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NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translated from the French original by Jonathan Hall

- 1 The central argument of this volume by Bo Zhiyue concerns the mobility of the provincial elites in China since 1949. This places it in the field of investigations into contemporary China known as *elite studies*, a field which has greatly expanded since the pioneering work of Roberto Scalapino¹. Subsequently, the proliferation of available Chinese sources, coupled with the country's increasingly rationalised procedures for leadership appointments, have made this question a legitimate object of research. A whole series of publications have reinvigorated the sociological study of the Chinese elites². A recent and significant initiative has been the establishment of the *China Leadership Monitor*³. This brings together all the latest analyses of the leading figures in the political system of the People's Republic.
- 2 Bo Zhiyue's work puts him in a direct line of descent from the classical school of elite studies of Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, and he himself acknowledges the influence of William Clark's work on the situation in Russia⁴. The supporting documentation is very solid, enabling the reader to grasp the historical development of the system in the provinces since 1949. The work is also impressive for the huge amount of material it analyses—the *Dangdai Zhongguo* (Contemporary China) and the *Shengqing* (Provincial Data) series—and for the number of its case studies (covering 23,845 official positions held by 2,534 leaders from 22 provinces, five autonomous regions, and the cities of Peking, Shanghai and Tianjin). Another positive feature is that

it provides research data on entire elite groups or populations, not on sample surveys. This research focuses on the holders of leadership positions in the provinces, namely the appointees as governor and deputy governor, and as Communist Party secretary and deputy secretary, between 1949 and 1998.

- 3 Nevertheless, this book comes up sharply against numerous limitations, when it seeks to distinguish itself from most of the accepted theories about the Chinese elites by relying on a statistical approach which is sometimes confusing and on an excessively narrow set of criteria: political mobility is only measured against the yardstick of the provincial leaders' economic performance.
- 4 The author categorically rejects the "factional model"⁵ advanced by Andrew Nathan, as well as Lowell Dittmer's theory of "informal politics"⁶. The latter theory takes the political uses of interpersonal relations or *guanxi* as its guiding principle to explain, with a certain justification, that the operational logic of personal contacts may well be necessary conditions, but can never be sufficient reasons in themselves, for setting up a political faction. In addition, Bo Zhiyue maintains that the various political campaigns since 1979 were not a decisive factor in the political mobility of the provincial leaders. This position leads him to deny the existence of "localist tendencies", in opposition to analyses like those of Li Cheng, David Bachmann and Zang Xiaowei, who testify to the emergence of such trends after the Communist Party lifted the ban on the recruitment of leading cadres in their native province. Bo demonstrates that whereas such leaders made up 50% of the personnel in the 1950s, their number declined steadily until the early 1980s and rebounded after 1989 to reach a figure of 42% of the total provincial leadership. His argument is that this phenomenon was a consequence of the low degree of mobility enjoyed by the social elites in China, or to be more precise, the fact that advancement is primarily horizontal or internal. Hongwu Ouyang's analyses of the turnover in the local leaderships since the mid-1980s confirm that the average length of a governor's tenure fell from 39 months between 1949 and 1978, to 32.6 months in the period since 1986. On average, the reappointment of the provincial leaders takes place every five years, following the pattern set by the Party Congresses. As for the mayorships, according to Pierre Landry's studies, these are decided by the central government about every 28 months. However, Bo Zhiyue points out that of the 13 deputy governors who were transferred between 1990 and 1998, over 60% were promoted to the post of deputy Party Secretary, which shows that the movement of cadres takes place more between the provinces themselves than outwards from the centre to the provinces.
- 5 The author also emphasises that from the 1980s to the 1990s political centralisation was matched by economic decentralisation. So, unlike Li Cheng's technocratic model, his view is that the level of education is playing an increasingly important role in the appointment of cadres, but not in their mobility. This is because provincial China "is not ruled by technocrats" but by "generalists", who are "admittedly better educated and younger, but not very specialised" according to him.
- 6 Bo Zhiyue's main thesis is that the political mobility of a cadre is determined by the amount of his locality's financial contribution to the central budget. Referring to the amount of provincial representation at the central committee and the politburo between 1969 and 1997, he attempts to show that the richer a province is, the greater its political power, and *vice versa*. The crucial factor is not so much a province's economic performance but its contribution to the state budget. This phenomenon

serves to explain why provincial representation at the centre is primarily under the control of the richest municipalities, followed by the major provinces, whose importance is measured in terms of prosperity, land area and population density.

- 7 In actual fact, while the theoretical models are challenged by the author do provide as an inadequate description of the current situation of the Chinese elites, that does not mean that they were wrong at their own time. Moreover, it is one thing to try to show that there is no localism in China, but quite another to account for political tensions which arise from the perception of an unstoppable rise of localist attitudes at the heart of the central government. The author clings to his definition of “localism” as meaning “to be a native of the same place where one holds office”, that is “to have been born there”. But is this form of localism the expression of a type of political representation, or of “identity” representation in the manner of the territory-based *guanxi* (*tongxiang guanxi*)? Does it seek the representation of provincial units or of particular personalities? For example, when the leader of Shandong province, Wu Guanzheng, was appointed to the central committee, was this on account of his economic performance and/or his *guanxi* connections, or was it his position as the representative of the economically prosperous province of Shandong which really counted? Similarly, was Li Changchun appointed in his day for his personal qualities, or because he represented Henan? The latter view is dubious, because Henan is neither rich nor prosperous and has been under-represented in the central institutions ever since 1949, except some periods under Maoist rule. To take another instance, when a well-known and charismatic provincial leader is removed from power, his position as provincial representative is not automatically filled by another. Such was the case of Tan Shaowen in 1993. His successor on the Tianjin city council, Gao Dezhan, did not immediately take over the deceased leader’s seat on the politburo.
- 8 All these examples show that the over- or under-representation of the native inhabitants of a province within the political institutions need to be analysed in a less quantitative manner, taking account of more qualitative aspects. For a local cadre the essential requirement is to possess both a solid regional base, fed by local *guanxi* connections and supported by a body of shared political experience, and a network of trust built on these two factors. This makes it difficult to distinguish “mobility” from territorial *guanxi* connections, because even when localism can be proven, it also reflects the role of “professional” concerns (which are sometimes predominant) that the appointee should have learnt his political skills within the local situation. Contrary to Bo Zhiyue’s basic thesis, performance and *guanxi* connections are not separate sources of support but interconnected ones. Together they make up the local cadres’ real power base. There are not, on one side, technocrats free of *guanxi* relations and, on the other side, non-skilled cadres only appointed through informal connections.
- 9 Moreover, the data provided by Bo Yizhue do not give us any way of assessing the overall pattern of political mobility in the careers of the provincial leaders. What is lacking is the complete analysis of the movement from the centre to the regions, but also from the provinces and townships to Peking. And yet it is this movement between centre and periphery throughout their careers which should be seen as playing a key role in the way they build up their networking contacts across the political structure. In this context we can also understand why the Peking authorities are encountering increasing resistance from the provincial leaders against the experts “parachuted in” by the central government. Li Cheng has summed up this situation: “the tension

between a struggle against localism on the one hand, and local demands that the regions be fully represented on the other, has become the stake in a real political contest”.

- 10 Finally, contradicting the work of Yang Dali which attempts to show the differences between the provinces in their relationship to Peking⁷, Bo Zhiyue rejects the view that such localities as Shanghai, Hubei and Guangdong employ different strategies in their dealings with the central government. But in that case, how could the under-representation of a rich province like Guangdong be accounted for? While no precise information on the real extent of the contribution of that province to the national budget is provided, here and there one comes across analyses suggesting fluctuations in the levels of its political representation in Peking which bear no relation to the sums accumulated and passed on. As the driving force behind the economic reforms, Guangdong only achieved substantial representation on the central committee after 1997. Despite these reservations, one cannot but agree with Bo Zhiyue when he writes, “the State is more firmly centralised than ever Any initiative which crosses Peking’s path will be blocked by the central government and redirected towards reinforcing central power in the country”.

NOTES

1. Scalapino Roberto, *Elites in the PRC*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1972.
2. Bachmann David and Li Cheng, “Localism, elitism and immobilism: elite transformation and social change in post-Mao China”, *World Politics*, October 1989, 42 (1), pp. 64-94; Li Cheng and White Lynn, “Familiar fealties and technocratic trends in the PLA and the succession to Deng Xiaoping”, *Asian Survey*, August 1993, 33 (8), pp. 739-757; Zang Xiaowei, “Provincial elites in post-Mao China”, *Asian Survey*, 31 (6), June 1991, pp. 512-525; Ouyang Hongwu, “The PRC’s new elite politics: The new institutionalism perspective”, *Issues and Studies*, No. 5, May 1998, pp. 1-21; Liu Xiaohong, *Chinese Ambassadors: the rise of the diplomatic professionalism since 1949*, Washington, University of Washington Press, 2001; Landry Pierre, “The CCP’s formal and informal channels of political control of municipal elites in post-Deng China”, *The State of Contemporary China*, Hong Kong 2004, and his forthcoming book, *The CCP and Local Elites in Post-Deng China*.
3. Cf. <http://www.chinaleadershipmonitor.org>
4. Clark William, *Soviet regional leadership after Khrushchev*, New York, Praeger, 1989.
5. Nathan Andrew J. and Tsai Kellee S., “Factionalism: a new institutionalist statement”, *The China Journal*, No. 34, July 1995, pp. 157-192.
6. Dittmer Lowell, “Patterns of elite strife and succession in Chinese politics”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 123, September 1990, pp. 405-430; Dittmer Lowell, “The modernization of factionalism in Chinese politics”, *World Politics*, No. 4, June 1995, pp. 467-494.

7. Yang Dali L., “Reform and the Restructuring of Central-Local Relations”, in *China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade and Regionalism*, David Goodman and Gerald Segal (eds.), London, Routledge, 1994, pp. 62-72.