POLITICAL SELECTION IN CHINA: THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF CONNECTIONS AND PERFORMANCE

Ruixue Jia
School of International Relations and Pacific Studies, University of California San Diego, and CIFAR

Masayuki Kudamatsu
Institute for International Economic Studies, Stockholm University

David Seim
University of Toronto and Research Institute of Industrial Economics, Stockholm.

Abstract
Who becomes a top politician in China? We focus on provincial leaders – a pool of candidates for top political office – and examine how their chances of promotion depend on their performance in office and connections with top politicians. Our empirical analysis, based on the curriculum vitae of Chinese politicians, shows that connections and performance are complements in the Chinese political selection process. This complementarity is stronger the younger provincial leaders are relative to their connected top leaders. To provide one plausible interpretation of these empirical findings, we propose a simple theory in which the complementarity arises because connections foster loyalty of junior officials to senior ones, thereby allowing incumbent top politicians to select competent provincial leaders without risking being ousted. Our findings shed some light on why a political system known for patronage can still select competent leaders. (JEL: H11, H77, O12, O43, P26, P27)

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E-mail: rxjia@ucsd.edu (Jia); masayuki.kudamatsu@iies.su.se (Kudamatsu); david.seim@utoronto.ca (Seim)