

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Politics of Promotion in China's Foreign Policy Bureaucracy

Tyler Jost and Yucong Li

Brown University, Providence, RI, USA

Corresponding author: Tyler Jost; Email: tyler_jost@brown.edu

Abstract

A robust literature on the professional advancement of Chinese officials has paid comparatively little attention to an important elite group: the foreign policy bureaucracy. We introduce original data documenting over 11,000 career assignments of 1,357 senior officials in the foreign ministry from 1949 to 2023 and leverage these data to offer the first systematic analysis of who rises to the top of China's foreign affairs system. We find that diplomats who spend a greater share of their careers in postings abroad are less likely to be promoted to higher ranks than diplomats who remain at home – and that these patterns persisted even after the professionalization of the foreign affairs bureaucracy. Meanwhile, the analysis finds only mixed evidence that diplomatic performance assists promotion. The data and analysis draw attention to the unique challenges of professional advancement in bureaucracies charged with managing China's foreign relations.

摘要

关于中国官员职业晋升的大量文献对一个重要的精英群体——外交政策官僚机构——的关注相对较少。本文基于一套原创数据，系统记录了1949年至2023年间中国外交部1,357位高级官员共计11,000余次职务任命，并据此提供首个系统性研究，探讨哪些类型的官员更有可能晋升至中国外事系统的高层。我们发现，相较于在国内任职的外交官，那些职业生涯中有更大比例时间在海外任职的外交官，其晋升至更高职位的可能性显著较低，即便是在外事官僚机构经历专业化改革之后，这一趋势依然存在。同时，我们仅发现有限证据表明外交绩效显著促进官员晋升。本文的数据与分析揭示了在负责管理中国对外关系的官僚机构中，官员职业晋升所面临的独特挑战。

Keywords: ambassadors; bureaucracy; Chinese foreign policy; diplomats; foreign affairs system; foreign ministry; promotion

关键词: 大使; 官僚; 中国外交; 外交官; 外事系统; 外交部; 晋升

Diplomats play a central role in Chinese foreign policy.¹ They are a key source of information about political developments abroad, serving as the proverbial eyes and ears of the state,² and are responsible for implementing the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) foreign policy decisions, such as those concerning the resolution of international conflicts,³ the negotiation of territorial disputes,⁴ participation in international organizations⁵ and the shaping of public opinion abroad.⁶

1 Medeiros and Fravel 2003; Loh 2024.

2 Klein 1960; Lu 1997; Liu 2001.

3 Weiss 2014; Cho 2021.

4 Fravel 2008; Chubb 2020.

5 Kastner, Pearson and Rector 2018; Fung 2019; Tan 2021; Fung et al. 2023; Leutert and Atkinson 2024.

6 Dukalskis 2021; Schliebs et al. 2021; Mattingly and Sundquist 2023; Brazys, Dukalskis and Müller 2023.

Despite the important role that diplomats play, existing scholarship has not systematically examined their professional advancement. A rich body of work examines political mobility across a range of other positions, including in the CCP central leadership,⁷ in provincial and municipal postings,⁸ in military commands⁹ and in state-owned enterprises.¹⁰ Yet, there are comparatively few studies – and no comprehensive data sources – that illuminate what helps cadres get ahead in the foreign affairs system.¹¹ A small number of studies have explored the demographic changes in the composition of China's ambassadors,¹² but they do not directly consider why some diplomats advance up the ranks while others do not. Instead, most of the scholarship examining the foreign affairs system takes an institutional approach,¹³ describing organizational structures¹⁴ and documenting whether and how interest groups,¹⁵ think tanks,¹⁶ advisers¹⁷ and bureaucracies¹⁸ shape policymaking. Although such accounts are essential, they sidestep the question of *who* rises to the top of China's foreign affairs system.

Examining promotion patterns in China's foreign affairs system is important for two key reasons. First, Chinese diplomats – like diplomats in many other countries – illustrate the distinct, and sometimes counterintuitive, dynamics of careers involving foreign assignments. One of the core functions of China's diplomatic corps is to staff embassies abroad. On the one hand, foreign postings might improve career prospects, allowing diplomats to showcase diplomatic skills and gain valuable experience and expertise about foreign countries. On the other hand, assignments abroad can deny cadres opportunities to build the critical connections with patrons back home that may help to shepherd their advancement to higher ranks – and could even raise suspicions about their political allegiances. Second, promotion is a critical mechanism by which the CCP exerts control over its diplomats. Thus, patterns of professional mobility not only shed light on the types of individuals (for example, which gender, which qualifications, which professional experiences) Party leaders prefer to represent their country, they also establish incentives that shape how diplomats perform their responsibilities, offering important insights into bureaucratic behaviour, ranging from the provision of information and advice¹⁹ to the style of dialogue with foreign interlocutors.²⁰

We address this gap by introducing original data on the professional backgrounds of 1,357 cadres who constituted the senior ranks of the Chinese diplomatic corps from 1949 to 2023. We systematically identified all individuals who held positions at or above the rank of ambassador or assistant minister in the foreign ministry. We then collected detailed information on each diplomat's career trajectory within the foreign affairs system. In total, we catalogued 11,296 career appointments for the diplomats in our sample. We supplemented our collection by documenting other demographic, educational and family background characteristics – as well as their placement inside and outside the foreign ministry at the end of their diplomatic career.

These data facilitate the first systematic analysis of promotion patterns in China's foreign affairs system, yielding two main findings. First, we show that diplomats are more likely to gain promotion when a greater share of their assignments are at home rather than abroad. While some foreign

7 Shih, Shan and Liu 2010; Shih 2022; Jost and Mattingly 2025.

8 Bo 2002; Choi 2012; Landry 2008; Landry, Lü and Duan 2018; Zeng and Wong 2021; Chen et al. 2023.

9 Wang, Peng, and Wang 2018; Mattingly 2024.

10 Leutert 2018; Leutert and Vorthers 2021.

11 On diplomatic appointments in other country contexts, see Lindsey 2023; Goldfien 2024.

12 Lu 1997; Liu 2001.

13 See, e.g., Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988; Mertha 2009.

14 See, e.g., Barnett 1985; Lampton 2001; Wuthnow 2017.

15 Shih 2008.

16 Rozman 2012.

17 Glaser and Medeiros 2007.

18 Swaine 2015.

19 Lu 1997; Jost 2023; Loh 2024.

20 Martin 2021; Leutert and Atkinson 2024.

experience appears to be a requirement for promotion in the contemporary foreign ministry, too much time abroad curtails a diplomat's promotion prospects. An increase in the share of diplomat posts abroad by one standard deviation decreases the chances of promotion to mid-tier levels by 48 per cent. We find this relationship is even stronger in the reform era, which past studies commonly characterize as a period of higher professionalism in the diplomatic corps.²¹ The findings suggest that assignments at home play a pivotal role in improving promotion prospects, even when such assignments may reduce the amount of street-level experience a cadre possesses. Second, we find mixed evidence that two key measures of diplomatic performance – experience in positions overseeing negotiation of international treaties and in positions managing international disputes – increases the likelihood of promotion. Collectively, the article offers a first step in unpacking the politics of promotion in China's foreign affairs bureaucracy, drawing attention to how postings interact with traditional models emphasizing merit and patronage in promotion, while also offering new empirical resources that open doors to future research.

Promotion in the Foreign Affairs System

China's leaders rely on the bureaucracy to help manage the country's foreign relations. This bureaucratic apparatus, sometimes called the foreign affairs system (*waishi xitong* 外事系统) and visualized in Figure 1, plays several important roles: it collects and processes information used during foreign policy decision making;²² it analyses potential foreign policies available to Party decision makers;²³ and it interprets and implements foreign policy decisions through diplomatic engagement, negotiation and public messaging.²⁴

The role of the foreign ministry

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is one of the principal organizations in China's foreign affairs system. The MFA is responsible for the unified management of foreign affairs, the facilitation of foreign policy decisions, and the implementation of these decisions on behalf of the Party and the state.²⁵ The MFA also helps to manage the flow of information from Chinese embassies abroad to the Party leadership. In addition to performing important tasks within the foreign affairs system, the MFA is also one of the largest central bureaucracies in China. While the MFA started in 1949 with only 170 cadres, its size grew to 1,536 (689 abroad and 847 domestic) by 1954, 3,259 (953 abroad and 2,306 domestic) by 1965, and 5,115 (2,233 abroad and 2,882 domestic) by 1982.²⁶ Estimates put the contemporary MFA's size between 4,000 and 5,000,²⁷ making the MFA much larger than most other central ministries.²⁸ Thus, as Lu Ning summarizes, the MFA is "one of the most important institutions of Beijing's foreign affairs establishment."²⁹

The MFA is, of course, not the only organization involved in foreign affairs. In particular, the MFA works alongside the CCP International Liaison Department (*Zhonggong zhongyang dui wai lianluo bu* 中共中央对外联络部, ILD hereafter), a Party organization under the Central Committee that manages relations with foreign political parties, meaning that the ILD has traditionally assumed more responsibility in the context of China's relations with communist countries, such as North

21 Lu 1997; Liu 2001.

22 Lu 1997.

23 Lampton 2001; Jost 2023.

24 See, e.g., Medeiros and Fravel 2003; Weiss 2014; Fung 2019; Kastner, Pearson and Rector 2018.

25 Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu 2000, Vol. 16, 759.

26 On the size of the MFA, see Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu 2000, Vol. 15, 99, Vol. 16, 759; Pei 1989, 314; Martin 2021, 186.

27 Martin 2021, 186; Loh 2024, 104.

28 On the MFA's size relative to other ministries, see Lu 1997, 20–21.

29 Lu 1997, 40. See also Loh 2024, 8, 23–24.

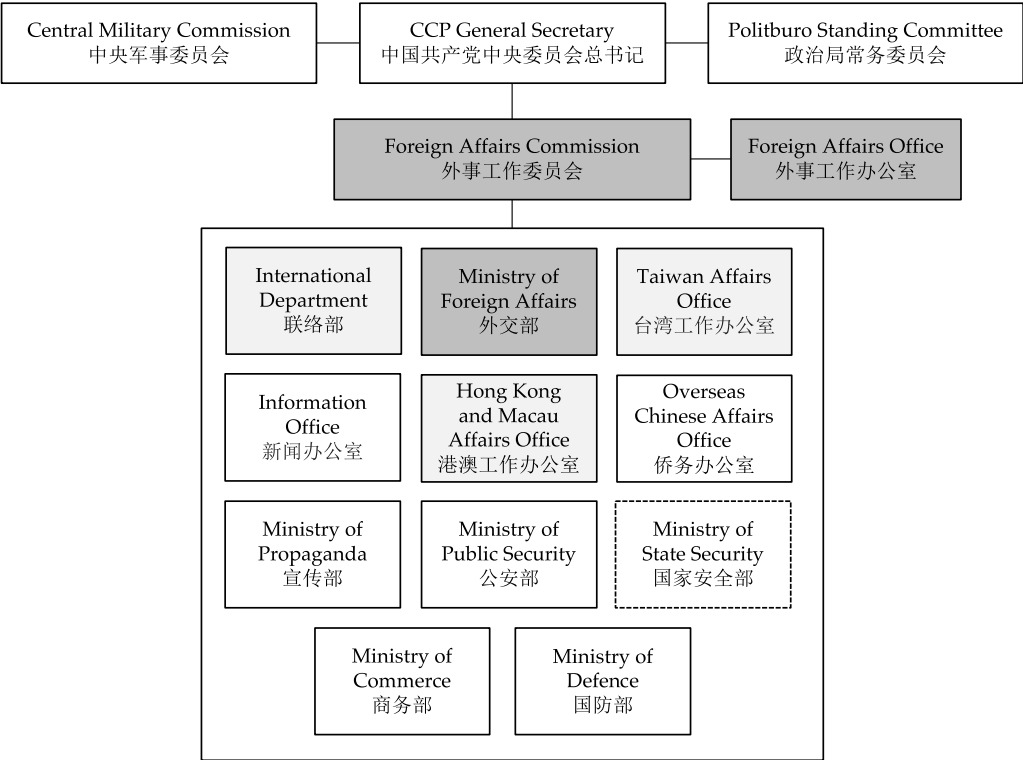


Figure 1. Structure of China's Foreign Affairs System
Notes: Organizational chart adopted from Swaine 1996, 363, and Lu 1997, 185. Composition of the Foreign Affairs Commission has been updated based on the 2017 membership (Jost 2023). Dark/light grey denotes an organization in which at least 75%/25% of past leaders (below the Party leadership) have professional experience in the MFA.

Korea. The boundary between the two organizations is often fluid, however, meaning that MFA diplomats can rotate through the ILD and vice versa.³⁰ We return to this point in our analysis.

The MFA's size and functional responsibilities make it a centrally important source of personnel for promotion to the senior ranks of China's foreign affairs system. As summarized in Table 1, the majority of individuals who occupied the highest positions within China's foreign affairs system spent their careers in the MFA. Almost all state councillors for foreign affairs, deputy chairs/secretaries of the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group, and directors of the Foreign Affairs Office previously served in the MFA. While other bureaucracies assume some responsibilities in foreign affairs – such as other members of the Foreign Affairs Commission like the Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Defence – the MFA has historically enjoyed responsibility for managing and coordinating these activities. For example, since its establishment in 1958, the foreign minister or state councillor for foreign affairs has overseen the routine affairs of the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group, such as inter-ministerial coordination.³¹ In addition, many past leaders of other key foreign affairs organizations, such the Taiwan Affairs Office (29 per cent), the Hong Kong

30 For example, Lu Kang is an MFA diplomat who has served as a deputy minister in the ILD since 2024, whereas Sun Haiyan is an ILD diplomat who served as ambassador to Singapore from 2022 to 2023. We are indebted to an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to this point.

31 On the MFA's early role in the FALSG, see Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu 2000, Vol. 14, 611. On the MFA's role supervising routine affairs since the early 1980s, see Jost 2024, 141–42; Zou 1998, 132, 144, 160, 186.

Table 1. Overview of Senior Leadership Appointments in China's Foreign Affairs System

Position	Appointments	
	Total	MFA background
State councillor/vice-premier for foreign affairs 国务委员/副总理	9	6 (67%)
Deputy chair/secretary, Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group 外事工作领导小组副组长/秘书长	6	5 (83%)
Foreign minister 外交部长	13	10 (77%)
Director, Foreign Affairs Office 外事办公室主任	10	8 (80%)

and Macau Affairs Office (29 per cent) and the ILD (42 per cent), worked previously in the MFA as well.

Postings and promotion in the MFA

While there have been thousands of MFA diplomats since 1949, less than two hundred rose to top positions – such as a vice-foreign minister, foreign minister, director of the Foreign Affairs Office (*waishi bangongshi zhuren* 外事办公室主任), secretary of the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (*waishi gongzuo lingdao xiaozu mishuzhang* 外事工作领导小组秘书长)³² or state councillor for foreign affairs (*guowu weiyuan* 国务委员) – within China's foreign affairs system. Examining such promotion patterns is important because it illuminates the types of qualifications (for example, education) and experiences (for example, cross-institutional appointments – *gua zhi* 挂职) that the Party hopes to cultivate in its future leadership. These criteria in turn shape the types of individuals who assume leadership positions within the organization. More broadly, promotion patterns shape career incentives,³³ which affect patterns of bureaucratic behaviour. Purges during the Cultural Revolution, for instance, discouraged diplomats from relaying sensitive information to senior leaders.³⁴ Similarly, some suggest that anti-corruption campaigns have encouraged more belligerent public messaging by Chinese diplomats.³⁵

A long tradition of scholarship examines patterns of political mobility and professional advancement to positions in the central,³⁶ provincial,³⁷ military³⁸ and corporate³⁹ leadership of the CCP. The crux of the scholarly discussion hinges on the relative importance of two factors. First, some accounts emphasize the importance of merit, suggesting that the Party rewards cadres who can demonstrate expertise and competence through performance.⁴⁰ Second, other accounts stress the value of patronage, suggesting that social connections allow individuals to shepherd a junior cadre's rise to the top.⁴¹

To date, however, the literature on promotion has devoted less attention to how, if at all, these factors shape promotion in the foreign affairs system. In particular, the foreign affairs system features a key characteristic not commonly emphasized in existing promotion models: foreign postings

32 The FALSG was renamed the Central Foreign Affairs Commission (*Zhongyang waishi gongzuo weiyuanhui*) in 2018.

33 Jiang 2018; Wang, Erik 2022.

34 Jost 2023.

35 Martin 2021, 201.

36 Shih, Shan and Liu 2010; Jost and Mattingly 2025.

37 Landry 2008.

38 Mattingly and Sundquist 2023.

39 Leutert 2018.

40 See, e.g., Li and Zhou 2005; Landry 2008; Zeng and Wong 2021.

41 See, e.g., Manion 1985; Shih, Shan and Liu 2010; Choi 2012; Jiang 2018; Leutert and Vortherms 2021; Shih 2022.

– assignments that dispatch cadres abroad and during which time cadres have routine social contact with political, economic, cultural and societal actors outside China. Of course, careers in other CCP organizations can feature assignments abroad. As the name implies, however, such postings are especially common in the foreign affairs system.

Foreign postings plausibly shape promotion patterns in unique functional, sociological and reputational ways. First, from the perspective of merit-based promotion, foreign assignments could assist with promotion because they allow diplomats to gain expertise through first-hand experience in foreign countries. Policy dictates that expertise should be a central component of personnel decisions in the foreign affairs system. According to the PRC Act on Diplomatic Missions in Foreign Countries, the Party officially prefers that diplomats have professional knowledge (*zhuan ye zhishi* 专业知识), work skills (*gong zuo neng li* 工作能力) and language abilities (*yuyan neng li* 语言能力).⁴² Official study manuals for diplomats note the value of communication and cross-cultural skills, both to diplomatic personnel on an individual level and to the national interest generally.⁴³ Diplomats who have spent years working in Japan, such as Wang Yi 王毅, might thus be primed for advancement to higher positions because they possess experience that Party leaders value.⁴⁴ Foreign postings could also offer unique opportunities to demonstrate performance, allowing Chinese envoys to showcase their skills in managing disputes or negotiating treaties. Appointment as ambassador to the United States, for example, allowed Yang Jiechi 杨洁篪 an opportunity to help manage tensions during the 2001 EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft incident.⁴⁵ Such merit-centric considerations may have become more salient after a series of administrative and personnel reforms were introduced to the MFA during the 1980s and 1990s, which nominally placed greater emphasis on merit-based promotion⁴⁶ and paved the way for the “best educated and most competent careerists” to rise to the top of the MFA.⁴⁷

Yet, foreign postings come with important downsides. For one, they shape the social ties diplomats can build with patrons who can assist their future promotion. Compared to assignments in the ministry headquarters in Beijing, foreign postings afford fewer opportunities to build professional and personal relationships with a larger pool of patrons, which could be critical for promotion. For example, postings in Beijing allowed Qi Huaiyuan 齐怀远 and Liu Huaqiu 刘华秋 to build connections to Ji Pengfei 姬鹏飞 (foreign minister, 1972–1974), who later championed their promotion. Postings in Beijing similarly helped Li Zhaoxing 李肇星 and Shen Guofang 沈国放 to develop ties to Qian Qichen 钱其琛 (foreign minister, 1988–1998).⁴⁸

Foreign postings could also raise concerns about national loyalty, which is a central consideration in personnel decisions within the foreign affairs system.⁴⁹ By law, the Party demands that diplomats be of good political quality and character (*juyou lianghao de zhengzhi suzhi he pinxing* 具有良好的政治素质和品行).⁵⁰ Diplomats are obligated by law to be loyal (*zhong yu* 忠于) to the nation and people (*zuguo he renmin* 祖国和人民), to the constitution and laws of the People’s Republic of China (*zhong yu Zhonghua renmin gongheguo xianfa he falü* 忠于中华人民共和国宪法和法律) and to their duties (*zhong yu zhi shou* 忠于职守).⁵¹ Peter Martin

42 See the PRC Act on Diplomatic Missions in Foreign Countries (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhu wai waijiao ren yuan fa*), Art. 6, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjbm_673085/zfxgk_674865/zcfg/fl/201802/t20180214_9276668.shtml.

43 See Zhou 2023, 302–08. This manual is part of the Foreign Affairs Cadre Training Materials (*Waishi ganbu xuexi peixun jiaocai*) series published by the China Diplomatic Academy (*Zhongguo waijiao peixun xueyuan*).

44 Martin 2021, 197–98.

45 Kan 2001, 4.

46 Lu 1997, 52; Liu 2001, 156, 167.

47 Liu 2001, 167.

48 Lu 1997, 63–65.

49 Martin 2021, 58; Loh 2024, 108–09.

50 Zhou 2023; PRC Act on Diplomatic Missions in Foreign Countries, Art. 6.

51 Ibid., Art. 8.

goes so far as to suggest that Chinese diplomats are sometimes “more concerned with avoiding charges of disloyalty than improving their country’s reputation.”⁵² One particular concern is that foreign exposure could undermine loyalty by shaping political attitudes and beliefs. Alastair Iain Johnston, for instance, traces how interactions within international organizations influenced Chinese representatives to support more cooperative foreign policies, such as international arms control agreements.⁵³ Party officials might thus perceive, rightly or wrongly, that individuals who have spent more time abroad are more likely to be sympathetic to foreign perspectives. In this way, foreign experience may thus decrease the likelihood of professional advancement.⁵⁴ For instance, early Party leaders selected military officers to serve as China’s first ambassadors, despite their lack of diplomatic experience, in part to ensure the loyalty of their senior representatives.⁵⁵ Even today, Chinese diplomats report that overseas education can undermine promotion prospects because of exposure to ideas that contradict the Party’s ideology.⁵⁶

In sum, foreign postings are a key aspect of careers in the foreign affairs system. It is possible that the Party rewards such assignments because they confer unique expertise and offer opportunities to demonstrate performance. Yet, it is also possible that such assignments undermine promotion prospects through their effects on patronage or reputation for political loyalty. In the next section, we introduce data to explore these two contentions empirically.

Data

To study professional advancement within China’s foreign affairs bureaucracy, we collected the career histories of 1,357 senior Chinese diplomats from 1949 to 2023.⁵⁷ One of the advantages of this approach is that MFA diplomats comprise the vast majority of officials appointed to the most influential positions within the foreign affairs system. Our sample included any individual who had served as an ambassador, assistant minister, vice-minister, minister or state councillor since the founding of the People’s Republic.⁵⁸ We believe this to be the most comprehensive resource to date documenting the professional backgrounds of cadres within China’s foreign affairs bureaucracy. In the conclusion, we return to ways in which future research might expand the scope of this collection.

The data collection relied on several sets of publicly available records and took place between 2022 and 2024. The first source was the MFA website, which provides the biographies of each ambassador, assistant minister, vice-minister and foreign minister, including their education, background and professional assignments.⁵⁹ The second data source was *Zhongguo waijiao cidian* 中国外交辞典 (*Dictionary of Chinese Diplomacy*), which is published under the direction of the MFA.⁶⁰ A third data source was a compendium of biographies of over four hundred Chinese ambassadors, entitled *Wu xing hongqi xia de dashi men* 五星红旗下的大使们 (*Ambassadors under the Five Star Red Flag*) and

52 Martin 2021, 9.

53 Johnston 2008, 160–191.

54 For a similar intuition in diplomatic ministries outside China, see Lindsey 2023.

55 Liu 2001, 15.

56 Loh 2024, 108–09.

57 Note that we use the terms “diplomat” and “diplomatic” as shorthand for individuals managing China’s foreign affairs, regardless of whether they are assigned to a diplomatic role such as ambassador.

58 An ideal design would leverage the personnel records of the entire MFA organization, but given that such records are not yet available, we focus on a pool of diplomats at a high enough rank that we can ensure sample completeness.

59 See “Zhongguo waijiao renwu” (Chinese diplomatic figures). Ministry of Foreign Affairs, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/wjrw_674925/xrbz_674927/. Accessed May 2022. The foreign ministry’s records include individuals who were removed from their position on disciplinary grounds, both during and after the Cultural Revolution. Using online searches, we found only one disciplined diplomat whose name no longer appears in the foreign ministry’s records.

60 Tang 2000.

overseen by senior diplomatic officials.⁶¹ Finally, to supplement these sources, we reviewed memoirs, as well as encyclopaedia entries.⁶²

For each diplomat, we catalogued two types of background characteristics. The first were basic demographics: birth year, birthplace, gender, level of education and family status. For education, we identified whether the diplomat attended a civilian college as well as the focus of his/her studies. For family status, we coded whether at least one of the diplomat's parents was either a member of the Central Committee or a senior MFA official (ambassador rank or higher). The second category included experiences before entering the foreign ministry, such as service in the Chinese military, service in the ILD, participation in the Long March, experience managing the Party's international affairs prior to 1949 and time living abroad.

Next, we examined each diplomat's assignments within the foreign ministry, including positions held early in his/her career (for example, staff, third, second or first secretary, division director, councillor, deputy director general). For each position, we collected the official title and location of the posting, as well as start and end dates for the assignment. To ease comparability, we then reviewed each assignment to identify the type(s) of regional (for example, Europe, Africa, North America) and substantive (for example, protocol, personnel, translation, information, arms control, protocol, research) issues associated with the posting. The full list of issue areas is provided in section 1.3 of the online Appendix.⁶³

Finally, we collected data on the nature and timing of the end of the cadre's diplomatic career. We first looked to see whether the diplomat was promoted to a higher rank within the foreign affairs system. Next, we examined whether the diplomat secured another assignment after his/her last posting within the foreign ministry. That is, after finishing their service inside the foreign ministry, some Chinese diplomats continue their career in another branch of the Party or state (for example, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), allowing for career advancement through an alternative route. We also identified if the diplomat was removed from a position on disciplinary grounds, such as an allegation of corruption, mishandling of information or other political errors. The codebook and an example set of codings for Han Nianlong 韩念龙 are provided in section 1.2 of the online Appendix.

Professionalization of the Foreign Ministry

Before turning to our statistical analysis of career advancement, we first explore what these data tell us about the composition of the senior ranks of the MFA over time. This serves both to validate the data collection procedures and to offer a detailed and systematic picture of demographic shifts within the foreign ministry since 1949, especially five changes emphasized by the existing literature as indicators of the MFA's increasing professionalism: (1) military service; (2) revolutionary backgrounds; (3) higher education; (4) early exposure to foreign countries; and (5) gender diversity.⁶⁴

As visualized in Figure 2, the data show that the composition of China's senior diplomatic ranks has changed dramatically over time. During the early Mao era (1949–1962), the senior diplomatic corps was overwhelmingly populated by current or former military officers (ranging between 67 and 84 per cent). Examples include Wang Youping 王幼平, Geng Biao 耿飚 and Huang Zhen 黄镇. Throughout this period, nearly all senior diplomats were male. While a large share of Chinese diplomats during this period had lived abroad prior to joining the foreign ministry (as high as 67 per

61 Shen and Shen 1993.

62 Bartke 1997. *Waijiao bu waijiao shi yanjiushi 1996*, a six-volume compendium of recollections of diplomatic service, was particularly helpful. Encyclopaedia entries on Baidu were consulted when no other sources were available.

63 The official title of assignments typically made identifying issue areas straightforward. In the case of assistant and vice-minister assignments, however, official titles do not contain specific information. Through consulting a variety of sources, we were able to identify which MFA departments the individual oversaw for the vast majority of cases.

64 Lu 1997, 52–53; Liu 2001, 153–163.

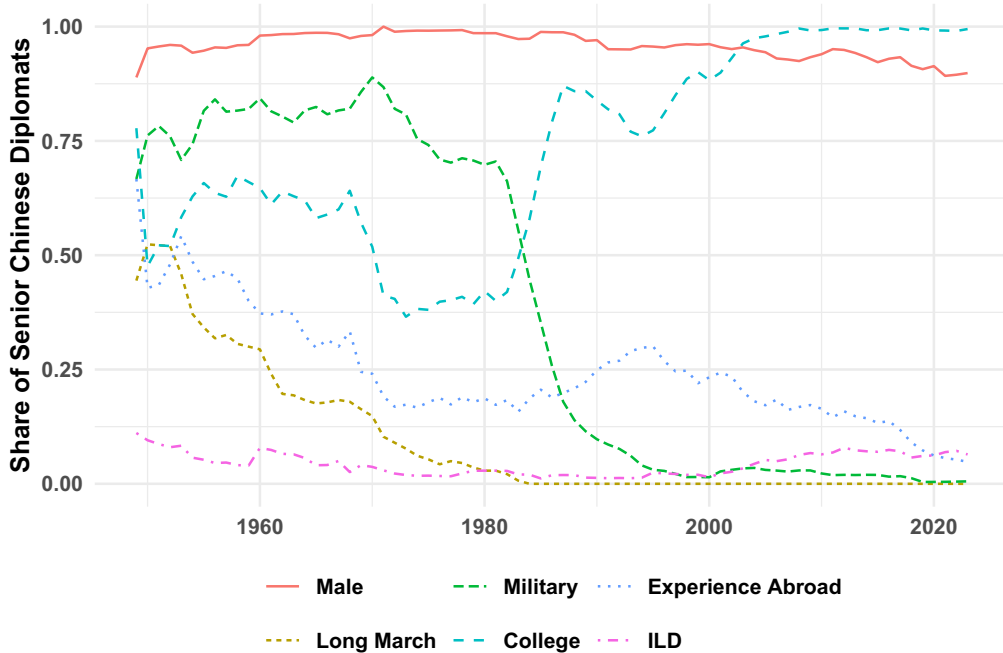


Figure 2. Professionalization Trends in the Foreign Ministry, 1949–2023

cent), this number steadily decreased over time. Between 4 and 11 per cent of senior MFA diplomats rotated through the ILD. Even in the MFA's early years, however, there were some signs of professionalization. The number of individuals with higher education in civilian colleges rose from 48 per cent in 1950 to 64 per cent in 1962. Similarly, the share of senior diplomats with the revolutionary credential of having participated in the Long March fell from 52 per cent in 1950 to 20 per cent in 1962.

In the late-Mao era (1963–1976), the senior diplomatic corps remained dominated by males (99 per cent on average) with military backgrounds (81 per cent on average). Examples include Xiong Xianghui 熊向晖, Liu Zhenhua 刘振华 and Li Yaowen 李耀文. Beginning in 1963, the share of senior diplomats with higher education steadily decreased, falling from 63 per cent in 1963 to its low point of 39 per cent in 1976. This may have reflected political criticisms directed at the foreign ministry both before and during the Cultural Revolution.⁶⁵

The data suggest, however, that the most dramatic change in the Chinese diplomatic corps occurred during the early 1980s. These data pinpoint three changes associated with the foreign ministry's professionalization following the 12th Party Congress in 1982. First, the number of Chinese diplomats with military backgrounds dropped precipitously, falling from 66 per cent in 1982 to just 1 per cent by 1998. Similarly, the share of diplomats who had rotated through the ILD was low compared to the early Mao era, averaging about 4 per cent. In 1992, for instance, the data suggest that only three individuals with ILD backgrounds (Dai Bingguo 戴秉国, Yang Zhenya 杨振亚 and Zhu Chengcai 祝成才) were in the MFA's top ranks. Second, the share of diplomats with higher education rose from 42 per cent in 1982 to 96 per cent in 2003. By the 2010s, virtually all Chinese diplomats were college educated. At precisely the same time, there was a major change in the share of cadres specializing in foreign languages prior to entering diplomatic service. While only roughly 22 per cent of diplomats had specialized in foreign languages during their higher education in 1982, 88 per cent

65 Jost 2023.

of diplomats had done so by 2003.⁶⁶ Third, gender diversity increased over the same period. Between 1982 and 2022, the share of women in the senior ranks of the Chinese diplomatic corps (for example, Fu Ying 傅莹, Zhang Jinfeng 张金凤 and Zhao Baozhen 赵宝珍) grew from 2 to 11 per cent, although we note this remains lower than the gender composition of the CCP, as well as Chinese society more broadly.

Overall, descriptive analysis of these data complements past qualitative studies, which have noted a general trend towards professionalization within China's ambassador corps over time. The high level of detail in the data, however, pinpoint the timing and scope of these changes. We now turn to our primary question of interest: what types of backgrounds and experiences help Chinese diplomats to professionally advance?

Analysis of Promotion in the Foreign Ministry

To analyse promotion patterns within the Chinese foreign ministry, we perform two sets of analyses. The first examines promotion to vice-minister rank. The second examines promotion to positions above vice-minister rank. We first discuss measurement and model specification before presenting each analysis in turn.

Research design

To study prospects for promotion within the MFA, we transformed the data on diplomatic appointments into a time-series format. Promotion decisions within the foreign ministry are made by comparing cadres at similar stages of their career at discrete periods of time.⁶⁷ As such, each observation is a diplomat-year (for example, Zhang Wenjin 章文晋–1978 or Zhou Wenzhong 周文重–2002).⁶⁸ We create three measures that serve as our explanatory variables. First, we measure the share of the diplomat's senior postings abroad relative to those in Beijing. Here, senior postings refer to assignments after appointment as ambassador, assistant minister or director general. A posting as the ambassador to Poland would increase this measure, whereas a posting as director general for North American affairs in Beijing would decrease it.

Next, we create two measures that capture observable and salient aspects of a diplomat's performance. The first is a count of the number of international disputes that coincided with the individual's past assignments.⁶⁹ The dispute count increases the more a diplomat served in positions that allowed him/her to manage the resolution of such disputes. Because we lack data on China's international disputes for more recent years, the study period for all regression models restricts the sample to from 1949 to 2014. The second measure is a count of the number of international treaties that were successfully signed during the diplomat's prior assignments. To that end, we collected metadata on 7,066 treaties signed between China and foreign countries between 1949 and 2022.⁷⁰ The treaty count increases the more a diplomat served in positions that allowed him/her to contribute to successful negotiation. We explore the possibility that cooperative performance may be weighted by the country's status in section 2.7 of the online Appendix.

Two points are worth noting. First, international agreements and crises are typically managed by multiple actors. Our measurement approach assumes that senior assignments, such as an ambassadorship, would afford opportunities to contribute to the group effort; this does not imply that individuals managed these events in isolation. Second, our analysis can evaluate whether two

⁶⁶ We visualize the higher education focus of the diplomatic corps in section 2.1 of the online Appendix.

⁶⁷ Our approach also follows past scholarship on promotion within the CCP and Chinese bureaucracy (e.g. Landry, Lü and Duan 2018; Mattingly 2024).

⁶⁸ Note that this includes officials still serving at the time of the analysis.

⁶⁹ We identify these international incidents based on the Dyadic Militarized Interstate Dispute dataset. Maoz et al. 2018.

⁷⁰ The details of all treaties are available at the People's Republic of China Treaty Database (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo tiaoyue shujuku*), maintained by the MFA (<http://treaty.mfa.gov.cn/web/index.jsp>).

observable aspects of performance (dispute management and treaty negotiation) shape promotion prospects, but it cannot assess whether the performance of other diplomatic responsibilities, such as dispatching cables, managing foreign engagements or delivering routine messages, shapes promotion.⁷¹

Our main models employ logistic regression with two-way fixed effects for Party congress and the duration of time the individual spent within the senior diplomatic corps.⁷² The first term captures unobserved variation in promotion dynamics unique to particular Party congresses. The second term captures the intuition that Party leaders may make promotion decisions in part by comparing a given diplomat to peers at similar career stages (for example, first year as an ambassador relative to sixth year as an ambassador). In addition, we specify a model with several demographic controls, including gender, military background, ILD status, princeling status and higher education. Finally, we employ robust standard errors clustered on the diplomat.

Promotion to vice-minister rank

For our first set of analyses, the dependent variable is promotion to a position with the rank of vice-minister. For these models, individuals enter the sample when they reach the lower ranks of the senior diplomatic corps. The dependent variable is coded as 1 if they were promoted to vice-minister during that year and 0 if not. As summarized in Table 2, this includes three types of positions: vice-foreign ministers; ambassadors with vice-minister rank; and other positions within the Party's foreign affairs system with vice-minister rank.⁷³ Individuals drop from the sample after they are promoted. Promotion to the vice-minister level is relatively rare: only 180 (about 13 per cent) of the diplomats reach this level.⁷⁴

Model 1 of Table 3 presents the results of a parsimonious model without controls that examines the relationship between foreign posting share and promotion. The results show a negative and statistically significant relationship between larger shares of assignments in China's embassies and promotion. A one standard deviation increase in the share of foreign postings decreases the odds of promotion by 48 per cent. Models 2 and 3 report parsimonious models that include our two measures of performance. Promotion is positively associated with experience managing international disputes and negatively associated with experience overseeing treaties, although the statistical significance of the relationship varies considerably across models.

Next, we consider these factors alongside other characteristics that might confound the relationship between foreign assignments and promotion. In particular, one question is whether talent underpins both assignment to domestic posts and promotion to higher positions within the foreign ministry. To probe this possibility, Models 4 and 6 include a proxy for the diplomat's talent level: a count of the number of junior assignments in countries that are a geopolitical priority for China.⁷⁵ The observed relationships between share of time abroad and diplomatic promotion remain the same as in the parsimonious models. While we caution against a causal interpretation of the results, the findings suggest that individuals who spend more time in Beijing are promoted at higher rates.

71 Ideally, we would directly measure performance based on internal assessments, such as performance reviews. Given that such data are not available, we opt for high-visibility indicators that would likely be included in performance evaluations.

72 For simplicity, we fit the experience variable into three-year intervals, which is the approximate duration of an average senior posting. We obtain similar results using a continuous experience count.

73 MFA department director generals and assistant ministers both hold department-level rank (*zhengsi ji*), although the latter enjoy some of the privileges of vice-minister rank. Most ambassadors hold department-level rank. Ambassadors assigned to high-status countries hold vice-minister rank (*fubu ji*). Ambassadors assigned to low-status countries can hold division level (*zhengchu ji*) or deputy department level (*fusi ji*) rank. Ambassadors to the World Trade Organization also have vice-minister rank but are not traditionally staffed by foreign ministry cadres.

74 As a robustness check, we evaluate a cross-sectional model in section 2.2 of the online Appendix and find similar results.

75 We coded geopolitical priority countries as those to which China assigns an ambassador with a vice-minister rank.

Table 2. Organizational Hierarchy within the MFA Sample

Rank	Category	Positions
Minister (and above)	Positions outside MFA	· state councillor/vice-premier for foreign affairs
		· deputy director/secretary, Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group
		· director, Foreign Affairs Office
		· director, Taiwan Affairs Office
		· director, Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office
		· director, Hong Kong Liaison Office
		· chair/vice-chair, National People's Congress Foreign Affairs Committee
		· chair/vice-chair, Foreign Affairs Committee, National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
		· minister, International Liaison Department
	MFA headquarters	· foreign minister · Party secretary
Vice-minister	Positions outside MFA	· deputy director, Foreign Affairs Office
		· deputy director, Taiwan Affairs Office
		· deputy director, Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office
		· deputy director, State Council Information Office
		· deputy director, Overseas Chinese Affairs Office
		· vice-minister, International Liaison Department
	MFA headquarters	· vice-foreign minister · deputy MFA Party secretary · secretary, MFA discipline inspection committee
	Abroad	ambassador to...
		· the United States
		· Soviet Union/Russia
		· United Kingdom
		· France
		· North Korea
		· United Nations–New York, –Geneva (from 1990)
		· Commissioner to Hong Kong or Macau
		· European Union (from 2005)
		· Japan (from 1993)
		· Germany (from 1997)
		· India (from 2009)
		· Brazil (from 2009)

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued.)

Rank	Category	Positions
Senior ranks		· South Africa (from 2010)
		· Egypt (from 2019)
		· African Union (from 2019)
	MFA headquarters	· director general
		· assistant foreign minister
	Abroad	· ambassador

Another important question is whether the observed relationships are specific to particular time periods. In particular, it might be the case that these dynamics subsided as the MFA professionalized, establishing a more merit-based organizational culture. To explore this possibility, models 5 and 6 analyse a subsample of the data, which is restricted to the period from 1982 to 2014. Two results of this analysis are noteworthy. First, the association between foreign postings and promotion remains negative and statistically significant – and the substantive relationship is considerably larger. This suggests that, even as the foreign ministry became more professional, it has become *more* important for a greater share of a Chinese diplomat's service to be in domestic, rather than foreign, postings. Second, in the period after 1982, we find a positive relationship between promotion and experience with international disputes,⁷⁶ but again, we find no systematic relationship between experience managing treaty negotiations and promotion.

There are several potential interpretations of our findings regarding assignment history. One category of explanation centres on how postings at home and abroad influence the strength and density of the social connections that diplomats can build. To probe this possibility, we leverage these data to create a measure of each diplomat's social ties within the foreign ministry. We identify a network tie as when two diplomats had worked in the same embassy – or in the same department of the Beijing headquarters – at the same time. On average, diplomats in our sample had ties to 19 other senior officials, but there is considerable variation between them. For example, in 1993, Tang Jiaxuan 唐家璇 possessed some 45 senior ties, while his contemporaries possessed 14 on average. Regression analysis presented in section 2.5 of the online Appendix suggests that there is a systematic relationship between posting history and senior ties within the MFA. A one standard deviation increase in share of postings abroad is associated with a 14 per cent decrease in the number of senior ties among diplomats competing for promotion to vice-minister level, and a 7 per cent decrease among diplomats competing for minister-level promotion.

An alternate possibility, as discussed above, might be that foreign postings undercut perceptions of a diplomat's national loyalty. To explore this possibility, section 2.4 of the online Appendix presents an interaction model in which we compare the effects of foreign postings during periods of high and low elite unrest, such as the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution or the Tiananmen Square crackdown. If foreign assignments undermined perceived political reliability, we would expect that diplomats with a large share of foreign postings would be particularly unlikely to be promoted during these periods of domestic political unrest. The analysis finds no significant difference between periods of high and low domestic instability.

Promotion to minister rank

Do patterns in foreign and domestic assignments also affect advancement to minister-level leadership positions in China's foreign affairs system? We explore this question first by examining the

76 Section 2.6 of the online Appendix further probes these results based on the favourability of the dispute outcome.

Table 3. Diplomatic Postings, Performance and Promotion to Vice-minister Rank

	Dependent Variable: Promotion to Vice-minister Rank					
	1949–2014			1982–2014		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of time abroad	-2.078*** (0.210)		-2.082*** (0.227)	-1.857*** (0.234)	-2.671*** (0.261)	-2.337*** (0.287)
International disputes (count)		0.177 (0.145)	0.275* (0.149)	0.261* (0.156)	0.365** (0.165)	0.361** (0.170)
Diplomatic treaties (count)		-0.067*** (0.031)	-0.006 (0.026)	-0.016 (0.025)	-0.026 (0.044)	-0.036 (0.039)
Junior priority experience				0.142*** (0.036)		0.146*** (0.039)
Male				0.984 (0.785)		0.619 (0.684)
Military background				0.580** (0.265)		0.133 (0.390)
Started in ILD				1.200** (0.593)		0.876 (0.676)
Higher civilian education				-0.092 (0.253)		0.397 (0.484)
Princeling				0.463 (0.509)		0.783 (0.499)
Party congress fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Experience count fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clusters	1,179	1,179	1,179	1,179	1,070	1,070
McFadden Pseudo-R ²	0.11	0.06	0.11	0.12	0.15	0.16
Observations	8,287	8,287	8,287	7,752	6,378	5,849

Note: Robust standard errors clustered by individual. *p<0.1; ** p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Table 4. Foreign Minister Career Trajectories

Name	Tenure	Background	Domestic Postings	Foreign Postings	Dispute Management
Zhou Enlai 周恩来	1949–1958	Revolutionary	None	None	None
Chen Yi 陈毅	1958–1972	Revolutionary	None	None	None
Ji Pengfei 姬鹏飞	1972–1974	Revolutionary	Beijing, 1955–1972	E. Germany, 1950–1955	None
Qiao Guanhua 乔冠华	1974–1976	MFA diplomat	Beijing, 1949–1974	None	None
Huang Hua 黄华	1976–1982	MFA diplomat	Beijing, 1954–1960	Ghana, 1960–1965; Egypt, 1966–1969; Canada, 1971; United Nations, 1971–1976	None
Wu Xueqian 吴学谦	1982–1988	ILD diplomat	Beijing, 1958–1982	None	None
Qian Qichen 钱其琛	1988–1998	MFA diplomat	Beijing, 1976–1988	Soviet Union, 1955–1963, 1972–1974; Guinea/Guinea-Bissau, 1974–1976	None
Tang Jiaxuan 唐家璇	1998–2003	MFA diplomat	Beijing, 1964–1969, 1985–1988, 1991–2000	Japan, 1978–1983, 1988–1991	None
Li Zhaoxing 李肇星	2003–2007	MFA diplomat	Beijing, 1977–1983, 1985–1993, 1995–1998, 2001–2003	Kenya, 1970–1977; Lesotho, 1983–1985; United Nations, 1993–1995; United States, 1998–2001	2000 Taiwan dispute
Yang Jiechi 杨洁篪	2007–2013	MFA diplomat	Beijing, 1975–1983, 1987–1993, 1995–2001, 2004–2007	United States, 1983–1987, 1993–1995, 2001–2004	1995 Taiwan Strait Crisis; 2001 EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft incident
Wang Yi 王毅	2013–2022, 2023–present	MFA diplomat	Beijing, 1982–1989, 1994–2004, 2007–2013	Japan, 1989–1994, 2004–2007	2004/2005/2007 Japanese disputes
Qin Gang 秦刚	2022–2023	MFA diplomat	Beijing, 1992–1995, 1999–2002, 2005–2010, 2011–2021	United Kingdom, 1995–1999, 2002–2005, 2010–2011; United States, 2021–2022	None

career trajectories of China's 12 foreign ministers since 1949. As summarized in Table 4, most foreign ministers had extensive experience working in the MFA headquarters. Prior to their promotion, China's foreign ministers spent over twice as much time on average in assignments at home than in assignments abroad. Second, prior assignments abroad skew towards strategically important countries, such as the United States, Japan and the United Kingdom – although there are exceptions to this pattern. Since the early 2000s, these postings coincided with significant international crises abroad.

Next, we compare the career trajectories with those of the other MFA cadres at the time. We construct a sample of diplomats who were eligible for promotion (i.e. vice-minister rank) during years

Table 5. Diplomatic Postings, Performance and Appointment to Minister Rank

	Dependent Variable: Promotion to Minister Rank					
	1949–2014				1982–2014	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of time abroad	–2.402*** (0.686)		–1.827** (0.824)	–1.770* (0.992)	–4.198*** (1.172)	–5.603*** (1.680)
International disputes (count)		–0.062 (0.214)	0.115 (0.247)	0.103 (0.242)	0.439* (0.228)	0.420* (0.236)
Diplomatic treaties (count)		–0.167*** (0.058)	–0.103** (0.048)	–0.142** (0.058)	–0.074 (0.064)	–0.188 (0.175)
Junior priority experience (no. of posts)				0.165** (0.069)		0.249*** (0.096)
Male				–2.281 (1.421)		–6.356*** (1.724)
Military background				0.534 (0.721)		–0.460 (0.762)
Started in ILD				3.914*** (1.007)		6.342*** (1.479)
Higher civilian education				0.206 (0.710)		0.708 (1.313)
Princeling				–0.126 (0.839)		1.773* (0.908)
Experience count fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clusters	18	18	18	18	11	11
McFadden pseudo-R ²	0.15	0.13	0.17	0.21	0.29	0.41
Observations	296	296	296	296	226	226

Note: Robust standard errors clustered by year. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

when there was a minister-level appointment. The dependent variable is coded as 1 if the individual was promoted to a minister-level position within the foreign affairs system, and 0 otherwise. All models continue to employ logistic regression with experience fixed effects. Given the small number of individuals in the pool ($n = 139$), we estimate models with standard errors clustered on the year rather than with period fixed effects. The small sample size also means that the results should be interpreted with caution.

We report the findings of our statistical analysis in Table 5. Models 1, 2 and 3 report parsimonious models estimating the relationship between promotion and foreign assignments, as well as between promotion and performance. As in our analysis of vice-minister level promotion, we find that a greater share of foreign postings is negatively associated with promotion. The results are substantively similar when including controls in model 4. The results remain statistically significant in models 5 and 6, which subset the sample to the period from 1982 to 2014. Similar to the analysis of diplomatic promotion to vice-minister ranks, the substantive relationship is larger in the reform era. We find no consistent relationship between promotion and experience managing disputes, while the relationship between promotion and experience with treaty negotiation is negative across the full sample.

In section 2 of the online Appendix, we report several robustness checks, including a replication of our analysis using a cross-sectional specification, using alternative measures of performance, dropping diplomats still holding positions at the time of our analysis, and controlling for the foreign minister. Our main results remain consistent throughout. Section 2.12 of the Appendix also reports additional models that account for current assignments in Beijing. The analysis again finds a positive relationship between assignment at home and promotion. We also report a number of empirical extensions, including whether service as the MFA spokesperson or in international organizations shaped promotion patterns. Finally, as shown in section 3 of the Appendix, the data suggest that, apart from the period of bureaucratic instability during the Cultural Revolution, Chinese diplomats have rarely been removed from their posts on disciplinary grounds.

Conclusion

This article introduces foreign assignments as a key aspect of promotion patterns in China's foreign affairs system. It presents the first systematic analysis of professional advancement within this system, introducing original data that offer a comprehensive resource to study China's diplomatic bureaucracy, and offers an important counterpart to other resources cataloguing elite career paths within the CCP.⁷⁷ Analysis of these data suggests, somewhat counterintuitively, that diplomats who spend a greater portion of their careers gaining experience working in foreign countries are less likely to rise up through the ranks than diplomats who remain at home.

The article's main contribution is to showcase the important but comparatively overlooked dynamics of professional advancement among the key bureaucratic actors responsible for informing and implementing China's foreign affairs. The findings speak to the unique ways that postings interact with traditional factors shaping promotion, such as merit and patronage. While the Party may value the street-level expertise and experience gained from foreign postings, countervailing factors, particularly the ability to form social ties, seem to dominate in promotion decisions. While it may pay to have some experience abroad, too many foreign postings can degrade a cadre's promotion prospects.

The findings also showcase the importance of career pathways that allow cadres to build ties within their organization early in their careers, an intuition that may have applicability outside of diplomatic circles. If diplomats – one of whose core functions is foreign engagement – stand to benefit from assignments at home rather than abroad, this suggests that other bureaucrats may face even higher costs to their career trajectory when they are dispatched to overseas posts. A similar logic could also possibly apply to the opportunity costs of assignments at the provincial, district and municipal levels relative to those in Beijing. In the People's Liberation Army, for example, an assignment in the Central Military Commission (such as Xi Jinping's secretarial work for the-then defence minister, Geng Biao) could improve promotion prospects more than time spent in low-level operational units.

Finally, the data and analysis identify important avenues for future research. Case studies might delve more deeply into the correlations we observe between assignments, performance and promotion. Future scholarship can also expand the scope of data collection to include other ministries and organizations within the foreign affairs system, such as the ILD and the Ministry of State Security. The data also open new opportunities for scholars to consider whether and how other factors, such as personal relationships with the supreme leader or popular appeal with domestic audiences, shape promotion in parallel. Future analyses could also examine alternative measures of performance and compare promotion within the Chinese system to that in other country contexts.

Other lines of inquiry might focus on unpacking the potential effects of individual-level attributes on bureaucratic behaviour. Do differences in education, prior military service or type of diplomatic assignments colour diplomatic reporting or policy recommendations? Do such differences make

77 Shih, Adolph and Liu 2012; Landry, Lü and Duan 2018; Mattingly 2024; Jost and Mattingly 2025.

some Chinese envoys more effective negotiators than others? Do social ties within the foreign ministry shape the likelihood that diplomatic messages are passed “up the line” of the foreign affairs system, perhaps because diplomats are better able to route information through their own personal networks rather than through formal reporting channels? Are different diplomatic backgrounds and social networks associated with different policy positions? Overall, this article opens doors to studying a central, but comparatively overlooked, part of the Chinese state responsible for managing China’s foreign relations.

Supplementary material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S030574102510091X>. Replication materials for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/G40WWJ>

Acknowledgements. For helpful comments and feedback, the authors thank Todd Hall, Wendy Leutert, Daniel Mattingly, Austin Strange, Saul Wilson and workshop participants at the Oxford University China Centre. We also thank Keely Thompson and Danny Ruodan Xu for excellent research assistance. The Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs provided funding for this project.

Competing interests. None.

References

- Barnett, A. Doak.** 1985. *The Making of Foreign Policy in China: Structure and Process*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Bartke, Wolfgang.** 1997. *Who Was Who in the People's Republic of China*. Munchen: K.G. Saur.
- Bo, Zhiyue.** 2002. *Chinese Provincial Leaders: Economic Performance and Political Mobility since 1949*. New York: Routledge.
- Brazys, Samuel, Alexander Dukalskis and Stefan Müller.** 2023. “Leader of the pack? Changes in ‘wolf warrior diplomacy’ after a Politburo collective study session.” *The China Quarterly* 254, 484–493.
- Chen, Hao, Saul Wilson, Yuhua Wang, Changxin Xu and Cheng Cheng.** 2023. “Dethroning the Mao-era elite: using organizational histories to illuminate cadre management.” *The China Quarterly* 258, 346–366.
- Cho, Hyun-Binn.** 2021. “Nuclear coercion, crisis bargaining, and the Sino-Soviet border conflict of 1969.” *Security Studies* 30(4), 550–577.
- Choi, Eun Kyong.** 2012. “Patronage and performance: factors in the political mobility of provincial leaders in post-Deng China.” *The China Quarterly* 212, 965–981.
- Chubb, Andrew.** 2020. “PRC assertiveness in the South China Sea: measuring continuity and change, 1970–2015.” *International Security* 45(3), 79–121.
- Dukalskis, Alexander.** 2021. *Making the World Safe for Dictatorship*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fravel, M. Taylor.** 2008. *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fung, Courtney J.** 2019. *China and Intervention at the UN Security Council: Reconciling Status*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fung, Courtney J., Enze Han, Kai Quek and Austin Strange.** 2023. “Conditioning China’s influence: intentionality, intermediaries, and institutions.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 32(139), 1–16.
- Glaser, Bonnie S., and Evan S. Medeiros.** 2007. “The changing ecology of foreign policy-making in China: the ascension and demise of the theory of ‘peaceful rise’.” *The China Quarterly* 190, 291–310.
- Goldfien, Michael A.** 2024. “Just patronage? Familiarity and the diplomatic value of non-career ambassadors.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 68(7–8), 1417–42.
- Jiang, Junyan.** 2018. “Making bureaucracy work: patronage networks, performance incentives, and economic development in China.” *American Journal of Political Science* 62(4), 982–999.
- Johnston, Alastair Iain.** 2008. *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980–2000*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Jost, Tyler.** 2023. “The institutional origins of miscalculation in China’s international crises.” *International Security* 48(1), 47–90.
- Jost, Tyler.** 2024. *Bureaucracies at War: The Institutional Origins of Miscalculation*. New York: Cambridge University.
- Jost, Tyler, and Daniel C. Mattingly.** 2025. “Networks of coercion: military ties and civilian leadership challengers in China.” *American Journal of Political Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12971>.
- Kan, Shirley A.** 2001. *China–US Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001: Assessments and Policy Implications*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.
- Kastner, Scott L., Margaret M. Pearson and Chad Rector.** 2018. *China's Strategic Multilateralism: Investing in Global Governance*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Klein, Donald W.** 1960. “Peking’s evolving Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” *The China Quarterly* 4, 28–39.

- Lampton, David M.** (ed.). 2001. *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978–2000*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Landry, Pierre F.** 2008. *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China: The Communist Party's Control of Local Elites in the Post-Mao Era*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Landry, Pierre F., Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan.** 2018. "Does performance matter? Evaluating political selection along the Chinese administrative ladder." *Comparative Political Studies* 51(8), 1074–1105.
- Leutert, Wendy.** 2018. "The political mobility of China's central state-owned enterprise leaders." *The China Quarterly* 233, 1–21.
- Leutert, Wendy, and Nicholas Atkinson.** 2024. "Crafting narratives of COVID-19 through China's Twitter diplomacy." In Guobin Yang, Bingchun Meng and Elaine J. Yuan (eds.), *Pandemic Crossings: Digital Technology, Everyday Experience, and Governance in the COVID-19 Crisis*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 213–240.
- Leutert, Wendy, and Samantha A. Vorthers.** 2021. "Personnel power: governing state-owned enterprises." *Business and Politics* 23(3), 419–437.
- Li, Hongbin, and Li-An Zhou.** 2005. "Political turnover and economic performance: the incentive role of personnel control in China." *Journal of Public Economics* 89(9–10), 1743–62.
- Lieberthal, Kenneth, and Michel Oksenberg.** 1988. *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lindsey, David.** 2023. *Delegated Diplomacy: How Ambassadors Establish Trust in International Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Liu, Xiaohong.** 2001. *Chinese Ambassadors: The Rise of Diplomatic Professionalism*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Loh, Dylan M.H.** 2024. *China's Rising Foreign Ministry: Practices and Representations of Assertive Diplomacy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Lu, Ning.** 1997. *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China* (2nd ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Manion, Melanie.** 1985. "The cadre management system, post-Mao: the appointment, promotion, transfer and removal of Party and state leaders." *The China Quarterly* 102, 203–233.
- Maoz, Zeev, Paul L. Johnson, Jasper Kaplan, Fiona Ogunkoya and Aaron Shreve.** 2018. "The dyadic militarized interstate disputes (MIDS) dataset version 3.0: logic, characteristics, and comparisons to alternative datasets." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63(3), 811–835.
- Martin, Peter.** 2021. *China's Civilian Army: The Making of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mattingly, Daniel C.** 2024. "How the Party commands the gun: the foreign–domestic threat dilemma in China." *American Journal of Political Science* 68(1), 227–242.
- Mattingly, Daniel C., and James Sundquist.** 2023. "When does public diplomacy work? Evidence from China's 'wolf warrior' diplomats." *Political Science Research and Methods* 11(4), 921–29.
- Medeiros, Evan S., and M. Taylor Fravel.** 2003. "China's new diplomacy." *Foreign Affairs* 82(6), 22–35.
- Mertha, Andrew.** 2009. "Fragmented authoritarianism 2.0: political pluralization in the Chinese policy process." *The China Quarterly* 200, 995–1012.
- Pei, Jianhang** (ed.). 1989. *Yanjiu Zhou Enlai: waijiao sixiang yu shijian (Study of Zhou Enlai's Diplomatic Thought and Practice)*. Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe.
- Rozman, Gilbert** (ed.). 2012. *China's Foreign Policy: Who Makes It, and How is it Made?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schliebs, Marcel, Hannah Bailey, Jonathan Bright and Philip N. Howard.** 2021. "China's public diplomacy operations: understanding engagement and inauthentic amplifications of PRC diplomats on Facebook and Twitter." Programme on Democracy and Technology, Oxford University.
- Shen, Jian, and Li Shen.** 1993. *Wuxing hongqi xia de dashimen (Ambassadors under the Five-Star Red Flag)*. Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe.
- Shih, Victor.** 2022. *Coalitions of the Weak: Elite Political Dynamics from the Late-Mao Period to the Xi Jinping Era*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Shih, Victor C.** 2008. *Factions and Finance in China*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Shih, Victor, Christopher Adolph and Mingxing Liu.** 2012. "Getting ahead in the Communist Party: explaining the advancement of Central Committee Members in China." *American Political Science Review* 106(1), 166–187.
- Shih, Victor, Wei Shan and Mingxing Liu.** 2010. "Gauging the elite political equilibrium in the CCP: a quantitative approach using biographical data." *The China Quarterly* 201, 79–103.
- Swaine, Michael D.** 1996. "The PLA and Chinese national security policy: leaderships, structures, processes." *The China Quarterly* 146, 360–393.
- Swaine, Michael D.** 2015. "The PLA role in China's foreign policy and crisis behavior." In Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell (eds.), *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policy-Making*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 141–165.
- Tan, Yeling.** 2021. *Disaggregating China, Inc.: State Strategies in the Liberal Economic Order*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Tang, Jiaxuan** (ed.). 2000. *Zhongguo waijiao cidian* (Dictionary of Chinese Diplomacy). Beijing: Shejie zhishi chubanshe.
- Waijiao bu waijiao shi yanjiushi**. 1996. *Dangdai Zhongguo shijie waijiao shengya* (The Diplomatic Careers of Contemporary Chinese Envoys). Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe.
- Wang, Erik H.** 2022. "Frightened mandarins: the adverse effects of fighting corruption on local bureaucracy." *Comparative Political Studies* 55(11), 1807–43.
- Wang, Peng, and Jingyi Wang**. 2018. "How China promotes its military officers: interactions between formal and informal institutions." *The China Quarterly* 234, 399–419.
- Weiss, Jessica Chen**. 2014. *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China's Foreign Relations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wuthnow, Joel**. 2017. "China's new 'black box': problems and prospects for the Central National Security Commission." *The China Quarterly* 232, 886–903.
- Zeng, Yu, and Stan Hok-wui Wong**. 2021. "Time is power: rethinking meritocratic political selection in China." *The China Quarterly* 245, 23–50.
- Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu** (ed.). 2000. *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhi shi ziliao* (Materials on the Organizational History of the Chinese Communist Party). Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe.
- Zhou, Jiali** (ed.). 2023. *Shewai libin liyi* (Diplomatic Protocol and Etiquette). Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe.
- Zou, Ximing**. 1998. *Zhonggong zhongyang jigou yange shilu* (Record of CCP Organizational Evolution: 1921.7–1997.9). Beijing: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe.

Tyler JOST is assistant professor at the department of political science and Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs at Brown University.

Yucong LI is a PhD candidate in the department of political science at Brown University.