhongguo jiceng minzhu zhengzhi jianshe fazhan baogao* [Report into the development of basic-level democratic political construction in China], ed. Bai Gang (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2008), pp. 300–01.

17. For a related discussion, see Saich and Yang, "Innovation in China's Local Governance," pp. 198–200.

FIGURE 1. CCP Cadre Recruitment Procedure



SOURCE: By authors.

drastically enhanced standards of political participation, it is in fact only cadres who make up the so-called masses and are able to put forward names and vote. According to the twelfth Article of the “Regulations for Selection and Appointment of Party Cadre Leadership” (*Dangzheng lingdao ganbu xuanbarenyong gongzuo tiaoli*), those who may participate in this democratic nomination are limited to the same level or lower-level serving Party cadres.¹⁸

In 2004, a journalist posed the following important question to Jiang Xianji, deputy director of the Organization Department of the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee: “The right to nomination is given to the masses, but who exactly are the masses? How do the ordinary people gain and exercise the right to nominate?” Jiang responded, “The term ‘the masses’ refers to the direct participants in the process of democratic nomination as outlined in the ‘Regulations for Selection and Appointment of Party Cadre Leadership.’ In carrying out this procedure, we are making the next step in development and expansion.”¹⁹

18. “Dangzheng lingdao ganbu xuanbarenyong gongzuo tiaoli” [Regulations for selection and appointment of the party cadre leadership], in *Ganbu renshi zhidu gaige zhengce fagui wenjian xuanbian* [Selected cadre personnel system policy reform statute documents], ed. Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu yanjiu shi [PRC Central Organization Department Research Office] (Beijing: Dangjian Readers Press, 2007), p. 46.

19. “Jiang ‘qunzhong gongren’ yuanze luodao shichu yu shengwei zuzhibu fubuzhang Jiang Xianji duihua ganbu xuanba zhidu gaige” [Applying the principle of mass acknowledgement to reality—discussion of cadre selection system reform with Provincial Committee Organization Department Chairman Jiang Xianji], *Sichuan Daily*, August 13, 2004, issue 6.

In actual fact, this election system is simply a mechanism of cadres choosing cadres. The use of the term “masses” to refer to the participants in the democratic nominations presumably stems from the historically established vocabulary of the CCP, in which the concept of “mass line” (*qunzhong luxian*) has special connotations. The CCP proclaims itself to be a proletarian political party and that by following the “mass line,” its source of political power is legitimized and consolidated. But the ambiguity of this term also causes misunderstandings for outsiders. It must be emphasized that if the term “the masses” is taken to mean the ordinary people, this is a grave misconception.

In this circumstance, only the cadres (or Party members) have the status of masses. Therefore, it is clear that this revolutionary election system in the PRC does not constitute deference to pluralized public opinion but instead increases the support of the so-called masses for the Party, thus enhancing the legitimacy of its rule.²⁰ The actual scope of the masses must be strictly managed and controlled. When compared with the Western political system of granting extensive rights of election to all citizens, which creates a mechanism for pluralized public determination, the PRC election system is fundamentally different.

PNDE by the masses and selection by the Party make up the two core parts of the recruitment system in China. This kind of system—nomination by the masses—allows the Party to possess sufficient information when making a decision on cadre selection. This helps ensure that the candidates with the apparent best integrity and ability come to the forefront. The revolutionary aspect of the method is merely that it grants the masses the “right of suggestion.” However, it does not offer them the “right of appointment” to decide cadre recruitment. The following section will draw on the example of the Seventeenth National Congress of the CCP to explain the procedure and the advantages and disadvantages of the PNDE mechanism.

THE FIRST ROUND OF ELECTIONS: PUBLIC NOMINATION

A few key points can be deduced from analysis of Public Nomination for CCP Central Committee membership. First, the operation of Public Nomination is the responsibility of President Hu Jintao and the Politburo. Second,

20. Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, “Accommodating ‘Democracy’ in a One-Party State: Introducing Village Elections in China,” in Diamond and Myers, eds., *Elections and Democracy in Greater China*, p. 124.

it is the Politburo that determines the initial name list upon which Public Nomination is based. Third, in order to better understand the perceived integrity and ability of the potential cadres on the initial name list, the Central Committee assigns investigative teams to interview the masses.²¹ The latter additionally fill in a “Cadre Leadership Public Opinion Questionnaire” that assigns approval points to the potential candidates. Fourth, the investigative teams convey the points-ranked results to the Politburo, which refers to this information when settling on the official preliminary candidate name list. Finally, because the Questionnaire process involves accumulating points and also takes into consideration the collective opinion of the masses, it can be characterized as a round of elections.

As noted, Public Nomination for Central Committee membership is coordinated by Hu Jintao and the leaders of the Politburo. Since Deng Xiaoping’s era, selection has been carried out only by the highest leadership. At the Thirteenth National Congress of the CCP, selection was planned by Deputy Director of the Central Advisory Commission Bo Yibo, but he reported to the Politburo Standing Committee to gain Deng’s authorization.²² Command over the process of selection at the Seventeenth National Congress was firmly in Hu Jintao’s hands. Hu began implementing the selection process while convening a Politburo meeting in June 2006.²³ The first task was to determine the initial name list to be contested in the round of Public Nomination.

After the initial name list has been decided, the investigative teams further probe the situations of those on the name list via information supplied by the masses.²⁴ Official records report, “The Central Committee first assigned close to 100 ministerial and provincial cadres to the role of investigative team directors, then transferred roughly 1,000 cadres to work in the investigative

21. The masses number roughly 35,000 people, including cadres working at a provincial and ministerial level as well as in the military and in state-owned enterprises.

22. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi [Party Literature Research Office of CCP’s Central Committee], *Deng Xiaoping nianpu: 1975–1997 (xia)* [Chronological record of Deng Xiaoping: 1975–1997 (vol. 2)] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Press, 2004), p. 1173.

23. Xin yi jie zhonggong zhongyang weiyuanhui he zhonggong zhongyang jilu jiancha weiyuanhui dansheng ji [Record of the founding of a New Central Committee and PRC Central Regulatory Investigation Committee] (October 21, 2007), Xinhua Net, <http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-10/21/content_6918611.htm>.

24. During the process of “Public Nomination” for Central Committee membership at the Seventeenth National Congress, the number of masses participating was dramatically increased. They included cadres such as those from the provincial level, national central departments, and central economic organizations, as well as central industry and the military in Beijing. See *ibid.*

teams.”²⁵ However, the provincial cadres assigned as team directors retain other extensive working responsibilities and may not be able to devote much time to investigative work. Analyses of the selection process during the Thirteenth National Congress reveal that team directors frequently assigned specific investigative tasks to their personal secretaries.²⁶ From this evidence, we can conjecture that the investigative teams of the 2007 Seventeenth National Congress would also be directed by provincial and ministerial-level cadres and their respective secretaries. The secretaries would be charged with specific investigative tasks, but the results of the investigations would be reported by the team directors themselves.

The investigative teams present their results for the initial name list to the Politburo, which then formulates a formal name list of preliminary candidates for Central Committee membership. The next stage in the procedure is Direct Election, which will decide the finalized list of candidates. Direct Election is an even more sensitive system because it is a more formal procedure. Because it involves a form of multi-candidate election,²⁷ it may result in candidates originally favored by the Central Committee failing to be elected. This would cause difficulties in high-level personnel arrangements and might affect political stability at the apex of power in China. To avoid such a predicament, the CCP employs certain methods during Direct Election to ensure that the Central Committee’s favored candidates are elected. These methods are discussed in further detail in the following section.

THE SECOND ROUND OF ELECTIONS: DIRECT ELECTION

After Public Nomination is complete, the formal candidates are selected through a multi-candidate Direct Election by the masses. From a certain perspective, this can be seen as the second stage in a process of selection by elimination, or a “second round of elections” by the masses. In this instance, the number of voters is drastically reduced. At the Seventeenth National Congress, the first round of elections—Public Nomination—involved masses numbering roughly 35,000 people. But in the second round—Direct

25. Ibid.

26. Zhou Jiong, “‘Xiao nüzi’ ruhe buru zhengtān de” [How the ‘young woman’ entered the political world], *Southern Metropolis Daily*, March 19, 2008, A7.

27. “Multi-candidate election” in this research refers to an election where the number of candidates is more than the number of places available.

Election—on October 18, 2007, only 2,200 Party representatives were eligible to choose candidates for Central Committee membership.²⁸

This methodology of election is significant because it may have an impact on the stability of the CCP's personnel structure. At the 1987 Thirteenth National Congress, the percentage of failed candidates was roughly 5%. At the 2002 Sixteenth National Congress, the percentage was maintained at 5.1%, but at the Seventeenth National Congress, it exceeded 8%.²⁹ The increased extent of this margin may have caused difficulty for the CCP's selection of Party elites. At the Thirteenth National Congress, when the CCP carried out multi-candidate elections for Central Committee membership, some Party elites failed to be elected for the next Congress. The former director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee, Deng Liqun, on the waiting list for Politburo Central Committee membership, was not selected. Chongqing Party Secretary Xiao Yang, originally also expected to be among the next committee members at the 1992 Fourteenth National Congress, was also eliminated during the round of competitive elections. Important cadres are generally expected also to serve on the Central Committee; thus, if a candidate fails to be selected, arrangements must be made for a new cadre to take over the post. In an effort to ensure that multi-candidate elections do not disturb the personnel structure, the CCP employs three different approaches.

Election Approaches

The first approach is to release certain information before the multi-candidate elections take place. A common manner of doing this is to issue new appointments for other posts. Party representatives would be aware that according to custom, these newly appointed officials should also be members of the Central Committee, and would thus vote for them. Before the Seventeenth National Congress, five department chiefs were newly appointed: Minister of Supervision Ma Wen; Minister of State Security Geng Huichang; Minister of Personnel Yin Weimin; Minister of Finance Xie Xuren; and Zhang Qingwei, chairman of the Commission for Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense.

28. "Zhongwei houxuanren yuxuan mingdan zuo queding" [Preliminary name list of candidates for Central Committee membership decided yesterday], *Wen Wei Daily*, October 19, 2007, A6.

29. "Cha'e xuanju kuoda, zhangxian minzhu jinbu" [Expansion of multi-candidate election: Prominent democratic progress], *ibid.*, October 22, 2007, A3.

The purpose behind such timely appointments is to ensure that when voting, Party representatives will make choices that follow the central Party authorities' advance plan.³⁰ It is assumed that Chinese "political correctness" (*zhengzhi zhengque*) will prevail, and the Party representatives will not overlook the information released by the Central Committee. Indeed, they are expected to vote the newly appointed cadres onto the Central Committee, to avoid creating problems for the Party.

In the second method, the Central Committee leadership lobbies the masses to be sure of their vote for a specific candidate. Two days before the Direct Election for Central Committee membership, Party representatives are tasked with "circling the candidates" (*juan xuan*), which allows the National Congress Presidium to know in advance which candidates the representatives will choose. If the circling results reveal a divergence from the candidates the central Party supports, the Presidium may begin lobbying the representatives on their behalf.³¹ In addition, the Central Committee leadership may also lobby the Party representatives to discourage them from voting for certain candidates. Deng Liqun's autobiography disclosed that before the Thirteenth National Congress, General Secretary Zhao Ziyang sent lobbyists to Shanghai and to Hubei, Liaoning, and Guizhou Provinces and elsewhere to discourage Party representatives from voting for Deng Liqun. Ultimately, Zhao succeeded.³²

The third method is the most crucial. The ratio of candidates to number of places open is not released before the election, and afterward, the ratio is only released publicly once the figures have been adjusted. Although the Party Central Committee had decided before the Seventeenth National Congress to conduct a multi-candidate election, on the eve of the gathering, the ratio of candidates to places was still unknown. In response to a question posed by a correspondent for the Agence France-Presse (AFP) wire service, Vice Director of the Organization Department Ouyang Song publicly admitted that even he did not know the ratio. Ouyang stated the following:

With regard to the new election method for Central Committee membership, the Seventeenth National Congress is still deliberating on the matter. As the election method still has not completely taken shape, naturally there is no

30. Author interview of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences scholar, Shanghai, July 16, 2008.

31. Author interview of Chinese regional Party journal journalist, Hangzhou, November 28, 2010.

32. Deng Liqun, *Shi'er ge chunqiu (yi jiu qi wu—yi jiu ba qi)* [Twelve springs (1975–1987)] (Hong Kong: Bozhi Press, 2005), p. 473.

definite answer to questions regarding the candidates in the election, or the margin of failure. . . . The current and future members of the Central Committee will implement a form of multi-candidate election; the margin of failure will be decided by the format of the election. The election format has not yet been adopted, so I don't know the answer.³³

This speech divulged an issue that the public had overlooked. Ouyang's press conference was held on October 17, 2007; at that point, then, even the Central Committee Organization Department was apparently still not sure of the exact margin of candidate failure. But on the 18th, the election would be held, and on the 20th the finalized list of candidates would be made public. It is highly doubtful that the 8% margin of failed candidates could ever have been published before the elections. This figure was the result of discussions made during closed negotiations. Given the sequence of events, it can be conjectured that the CCP decided on the margin of failure in accordance with necessity only after the Party representatives had posted their ballots.

The purpose behind this method is to lower any risk to the personnel structure. For example, if the Party Central Committee released too high an expected margin of failure *before* the election took place, favored candidates might fail to be elected, and a situation similar to that of Deng Liquan and Xiao Yang might occur again. We can contrast the procedure in democratic countries, where by law the quotas for election must be published before the election takes place. The margin of failure will be decided based on this logic. The CCP's election method is vastly different from multi-candidate elections in democratic countries and forfeits any real attribute of competitiveness.

THE PRINCIPLE OF "PARTY SUPERVISION OF CADRES": THE RIGHT OF THE UPPER PARTY AUTHORITIES TO APPOINT PERSONNEL

After the masses have completed the process of Public Nomination and Direct Election, the finalized list of candidates is decided upon. Following this, the list is presented to the Presidium of the National Congress so that it may decide the margin of failure. This number is entirely decided in closed negotiations. At the Seventeenth National Congress, the final decision rested in the hands of the Presidium meeting attendees on October 20. The final

33. "Zhongyang lingdaoren bianhua xuanju hou cai zhixiao" [Change in central leadership only made known after election], *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, October 18, 2007, A6.

standing of the cadres is decided in this meeting and then published; the final margin will depend on how many candidates must be eliminated from the list. This is a very sensitive task, particularly as a decisive cut (*yidao qie*) must be made between failed and successful candidates. It may be that this is when retired senior officials exercise their influence.

The Presidium of the Seventeenth National Congress contained a large number of retired “Old Comrades” (*lao tongzhi*). The Presidium Standing Committee included, aside from serving and alternate members of the Sixteenth National Congress Politburo Standing Committee, retired members from that Committee and from earlier national congresses. Jiang Zemin, Zeng Qinghong, Li Peng, Zhu Rongji, Wan Li, Qiao Shi, and Song Ping were all members of the Presidium Standing Committee.³⁴

During negotiations over candidates, these “Old Comrades” may hope to guarantee selection of their preferred cadres. The Seventeenth National Congress Central Committee alternate member who received the smallest number of votes was former General Secretary Jiang Zemin’s preferred cadre Jia Ting’an, the chief of the Central Military Commission Office.³⁵ They have a close and long-standing relationship;³⁶ during Jiang’s time in office in the 1980s, Jia Ting’an simultaneously served as director of the Ministry of Information Industry and Jiang’s personal secretary. A similar situation occurred at the Sixteenth National Congress. The alternate member who garnered the smallest number of votes was Central Security Bureau chief You Xigui. You was also in Jiang Zemin’s faction and had for a long time taken charge of Jiang Zemin’s personal security.³⁷

In such situations where preferred cadres finally ranked lowest, it can be presumed that when deciding on the final cut, members of the Presidium Standing Committee will still attempt to guarantee the success of their faction’s cadres.³⁸ For example, if a preferred cadre obtained the 90th ranking out of a total 100 candidates, the Party elders may decide to cut off the vote at 90 candidates, giving a 10% rate of failure. To ensure that Jia Ting’an and

34. “Zhongguo gongchangdang di shiqi ci quanguo daibiao dahui zhuxituan changwu weiyuanhui chengyuan mingdan” [The name list of Presidium Standing Committee members of the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China], October 14, 2007, People Net, <<http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/104019/104101/6376014.html>>.

35. Tianjin, July 10, 2011, interview.

36. Robert Lawrence Kuhn, *The Man Who Changed China: The Life and Legacy of Jiang Zemin* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2004), p. 121.

37. Ibid., p. 248.

38. Tianjin, July 10, 2011, interview.

You Xigui would not lose the election despite their low rankings, the CCP set the rate of failure at 8% and 5%, respectively, allowing both Jia and You to squeeze through in last place. Through consultation with Party elders and top leaders, the CCP authorities can decide the margin of failed candidates by cutting the vote at the position of the lowest-ranking favored candidate, thus placating all factions within the Party.

In the next stage of proceedings, on October 21 the finalized list of candidates for Central Committee membership was presented to the Party Congress for individual candidate election. Party Congress members vote on each candidate. The only way a candidate can be eliminated at this stage is if the votes in their favor do not surpass 50% of the total.³⁹ Thus, the process at this stage is largely ceremonial and symbolic.

It is possible to reconstruct the process of appointment to Central Committee membership, but because of a lack of related material, the picture painted by this research may not be comprehensive. Most important, this research aims to convey that during the process of PNDE, every attempt is made to avoid any political unrest, by employing certain methods unknown to the public. In academic circles, when consulting official PRC documents, it is not enough simply to skim the superficial meaning of the document. In order to uncover that which is hidden, it is crucial to deeply explore the actual implementation of a given issue. In terms of research into high-level political personages in the PRC, these discoveries may be of great academic value.

SUCCESSSES AND FAILURES OF THE PNDE SYSTEM

PNDE is an important mechanism currently being implemented in the CCP to recruit and appoint new political elites. This section will discuss some of the historical origins and evolutions of the system and delve more deeply into the advantages and disadvantages of its design. This issue will be approached from a more macroscopic perspective, and the analysis will extend beyond Central Committee membership selection.

There are in fact several advantages to using PNDE to select and appoint personnel. First, this system creates an enduring atmosphere of caution for cadres expecting promotion. As nomination takes a long time and there are many masses involved, one moment of carelessness by cadres in terms of the five indices of

39. "Dang xuan an xing huo depiao paixu youbie" [Differences between being ordered by surname or by score in the election], *Sun Daily*, Hong Kong, October 21, 2007, A20.

appraisal (morality, ability, diligence, initiative, and integrity) (*de, neng, qin, ji, lian*) can easily result in criticism. In 2007, Xi Jinping's appointment as secretary of the Shanghai Municipal Committee occurred not just because of the recommendations of Party elders. More important, when the Central Committee assigned people to conduct grassroots Public Nomination in Zhejiang Province (where Xi Jinping was posted), Xi earned the highest marks of approval. This led to the authorities' decision to assign him to a governing role in Shanghai.⁴⁰

Li Xiaopeng, who also hoped to gain Central Committee membership in 2007, enlisted the cooperation of his father, former Premier Li Peng, to visit several provinces in order to rally support. However, because of ecological damage sustained while Li Xiaopeng directed the expansion of a hydroelectric plant, he received negative criticism and, in the end, failed to gain appointment to the Central Committee.⁴¹ This method of long-term appraisal means that qualification for cadre selection no longer relies merely on invitation or elections involving short-term competition; thus, the system reduces the leeway for political manipulation by cadres.

In addition, authority over the criteria for cadre appointment rests with the central Party authorities. For example, in recent years the government has stated that it will "take care to select cadres familiar with the fields of financial management, foreign economics and trade, fiscal administration and banking, law, urban planning management, and information technology."⁴² The PNDE method of recruitment allows the CCP to adapt the criteria for nomination at any given time and, via the information supplied by the masses, to select and appoint those cadres who match the CCP's needs. In other words, the CCP can employ this mechanism of selecting cadres to fulfill the demands of national development by guaranteeing that the cadres nominated by the masses have the skills required. Maria Edin believes that this kind of system, which links standards of cadre appraisal to the needs of national development, is a typical pattern for countries in a developmental state.⁴³

40. Tianjin, July 12, 2011, interview.

41. Hangzhou, November 28, 2010, interview.

42. "Zhongguo shengbu ji ganbu miji tiaozheng, nianqing hua zhishi hua tedian tuchu" [Rigorous modifications put forward to create a younger and more knowledgeable body of provincial and ministerial-level cadres in China], Xinhua Net, October 23, 2007, <http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2007-10/23/content_6928019.htm>.

43. Maria Edin, "Local State Structure and Developmental Incentives in China," in *Asian States: Beyond the Developmental Perspective*, eds. Richard Boyd and Tak-Wing Ngo (New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2005), pp. 122–23.

Finally, a direct comparison with Western election systems suggests that PNDE may be beneficial for stability during the process of governmental reform. In 1989, Mikhail Gorbachev, former general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, introduced Western-style democratic elections to elect members of the People's Congress. In this election, 13% of the Soviet Communist Party cadres contesting the elections failed to be elected, including around 30 high-level cadres. Nikolai Ryzhkov, the former chairman of the Soviet Union's Council of Ministers, believes that this spelled the beginning of the Communist Party's loss of political power. After that election, the legitimacy of one-party rule began to evaporate and finally the regime was destroyed.⁴⁴ The experience of the Soviet Union has led the CCP to see defeat of one candidate in elections as a path to the destruction of the whole Party regime.⁴⁵

The design of PNDE allows the CCP to control the entire election procedure. From this perspective, it can be predicted that at the Eighteenth National Congress in 2012, the CCP will not introduce Western-style elections. It is far more likely that the number of candidates will be increased in order to boost the level of competition. It is even possible that the system will be extended from two rounds to three in order to facilitate the selection of the best candidates.⁴⁶ In whatever way PNDE develops, because the power to make final selections and to decide on the candidate name list will always rest with the Party, a repeat of the Soviet failure will not occur in China as a result.

However, there are criticisms of PNDE. First, an important part of the system, the results of the nomination by the masses, is not immediately open to the public. The results of PNDE for Municipal Party Committee secretaries are all published, which raises the level of competition.⁴⁷ On the contrary, the results of PNDE at the central government level are not made public: they are reserved for those in central government departments. Therefore, this kind of election system lacks competitive significance. Instead, its main function

44. Nikolai Ryzhkov; Xu Changhan (transl.), *The Tragedy of Great Power* (Beijing: Xinhua, 2008), pp. 311–12.

45. Author interview of Chinese think tank scholar, Beijing, May 25, 2011.

46. Shanghai, July 16, 2008, interview.

47. Shi Weimin et al., "Shan Hanqing Jiangsu sheng Suqian shi Suyu qu Caiji zhen 'Gong tui zhi xuan' dang wei shuji diaocha baogao" [Investigative report of the Party Committee Secretary into "PNDE" in Caiji Town, Suyu District, Suqian Municipality, Jiangsu Province], in *Xiangzhen gaige: Xiangzhen xuanju, tizhi chuangxin yu xiangzhen zhili yanjiu* [Reform in villages and towns: Research into town elections, system innovation, and township administration], eds. Shi Weimin et al. (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2008), p. 402.

is to provide a source of information for the central government in order to control the performance and criticism of subordinate cadres.

Second, the control of the central government over the PNDE process is stronger than that of the regional authorities. For example, the basic level of naming candidates includes joint nomination from the upper Party authorities and cadres. However, the right of nomination at the central government level is firmly in the top elite's hands. For instance, the Public Nomination stage of the selection of Politburo members at the Seventeenth National Congress was planned by Secretary of the Central Secretariat Xi Jinping and the head of the Central Organization Department, Li Yuanchao.⁴⁸ Regional-level Public Nominations usually involve the candidates presenting their political proposals; the masses responsible for nomination are allowed to pose questions on the spot.⁴⁹ However, Public Nomination at the central government level has no such measures in place.

Finally, one remaining fault of this system is that individuals harboring resentments may use the process of Public Nomination to exact revenge. On the night before the Seventeenth National Congress, 61-year-old Ma Kai, chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission (Guojia fagai wei), was considered to be a popular candidate for Politburo membership because of his background in finance and economics and the high probability that he would be promoted to vice premier of the State Council. But his name surprisingly did not appear on the final list of candidates for Politburo membership drawn up by central government.

The leaked results showed that Ma Kai received a low score at the mass appraisal stage. As chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission, during a sweeping investigation, Ma offended regional authorities, provoking this collective response from regional officials.⁵⁰ It can be conjectured that those cadres who become preliminary candidates through Public Nomination will be those most proficient in public relations; working achievements do not necessarily count equally.

48. "Dang de xin yi jie zhongyang lingdao jigou shi zenyang chansheng de" [How the new central leadership structure of the party was produced], Xinhua Net, November, 21, 2007, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/banyt/2007-11/21/content_7120521.htm>.

49. It is worth noting that during this stage, a system of "democratic appraisal" (*minzhu pingyi*) may be inserted into the proceedings; this allows the voters to better understand the performance of the nominees.

50. "Dezui difang shipiao, Ma Kai wei jin zhengzhiju" [Votes lost by offending regional authorities: Ma Kai not promoted to the Politburo], *Mingpao News*, December 7, 2007, A21.

PNDE is a system still in development. This system, when employed at the central government level, causes the CCP to face an elevated risk, so that control exercised over the system is particularly strict. As pointed out by Singapore's *Union Morning Post*, "[A]s the process of producing the candidate name list by democratic nomination remains under the control and guarantee of the Politburo Standing Committee, it can be seen that whilst promoting inner-Party democracy, the CCP has developed a method of reducing risk to the lowest possible level."⁵¹ On the whole, PNDE should not be seen as an independent system but rather as a constituent link providing relevant information for the Party's closed negotiations on appointments of new personnel.

CONCLUSION: ADAPTATION OF THE CCP REGIME AND CADRE RECRUITMENT SYSTEM

Although PNDE is a limited system, it is still valuable for discussion and exploration. In terms of CCP political operations, this system may become a new procedure for wider personnel selection and appointment. In the past, personnel recruitment was mainly under "Party Committee guidance" (*Dangwei zhudao*); the upper Party authorities selected cadres for future succession based on cadres' age, personal background, and abilities. PNDE, however, attaches importance to the role of the masses, narrowly defined, in judging the achievements and conduct of the cadres. PNDE will certainly not replace the model of Party Committee guidance. The significance of the procedure is instead to use information provided by the masses to better understand the competency of lower-level cadres.

The CCP is exploring in earnest the system of PNDE, which can be seen on some levels as a "two-round election system." However, this system is intrinsically different from election systems in Western countries. First, the definition of the masses is strictly limited; only Party members and cadres are included. Second, the election only decides upon pre-approved candidates, not victors. Finally, the better candidates are identified stage by stage, and it is the upper Party authorities that perform the final selection. In this sense, the election system in the PRC merely provides information accumulation. Its aim is not to elect the most publicly popular leaders through competition. Instead, it informs the upper Party elites as they make key personnel choices, thereby enhancing their governing ability.

51. "Xin yi jie zhengzhiju weiyuan xuanju shixian tuijin dangnei minzhu chuangxin" [Democratic innovation promoted in the inner party during elections for the new Politburo membership], *Union Morning Post*, October 25, 2007, A27.

The emerging system of PNDE was derived by the CCP regime to meet the needs of national development. Many academics believe that the regime is a resilient political system.⁵² The example of PNDE demonstrates that through innovation, an election system has gradually evolved that can adapt to the regime's needs. David L. Shambaugh believes that the CCP regime will find a balance of survival between adaptation and extinction.⁵³

In fact, for the CCP system, PNDE is an adaptive mechanism that can be employed to handle simultaneously two important aspects of governance: recruiting talented personnel and maintaining the one-party system. The current election system has its theoretical roots in the West, but the CCP has created a new electoral logic. Elections are limited to deciding on candidates and informing the Party elite through voting by the masses in a two-round election system. The approach is beneficial for personnel appointment in the CCP. In sum, this system simply functions as an adaptive tool to ensure the continued existence of the CCP regime.

52. Andrew J. Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience," *Journal of Democracy* 14:1 (January 2003), pp. 6–17; Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard and Zheng Yongnian, "Introduction: Bringing the Party Back In," in *Bringing the Party Back In: How China Is Governed*, eds. Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard and Zheng Yongnian (Singapore: Eastern University Press, 2004), p. 19.

53. David L. Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 177.

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