

# The separation of officials from local staff: The logic of the Empire and personnel management in the Chinese bureaucracy

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## Abstract

This article contrasts and examines two distinct modes of personnel management practice in the Chinese bureaucracy: (1) the *historical* pattern of the separation of officials from local staff (*guanli fentu*); (2) the *contemporary* pattern of stratified mobility (*cengji fenliu*) among officials across levels of administrative jurisdiction. I argue that these two patterns, albeit distinct, have been rooted in the same institutional logic of governance in China, which is discussed and explicated in light of ‘the logic of the Chinese Empire’, especially in terms of the principal–agent problems associated with the scale of governance, the complementary roles of formal and informal institutions, and the shift between symbolic and substantive authority in central–local government relationships. The personnel management practices and the resulting mobility patterns have provided stable institutional bases for central–local government relationships, and they have set limits to the downward reach of the state and the upward reach of local interests, and helped shape distinctive institutional practices in governing China.

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**Keywords**

Separation of officials from local staff, stratified mobility, state governance, logic of the Empire

**Research question**

From the perspective of organizational analysis today, it can be argued that the separation of officials from local staff that emerged in the Wei, Jin, Northern, and Southern Dynasties in Chinese history was a major institutional change in the personnel system of the Chinese bureaucracy. On the one hand, the convention of local elites serving as county magistrates gave way to the direct appointment of outside officials to fill these positions by the central government; on the other hand, there emerged distinct career paths, statuses and positions, and incentives between officials and local staff, and these paths diverged gradually over time and eventually became separated by a huge institutional divide. The separation of officials from local staff together with the institutional arrangements and organizational behavior incurred by this separation was a central feature of the Chinese bureaucracy, in sharp contrast with the Weberian bureaucracy. Using the analytical framework of the 'logic of the Empire' (Zhou X, 2014) as its starting point, this article examines the relationship between this logic and the personnel management practices in the Chinese bureaucracy, explores the origins and significance of the separation of officials from local staff, and interprets the logic of Empire in this light. The core argument of this article is this: the separation of officials from local staff is an institutional arrangement of state governance in response to the principal-agent problems associated with the scale of governance. Such a personnel system has generated the structural characteristics of the relationships between the central and local governments, between officials and local staff and, furthermore, between the state and society, and these relationships in turn permeated the logic of the Empire, the coexistence of formal and informal institutions, and the shift between symbolic and substantive authority (symbol and substance). In this sense, the separation of officials from local staff is a key component and the very embodiment of the logic of the Chinese Empire.

We are interested in the phenomenon of the separation of officials from local staff not only out of historical curiosity, but also for the important, realistic significance of the historical process. The separation of officials from local staff as a historical legacy still exists today in the Chinese bureaucracy of the People's Republic in various forms and to different degrees. What interests us is a historical perspective that can inform our understanding of modern state governance and the Chinese bureaucracy. Tracing the history of the separation between officials and local staff can help us to recognize two distinctive characteristics of modern state governance. The first of these involves central-local government relationships. In the long history of state governance in China, a contradictory phenomenon has

existed in central–local government relationships: on the one hand, centralization of authority is stable and supreme; on the other hand, local authority acts on its own, regardless of prohibitions by the central government. The two levels of governance coexisted over a long history, engaged in a cyclical performance that rose and fell at different times; even severe suppression by the central government failed to eliminate local authority: the latter still executed its influence in different and covert ways. This article points out that the institutional arrangement of the separation of officials from local staff functioned as the basis for maintaining the unification of the Empire even as it also produced contradictions and tensions between central and local governments.

The second characteristic of modern state governance that tracing the history of the separation of officials from local staff can help us to understand is the current position of basic-level government in the structure of state governance. In the traditional bureaucracy of China, basic-level governmental tasks were usually referred to magistrates who dealt with affairs associated with the common people. The magistrates governed the locality for the Empire on the one hand; on the other hand, they levied taxes, collected grain, and maintained public order for the imperial power. In modern China, the function of local government is similar to that of the magistrates in that it deals with the affairs of common people living in towns and streets. In recent years, abundant research has been done on the actions of basic-level government and the sustained efforts of the central government to reorganize local governments in a top-down manner. Divergence, distance, and tension have emerged between basic-level government and central policies in different locations, areas, and circumstances. The call of ‘enhancing basic-level government’ can be heard frequently from everywhere.

These observations raised a series of questions: if the local government acts as the pivot between state and society, between the government and the common people, then what is the role of the institutional arrangement of the separation of officials from local staff here? What is the relationship between the basic contradiction in the state governance of China and the bureaucratic personnel management?

This article explores the separation of officials from local staff from historical and theoretical perspectives. In the first section, I review the historical evolution of the separation of officials from local staff and the resulting institutional characteristics. In the second section I analyze the pattern of geographically stratified mobility in the People’s Republic and the corresponding schema between officials and local staff and discuss the differences and similarities between this pattern and the historical separation of officials from local staff. In the third section, taking ‘the logic of the Empire’ (Zhou X, 2014) as my analytical frame, I analyze and explain the relationship between this institutional arrangement and state governance theoretically. In the concluding section I discuss the significance of the institutional arrangement in modern society and the challenges it faces.

## The separation of officials from local staff: A historic review of the bureaucratic personnel system of the Empire

According to historical research, identifiable bureaucracy existed in the Western Zhou Dynasty of the early ancient period (Li, 2010). The Qin Empire unified the country and established an imperial bureaucracy based on a system of prefectures and counties; in the Western Han Dynasty, this bureaucratic system, with secretarial and administrative functions, matured (Tomiya, 2013). Afterwards, the bureaucratic system of China experienced a long process of evolution, during which the personnel system transition of separating officials from local staff that originated in the Wei, Jin, Northern, and Southern Dynasties was very prominent. This phenomenon has aroused a great deal of research interest on the part of historians, and some common conclusions have emerged regarding the evolutionary process.

Miao (1969) listed three stages of the evolution of the relationship between officials and local staff as follows. The first stage lasted from the Qin Dynasty to the Western and Eastern Han Dynasties, with the basic characteristic of officials being interlinked with local staff (or scholars converging with local staff). After the Qin Dynasty unified six states, the central government looked down upon scholars and showed respect for local staff. The Qin Empire depended on local staff's governance, and thus the local staff's status was greatly enhanced. In the Western Han Dynasty, a complete bureaucratic system was established, and local staff and scholars were all employed in governing the people. At that time, officials were interlinked with local staff, 'the local staff started to acquire Confucian learning and the scholars began using official documents and practicing administration' (Yan, 1996: 453).

The second stage lasted from the Wei, Jin, Northern, and Southern Dynasties to the Sui and Tang Dynasties, with the prominent characteristics of *separation of officials from local staff*. In the Wei and Jin Dynasties, the central government established the Nine Grades Official Selection System, which divided officials into upper and lower classes according to their family status. Furthermore, the central government centralized the power and attached more importance to families of power and influence than to the common people. Thus, there were no subordinate staff from families of high social rank and no upper-class officials from common families, showing an evident trend of social status polarization among officials and subordinate staff becoming more inferior (Miyazaki, 2008).

Since the Tang and Song Dynasties, the scholars who intended to start political careers would never want to be subordinate staff, who were mainly lowly fellows in the marketplace, servants of big families and released criminals, as the subordinate staff were inferior. (Miao, 1969: 6)

The third stage lasted from the Sui and Tang Dynasties to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, when the integration of local clerks and runners became mainstream. 'Since the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the magistrates appointed by the central

government were limited in number, and the local people were employed to deal with minor affairs' (Miao, 1969: 7): thus emerged the subordinate staff. As Huang (1985: 41) stated,

In the past subordinate staff were responsible for keeping account books and reported on their work to the head regularly. When errands needed running, they would employ local people. Wang Anshi altered manpower requisition to service employment, and thus the employed runners for the government became the subordinate staff.

The separation of officials and local staff experienced some changes in the succeeding Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties; however, the employment of subordinate staff continued to develop and became a system.

To begin with, let us define the object of study of this article by reviewing past research studies. In general, 'what we call the subordinate staff are mainly people in charge of documentation in the local government, dealing with specific or technological affairs, or engaged in other miscellaneous work' (Ye, 2009: 81). 'Local staff' has had various meanings at different times in history; even after the separation of officials from local staff took place, there was evident heterogeneity within the category of local staff. The term was used to refer to clerks in the six departments of the central government as well as secretaries in the county government. In prefecture or county governments, the 'subordinate staff' mentioned in documents served as secretaries and runners. Although the basic-level governance of the Empire was characterized by 'one-person government' (Qu, 2003), the administrative affairs of basic-level governments can only be completed with the assistance of a huge group of subordinate staff. Taking Wujiang County during the Qianlong Period as an example, there were only 11 assisting officials under the county magistrate and over 300–400 local people serving as runners engaged in all kinds of services (see Zhou B, 2009: 115–117). In the late Qing Dynasty, there were more than 100 subordinate staff in each county (see Zhang, 2011: 80). This article focuses on the relationship between basic-level government and state governance, especially the subordinate staff of prefectures and counties.

Countless studies of the Chinese subordinate staff system have been undertaken by historians. Qu (2003) elaborated the role of subordinate staff in prefecture and county governments in specific chapters. Miao (1969) and Zhou B (2009) provided and discussed comprehensive and detailed materials concerning the subordinate staff system in the Ming and Qing Dynasties as well as its activities and influences in their research. Ye (2009) published a book on the government clerks in the Southern and Northern, Sui, and Tang Dynasties, especially the Tang Dynasty. By reviewing plenty of historical facts, Zhao (1994) studied innovations in the relationships among officials, local staff, and servants from the Pre-Qin Period to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, especially their positive and negative functions regarding administrative efficiency, and elaborated on the historical influences of officials and the local staff system and their activities by applying Max Weber's

bureaucracy theory and Parsons' theory on functionalism and his analytical concepts. Zhou B (2009) explored the significance of the subordinate staff system for theories of social science. Yan (2009) traced the evolution of the official ranking systems of the Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, Northern, and Southern Dynasties, especially the evolution of positions and official ranks. In the course of evolution, scholars and local staff were integrated into a scholar official stratum that was typical of Chinese culture and were gradually separated from officials engaged with technologies. The chief object of Yan Buke's research was the evolution of official rank and family status, rather than the evolution of local staff. In a series of articles, Zhu (2006) stressed the significance of subordinate staff in traditional state governing, which was different from traditional scholars, who viewed subordinate staff as blemishes on society.

Among foreign scholars, Miyazaki (2008) has done the most thorough studies on the separation of officials and local staff. Taking the Nine Grades Official Selection System as a clue, he traced the three key transitions in the state system of China from the Han, Wei, Jin, Northern, and Southern Dynasties to the early Sui and Tang Dynasties: from aristocracy to bureaucracy, from recommendation system to imperial examination system, and the separation of officials from local staff. The three transitions were different aspects of the same process, reflecting the significance of one another. Miyazaki believed that the separation of officials from local staff was the result of bureaucrats becoming aristocrats: after aristocracy was replaced by bureaucracy, the bureaucracy itself became aristocratic and brought about the separation of officials from local staff. Thus, the officials selected through imperial examination became the stratum of scholar-bureaucrat who spent their political careers reading Confucian classics and dumped minor affairs on their subordinate staff.

Among the English references, Reed (2000) wrote a detailed and vivid description of the selection, rewards and punishments, and social ecology of subordinate staff based on archived materials from the late Qing Dynasty in Ba County. In particular, he emphasized the local relationship network of subordinate staff in this book.

To summarize, bureaucracy has attracted a great deal of attention in the study of Chinese history, resulting in numerous books, while there have been relatively few studies on the separation of officials from local staff, especially the subordinate staff system. Zhao (1994: 3) wrote, 'All works on subordinate staff compared with those on the Chinese bureaucratic system at home and abroad are just like a speck in a vast ocean'. In my opinion, even after 20 years, this judgment is still appropriate.

From the perspective of modern organizational analysis, the separation of officials from local staff is a prominent characteristic of the bureaucracy of the Empire: officials coexisted with local staff within one bureaucratic institution, occupying the roles of superior leaders and subordinates, respectively. However, they were also two distinct groups: in the aspects of selection, personnel flow, promotion, supervision, and salary system, the two groups' careers were totally different, as was reflected in systemic arrangements. Here we shall discuss the chief institutional

characteristics during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, for example. Firstly, there was a strict divergence in selection and personnel flow between officials and local staff so as to divide them into two distinct groups. The officials came from different locations and were dispatched to various regions after they succeeded through the imperial examination and were appointed as officials. The local subordinate staff were selected among 'innocent' common people, or the losers from government-run schools at all levels. There was a rule in the Ming Dynasty that subordinate staff could not attend the imperial examination. Thus, the subordinate staff were deprived of the right to seek promotion as officials through rightful means. The selection of officials through imperial examination was totally different from the flow and promotion of local staff. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the government required that the appointed officials take up positions in other provinces rather than in their hometown provinces. On the contrary, the subordinate staff were local people. The local staff could not get promoted as officials for life; even those few who were promoted in exceptional circumstances could only move into the position of assistant official or subordinate official (Yan, 1989). The Qing government followed the regulations of the Ming Dynasty and appointed subordinate staff to provide services, then later selected or recruited subordinate staff for posts allocated by the government, issuing them with work certificates, and allocating silver to them as service payments. The description 'each subordinate staff member has his own designated portion of silver and rice' shows that some subordinate staff were formal government employees (Zhang, 2011: 80). However, a much larger number of subordinate staff were not formal government employees. Under the 'uncompleted financial system', the officials and local staff had salaries, but the salaries could not cover their household expenses. The subordinate staff especially, who had barely any official income, had to make their livings by running for the government.

Secondly, the subordinate staff were commonly characterized as 'extremely humble but possessing mighty power' in position. On the one hand, the subordinate staff occupied inferior ranks in the bureaucracy, being merely the executors of authorities' orders. On the other hand, the subordinate staff occupied the most important strategic positions and grasped the actual power in hand. This phenomenon can be explained as follows. Firstly, the evident distinctions between the selection and flow between officials and local staff resulted in this situation: within local governments, officials (and their aides) were all non-natives, and all the subordinate staff were locals (Wang, 2012). The divergence was made even more prominent by the short tenures of the officials. For example, the average tenure for officials in local government was less than three years (Huang, 2001; Kuhn, 1999; Li, 1975). In contrast, the clerks were indigenous to the locality. They served the government over a long period of time or even for generations and kept each office under control. It was said that officials might be transferred or promoted, but subordinate officials would not change their positions, that subordinate staff were the same as clerks who served the government in their home counties as natives, and that they tried to hold onto their positions long after their prescribed

terms of service. In addition, they tended to join up with local forces by staying in their positions for a long time and becoming familiar with their undertakings. Thus, with the assistance of their interwoven social networks, subordinate staff maintained monopolies in their professions and, to some extent, seized the actual authority of local administration (Zhang, 2011). This situation can be interpreted through organizational analysis: the principal–agent structure caused serious information asymmetry; the stable indigeneness of subordinate staff provided them with information advantages that enabled them to grasp significant substantive power. This point was frequently discussed in previous studies.

Secondly, although the group of subordinate staff had no formal institutional restrictions in the bureaucratic system, they had stable codes of conduct. Ye (2009) discussed the clerk system in the Southern and Northern Dynasties, especially in the Tang Dynasty, and the formation of the clerk stratum as a group. His observation seems similar to the local subordinate stratum. Reed pointed out after studying the subordinate staff of the Ba County government of the late Qing Dynasty that ‘although the subordinate staff served outside the legal system and their activities always went against legal regulations, their conducts were inconsistent with sensitivity in terms of inward construction and rules and procedures of implementation’ (Reed, 2000: 5).

Thirdly, the significance of subordinate staff lies in their core place in the informal system of the bureaucratic organization. For instance, in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there was a huge discrepancy between the ‘recorded areas of the field’ after approval in the report to higher authorities and the ‘actual areas of the field’ controlled by county governments (Chen, 1988). Such information was usually held by subordinate staff who had occupied their positions for a long time.<sup>1</sup> In discussing the cultural nexus of power in a local society during the late Qing Dynasty, Prasenjit Duara pointed out that the clerks and runners played a vital role in land measurement, audited finances and tax and charge collections, and played significant roles in exploitative and protective brokerage. This situation was not really improved in the Republic of China (Duara, 2003: Chapters 2 and 8).

Fourthly, compared with well-developed and detailed official system regulations, the formalization of the bureaucratic system did not proceed among subordinate staff, and there was an evident lack of a subordinate management system. As Zhou B (2009: 3) stated, ‘Taking the Qing Dynasty as an example, the systemic design of local subordinate staff was seriously marginalized’. This observation is suitable for all dynasties after the separation of officials from local staff since the Sui and Tang Dynasties. Although for subordinate staff, there was a rational evolvement from manpower requisition to service employment in the Qing Dynasty, the regulations for their selection, salaries, and career development were repeatedly altered, almost without any stable and unified systemic arrangement. Furthermore, their salaries were lower than the incomes earned by farming (Miao, 1969; Zhou B, 2009).

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, when the subordinate system was established, the central government had roughly regulated the number of

subordinate staff and categories of services but rarely implemented the regulations (Reed, 2000). Moreover, there were no explicit regulations on the management, rewarding, punishment, and encouragement of subordinate staff, most of whom had no stable salaries. The actual power to manipulate their fates was in the hands of local magistrates.

As the key segment in the power structure of local government, the subordinate staff to some extent dominated the operation of the whole local government. They were the 'public persons' of the local government with legal identities (different from the category of 'private persons' such as legal advisors). In addition, as the 'non-official' group within the governing structure, who were not restricted by the traditional bureaucratic system, they can be regarded as a 'quasi-formal' structure at the most. (Zhou B, 2009: 3–4)

Therefore, the bureaucratic system reform throughout history rarely reached the level of subordinate staff.

In discussing the transformation from the late Qing Dynasty to the early Republic of China, Duara pointed out that,

...as indicated by a person of the same period, although there had been immense reforms in the tax system, there were no substantive changes at the lowest level, and the tax collectors were still beyond the control of the central government. (Duara, 2003: 225)

This situation resonated through many periods of history. To summarize, in contrast with the formalizing and specializing trend of the official system within the bureaucracy, the subordinate staff system was always marginalized in relation to the bureaucracy and failed to enter the formal system.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, I would like to compare the separation of officials in the Chinese bureaucracy and in western civil services such as those in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. According to the article 'Civil Service' in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the early civil service in the United Kingdom was influenced by the bureaucratic system of the Chinese Empire. The two systems had similarities in terms of form: in both, the officials appointed by the central government were like political appointees, while the subordinate staff occupied stable positions in the bureaucracy with similar career paths for civil servants. However, by investigating the specific characteristics of each system and the operating processes of the two systems, we can also observe the following major differences. (1) Within the western civil service system, the civil servants had access to pervasively applied career paths, channels of flow, and relevant incentive mechanisms. Although promotion and career paths existed for clerks in all divisions of the central government in the Chinese bureaucracy, there were seldom any such formal systems for subordinate staff. (2) The conduct and activities of western civil servants were explicitly restricted by regulations in terms of limits of authority within a formal system of bureaucracy, while subordinate staff of the Chinese local government were controlled by the magistrates.

(3) The western civil service system had no substantive relationship with the locality in which the civil servants provided services, while subordinate staff in the Chinese bureaucracy were deeply rooted in their local communities. Thus, there were obvious disparities between the characteristics of the Chinese bureaucracy and the western Weberian bureaucratic organization.

Officials, aides, and clerks throughout Chinese history all sensed the significance of subordinate staff in state governing, and wrote a great many texts criticizing and blaming subordinate staff. From the works of Ye (1961) in the Southern Song Dynasty to those of Huang (1985) and Gu (2006) between the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the many kinds of popular collected essays on statecraft in the Qing Dynasty, all included whole chapters about the disadvantages of subordinate staff. Miao (1969: 1) quoted Liang Zhangju, an official in the Qing Dynasty, in saying that 'the subordinate staff are the pivot between officials and the common people'. Han (2011), a scholar in the Qing Dynasty, stated:

There is no one who will not ask other people for help. The top ones assist virtue, the next ones down provide services. Who administers the government and is in charge of all the affairs under Heaven? The answer is that there are two kinds of explicit governing and two kinds of implicit governing. What does explicit governing mean? The three ducal ministers govern the six departments and the six departments administer their subordinate divisions; this is explicit governing within the central government. The heads of Dao supervise prefects and county magistrates, and the governors supervise the heads of Dao; this is explicit governing outside the central government. What does implicit governing mean? It is subordinate staff who are in charge of the affairs of the local government and handle government affairs for the six departments. It is legal advisors who take charge of the affairs of prefects, heads of Dao, and governors of the seventeen provinces. On the one hand, they assist the emperor and administrate civil affairs; on the other hand, there are seldom any tracks of their activities. (Zhen, 1825: see volume 25, *Lizheng* 11)

The view that the subordinate staff 'handle government affairs for the six departments' points to their evident importance. In talking about the importance of subordinate staff, Qian (2001: 125) noticed that,

... during the Guangxu Period of the late Qing Dynasty, it was said that 'when any affairs are at the disposal of subordinate staff, they can decide whether to speed up or postpone the procedure of official selection, the degree of punishment, the amount of tax, the execution of ritual, the effect on the lives of the common people, the scale of a lawsuit, and the size of the project.'

The Japanese scholar Kenji Shimada made the same comment:

In modern times in China, administrative affairs are under the control of subordinate staff. Even the officials appointed by the emperor are not able to perform administration when they infringe on subordinate staff. This is a well-known fact. What the

officials are concerned with is reading and writing scholarly works, social activities about composing poetry and essays, and social intercourse with other scholar officials. Their engagement in political affairs lies in asserting conceptual governing ideas and moralized ideals... who are subordinate staff? As servants of the local government, they resemble officials, but not actual officials. They know well the craft of administration rather than the spirit of administration. They are able to read but cannot understand well-written papers. In any sense, their existence is a paradox; they are vulgar people. As long as the scholars want to sustain themselves as officials, it is impossible for them to go without subordinate staff, no matter how contemptuous or resentful they may be towards them. (Shimada, 2008: 150)

This comment was made in the Yuan Dynasty, but it was also largely pertinent to the following Ming and Qing Dynasties. The numerous criticisms concerning subordinate staff in historical documents can best illustrate their importance.

It can be inferred from the above discussion that the separation of officials from local staff was an awful institutional arrangement that generated tension within their organization. A series of institutional arrangements, including selection, flow, and management, degraded subordinate staff to low social status but with significant power, beyond the institutional restrictions. The imperial examination system is regarded as an important channel of upward flow in Chinese society; however, the separation of officials and subordinate staff signifies that the majority of grassroots staff were excluded from the institutional structures. The lack of any type of incentive mechanism led to various kinds of dishonesty. As our predecessors stated, 'The scholars were endowed with ranks of nobility along with their salaries, so they attached more importance to fame than to wealth; there was no promotion path for local officials, so they valued wealth more than fame' (Ouyang and Song, 1975: 4795).

However, the above observations raise some new questions: If there were many disadvantages to the subordinate staff system, which seemed to conflict with the principle of a centralized system, why did this system survive throughout the long history of China? Why did the criticisms and memorials to the throne not bring about great reforms by replacing the system with a formalized personnel system? Apparently, those multiple records and discussions about subordinate staff in the historical records were not conclusive on this subject; they were the starting points for further exploration. Before we start our own theoretical analysis, it is necessary to study the continuation and variation of the separation of officials and local staff in modern Chinese society.

### **'Stratified mobility': The bureaucratic personnel flow pattern in the People's Republic period**

The bureaucratic system in the People's Republic originated from the Leninist party as it developed through armed struggles, and thus its personnel system has different characteristics from that of the Chinese Empire, including, for example, its

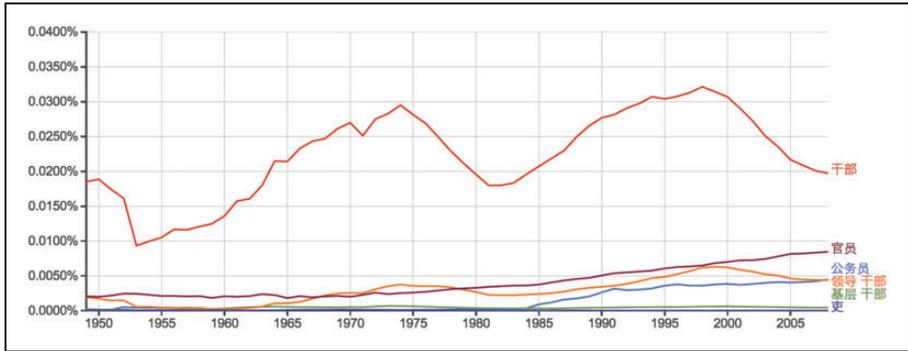
dual authoritative system of party and government, its institutional arrangement of party administrating organizational personnel, its selection standard of being both red and expert, etc. However, by investigating the general process of bureaucratic personnel flow and its characteristics, it is easy to discern traces of the separation of officials and local staff over the history of the Empire within the modern bureaucratic system.

### *The spatial flowing trend in the modern bureaucratic system*

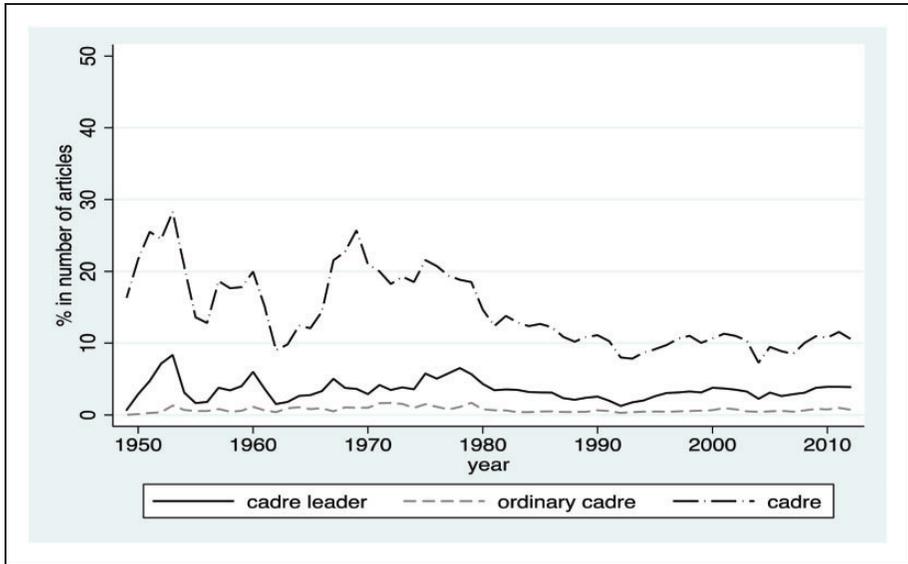
Browsing through the vocabulary describing the bureaucratic system in the People's Republic period, one finds that the separation of officials from local staff as well as subordinate staff has disappeared from the official language, and the imported concept of 'cadre' has taken its place. In the Mao Zedong era, the appellation of cadre generally referred to the common staff in governmental organizations and state-owned units, including leaders, managers, and professionals. Mao Zedong and official documents often distinguished between 'leading cadres' and 'grass-root cadres' when referring to officials in the bureaucratic system in particular. In the Post-Mao era, the professionals and common staff separated themselves from the 'cadres' group. In recent years, 'public servants' has become the appellation for full-time staff of governmental bureaucratic organizations. By counting the frequency of these relevant appellations in Chinese books, one can see that from 1949 to 2000, 'cadres' ('leading cadres' and 'grass-root cadres') has become the chief appellation for governmental officials (Figures 1 and 2).

By observing the situation of cadre/official flow, it is easy to discern the separation of officials from local staff, with different forms of expression. I will take a township government that I studied through tracing observation over the past 10 years as an example. During the years 2004–2014, a total of 16 people (namely, the secretary and deputy secretaries of the Party Committee, the town chief and deputy town chiefs, and the chairman of the township People's Congress) made up the principal and deputy leaders of the Party and the township government. All 16 leaders were transferred from other departments or towns in the county. Among them, one leader whose family was also in the town retired from his post in the township government; two deputy leaders kept working in the township government (their families were in the town), and all the other 'non-natives' (except for the ones who had been transferred to the town not long before and kept working there) left the town and were transferred to other regions within the county to continue their careers. Among the cadres in the township government, most of the common staff who had transferred from other regions (for example, college graduates working as village officials, and college officials through employment) eventually left the town. In contrast, most of the officials were indigenous and did not quit their positions in the township government nor did they expect to ever leave the town.

The flow of cadres in this township government shows, to some extent, the basic pattern of the separation of officials from local staff: the chief leaders of the township government resemble the flowing officials in history who were transferred from



**Figure 1.** The frequency of ‘cadres’ (干部), ‘public servants’ (公务员), ‘officials’ (官员), and ‘local staff’ (吏) in Chinese books by Google books Ngram Viewer (1949–2008).



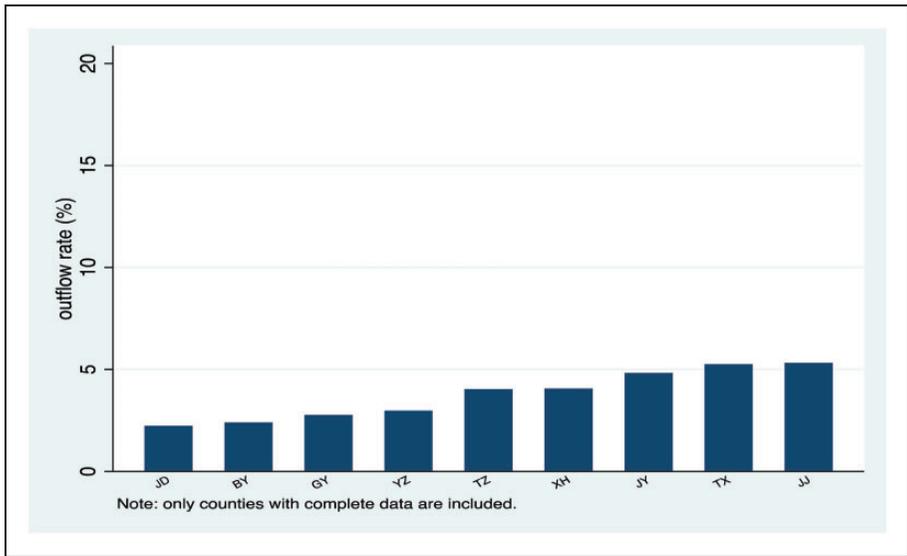
**Figure 2.** Percent of frequencies of the key words of cadres appearing in articles in the *People's Daily*, 1949–2012.

one place to another and stayed for only a short period; the local officials resemble the local staff who were indigenous and rooted to their native land. The flow also shows that the stated leading cadres of the township government were only transferred to one administrative level higher, and there was no case of flowing beyond the administrative boundary of the county. This is a common pattern in the township governments in other regions. Within the basic level of a city government, where there is high mobility, a larger number of basic-level cadres come from

outside the city; however, most of them stabilize in the local administrative area and integrate themselves into the local social network. They have no substantive differences from the modern local staff in structural positions and behaviors.<sup>3</sup>

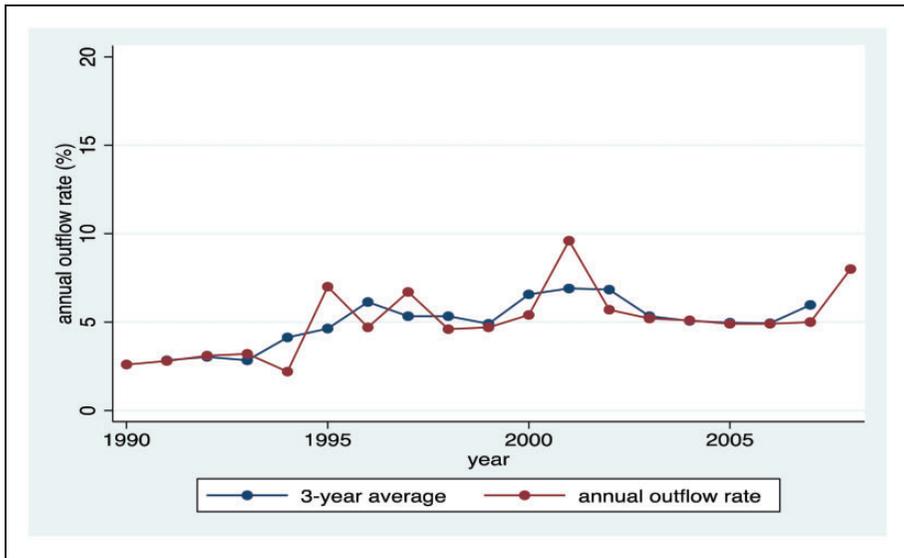
Similar patterns can be found if we observe the flow situation of officials within a broader scope. From yearbooks of some counties and cities and local chronicles, we have collected materials about the flow situations of chief leaders of main departments in the city, county, and township governments in two prefecture-level cities, Yangzhou and Taizhou, and their jurisdictions from 1990 to 2008. According to the materials collected, the officials at the lowest level were chief leaders of towns, namely, secretaries of the township Party Committee, town chiefs, and chairmen of the township People's Congress; the materials about county governments included county Party Committees, county governments, and chief leaders of county government departments (for example, secretaries and deputy secretaries of the county Party Committee, county magistrates and deputy county magistrates, heads of bureaus and offices at the county level); the materials about city governments included city Party Committees, municipal governments, and chief leaders of bureaus, committees, and offices at the municipal level. These officials were formal Chinese officials, the lowest rank being section chief. We analyzed the flow situation of these officials crossing administrative regions (counties and cities) from 1990 to 2008. We defined 'administrative regions' as the counties (including county-level cities) employing these officials or cities (prefecture-level cities) employing them. 'Flowing across administrative regions' refers to the flow of officials from the county or city (municipality) to another county or city (municipality), including the flow between counties and cities involving the same prefecture-level city.<sup>4</sup> In contrast with the previous studies on promotion of officials, this article is concerned with the flow of officials in a geographical sense.

Firstly, we observed that the flow rate of officials crossing administrative regions (namely, the administrative boundaries of counties and cities) is extremely low. Figure 3 shows the ratio of number of officials flowing across administrative regions to the total number of officials in the region during the same period from 1990 to 2008. In Figure 3, among the chief official groups in the organizations of counties and cities, the personnel flow across administrative regions has been approximately 1–5% overall in the past 20 years.<sup>5</sup> Figure 4 describes the annual flow rate of officials crossing administrative regions, namely, the ratio of the number of officials crossing administrative regions each year to the number of officials in the region during the same year. As the flow rate might be influenced by some special events (for example, a government election), Figure 4 also presents the three-year average flow rate. The figures show a decreasing of flow rate by year, with an annual flow rate of less than 1%. Our materials include information about chief officials in chief departments of counties and cities within a range of 20 years, and thus overall our figure can reflect the basic spatial flow trend of governmental officials. In other words, most of the officials spent their career lives within the boundaries of their administrative regions.



**Figure 3.** Outflow rates across administrative jurisdictions by city and county, 1990–2008.

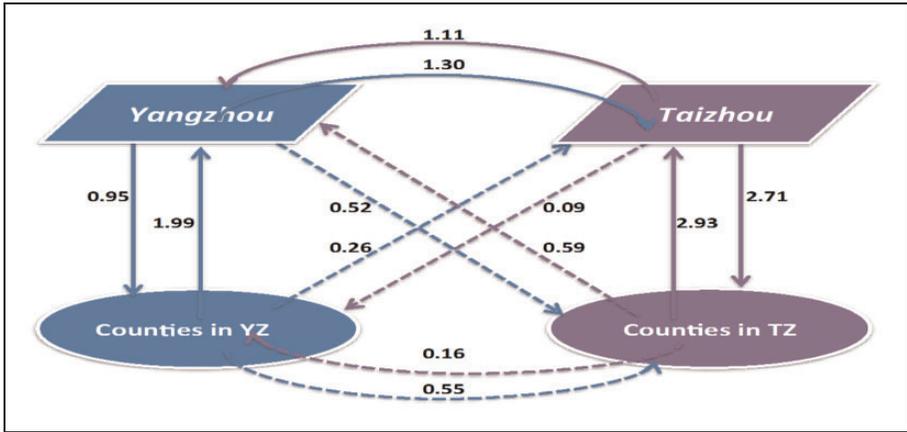
Secondly, the spatial flow of officials is mainly restricted by the boundaries of administrative regions. Taizhou was separated from Yangzhou in 1996 and upgraded as a prefecture-level city, and some county areas that belonged to Yangzhou became areas of Taizhou. This situation provides an excellent natural experiment for us to observe the boundaries of administrative regions and flow pattern of officials. We divided the administrative regions of Yangzhou and Taizhou into counties (including county-level cities) and prefecture-level cities to observe the personnel flow among them. In Figure 5, Yangzhou and its subordinate cities and counties are administrative regions of Yangzhou, Taizhou and its subordinate cities, and counties are administrative regions of Taizhou. The shift from the prefecture-level city to its subordinate cities or counties is internal flow within administration regions. The internal flow within administrative regions is shown in solid lines, while the flow between administrative regions is shown in dotted lines. Figure 5 shows the following characteristics: firstly, on the whole, the internal flow within administrative regions and the flow between administrative regions were very low, within a range of less than 1–3%. Secondly, the internal flow within administrative regions (namely between Yangzhou and its subordinate cities and counties and between Taizhou and its subordinate cities and counties) was prominently higher than the flow between administrative regions (namely between Yangzhou and the subordinate cities and counties of Taizhou, between Taizhou and the subordinate cities and counties of Yangzhou); usually the former was several times higher than the latter. Thirdly, there was a high flow rate between Yangzhou and Taizhou. The two prefecture-level cities are at the same administrative level and the personnel flow between them is decided by provincial



**Figure 4.** Annual rate of spatial outflow across administrative jurisdictions by city and county, 1990–2008.

departments. In this sense, the flow between these two prefecture-level cities belongs to flow within the same administrative region, that is, within the same province. In summary, the flow situation between these two cities was consistent with the trend discussed above. These trends explicitly demonstrate that administrative region (rather than geographic distance) works as the basic mechanism to restrict the spatial flow of officials.

Thirdly, suppose that there was a possibility of flow between administrative regions among only a few officials. In that case, the flow usually means promotion of position or status. Which departments or positions, then, had the advantage in flowing between administrative regions? Figures 6 and 7 show the 15 government departments and positions with the highest flow rates between administrative regions. From these figures, we can conclude the following. Firstly, the spatial flow usually took place in departments holding higher positions within the bureaucratic system (e.g., county Party Committee, county government, and organization department), especially involving officials of these departments (e.g., leaders of county and municipal government). Secondly, the more powerful departments (e.g., tax department, discipline inspection departments, and banks) had higher flow rates between administrative regions. Thirdly, some special policies encouraged spatial flow for some special departments (e.g., the Communist Youth League). In this sense, the departments and positions with higher flow rates between administrative regions became organization bases for the training and reserving of flowing officials. Through top-down shifts and flow of officials, the flowing officials and their



**Figure 5.** Outflow rate (%) between Yangzhou, Taizhou, and their subordinate counties (cities).

career paths connected departments in different administrative regions, sustaining and strengthening the top-down central force in these regions.

*Discussion: The pattern of stratified mobility and relative pedigrees of officials and local staff*

In the analysis above, I described the flow trend of governmental officials as following a geographical pattern of stratified mobility: in other words, most officials at each administrative level are confined to flowing and adhering to positions within the same administrative region, with only a few officials in the highest positions at the same level having the opportunity to flow to other administrative regions or to upper levels; furthermore, similar trends can be found at each level in the bureaucratic system. To be specific, this pattern has the following characteristics:

1. A highlighted geographic basis. The flow at the township, county, and municipal levels, be it shifts at the same level or to the upper levels, basically takes administrative regions as boundaries, that is, most cadres flow within the same administrative district (region). For example, most township government cadres flow within the township all their lives; most cadres of county departments flow within the county all their lives; similarly, most cadres of municipal level or subordinate departments flow within the municipal administrative district all their lives.
2. Stratified mobility for different levels within the bureaucratic system. The chief leaders (e.g., principal and deputy leaders or leaders of chief organizations) at the highest level of the bureaucratic system of the administrative region have more opportunities to flow to other administrative regions (e.g., transfer of the

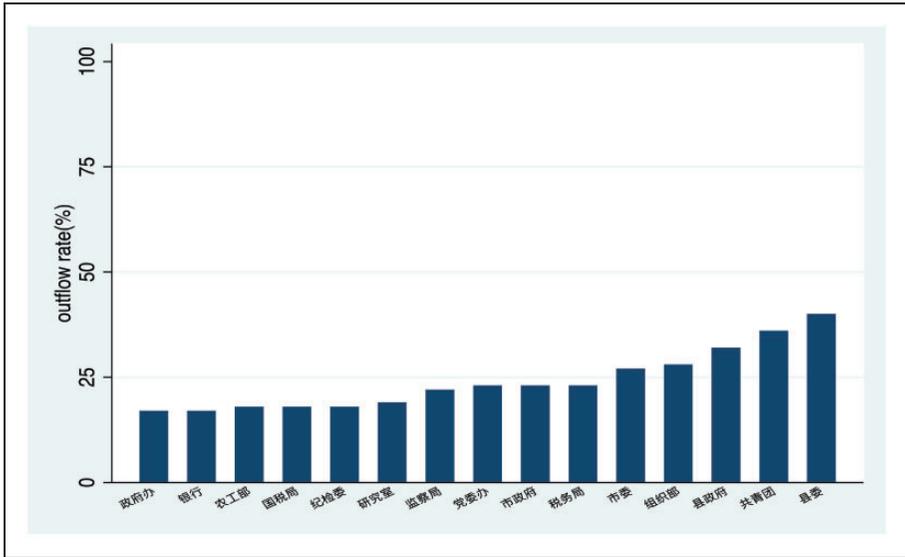


Figure 6. Top 15 bureaus/offices with high outflow rates, in Yangzhou/Taizhou prefectures, 1990–2008.

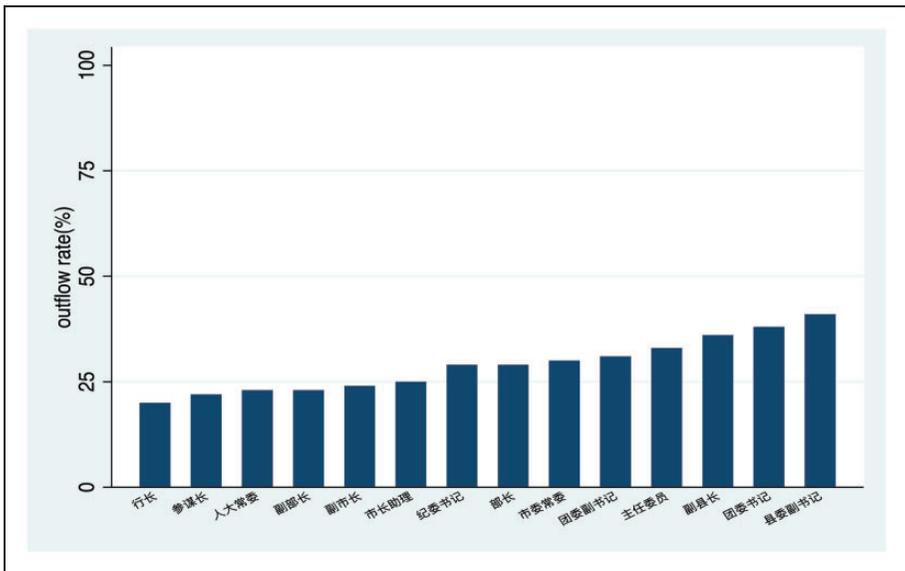


Figure 7. Top 15 positions with the high outflow rates across administrative jurisdictions, Yangzhou/Taizhou prefectures, 1990–2008.

leader of one county to work as the leader of another county) or to upper-level administrative regions (e.g., transfer of the leader of one county to work in a municipal department). In other words, for each level of the bureaucratic system (municipal, county/district, township levels), officials' flow space is usually restricted to the immediately higher level administrative jurisdiction, that is, chief leaders at the township level flow to departments within the county, chief leaders at the county level flow to departments within the city, and chief leaders at the municipal level flow to departments within the province; furthermore, there is seldom any spatial flow across neighboring administrative levels (e.g., a county Party secretary is transferred to another prefecture-level city).

3. In view of the discussion above, the staff within government departments generally take on the characteristics of 'subordinate staff'. Our materials only include information about and flow status of chief officials of government departments (normally principal and deputy leaders). These departments and organizations also employ numerous staff, for example, common staff in township governments or common civil servants in departments of municipal and county governments. There is no great difference between them and the subordinate staff in history in terms of structural status, that is, most of these subordinate staff spend their entire career lives in the vicinity of the same administrative level. Furthermore, being rooted in a local area for a long period, they are inextricably connected with the local cultural network.

The pattern of stratified mobility of the modern bureaucratic system is, to a great extent, a continuation of the separation of officials and local staff. The 'cadre' system in the period of the People's Republic has combined all kinds of officials of different ranks into a unified ranking system and wiped out the separation of officials from local staff in the official system. However, the flow of officials at different levels is greatly limited by geography and the flow trend bears the characteristics of historical local staff: the career life of a basic-level staff member is restricted to a specific geographic area. Most of the officials at one particular level (e.g., township, county, or municipal) may spend their whole career lives in the administrative district at the same level, and only a few officials in the highest positions may flow to the immediately higher level administrative jurisdiction. Each level has the same situation. As most officials live in a locality for a long period of time, they have stable social networks there; in other words, they resemble the subordinate staff in history in terms of geographical benefits and local social networks. Thus, the arrangement of the cadre system in basic-level government (township and street) strongly reflects the characteristics of the separation of officials from local staff; for example, the boundaries between officials and local staff continue in various forms (within or outside of the institution, formal, contract, or temporary staff). In terms of organizational structure, officials and local staff still belong to two different vocational groups in terms of regulation and systematic restrictions, career life, salary and benefits, and group interests.

However, compared with the separation of officials from local staff, the pattern of stratified mobility in modern times has been transformed by the relative pedigrees of officials and local staff, which will be explained below. The historical pattern of separation of officials from local staff caused the flow of officials geographically between different administrative regions, for example, the flow to other prefectures, districts, or provinces; in contrast, the pattern of stratified mobility takes on an ascending or successive feature between administrative districts at neighboring levels, that is, some chief officials flow to the immediately higher level administrative jurisdiction (or immediately lower level administrative jurisdiction). For example, the chief officials of the county government may flow to the city or to other subordinate counties in the city, and municipal level officials may flow to chief leading positions in the counties. Thus, the succession is strengthened between administrative regions and their subordinate regions. The network established by this kind of flow pattern indicates that upper and lower levels of bureaucratic strata are not only linked within the official ranking system, but also demonstrate successive geographic pedigrees that extend to the upper levels one by one, a pattern similar to the hierarchical marketing structure proposed by Skinner (1964).

This pattern of flow is of great significance from the perspective of the separation of officials from local staff: focusing on one specific administrative level, the immediately higher level officials are flowing officials, meaning that their appointment and flow takes place in a larger administrative region; in contrast, the immediately lower level officials are stable local staff who spend their entire career lives in the same locality. In other words, if we look at things from the angle of officials at one particular level, for those officials immediately below them, they are the flowing officials who are from other administrative regions; for those officials immediately above them, on the other hand, they are the stable local staff whose career lives are confined to the subordinate administrative regions. Therefore, the roles of officials and local staff differ when observed from different levels in the bureaucratic system: the immediately lower level officials are more like local staff for the immediately higher level officials; the reverse is also true. We call this characteristic 'relative pedigrees of officials and local staff'. From this perspective, we can find the dual identity of 'official' and 'local staff' among cadres in the modern bureaucratic system, especially in government organizations.

The significance of the geographic basis should be highlighted here. Under any social circumstances, the pyramid-like bureaucratic system leads to a decreasing top-down flowing trend, which is commonplace. However, in Chinese society, the trend of stratified mobility in the bureaucratic system was integrated into local China on a geographic basis and experienced transformation, and this process gave rise to the prominent characteristic of stratified mobility in the Chinese bureaucratic system on a geographic (administrative region) basis. Whether seen from the angle of historical continuation or a variation of stratified mobility, geographic space is still the most important dimension, with abundant political and social significance. In this respect, the separation of officials from local staff and stratified

mobility arrive at the same end. The significance of geographic social network, unofficial system, and bureaucratic power on a geographic basis are inevitably integrated and strengthen one another. In the period of the People's Republic, generally speaking, the officials of one region are local officials, whose career lives start and continue in a specific district; their dependence on space fosters a firm social network and benefits solidarity, thus generating perceptible regional characteristics in behavior. The orientation of the bureaucratic system resisting external powers is expressed by gathering internal powers and rejecting external powers on a geographic basis. Officials on a geographic basis provide stable personnel resources and related interest groups for boundaries of administrative regions and internal organizational mobilization, and become an important source for the local system of authority decentralization (Cao, 2011) as well as the institutional basis for administrative subcontract (Zhou L, 2014). The evolution of the personnel system from the separation of officials and local staff to stratified mobility and the systemic arrangements that followed have given rise to the distinctive characteristics of the Chinese bureaucratic system.

### **The separation of officials and local staff, stratified mobility, and the logic of the empire: A theoretical analysis**

In this section, we will redirect our study from historical phenomena to social science analysis. Using the analytical framework of the logic of the empire by Zhou X (2014), we will analyze and explain the institutional arrangement of the separation of officials from local staff and stratified mobility through theoretical analysis. This is a two-way discussion: we not only interpret the separation of officials from local staff from the perspective of the logic of the empire, but also understand the logic of governing the state through the separation of officials and local staff.

#### *A theoretical perspective on 'control rights'*

The generation and continuation of an institutional arrangement is restricted by its inherent mechanism and circumstances, and a different theoretical perspective can help us to interpret and comprehend the origin and mechanism of an institutional transition. Before discussing the separation of officials from local staff, we will propose a theoretical perspective for interpreting this institutional phenomenon.

Seen from the organizational perspective, the separation of officials from local staff can be regarded as a matter of the distribution and combination of authority relationships within the bureaucratic system, including the authority allocation between officials and local staff, the official system for local staff, and the transforming mechanisms between officials and local staff at different times and under different circumstances.

Based on the incompleteness of contracts and new property rights in economics (Aghion and Tirole, 1997; Hart, 1995; Hart et al., 1997; Tirole, 1994), Zhou and

Lian (2012) proposed their theory of control rights to explain the combination and arrangement of control rights at all levels in the bureaucratic system and the various patterns of state governing generated thereby. The basic idea of the theory is as follows: within a government organization, the official system regulates the authority relationships at different levels. The principal–agent relationship cannot formulate or implement a complete contract because of asymmetric information, different goals, and bounded rationality. Therefore, the actual control rights at superior and subordinate levels of officials might be allocated to different levels because of the nature of tasks, information distribution, uncertainty of circumstances, and relevant transaction costs. In other words, the authority allocation among different levels in the bureaucratic system is determined by the demands and conditions of information and incentives in specific circumstances. For example, in task circumstances in which information is highly dispersed throughout the basic level of society (e.g., supervision of environmental protection and land rights ascertainment), centralization of power will bring about high costs for information collection and handling, so the superior departments have to pass the real authority in implementation down to subordinate organizations. From this analytical perspective, it is necessary to consider the interactions between different levels of the bureaucratic system in specific task circumstances and the pertinent transaction costs. We proposed three kinds of control rights: decision-making rights, inspection and acceptance rights, and implementing and motivating rights. In the common status of the Chinese bureaucratic system, the former two rights, goal setting rights and inspection and acceptance rights, are seized by the central government, while the implementing and motivating rights are delegated to the local government. This arrangement has the characteristics of ‘administrative subcontract’, as described by Zhou (2008) and Zhou and Wang (2012), namely the central government ‘contracts’ with local governments regarding miscellaneous local affairs; for example, in birth control and environmental protection, the central government sets goals in chief areas and supervises their achievement, and the local government is responsible for implementation of these goals and activities in other, secondary areas (see also Zhou and Lian, 2011: 7–10). The essence of the system lies in ensuring the unity of the central government (imperial power) while also allowing local governments flexibility in implementation.

This theoretical perspective helped us to notice the significance of details in the separation of officials from local staff in several respects. Firstly, the central government (Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs) was responsible for selecting, allocating, and promoting officials in each prefecture and county. Therefore, in personnel management and supervision, the central government possessed a powerful top-down mobilizing mechanism in the hierarchical system. Secondly, the personnel system in which officials were appointed to work in other regions and through which they frequently flowed signifies that officials were most concerned about orders from higher authorities; in other words, they considered fulfilling the authorities’ orders to be their foremost target in terms of incentive setting. Thirdly, in contrast, the subordinate staff were excluded from the bureaucratic system.

Therefore, the mobilizing ability of the central government could only be extended to the level of magistrates of counties, and the mobilizing ability below the county level belonged to the subordinate staff, who were half-excluded from the official system and directly dominated by the superior officials. In this sense, there is consistency between the formal authoritative relations of officials and local staff and the administrative subcontract (Zhou L, 2014), in which officials have the actual control power in deciding affairs of the locality.

However, the system was not exactly an administrative subcontract in the control rights sense for several reasons. Firstly, the central government held the arbitrary decision-making rights and could look into basic-level affairs at any time. The officials appointed by the central government flowed among basic-level governments and managed local affairs as authorized by the emperor to maintain the unity of the country and the ability to mobilize resources. Through flowing officials and official discourse in the bureaucratic system, the Chinese Empire linked all the villages, towns, and cities in the territory of the Empire together.

Secondly, the special relationship between officials and local staff in the geographical sense resulted in diversified top-down administrative power and effectiveness. The internal stability and sustainability of local governments and the implementation of administrative subcontract were inevitably maintained by the local subordinate staff and local gentry. Because of information advantages and the local social network of local subordinate staff and incentives arrangements for them, they possessed the actual control rights in many respects.

Thirdly, in actual practice, the superior and subordinate authoritative relationship between central and local governments and between officials and local staff was not a stable contractual relationship but, rather, consisted of frequent alternation between tense and relaxed relations between the parties. When the central government mobilized with high pressure, the local governments reacted accordingly. In this way, the central and local governments constituted a highly correlated bureaucratic system. Under ordinary circumstances, the separation of officials from local staff or stratified mobility resulted in flowing officials and stable local staff (or officials at different administrative levels) and strengthened the complicated social network and stable unofficial systems within the region, demonstrating the delicate relationships in the independent administrations of different regions and alternation of tense and relaxed relationships between officials and local staff. Under different circumstances, in the process of interaction between central and local governments, the arbitrary decision-making rights of the central government and the specific information distribution channels may lead to different allocations and combinations of authoritative relations existing between different administrative levels and generate different modes of state governing. The separation of officials from local staff or stratified mobility played a deliberate and important role in regulating interactions in the relationships.

How could we interpret the authority allocations and transformations between officials and local staff, and between central and local governments? In an article I previously published (Zhou X, 2014), I proposed three pairs of relationships in

the governing of the Chinese Empire: the principal–agent relationship; the relationship between formal and informal institutions; and the relationship between symbolic and substantive authority, as well as the linkage and transformations between them. I will now analyze and discuss the separation of officials from local staff, its relevant institutional arrangements, and its significance for governing the Empire by focusing on these three pairs of relationships.

### *Principal–agent: A genetic explanation for the separation of officials from local staff*

Bureaucracy serves as the organizational basis for empire governing. The large scale of the empire entailed a bulky and complex bureaucracy as well as a long, loose administrative chain, which intensified difficulties in principal–agent relationships, especially concerning information asymmetry, and hence also personnel management difficulties (Zhou Z, 2013). From the perspective of the theory of control rights, the separation of officials and local staff emerged in response to the difficulties in principal–agent relationships in governing the empire. The essence of the institutional arrangement was that the governing power over the prefectures and counties belonged to the central government, while the actual administrative rights were distributed, after bargaining, among magistrates, county gentry, and subordinate staff so as to reduce the transaction costs of personnel management in the imperial bureaucracy.

In the process of centralizing authority, the state bureaucracy expanded its scope and depth of governing and also enlarged the scale of bureaucratic organization. In the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the central government set up two departments in most counties, while in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there were six departments in each county government. The central government altered its protocols from selecting officials from local areas to making its own direct appointments. For example, in the Han Dynasty, subordinate staff in a prefecture or county government were indigenous and employed by magistrates, while in the Tang Dynasty, the supporting staff were appointed by the central government, and most of them were from other prefectures or counties. The two cases were totally different (Yan, 2007). The appointment of Yuan Shi, another kind of subordinate staff, was carried out by the prefecture government during the Han Dynasty, while in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, the appointment of subordinate staff was first made by the Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs (Zhao, 1994: 35). It cannot be denied that the scale of personnel management was the greatest challenge that institutional arrangements faced. A large number of officials in each region were appointed by the central government. Directly administering imperial examinations as well as the selection, transfer, assessment, salary, and inspection of officials placed a heavy burden on the central government. The number of subordinate staff was 10 times or even 100 times the number of government officials, so it was impossible to centralize governing of all subordinate staff. From this situation, we can infer that the separation of officials from local staff or the strategy of managing officials while

loosening control over subordinate staff was undertaken as a last resort. Since the central government held the supreme power, it was then natural to emphasize the divergence of officials from local staff and also to respect officials as well as look down upon local staff. This historical evolution illustrates a process of transformation toward selecting superior and eliminating inferior institutional arrangements in empire governing so as to eliminate the contradictions between a unified institution and effective governing.

Therefore, I propose that in China the centralized authority and its bureaucratic system sharply raised the transaction costs of the principal–agent relationship, especially the information costs of official assessment, flow, and supervision. The separation of officials from local staff served as an institutional arrangement for this difficulty; in other words, the central government was in charge of the appointment and jurisdiction of officials in each region, while delegating the management power in the administrative regions (or departments), including the personnel rights of subordinate staff, to the officials of the local governments. This explanation differs from the genetic explanation of gentrification of bureaucracy proposed by Miyazaki (2008). It can be concluded from the above discussion that the emergence of the separation of officials and local staff can be attributed to the expansion of bureaucracy and the resulting increase in organizational scale; moreover, the ranking framework of officials provided social and cultural resources for the separation of officials from local staff, which represents the evolutionary process of the empire responding to its governing burdens. The main idea of this article differs from Ray Huang's (2001) 'submarine sandwich' theory that the Chinese empire faced a governing dilemma in that its highest and lowest levels (the imperial authority and the common people) were magnificent but impractical, with no powerful bureaucratic level in between to connect them. On the contrary, I believe that the missing in-between level finds expression in the separation of officials from local staff. On the one hand, the scholar officials possessed knowledge of the classics but knew nothing about practical affairs; on the other hand, the clerks and subordinate staff at the basic level of society made their livings outside the bureaucratic system. They provided services but were given little power. Ray Huang attributed the dilemma to the absence of 'mathematically manageable' technology. For example, the rational management of taxes could not be achieved when the area of the field was not made clear. However, even in modern times, when we have highly advanced mathematically manageable technology, the incompleteness, asymmetry, and vagueness of available information greatly diminishes the capability of information technology. I think this institutional arrangement was a measure taken to try to overcome the limitations of centralized authority, implying that empire governing was overburdened by its huge scale and had only limited ability to extend its power down to the basic level. The separation of officials and local staff largely alleviated these problems.

In modern China, the state bureaucratic system undertook strenuous work in various areas, including politics, economy, culture, and social security. Hence, the bureaucratic system had frequent interactions with the common people, resulting in

incremental burdens in state governing, an expanded bureaucracy and more serious problems in the principal-agent relationship. With the expansion of the government official group and more intricate labor division, a heavy burden of information collection, processing, explanation, and decision-making was imposed for personnel assessment, incentives, promotion, supervision, transfers, and training; thus, the intention to maintain upward centralizing authority was seriously limited, and administrative authority had to be distributed to each jurisdiction of the bureaucracy.

This process led to the current, geographically based administrative regions and the pattern of stratified mobility. In particular, within the state bureaucracy, the flow and promotion of chief officials at one level (e.g., within township and county departments) is evaluated and determined by the superior department (e.g., the county Party committee) at the next highest level (or two levels higher). Therefore, the spatial flowing scope for these officials should be restricted to the geographic space administrated by the superior department at the next highest level. The personnel management of departments at all levels of the Chinese bureaucracy, such as departments in the health bureau, the education bureau, or the environmental bureau, is administrated by the regional government. Hence, officials in most departments have to spend their career lives in their original departments. Only those in very powerful departments, such as the National Tax Bureau, Discipline Inspection Commission, and banks, or individual officials specially promoted by leaders at least two levels above their own, have the opportunity to flow beyond their current administrative jurisdiction. In other words, this pattern of stratified mobility is a result of the geographic structure of the Chinese bureaucracy. Suppose that personnel flow occurred across administrative regions or jurisdictions; in that case, corresponding institutional arrangements would be needed to organize information flow, evaluations, and authority relationships. This situation would undoubtedly conflict with the basic structure of the current bureaucracy. Therefore, the mobility pattern across administrative levels can only be accidental and partial. The so-called 'decentralized authoritarianism' (Landry, 2008) is the last resort against the restrictions of the state scale, although it has been expressed in different forms and under different labels across history.

### *Formal and informal: The separation of officials from local staff and the state governing mechanism*

In discussing the logic of empire governing, I emphasized the importance of the coexistence and interactions between formal and informal institutions (Zhou X, 2014). A distinctive difficulty for empire governing is the contradiction between a unified institution and effective governing, namely that the incongruity between the uniform characteristics of an institution and the specific situations in each region will give rise to tension, conflicts, and even turmoil. Empire governing needs to resolve the contradiction between centralized authority and local adaptability, and the coexistence and interactions between formal and informal institutions can alleviate the tension to a great extent: the former ensures that 'the orders issued by

the central government' will be obeyed by the local government, and thus the central government has symbolic authority, while the local government can provide flexibility for the implementation of orders in accordance with specific situations.

Based on the theory of separation of officials from local staff, I propose the following: to a great extent, the relationship between formal and informal institutions in empire governing is interwoven with the institutional arrangement of the relationships between officials and local staff and their interactions. The informal institution was established based on long-term and stable social interactions and the associated social networks, shared values, and interest groups; the pattern of subordinate staff being based in the local region brought about by the separation of officials from local staff served as a stable basis for informal institutions. On the one hand, the institutional arrangement of separation of officials from local staff resulted in two totally different groups in terms of education, social status, and career life. It could be said that the two distinct groups were the expression of formal and informal institutions. On the other hand, being closely linked in the bureaucratic system, the two groups interacted frequently and relied on one another. As Lu (1882) stated in 'Discussions about subordinate staff', 'The subordinate staff cannot harm the common people. They make mischief by relying on government officials. If they rely on high-ranking officials, they will be rude and contemptuous; if they rely on minor officials, they will be humbler'. In the meantime, the subordinate staff served as the pivot for bureaucracy, gentry, and the common people. There are few works on the relationships among subordinate staff, clan, and gentry, although Spence (2005: 28–32) described the local taxation system during the early Qing Dynasty in which the government levied taxes on farmers twice per month for nine months of the year. Given the frequent interactions between farmers and tax collectors and even subordinate staff, it is easy to imagine the abundant social relationships between them. We can find similar statements about the relationship between law and judicial precedent in previous discussions:

As for law, we enact and apply it; as for judicial precedent, we write and obey it. There will be disadvantages when the law has been utilized for too long, so the judicial precedent is created to renovate the unsuitable law. The function of judicial precedent is to make up for the drawbacks in the law. Hence, the law helps us to observe the principle, while the judicial precedent helps us to be flexible. (Xi, 1981: 199)

The importance of subordinate staff was reflected in its flexibility within institutions. As the subordinate staff stayed in one region for long periods, they could accomplish tasks by taking advantage of the gaps between the laws and judicial precedents based on local conditions with the precondition of not harming the symbolic dignity of the law. Reed (2000: 248) proposed that,

... at the most basic level, the subordinate staff should not be regarded as the representatives of the state or society. On the contrary, they should be regarded as both

agents of the state and a group rooted in local communities, both as providers of various services and as individuals seeking to benefit themselves by making efforts utilizing their resources.

The interdependent and mutually restricting relationship between officials and local staff constitutes a specific expression of the relationship between formal and information institutions.

By analyzing the interactive relationship between officials and local staff in history, we can discern two opposing situations that are worth studying. The first situation was frequently described in historical records and literary works: tension and conflicts occurred between the formal institution, with the moral doctrines its officials defended, and the informal institutions of subordinate staff. The officials in administrative regions implemented imperial orders, representing the regulations and doctrines of formal institutions, while subordinate staff adapted pragmatically and informally; thus, informal institutions ignored, distorted, or even rejected formal institutions.

We can better understand the role subordinate staff played in informal institutions by looking at a particular historical case. The subordinate staff played an important part in tracking down criminals for the county government. However, in practice they always made decisions by themselves and adapted the laws. As one sergeant commented,

It is not true that sergeants don't like rewards and don't fear collusion; moreover, not all of them tolerate criminals. It is difficult to track down the criminal, and more difficult to handle a case. In order to solve a case, the sergeants need to employ many assistants to investigate and conduct searches—how can they meet transportation and board expenses? If one case is solved with irrefutable evidence, the criminals will be sentenced to death at most, or will be banished to a distant area at least; besides, it takes a long time to escort the criminals to the prefecture and provincial trial department, so a big sum of money will be needed. How can they meet such expenses? The cost of solving a case is one or two hundred taels of silver, and the sergeants cannot cover these expenses, so they would rather be blamed than track down the criminals. (Zhou B, 2009: 78)

According to my observations doing field work on basic-level governments, it is not unusual to hear similar comments by modern cadres at this level. In modern China, basic-level cadres engage in strategic behaviors such as adaption, deviation, and collusion in implementing top-down policies, constituting prominent characteristics for state governing (Sun and Guo, 2000; Zhou, 2012a). These adaptive informal behaviors can alleviate excessive burdens in state governing.

The second situation we encounter in analyzing the relationship between formal and informal institutions involves the relationship between rigid observance of laws and regulations by clerks (formal) and the subjective initiatives of officials (informal). In reviewing the criticisms on subordinate staff in history, we encounter a

common topic: because of over-elaborate laws and regulations, the clerks exercised great control in implementing them and thus the authority of officials was restricted. As Ye (1961: 834–835) stated,

Within the state, the law serves as the foundation, while judicial precedent is important for governing. No matter how high the official's rank is, no matter how capable he is, if he doesn't know the law and judicial precedents well, he can achieve nothing... they [officials] only have superficial knowledge about the law, while the local staff know it well, and thus the actual affairs are done by the local staff.

Zhao (2013: 44–45) made the following observation,

As ancient explanations will be inapplicable, a judicial precedent was created for each case in later generations; thus, it was unnecessary to quote ancient explanations to solve cases. In this way, there were too many judicial precedents handled by subordinate staff, making the laws and regulations useless.

Gu (2006: 509 and 541) had the harshest criticism:

The purpose of enacting the law was to prevent local staff from doing mischief; however, they usually determined how the law would be implemented. We can say that a local staff's decision is more important than the law, and the power of the central government is less than that of local staff... In past generations, there were emperors who were not good at governing the state and holding centralized authority in their own hands. The vast domain of the state could not be controlled by any single man, so laws were enacted to enable the central government to exercise authority, and later more and more laws were issued to restrict the power of officials. As a result, treacherous officials could not break the law openly, and wise and able officials could not make contributions beyond the control of the law and their main purpose was only to not commit any mistakes. In this way, the imperial power was delegated to local staff rather than to officials.

Zhu (2006) emphasized the importance of subordinate staff in state governing: on the one hand, the emperor gave great authority to officials; on the other hand, he constrained them by relying on subordinate staff. The imperial power,

... entrusted officials with decisive power that the subordinate staff could not possess within a certain scope and allowed officials flexibility in administration under the condition of not violating the laws and judicial precedents ... [and] let subordinate staff supervise officials in observing laws and judicial precedents to maintain the unification of state orders. (Zhu, 2006: 93)

Some scholars believed that 'it was the daily work by the subordinate staff who knew the laws and regulations well that constituted the basis for the rational

administration of bureaucracy' (Ye, 2009: 125). Here, the formal and informal relationship is reflected in the fact that the subordinate staff in a formal institution restricted the informal flexibility of officials.

From the discussion above, we can conclude that the microscopic process of the relationship between formal and informal institutions in state governing has different manifestations within the relationships between officials and subordinate staff: the formal policy and informal implementation shows the flexibility and adaptability of subordinate staff in governing local regions, while officials' autonomy in decision-making and clerks' rigid, law-abiding features reflect the rigidity of clerks as representatives of formal institution. These relationships illustrate that the actual control over the bureaucratic working processes changes with its allocation among the emperor, officials, and subordinate staff in accordance with different situations, regions, and time periods. The intrinsic mechanism of this process needs further exploration. Studies on the behavior of basic-level governments in recent years have pointed to the vital role of basic-level cadres in state governing (Ai, 2011; Feng, 2014; He, 2007; Ouyang, 2011; Tian, 2012; Wang et al., 1997; Ying, 2001; Zhang, 2007; Zhang and Li, 2012; Zhe and Chen, 2011; Zhou, 2007).

Although these staff cadres lack great power, their ability and functions in solving practical problems cannot be underestimated. I will take one field study in a town in North China as an example. Whenever there were disputes in the town, the cadres from other regions (township leaders) relied on local cadres, who had abundant local knowledge and social networks, to solve them. During the most intensive period of village elections, all the villages with dispute risks arranged the most capable local cadres to host the election, while cadres from other regions would stay away or sit silently at the election spot. It could be said that basic-level officials reflect the characteristics of state power. If it were not for the participation, collusion, and adaptability of these staff cadres at the basic level, the implementation of state or superior policies could not be accomplished and the unified institution of China could not find its footing (Zhou, 2010: 53; Zhou, 2011: 74–76).

### *Symbolic and substantive: The separation of officials from local staff and the pace of state governing*

Zhou X (2014) commented that, for the centralized authority, there is interdependence as well as tension between the formal and informal institutions, which can provide temporary balance in their interactions. This important interactive mechanism is an alternation between symbolic and substantive authorities by the central government manifested in two phases: in the phase of 'symbolic authority taking the place of substantive authority', the central government can pass substantive authority to local officials through formal orders or tacit consent to bring about the possibility of effective governing; in the meantime, this kind of top-down 'authorization' preserves the symbolic authority of the central government. In the phase of 'rectifying symbolic authority with the assistance of substantive authority', on the

other hand, the central government takes back the substantive authority, cracking down on 'deviant' behaviors of the local government through a political campaign to preserve the central government's authority. Thus, there is periodic alternation between handing over and taking back substantive authority between the central and local governments. From this perspective, the authority allocation among different jurisdictions of the bureaucracy changes along with the implementation of organizational focus and arbitrary decision-making rights.

By taking a microscopic view of the actual operation of the separation of officials from local staff, it is easy to notice the following structural characteristic: the officials within the bureaucracy are the most sensitive to top-down mobilizing, as their recruitment, appointment, flow, and promotion is evaluated by the central (or superior) government. In contrast, the subordinate staff take a more dubious attitude toward orders from the central government. The imperial bureaucracy did not historically take subordinate staff into formal institutions; rather, they were governed by local government officials. They were marginalized from the bureaucracy and their behaviors had distinctive local characteristics. Not that the subordinate staff failed to obey the officials' orders and run out to execute them, but the alienation and barrier between officials and subordinate staff in institutions meant that the connection between bureaucracy and local administration was transient, partial, and conditional. On the one hand, the subordinate staff obeyed and executed the orders of officials, while on the other hand, the relationship between them and the bureaucracy was totally different from relationships within the bureaucracy, as the subordinate staff had interwoven links with local benefits. Their structural position produced a centrifugal trend in the working of the bureaucracy.

The coexistence of authoritative relationships and alienation between officials and local staff in daily affairs made the loose linkage between intention and explanation, orders and implementation, a component of bureaucratic operation. Mobilization within the bureaucracy and the daily work of subordinate staff were integrated as a whole: the top-down mobilizing mechanism affected officials' behaviors, while the stability of subordinate staff brought about the dissociation between mobilizing and their daily work.

The above discussion points out one possible significance of the structural arrangement of the separation of officials from local staff: the growing benefits in local regions for subordinate staff generated an important buffering area between the state and the common people, that is, by forming alliances with local gentry elites, they built their own interest groups, which were interwoven into the local cultural network (Chen, 1988; Duara, 2003). In this way, under certain circumstances, the subordinate staff played a decelerating and sound-deadening role during the process of the bureaucracy extending down to the basic-level society, resulting in loose coupling between different regions and the central authority, and thus the adaptability of local regions was enhanced.

During the period of the People's Republic, the systemic degree of the state bureaucracy has been much higher than the historic dual structure of the separation of officials from local staff. The newer situation brought about new

characteristics of the transfer between symbolic and substantive authority. Although local governments administrate their own regions independently, the bureaucratic system now governs the whole state through a top-down ranking structure. Under intensive mobilizing circumstances, there is interregional competition as well as simultaneous effective evolution among local governments; therefore, the different domains and regions of the whole state have been swept into periodic top-down tremors (Feng, 2011; Zhou F, 2009; Zhou, 2012b).

However, the pattern of stratified mobility has had an important influence on this mobilizing system: stratified mobility generated a densely structured social network and stable informal institution among regional jurisdictions. As a result, information distribution and processing were changed, the interdependent and protective interest structure was strengthened, and, finally, the center of real control rights was passed down to the basic-level government. In the interactions between central and local governments, especially when the central government launches a top-down campaign, the local officials now may assume negative attitudes, take excessive measures, or distort the central government's orders. In this way, the top-down governing authority is seriously bound, and the unified system is very loosely coupled with local governing. Within the relative pedigrees of officials and local staff, the wavering division of control between the two groups is determined by the tension and interests of each party concerned in the actual practice of governing.

In summary, the three stages of the interlink between officials and local staff, the separation between them, and the stratified mobility in the evolution of the personnel system in the Chinese bureaucracy have all been characterized by a deliberate balance between the authority system and effective local governing. That is to say, on the one hand, the central power governs local officials to maintain a unified system while, on the other hand, it alleviates the pressure of the principal-agent problem through decentralization of power to each jurisdiction. In the period of the People's Republic, this balance can be found in a series of institutional arrangements, including 'Party governing cadres' and 'delegating personnel rights to each successive jurisdiction'. As stated in the above discussion, these institutional arrangements originated from the basic contradiction and corresponding measures in the state governing of China and have profound impacts on the state governing process and its characteristics. The separation of officials from local staff provides new vision in understanding the logic of state governing in China.

## **Discussions and conclusion**

The separation of officials from local staff is an important systemic evolution in the history of the Chinese bureaucracy. The related historical phenomena can be found in historical records and research works. The contribution of this article is that, from the perspective of social science and the framework of 'the logic of the empire' (Zhou X, 2014), it explained the notion of the separation of officials from local staff and its continuation and variation in modern society by theoretical analysis, and

surveyed its significance in state governing. Although the separation of officials from local staff disappeared from modern political language (e.g., cadre group, basic-level cadres), we can still recognize and understand the legacy of it in modern society by examining historical records. In the concluding section of this article, I summarized my studies and emphasized the significance and challenges of this institutional arrangement in state governing.

Why did the Chinese emperor adopt the institutional arrangement of the separation of officials from local staff? Why has the pattern of stratified mobility prevailed in the bureaucratic system in modern China? There is no doubt that different theoretical perspectives and historical explorations may propose different genetic explanations, for example, cultural origins, class division, rational choice, an evolutionary process of selecting the fittest in history, etc. This article proposed the following thesis based on ‘the logic of the Empire’:

The separation of officials from local staff is an institutional arrangement created in response to the principal–agent problem that the imperial bureaucracy faced due to the burden of the huge scale of the bureaucratic group and intricate division of labor. These factors motivated the centralized authority system to take appropriate measures and to delegate personnel rights to each successive jurisdiction in practice. Thus, even under different administrative systems, although the separation of officials from local staff and the stratified mobility under the People’s Republic were different in form, they were consistent in essence.

In my opinion, the reason for the subordinate staff’s exclusion from the bureaucracy and lack of formalization lies in the fact that the structural limitations of imperial bureaucracy could not take the larger group of subordinate staff into the formal institution. Furthermore, its formalization would have meant standardization and credible commitment, which would have greatly diminished the flexibility of administration.

Let us take post allocation of subordinate staff as an example. Each region had different situations in terms of transportation, area, taxation status, and public security, and, in addition, the local governments had to perform different tasks at different times; thus, it was difficult to arrange posts for subordinate staff. When there were not enough formal posts, the local governments had to employ local people; even if there were regulations, they could not be executed (Reed, 2000). This was the primary reason for all regulations regarding the subordinate staff of the empire becoming formalistic. The institutional arrangement of subordinate staff between formal and informal institutions provided flexibility and stability for state governing. This arrangement was the result of a trial-and-error process concerning the interactions among all kinds of benefits, social and cultural resources, and specific historical conditions in state governing, rather than the result of so-called rational choice.

The separation of officials from local staff has influenced the Chinese bureaucracy, with its own particular characteristics in state governing. Flowing officials

and stable local staff as well as the gap between them have created an interesting institutional pattern: by observing the state institution from the top-down perspective, officials integrated administrative regions with local governments and their own career lives under a centralized authority; by observing the state institution from the bottom-up perspective, local staff governed their regions independently. From the perspective of modern histological theory, this structure was similar to a collective body of independent economic entities, like conglomerates in a modern enterprise system. Under the ownership of a large enterprise, individual subsidiary companies have no relations with one another in business; their subordination to the parent enterprise is achieved through other mechanisms (ownership, financial accounting, and personnel management).

As stated above, this pattern has remained the same in the form of stratified mobility under the People's Republic; however, to a great extent, it includes a relative pedigree of officials and local staff. Compared with the historical separation of officials from local staff, the geographic bureaucratic jurisdictions in modern times show a more distinctive continuous relevance on the one hand, while on the other hand, they have a stronger top-down sheltering inclination. Both the past separation of officials from local staff and present-day stratified mobility have profound relationships with geography (administrative regions); moreover, both of them take geography as a boundary. This is the basic pattern and essence of state governing.

The stratified mobility model that I proposed in this article describes an important characteristic of personnel flow in China from a macroscopic perspective, providing a new way of looking at state governing in China and its bureaucratic system. It might be helpful to review recent studies about government incentive design from a microscopic view. These studies mainly focused on the promotional events of officials, motivating mechanisms, and individuals' career lives. Stratified mobility and personnel flowing across levels of administrative jurisdictions imply that most officials will not spend their entire careers away from their home counties or cities, and that many of them will never even leave their current work units or systems. Therefore, it is easier for them to become integrated into a local social network and strengthen the boundaries and distances between flowing officials and stable local staff and among the various levels of administrative jurisdictions. Motivating mechanisms, such as promotion tournaments, are designed for flowing officials and have little potential to break into the closed structure. Thus, the discussions in this article have pointed out a new research area and its significance based on officials' geographical flowing and their career lives.

We can survey again the dispute between the system of prefectures and counties and the feudal system from the perspective of this article. Wang made the following comment in the opening chapter of *Reading the Mirror of Universal History*:

The system of prefectures and counties lasted for two thousand years and is still in use today. This is because it applies to both ancient and modern times and can make good arrangements for both the government and the common people. The system is

consistent with the general trend of China and will not be transformed by human will.  
(Wang, 1975: 1)

There is also a common view in sociological and historical publications that the form of the Chinese government has consisted of a centralized authority and a system of prefectures and counties since the Qin Dynasty. Many scholars have attributed the problems over the course of history to this system. In discussing the great changes at the turn of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Gu Yanwu quoted Ye Shi as saying, 'Nowadays, the appointment of subordinate staff follows feudalism, while that of officials doesn't . . . If there was a sage who could apply feudalism to prefectures and counties, the empire would be governed in an orderly fashion' (Gu, 1959: 12). The discussions in this article show that throughout Chinese history, state governance in essence embodies the institutional arrangement of 'applying feudalism to prefectures and counties', that is, although the flowing officials held power in hand, that power was integrated with local knowledge in the behaviors of subordinate staff, showing flexibility and diversity in each region. The differences of each region became systemized and stabilized because of the separation of officials from local staff, especially the situation of flowing officials and stable local staff. That is to say, the operation of the state reflects feudalism within the framework of the system of prefectures and counties. The combination of the formal institution of a system of prefectures and counties and the informal institution of feudalism provided the flexibility of a loose connection of local governments in maintaining the unification of the empire. This was the basis for the long history of the Chinese Empire. The pattern of stratified mobility in modern society has, to a great extent, continued and strengthened the separation of administrative regions on a geographic basis. After over half a century's construction and social revolution of the People's Republic of China, state governing today faces the arrangement of 'applying feudalism into prefectures and counties' in local regions, as Gu Yanwu commented. Is this deplorable or fortunate for China?

In a previous article (Zhou X, 2013), I distinguished state power (imperial power) from bureaucratic power and discussed the basis for their respective legitimacies, the relationship between them, and their significances in state governing. This article further distinguished between and discussed officials and local staff and the significance of the structure of the corresponding bureaucracy and the conjunction group (local staff) in the basic-level society. These two articles are relevant in identifying and distinguishing between state power, flowing officials, and stable officials at the basic level (local staff) and the relationships among them. According to Weber, the imperial power was established on charisma and traditional authority, and the legitimacy of the bureaucracy was established through top-down authorization. The discussions in this article signify that the separation of officials from local staff resulted in different legitimacy, structures, and features of behavior respectively. The legitimacy of local staff as described in this article was established on the stable combination of the legitimacy of the bureaucracy and local authority (the power of local cultural networks as proposed by Duara, 2003).

By viewing the imperial power, flowing officials, and local staff as a whole, we find that the institutional arrangements of the separation of officials from local staff and stratified mobility provided delicate and important incentives for the evolution of state governing. The contradiction between officials and local staff reflects the contradiction between the central and local governments. Furthermore, the separation of officials from local staff provided basic conditions for the effective governing of local regions. The two-fold characteristics of officials and local staff have important meanings. In governing the basic-level society, local staff, with their local knowledge and cultural networks, are indispensable: they can eliminate public discontent, resolve conflicts, finish tasks, or conceal problems through measures of adaption or collusion (Sun and Guo, 2000; Wang et al., 1997; Zhou, 2010) while maintaining the symbolic significance of centralized authority. It is difficult to imagine that officials from other regions can easily solve troublesome problems of the region without the help of local staff. Furthermore, as the subordinate staff were not included in the institutional arrangement of bureaucracy as formal officials, they can utilize various 'adaptive' measures to finish tasks in implementing policies and be blamed for the possible bad results. As a result, the formal bureaucratic system can extricate itself from direct involvement, and direct attacks on formal institution due to local conflicts can be avoided. It is also significant that the personnel flow within the bureaucratic system and the serious disparity between officials and local staff and between officials of crossing immediate levels helps the central authority eliminate restrictions from local interest groups and interest interdependence in a geographical sense; hence, there is the possibility of a revolution restarting under certain conditions. As a result, interest distribution in local regions will be constantly changing and unified authority of the central government can be maintained.

Today, when surveying the institutional arrangement of the separation of officials from local staff, we give special attention to this historical legacy and its realistic significance in a new version. The question of subordinate staff was not a prominent difficulty during most of the imperial period. This was because, within the imperial institution, the jurisdictions below the county level had few relations with the state, except in the areas of taxation and public security, and the basic organizational forces were the gentries and clans in rural society. In other words, the areas in which subordinate staff were involved were limited. This situation has greatly changed during the period of the People's Republic. With the extending and strengthening of state power to the basic level of society, basic-level cadres play more important roles. The relationship between officials and local staff is embodied in a relatively closed system geographically: a top-down, continuous pedigree with different administrative levels interwoven is a prominent characteristic of state governing. With modernization and the extensive application of communication technologies and social media, the central government and local regions have become integrated into a close-knit institution. This development has led to the following results: firstly, it is now difficult to maintain the traditional local administrative boundaries, and the flexibility of

the local government is greatly suppressed; secondly, measures taken by local governments cause great tremors to state governing through unofficial channels, such as feedback from social media. It is evident that, in recent years, violent law enforcement and protest events in various forms have caused nationwide tremors, and regional problems have expanded and placed heavy burdens on centralized authority. Within the relative pedigrees of officials and local staff, different levels of officials and staff are linked with state power; thus, the state cannot escape the responsibility for dealing with these problems and must take immediate action in response to behaviors at the basic level of society. The huge group of subordinate staff who existed beyond the reach of state power in ancient times and the 'basic-level cadres' today serve as a double-edged sword in state governing. Nowadays, with diversified forms of social development, tensions and pressure brought about by this complex institution are forcing the state to develop new patterns of governing.

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### Notes

1. Chen (Qing Dynasty) (2003: 5-6) summarized this view in *Advice for Officials*:

However, within the system of officials and local staff established by the central government, the positions of officials are transient, while those of the local staff are stable; the number of officials is small, while that of local staff is big. Normally, officials are appointed to a region thousands of *li* from their hometown; they might not be good at writing official documents and handling taxation and may not be familiar with local customs. In contrast, the local staff are skilled at these tasks. Where writing and issuing official documents and checking and supervising affairs are concerned, there are cases in which officials cannot do these tasks and have to depend on local staff. Therefore, national welfare and people's livelihoods depend on officials as well as local staff. The responsibilities of local staff are so great! There are also so-called 'officials' who cannot start reforms but no local staff who know nothing about local customs.

2. Ye (2009) pointed out that in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, there was formal ranking and a promotion system for clerk staff in departments of the central government. However, no records exist about formal systems and flow channels for local staff in local governments.

Therefore, the characteristics of subordinate staff apply only to subordinate staff in local governments. This is also what this article is concerned about.

3. I should thank Yonghong Zhang and Xiaochun Huang for this view.
4. As this material only includes information about flowing officials in Yangzhou and Taizhou, there is no material available about officials flowing to other prefectures or provincial departments. Here the flow rate of officials crossing administrative regions might be lower than in the real situation. According to common observations, the situation of flowing officials crossing administrative regions is less common. These elements will not change the basic trends shown in this article. Furthermore, as the information for some years in some counties or districts of Yangzhou and Taizhou is missing, to avoid errors, I have taken pertinent measures. I did not include 'districts' (county level) in my analysis, as the meaning of official flow from districts to other regions of the city is different from flow crossing administrative regions.
5. It is possible that chief officials of Yangzhou and Taizhou might flow upwards (provincial level) or to other prefectures. As this possibility is not shown in our materials, it needs further exploration. Even if we consider all possibilities, the total flow rate will be at a similarly low level.

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