

BRIDGING STATE AND NONPROFIT:
DIFFERENTIATED EMBEDDEDNESS OF CHINESE POLITICAL ELITES IN
CHARITABLE FOUNDATIONS

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Abstract

How are political elites embedded in both civil and political domains? I studied 246 Chinese political elites who also served on nonprofit foundations' boards from 2011 to 2015 and conceptualized a framework to understand the state-nonprofit relationship before 2015. The political elites can build horizontal connections with foundations, helping the party-state reach nonprofit actors. They can also build vertical connections with political groups, helping foundations access political resources. The dual-role elites' connectedness with foundations and in the polity varies by their primary positions in the political system. Effective communication between the state and nonprofit actors requires elites to have strong connections in both the civil and political domains, but the situation in China is far from ideal—those embedded in foundations are disconnected from the polity, and those connected in the polity are marginalized in foundations.

Keywords: Chinese political elites; nonprofit sector; civil society; political networks; nonprofit foundation; Chinese Communist Party; Chinese Youth League

Correspondence: maji@austin.utexas.edu; 2315 Red River St, Austin, TX 78712, USA. ORCID: 0000-0003-3682-6587. *Acknowledgment:* This paper was presented at the 2019 Annual MPSA Conference in Chicago, 2019 West Coast Nonprofit Data Conference in Phoenix, 2019 Guanxi for Guanxi Studies in Beijing, and LBJ Washington DC Center. I thank Andy Zhao, Franziska Barbara Keller, Jeremi Suri, Jiar-der Luo, Joseph Galaskiewicz, Joshua Eisenman, Karl Johnson, Meiyang Xu, Ronald Burt, Sonja Opper, Steven Klein, and conference attendees for their constructive comments and help. I thank Julie Yu-wen Chen and Sujian Guo for handling this manuscript and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments. *Compliance with Ethical Standards:* The author declares that this study complies with required ethical standards. *Conflict of Interest:* The author declares no known conflict of interest. *Funding:* The project is partly funded by the 2019 Faculty Research Program of the IC2 Institute and the Academic Development Funds from the RGK Center. *Biography:* Ji Ma is an Assistant Professor in Nonprofit and Philanthropic Studies at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs and affiliated faculty member of the Center for East Asian Studies and the School of Information, UT Austin. He studies and teaches state-society relationship, knowledge production, and computational social science methods.

Introduction

The relationship between the party-state and nonprofits in China has been of interest to scholars, practitioners, and politicians for a few decades because of the expectation and fear that a burgeoning nonprofit sector may bring multiparty democracy to the authoritarian regime. A rich body of scholarship has been crafted from different macro perspectives; however, we are still in dire need of a framework to understand how the party-state and nonprofit actors interplay at the meso and micro levels.

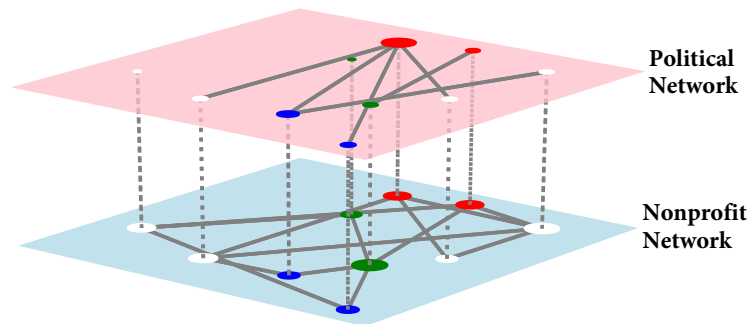
Scholars have introduced numerous theoretical lenses to better understand the state-nonprofit relationship. The initial attempt started in the early 1990s, when scholars and policymakers primarily used a neo-Tocquevillian perspective and theorized the relationship as conflicting (e.g., Chamberlain 1993; Madsen 1993). The second wave started in the mid-2000s, when scholars and policymakers tried to theorize the relationship as being contingent and applied a lens of corporatism. Studies of this stream, for example, those on “graduated control” (Kang and Han 2008), “contingent symbiosis” (Spires 2011), and “consultative authoritarianism” (Teets 2013), framed nonprofit actors as the service arms of the state, leaving room for these organizations to grow. However, their survival is still contingent upon their focuses on nonpolitically sensitive areas. The third wave started in the late 2010s, when the relationship was theorized as being networked. Scholarship of this wave began to emphasize the active roles of nonprofit actors and the mutual embeddedness between the civil and political domains (e.g., Ma and DeDeo 2018; Teets 2018). A growing number of scholars have started to emphasize the blurring boundary between the party-state and nonprofit sector (e.g., Hasmath, Hildebrandt, and Hsu 2019; Farid and Song 2020; Song 2021; Snape and Wang 2020; Weng and Zhang 2020; Zhang and Guo 2021).

This study follows this research trend and advances our understanding of the mutual embeddedness between political and civil actors in China. By examining 246 political elites who also served on nonprofit foundations’ boards from 2011 to 2015, I analyzed their profiles and networks and found that the dual-role elites who are popular in the nonprofit sector are

marginalized in the party-state, and vice versa. In order to make the state-in-society strategy work (Migdal 2001), political elites need to have strong connections in both the civil and political domains. But the situation in China is far from ideal—those embedded in foundations are disconnected from the polity, and those connected in the polity are marginalized in foundations. We need to be cautious about generalizing the findings because this study only covers foundations and there are other channels between the party-state and nonprofit sector. However, as one of the first studies theorizing a framework at the meso and micro levels, this paper provides an essential baseline and can serve as a stimulus for future research.

Research Framework: Differentiated Embeddedness in a Multilayer-Network

Figure 1: BRIDGING CIVIL AND POLITICAL SPACES: A MULTILAYER-NETWORK PERSPECTIVE



Notes: The image is only for illustration and does not reflect real observations. Non-political actors in the nonprofit network are hidden for visual clarity. Nodes in the same color indicate political elites from the same political organizations. For example, red nodes are all political elites from the Chinese Communist Party. Nodes in the same positions but in different networks represent the same individuals. Node size represents the number of direct connections of a node in that given network.

The dual-role elites' double-embeddedness can be conceptualized through a multilayer-network perspective. From this perspective, an individual's purpose is a function of that person's embeddedness in a specific domain, and one individual can have multiple purposes that are defined by the different domains in which they are embedded (Padgett and McLean 2006, 1469). As Figure 1 illustrates, the same political elites can be embedded in both the civil and political spaces.

The multilayer-network figure also presents two important notions in the literature on the state-nonprofit relationship in China: horizontal and vertical connections (e.g., Salmenkari 2013; Lu and Tao 2017). A *horizontal connection* primarily considers how nonprofits are mutually connected (e.g., Hasmath and Hsu 2020), and a *vertical connection* measures these actors' access to political resources. The political elites who are embedded in both civil and political arenas are crucial—they can build horizontal connections with nonprofit groups, and they can also build vertical connections with the party-state. In a nutshell, they are unique players bridging civil and political spaces.

Combining the multilayer-network perspective and the two notions of connection, Table 1 illustrates the theoretical framework. The dual-role elites can be grouped into four categories according to their embeddedness. 1) Those who have strong connections in nonprofits are excellent state agents when it comes to reaching nonprofit actors. 2) Those who have strong connections in the polity can serve as access points to the party-state. 3) Those who are less connected in nonprofits are weak state agents. And 4) those who are less connected in the polity are ineffective access points to political resources. The sections below briefly review these elites' roles in the civil and political domains.

Table 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DIFFERENTIATED EMBEDDEDNESS OF CHINESE POLITICAL ELITES

		Nonprofit embeddedness (<i>horizontal connection</i>)	Political embeddedness (<i>vertical connection</i>)
Embeddedness of political elites	Strong	State agents for accessing civic resources	Access points to the party-state
	Weak	Weak state agents in nonprofits	Ineffective access points to political resources

Political Elites in the Nonprofit Sector: Access Points to Political Resources

Chinese political elites have been active players in the nonprofit sector since the founding of the socialist state. In the 1950s, numerous mass organizations were created by the state, and they are

still quasi-government units today. The party-state also created the first nonprofit foundations in the early 1980s, and most of their staff in the following two decades were government employees. Even in the late 1990s, the majority of Chinese nonprofits were staffed by government officials serving as employees and political elites serving as board members (Heurlin 2010, 232–233).

The regulations on how to register a nonprofit in China all employed an important strategy for the state to monitor the nonprofit sector—the “dual registration” system.¹ According to these regulations, a nonprofit was required to 1) have a government department serving as its “supervisory sponsor” and 2) register with the departments of civil affairs at different levels in the party-state. As a result, nonprofits in China differ from their counterparts in Western democracies: they have limited autonomy and are closely monitored or even directly established by the state (Ma 2002). These nonprofits, particularly those engaging in politically sensitive activities, must prudently manage their relationships with the state to achieve a “contingent symbiosis” (Spires 2011).

Despite these operational constraints, the number of nonprofits in China has increased substantially since the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, and the interaction between these organizations and the party-state is bidirectional. Nonprofits in China can have considerable policy influence through their connection to the state (Saich 2001, 210; Mertha 2009), and the state also relies on them as an indirect tool of social control (Teets 2013). In short, the party-state actors and nonprofits are mutually embedded.

For example, Teets (2018) found that nonprofits exploited their governmental supervisors as access points to the policymaking process, which they would not have been able to access otherwise, and formed policy networks with these policymakers that resemble those in Western democracies. Another study on Chinese nonprofit foundations found that, as a dominant power in the Chinese nonprofit sector, these organizations were able to form a decentralized organizational network through board interlocking relationships. Despite the widespread appearance of government officials on foundations’ boards, Chinese nonprofits were able to cluster into several autonomous elite groups and form a multipolar structure that resembles what is found in liberal

societies (Ma and DeDeo 2018). Moreover, Lu and Tao (2017) discovered that grassroots nonprofit actors formed “horizontal connections” with each other and that they also forged “vertical connections” with the state through retired government officials.

The literature has singled out the fact that the party-state relies on political elites to monitor the activities of nonprofits. But more importantly, nonprofits can also exploit these elites to reach the party-state. However, scholars have rarely investigated how exactly these dual-role politicians function.

Political Elites in the Party-State: Unification and the Fractured Polity

Unifying politics and administration

Democratic regimes are characterized by a separation of power (Long 1949, 1952; Rosenbloom 2008), but China’s post-Mao era is experiencing the opposite. In the 1980s, political elites in China had already realized that the party-government relationship was the major challenge to reforming the political structure, but later legislation made no progress in separating the cadre and civil servants because such separation would fundamentally challenge the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP’s) hegemony (Tao-chiu and Chan 1996). The enactment of the *Law on Public Servants* in 2005 formally institutionalized the combination of politics and administration by recategorizing public servant positions as “leading” or “non-leading” (Chan and Li 2007, 389).

As Table S4 in the appendix presents, Chinese political leaders in “leading positions” are ranked in ten categories, from the lowest rank of “Section/Township Deputy” (*xiangkeji fuzhi*) to the highest rank of “State Leader” (*guojiaji zhengzhi*). These ranks also correspond to geographic levels, with the township level being the lowest and the state or central level being the highest (PRC National People’s Congress 2005, Article 16; Chan and Li 2007, 393). Leadership changes follow the “one-level-down” and “party control” principles, in that the party committees at a lower level prescreen the proposals to be submitted to the party organizations at a higher level for decision-making purposes (Chan and Li 2007, 392). For example, a party committee at the

bureau/department level will review a list of candidates before submitting their proposal to the party committee at the province/ministry level for decision-making.

The number of cadres at different levels comprise a pyramid structure. In 1998, there were approximately 545,000 leading cadres who were ranked at the county level and above (i.e., *xianchuji* and above). Among them, over 500,000 were at the county level or below, 34,000 were at the bureau or municipal level, 2,500 were at the ministerial or provincial level, and less than 1,000 were at the national level (Brødsgaard 2018, 392). Although leaders at the provincial level are not large in number, they are important brokers between local and national political elites (Saich 2001, 144).

A fractured political system

Although CCP members hold more than 96% of the leading positions (Brødsgaard 2018, 391), they serve in different political and bureaucratic institutions. Thus, these political elites may represent the interests of different departments that do not necessarily hold views consistent with those of the central leaders.

Such misalignment is real and emergent—the political elites are far from being a unified group. For example, the leaders of state-owned enterprises form a powerful group of corporate elites who are highly independent from government agencies (Brødsgaard 2012). Meanwhile, the People’s Consultative Council, which comprises non-CCP elites from diverse social and economic professions, plays an important role in political participation and consultation (He and Thøgersen 2010; Yan 2011, 689). Furthermore, as the CCP’s primary youth organization, the Chinese Youth League (CYL) prepares youths to be the “assistants and reserve army” for the party. However, having this separate group may also be supporting the rise of the “CYL Clique” (*tuanpai*) within the party (Kou and Tsai 2014, 159–162). Finally, intellectuals have opened up a robust public sphere for political debate (Goldman and Gu 2004, 13). Most, if not all, of these individuals are CCP members, but they serve in various institutions and are driven by different interests.

To handle the potential threat of a fractured polity, the CCP's central leaders began to bypass political and bureaucratic institutions and strengthen the party's direct governance at all levels during Xi Jinping's presidency (Guo 2020). In November 2018, the Central Committee of the CCP released the *Regulations on the Operation of the Party Branches*, which required all social, economic, and military "units" to establish CCP branches, and a unit was defined as having three or more CCP members, regardless of its registration status (e.g., as a formally incorporated cooperative company, private company, publicly listed company, or even a temporary working team; Xinhua News Agency 2018). Although such a requirement has long existed since the 1990s, it became unprecedentedly compelling during Xi's presidency (Nie and Wu 2021, 2). Besides establishing the CCP branches, the Xi administration has invested more effort in advancing the party's direct control. In 2013, only two regulations of this sort were made. The number was tripled in 2015. Then in 2018 alone, thirteen regulations were announced, followed by twenty-two in 2019.²

Research Questions

Based on the theoretical framing and the analysis of the elites' roles, I am motivated to explore how these dual-role elites are embedded in the civil and political domains. Specifically, I develop this study from three perspectives.

1. *What are the characteristics of the dual-role elites?* Answering this question involves examining the elites' demographics, their cadre ranks and positions, and how these characteristics change over time.
2. *What are the profiles of the social and institutional networks?* This switches our analysis from studying the individuals to describing the networks in which these individuals are embedded. Answering this question discloses the structures of these networks.
3. *What are the patterns of embeddedness?* Finally, I analyze the patterns of interactions between these elites. The analysis helps us group the dual-role elites as Table 1 theorizes,

creating a framework and stimulus for understanding the differentiated embeddedness of political elites in the nonprofit sector.

Data and Methods

Data Sources

I used two datasets: the Research Infrastructure of Chinese Foundations (RICF; Ma et al. 2017) for charitable foundations and the Chinese Political Elite Database (CPED; Jiang 2018) for political elites. The online appendixes have more details on data preprocessing and validation.

Research Infrastructure of Chinese Foundations. The RICE provides comprehensive data on Chinese foundations, including their institutional characteristics, financial status, and personnel from 2013 to 2016. The data descriptor of the RICE contains more technical details on dataset construction and validation (Ma et al. 2017). Following this descriptor, I constructed a dataset on foundations from 2010 to 2016. Although each year is different, roughly 30% of all the foundations are eligible to raise funds publicly,³ the board size is 11.72 ($SD = 6.44$) people on average, and there are about 140 political elites embedded in the foundation network each year. Tables S1 and S2 in the appendix have more details about the foundations.

Chinese Political Elite Database. The CPED is a biographical database that contains the demographic and career information of over 4,000 Chinese political leaders who belong to one of the following groups: 1) “all city secretaries, mayors, and members of provincial standing committee[s] between 2000 and 2015,” 2) “all provincial secretaries and governors between 1995 and 2015,” and 3) “all other full and alternate Central Committee members between 1987 and 2012” (Jiang 2018, A-2). These criteria also serve as the definition of a “political elite” in this paper.

The final linked dataset tracks an elite’s foundation membership and political position in a given year. For example, as Figure S2 in the appendix shows, the political elite CJS was on two

foundations' boards (i.e., Foundation ID 250 and 1387) between 2010 and 2015, and he changed his primary position four times during the same time period.

The limitations of the data sources may bias the analysis, and selection bias is the most concerning issue. First, the foundations included are only a part of China's nonprofit sector. Therefore, using foundations as the primary units of analysis may ignore the activities of other nonprofits. However, empirical analysis shows that foundations are the most developed form of and the dominant power in the Chinese nonprofit sector (Lai et al. 2015; Ma and DeDeo 2018, 293), and they also contribute to our understanding of the state-civil society relationship in authoritarian countries (Levy and Pissler 2020, 5). Second, a substantial number of foundations are created by the government (Wang 2018, 308). As a result, the analysis may merely reflect the assignments of the party-state. However, these government-created foundations are not isolated agents; they are instead structurally connected to other types of foundations (Ma and DeDeo 2018, 294) and lead the development of the foundation landscape (Wang 2018, 297). Third, the CPED may miss cadres at the grassroots level, but the technical details of its construction and validation suggest that the dataset is better than acceptable (Jiang 2018). Moreover, these grassroots cadres may have limited influence on the foundation landscape in comparison to high-level political elites. In general, we can expect that the biases of the analysis due to data source limitations are unavoidable but better than acceptable.

Variables

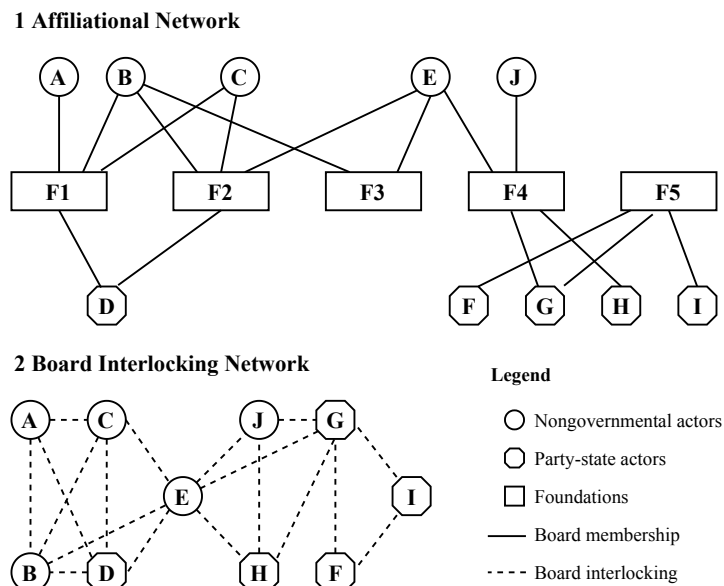
Dependent variables: Nonprofit and political embeddedness

I used board interlocking relationships between nonprofit foundations to operationalize the dependent variables. In theory, the board interlocking relationship plays a crucial role in organizational governance and strategy. Although controversial in practice because organizational behaviors largely exist outside of boardrooms, the board interlocking relationship has been empirically tested as a valid proxy to study the organizational relationships of companies and

nonprofits (e.g., Mizruchi 1996; Davis 1996; Esparza and Jeon 2013; Faulk et al. 2016; Ma 2020; Wu, Zhang, and Chen 2021).

I constructed two dependent variables to measure a political elite's horizontal and vertical connections: *nonprofit embeddedness* is operationalized by counting an elite's connections to nongovernmental actors, and *political embeddedness* is defined as an elite's connections to the party-state actors. Figure 2 illustrates how the two variables are constructed. I first create a bipartite affiliational network using board membership in which there are two types of nodes (i.e., foundation and board member; Subgraph 1 in Figure 2). Then the bipartite network is converted to a unipartite board interlocking network in which nodes represent board members (Subgraph 2 in Figure 2). Take node G in the figure for example: its nonprofit embeddedness is 2 (connected to E and J), and its political embeddedness is 3 (connected to H, F, and I). Meanwhile, individual D's nonprofit embeddedness is 4 and political embeddedness is 0.

Figure 2: DEPENDENT VARIABLES: NONPROFIT AND POLITICAL EMBEDDEDNESS



Independent and control variables

The primary independent variable is *political position*. It is a categorical variable and coded according to an individual's primary position in a given year using the itemized curriculum vitae

from the CPED. The variable has ten categories: 1) Chinese Communist Party (CCP; only when individuals directly serve as party officials, e.g., as the secretary of a party committee), 2) Chinese Youth League (CYL), 3) Judiciary, 4) Mass Organization (MO; e.g., the All-China Women's Federation), 5) People's Congress (PC), 6) People's Consultative Council (PCC), 7) State Council, 8) Central state-owned enterprise (CSOE), 9) Local state-owned enterprise (LSOE), and 10) School (e.g., university principals).

There are two caveats in coding these categories. First, the CYL is also a mass organization, but it is coded separately because of its direct affiliational relationship with the CCP (i.e., preparing youths to be the CCP's "assistants and reserve army") and because of the evidence of the CYL Clique (Kou and Tsai 2014, 162). Second, if individuals hold multiple positions simultaneously, I used the position that 1) has a longer track record or 2) has more important roles in policymaking (Zheng 2010; Bo 2012; Jane Duckett 2012; Saich 2015).

Control variables in the regression analysis include demographics (i.e., age, gender, education, and cadre rank) to control the influence of individual characteristics. A foundation's average board size is included to control organizational influence because individuals on larger boards can have more connections.

Estimation Strategy

To understand how political actors in different positions are embedded, the two dependent variables (i.e., nonprofit embeddedness and political embeddedness) are regressed on political position and controls. An ideal analysis should take advantage of the dataset's panel structure, but the analysis of data quality (Figure S1 and Table S2) suggests the within-category variations of political position are small. Therefore, a fixed-effect regression is not appropriate if we use political position as the primary independent variable. Thus, the strategy is to use a pooled ordinary least squares regression to generate initial findings and then to conduct qualitative member checking to explain and confirm the findings—a quasi-"explanatory sequential design" in mixed methods (Creswell and Clark 2017, 66).

Two limitations may bias the quantitative estimations. First is the presidential preferences. Because President Hu Jintao was the head of the CYL and his presidency has been considered to have ushered in the rise of the CYL clique (Kou and Tsai 2014), it is possible that cadres with previous CYL experience were favored during Hu's presidency. Therefore, I considered cadres' *previous CYL experience* in the robustness check.

Second, using only foundations' board interlocking relationships cannot capture "social ties beyond the boardroom" (Barnes 2017, 37). The ties formed through other channels, for example, political elites' work relationships and friendships made through private social clubs, can reduce the social distance between elites. However, the dependent variables and regression models cannot consider these interactions. Nevertheless, it is difficult to obtain affiliational data of this sort even in democratic countries where political and social operations are much more transparent. Because individuals who have connections with different social groups are structural holes who bridge heterogeneous information and are more likely to form weak social ties outside of boardrooms (Granovetter 1973; Burt 1992), I used the Herfindahl index of the types of political connections (i.e., *embeddedness diversity*) to approximate these social ties.⁴

For the qualitative member checking, I conducted a series of interviews and focus groups following "explanatory sequential design" in mixed methods (Creswell and Clark 2017, 66). Using the dataset in this study, I identified a list of highly connected political elites in both the civil and political networks. Then I contacted a scholarly network in China and consulted a few scholars associated with several of the most prestigious Chinese universities. Because interviewing political elites in this study would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, these scholars helped me by 1) interviewing several key informants who were colleagues of these political figures and 2) arranging presentations at universities, foundations, and think tanks that were closely associated with these elites. The interviews and focus groups used the theoretical framework (Table 1) as an instrument and primarily focused on three questions: 1) the interviewees' opinions and understanding of the framework, 2) how they would group the political elites, and 3) the reasons for their grouping. Because the informants were selected

through snowball sampling, the qualitative fieldwork and analysis focused on process tracing to minimize the influence of selection bias (Small 2009; Bennett 2010).

Results

Profile of the Dual-Role Elites

Table 2 presents the demographics and network statistics of the political elites who sit on foundation boards. Male leaders dominate the political elites (92%), and some positions are male only (i.e., leaders of the Judiciary, LSOE, and School). The most gender-diverse positions are found in MO, where females account for 32% of the political elites. The CYL leaders are the youngest (with a mean age of 47 years) and most connected group in the nonprofit network (being connected to 34 people on average), but none of the CYL leaders have connections with political actors. The CCP, PC, and State Council leaders are dominant in number—each accounts for approximately 20% of the total observations.

Table 3 presents education and cadre ranking profiles. With respect to educational background, the political elites are a highly educated group: 49% of all leaders hold a master's degree or above, and 37% of the School leaders and 22% of the CCP leaders hold a doctoral degree. Although high-ranking officials may have ways of obtaining advanced degrees without substantial work, these political elites are still a well-educated group.

With respect to the positions' ranks, 33% are political leaders at the local government level (i.e., Bureau/Department leaders who govern provincial or municipal areas).⁵ Over half of the political elites are at the Province/Ministry levels, where they play important roles in bridging local and national political leaders. This spindle-shaped structure differs significantly from the pyramid structure of the cadre system as a whole (Ang 2012, 693; Brødsgaard 2018, 391).

Table 4 presents the positional categories and ranks of the political elites by time. From 2011 to 2015, the CCP, PC, and State Council were the top three political groups that integrated nonprofits. Even in 2013, when Xi ascended to power, the percentages of positional categories

Table 2: POLITICAL ELITES ON FOUNDATIONS' BOARDS: DEMOGRAPHICS AND NETWORK STATISTICS

	CCP	CYL	Judiciary	LSEO	MO	PC	PCC	State Council	CSEO	School	All
Male percentage	92% (160)	79% (11)	100% (10)	100% (14)	68% (28)	96% (130)	89% (86)	97% (150)	74% (14)	100% (52)	92% (660)
Age (year)	61 (7.0)	47 (2.2)	71 (10)	63 (6.1)	68 (7.8)	74 (5.9)	74 (4.5)	62 (7.9)	69 (5.0)	64 (7.4)	66 (9.2)
Network degree - Civil	17 (10)	34 (14)	12 (5.1)	15 (4.7)	16 (7.4)	14 (8.0)	17 (8.4)	19 (11)	20 (10)	20 (8.5)	17 (9.9)
Network degree - Political	0.87 (1.8)	0 (0)	0.70 (0.82)	0.29 (0.47)	0.71 (0.93)	0.46 (1.4)	0.57 (1.0)	1.1 (1.8)	0.53 (0.84)	1.0 (1.1)	0.76 (1.5)
<i>#Observations</i>	177	14	10	14	41	133	97	158	19	52	715

Notes: Male political elites dominate the political space. The CCP, PC, and State Council are the three largest groups. The CYL is the most connected group in the nonprofit network but is totally isolated in the political network. Standard deviations for means and raw counts for percentages are in parentheses; percentages are shown by column. CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CYL = Communist Youth League; MO = Mass Organization; PC = People's Congress; PCC = Political Consultative Conference; CSEO = Central state-owned enterprise; LSEO = Local state-owned enterprise.

Table 3: POLITICAL ELITES ON FOUNDATIONS' BOARDS: EDUCATIONAL DEGREE AND CADRE RANK

	CCP	CYL	Judiciary	LSEO	MO	PC	PCC	State Council	CSEO	School	All
<i>Educational Degree</i>											
Doctoral	22% (39)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	7.3% (3.0)	0.75% (1.0)	7.2% (7.0)	17% (27)	5.3% (1.0)	37% (19)	14% (97)
Master	52% (92)	50% (7.0)	50% (5.0)	43% (6.0)	34% (14)	26% (35)	16% (16)	40% (63)	16% (3.0)	23% (12)	35% (250)
Bachelor	24% (43)	50% (7.0)	50% (5.0)	36% (5.0)	59% (24)	48% (64)	49% (48)	37% (58)	53% (10)	38% (20)	40% (280)
Vocational school or below	1.7% (3.0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	21% (3.0)	0.00% (0)	25% (33)	27% (26)	5.7% (9.0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	10% (74)
NA	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.63% (1.0)	26% (5.0)	1.9% (1.0)	0.98% (7.0)
<i>Rank of Positions</i>											
State Deputy	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	50% (5.0)	0.00% (0)	7.3% (3.0)	0.75% (1.0)	2.1% (2.0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	1.5% (11)
Province/Ministry Head	9.0% (16)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	32% (13)	31% (41)	42% (41)	13% (20)	11% (2.0)	23% (12)	20% (150)
Province/Ministry Deputy	28% (50)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	7.1% (1.0)	41% (17)	56% (74)	53% (51)	28% (45)	58% (11)	50% (26)	38% (280)
Bureau/Department Head	54% (95)	79% (11)	50% (5.0)	57% (8.0)	9.8% (4.0)	13% (17)	3.1% (3.0)	53% (83)	32% (6.0)	13% (7.0)	33% (240)
Bureau/Department Deputy	8.5% (15)	21% (3.0)	0.00% (0)	36% (5.0)	9.8% (4.0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	6.3% (10)	0.00% (0)	3.9% (2.0)	5.5% (39)
Division/County Head or below	0.56% (1.0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	9.6% (5.0)	0.84% (6.0)
<i>#Observations</i>	177	14	10	14	41	133	97	158	19	52	715

Notes: The political elites are well educated. Most of these cadres are Bureau/Department Heads or Bureau/Department Deputies who bridge the local and national political domains. Percentages are shown by column, and raw counts are in parentheses. CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CYL = Communist Youth League; MO = Mass Organization; PC = People's Congress; PCC = Political Consultative Conference; CSEO = Central state-owned enterprise; LSEO = Local state-owned enterprise.

remained largely stable,⁶ and no substantial fluctuation in ranks occurred in the time period observed.

In general, the demographics suggest that the political elites embedded in Chinese foundations are a male-dominated and well-educated group who are focused on bridging local and national interests. Despite the high turnover rate of individuals (Figure S1), the positional structure of these elites is well institutionalized and stable.

Social and Institutional Networks Created Through Foundations

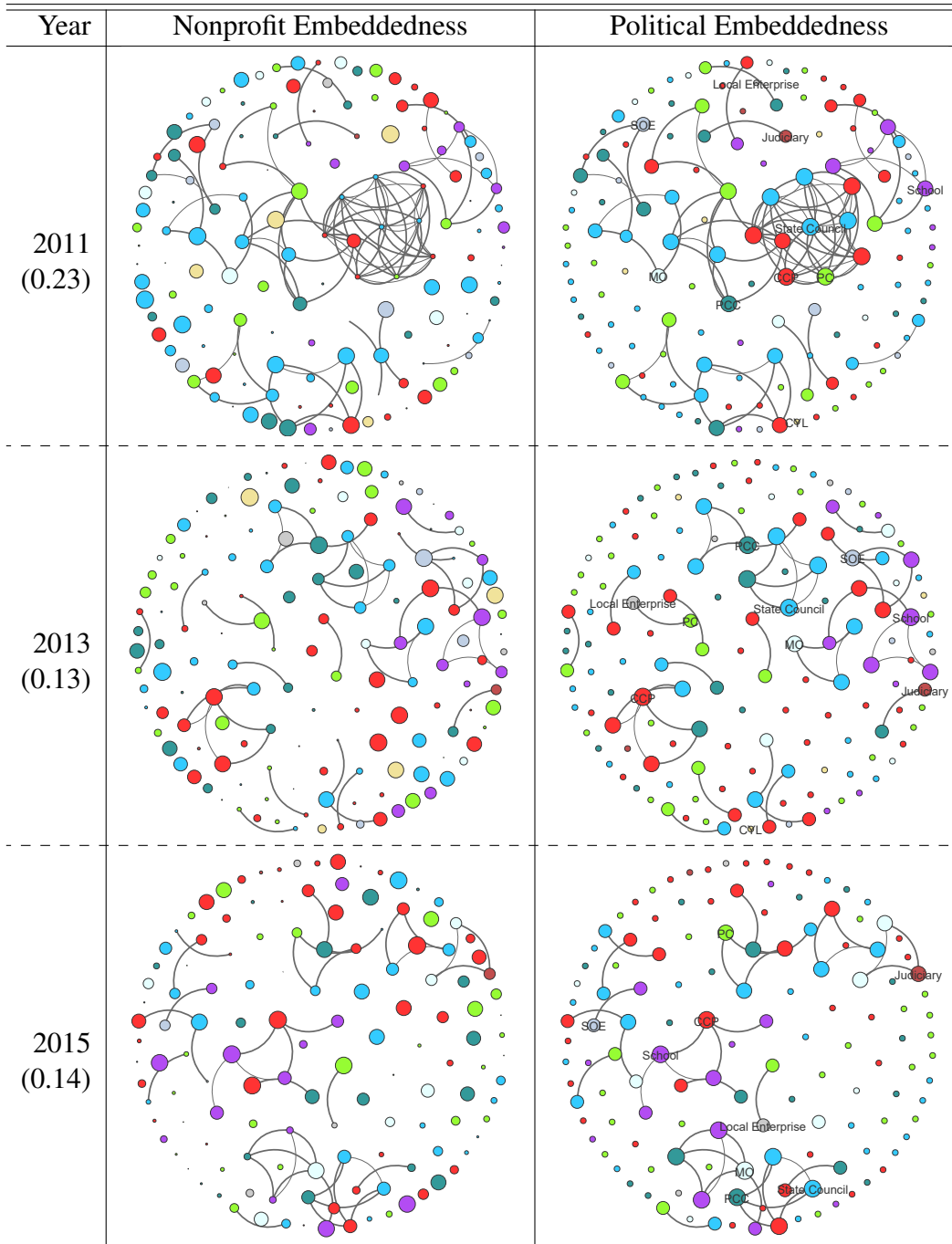
Figure 3 shows the political elites in nonprofit and political networks from 2011 to 2015.

Contrary to many beliefs about authoritarianism that assume a dominant ruling party, the actors in the networks are diverse. This finding is consistent with prior empirical studies, which have found pluralistic and multipolar structures in policy and nonprofit networks (Ma and DeDeo 2018; Teets 2018). The connections between different formal institutions (the bold edges in Figure 3) are widespread ($> 70\%$ for all years; Figure 4). Put together, the political elites embedded in the nonprofit sector form a well-educated and pluralistic group that connects local and national interests.

The networks presented in Figure 3 also suggest a crucial structural change: the formation and dissolution of political cliques along with presidential changes. I used transitivity, an important structural feature in social networks, to measure such structural change (Holland and Leinhardt 1970, 1971). Transitivity presumes that if a chooses b as an ally, and b chooses c as an ally, then a will also choose c as an ally. As Figure 3 shows, there were dense cliques (or “triangles” in social network analysis terms) both in the nonprofit and political networks in 2011 (during Hu’s presidency, $transitivity = 0.23$). These cliques dissolved in 2013 (the year of presidential change, $transitivity = 0.13$) and then began to form again in 2015 (during Xi’s presidency, $transitivity = 0.14$).⁷

By analyzing the types of connections between individuals (e.g., between the CCP and State Council, the CCP and the PC, and the CCP and the PCC; Figure 4), we can better understand how

Figure 3: NONPROFIT AND POLITICAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF POLITICAL ELITES



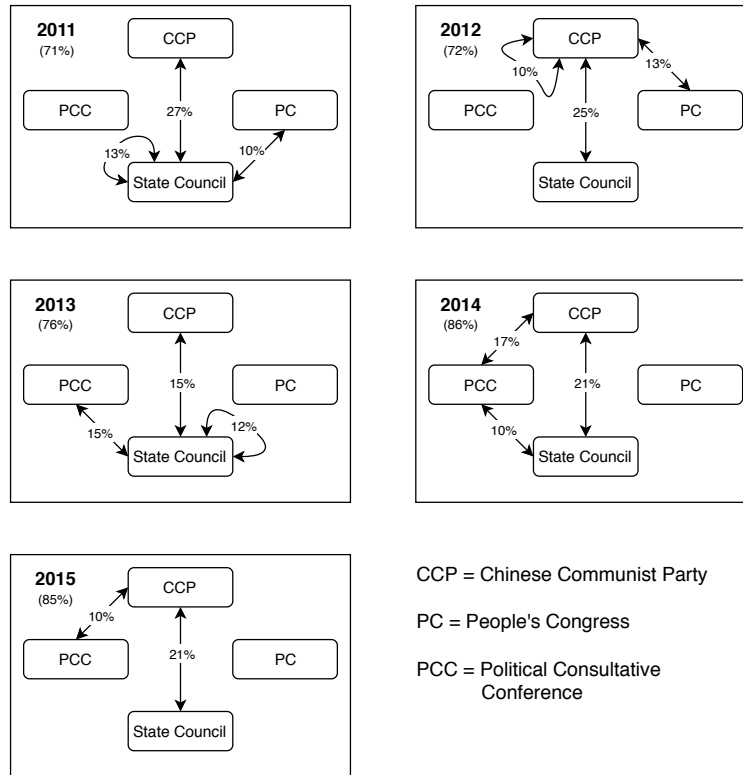
Notes: The nonprofit and political networks are pluralistic, and dense cliques are observed in 2011 and then dissolved and reformed afterwards. Nodes represent political elites. Node size represents standardized node degree using $\log_{10}(e^{PctlRank})$, where e is Euler's number and $PctlRank$ is the percentile rank of the raw node degree. Node colors represent political affiliations and are consistent across different years. Bold edges connect nodes with different political affiliations. The two networks for the same year use the same Kamada-Kawai layout (i.e., an elite's position in different networks does not change for a given year; Kamada and Kawai (1989)). Numbers in parentheses represent network transitivity. CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CYL = Communist Youth League; MO = Mass Organization; PC = People's Congress; PCC = Political Consultative Conference; CSOE = Central state-owned enterprise; LSOE = Local state-owned enterprise.

Table 4: POLITICAL ELITES ON FOUNDATIONS' BOARDS: POSITION AND RANK BY TIME

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	All
<i>Category of Positions</i>						
CCP	20%	28%	26%	24%	26%	25%
	(28)	(38)	(39)	(36)	(36)	(180)
CYL	2.8%	2.9%	2.7%	1.4%	0.00%	2.0%
	(4.0)	(4.0)	(4.0)	(2.0)	(0)	(14)
Judiciary	1.4%	1.5%	1.3%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%
	(2.0)	(2.0)	(2.0)	(2.0)	(2.0)	(10)
LSOE	0.71%	1.5%	2.7%	2.7%	2.2%	2.0%
	(1.0)	(2.0)	(4.0)	(4.0)	(3.0)	(14)
MO	5.0%	3.6%	4.7%	6.8%	8.6%	5.7%
	(7.0)	(5.0)	(7.0)	(10)	(12)	(41)
PC	16%	17%	19%	22%	19%	19%
	(23)	(23)	(29)	(32)	(26)	(130)
PCC	13%	13%	14%	14%	14%	14%
	(18)	(18)	(21)	(21)	(19)	(97)
State Council	29%	22%	21%	19%	19%	22%
	(41)	(31)	(31)	(28)	(27)	(160)
CSOE	5.0%	3.6%	2.7%	1.4%	0.72%	2.7%
	(7.0)	(5.0)	(4.0)	(2.0)	(1.0)	(19)
School	7.1%	7.3%	6.0%	6.8%	9.4%	7.3%
	(10)	(10)	(9.0)	(10)	(13)	(52)
<i>Rank of Positions</i>						
State Deputy	1.4%	0.72%	1.3%	2.0%	2.2%	1.5%
	(2.0)	(1.0)	(2.0)	(3.0)	(3.0)	(11)
Province/Ministry Head	18%	17%	21%	23%	21%	20%
	(26)	(24)	(32)	(34)	(29)	(150)
Province/Ministry Deputy	35%	39%	37%	41%	40%	38%
	(50)	(54)	(55)	(60)	(56)	(280)
Bureau/Department Head	35%	36%	33%	31%	32%	33%
	(50)	(49)	(50)	(45)	(45)	(240)
Bureau/Department Deputy	7.8%	6.5%	6.7%	2.7%	3.6%	5.5%
	(11)	(9.0)	(10)	(4.0)	(5.0)	(39)
Division/County Head and below	1.4%	0.72%	0.67%	0.68%	0.72%	0.84%
	(2.0)	(1.0)	(1.0)	(1.0)	(1.0)	(6.0)
<i>#Observations</i>	141	138	150	147	139	715

Notes: The compositions of category and rank are quite stable over time. Percentages are shown by column, and raw counts are in parentheses. CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CYL = Communist Youth League; MO = Mass Organization; PC = People's Congress; PCC = Political Consultative Conference; CSOE = Central state-owned enterprise; LSOE = Local state-owned enterprise.

Figure 4: LINKS BETWEEN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS: SEPARATING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEGISLATION



Notes: The CCP-State Council coalition separates two institutional spaces. The space on the left has PCC for political participation, and that on the right has PC for legislation. Only showing links greater than 10% of the total connections. Percentages in parentheses represent the proportion of links that connect different political institutions. Detailed statistics and raw counts are in Table S6.

formal political institutions orchestrate policy in the nonprofit sector. As Figure 4 presents, the links between different political organizations consistently make up more than 70% of all connections in all years observed. In contrast to many beliefs about authoritarian regimes, where the ruling party dominates the polity, the Chinese political system is quite pluralistic and collaborative.

The connections between and within the CCP and State Council are consistently the highest, indicating the close relationship between the two political groups and their important roles in influencing the nonprofit sector. The CCP–State Council coalition separates two institutional spaces: a legislative space with the PC and a political participation space with the PCC. The two

institutional spaces would not be able to reach each other without routing through the CCP–State Council coalition in all years observed. Such a coalition also resembles the politics-administration tension studied in democracies (Long 1949, 1952; Rosenbloom 2008).

A shift from the PC to the PCC as the main entity tied to the CCP–State Council coalition occurred after the leadership change from Hu to Xi. In 2011 and 2012 (during Hu’s presidency), it was the PC that connected to the CCP–State Council coalition; between 2013 and 2015 (during Xi’s presidency), the PCC assumed the PC’s role. The shift from the PC to the PCC indicates both an institutional improvement and a retreat. In theory, the PCC is an important institution for non-CCP elites’ political participation. Policy bargaining and participation within the PCC will not threaten the CCP’s hegemony because the PCC has no legislative authority (Yan 2011; He and Thøgersen 2010). The close relationship between the PCC and the ruling party is propitious for building an inclusive regime, but the detachment of the PC from the CCP signals a retreat because the PCC cannot reach the final legislative body, even though it can reach the ruling party.

There was also a shift from the State Council to the CCP as the primary institutional broker during the two presidencies. The PC and PCC were both connected to the State Council initially, but they all ultimately switched their connections to the CCP. In all the years observed, the PCC had no or a low (< 2.6%) number of direct or indirect connections with the PC. Thus, the CCP has built itself as a necessary broker in the institutional network.

In general, the structures of the individual and institutional networks show the pluralism under authoritarianism. The connections between political elites are widespread and diverse, and they systematically differ across presidencies. The institutional political networks embedded in the nonprofit sector separate legislation and political participation by blocking non-CCP institutions from reaching legislative authority—a key strategy for balancing civic participation and the ruling party’s hegemony.

Predicting Embeddedness in Nonprofit Foundations

Main regression results: A strategy of differentiated embeddedness

Table 5 presents more inferential statistics by regressing political affiliations and controls on nonprofit and political network degrees in both presidencies.⁸ The table reveals some presidential differences: compared to Hu's presidency, CSOE's nonprofit embeddedness and CYL's political embeddedness dropped substantially in Xi's presidency, whereas the political embeddedness of MO, PCC, and School significantly increased. The results of CYL are worth highlighting as well: the CYL cadres had larger degrees of nonprofit embeddedness, but were marginalized in the political arena. Such a pattern survived the presidential change.

The estimations of the current presidency can be grouped into four categories as Table S5 in the appendix summarizes. 1) Strong nonprofit embeddedness includes CYL. 2) Weak nonprofit embeddedness includes Judiciary, LSOE, State Council, and CSOE. 3) Strong political embeddedness includes MO, State Council, and School. And 4) weak political embeddedness includes CYL and CSOE.

Checking robustness: Considering presidential preferences and diversity of embeddedness

As Table 6 presents, the addition of embeddedness diversity and previous CYL experience substantially improves the adjusted R^2 of the models that predict embeddedness in the political network (from just over 0.1 to almost 0.6). Statistically, the test is effective because the stability of coefficients and the increase of R^2 are beneficial to evaluate robustness (Oster 2019).

Table 6 confirms the differentiated embeddedness presented in Tables 5 and S5. It also supports the anecdotal observations of China's fractured political system (Shih, Adolph, and Liu 2012; Shih 2016). Hu was the head of the CYL, and his presidency has been considered to have ushered in the rise of the CYL Clique (Kou and Tsai 2014). As Table 6 shows, previous CYL work experience could help a cadre gain a significant political advantage under Hu's

Table 5: EMBEDDEDNESS OF POLITICAL ELITES IN NETWORKS

	Nonprofit Embeddedness			Political Embeddedness		
	<i>Hu</i>	<i>Xi</i>	χ^2	<i>Hu</i>	<i>Xi</i>	χ^2
<i>Political Affiliation</i>						
CCP	-.04 (.12)	-.03 (.09)	.01	.08 (.36)	.07 (.08)	.00
CYL	1.27** (.62)	1.15*** (.34)	.03	-1.43*** (.41)	-.43*** (.15)	5.80**
Judicial	-.10 (.08)	-.18*** (.07)	.86	-.14 (.29)	.39 (.30)	2.3
LSOE	-.07 (.10)	-.20*** (.07)	.15	-.53* (.32)	-.11 (.14)	1.8
MO	.09 (.20)	-.11 (.10)	1.00	-.64* (.36)	.29** (.14)	6.30**
PCC	.03 (.09)	-.08 (.07)	1.10	-.34 (.27)	.12 (.09)	3.4*
State Council	.09 (.16)	-.14* (.08)	1.70	-.06 (.38)	.18** (.09)	.45
CSOE	.16 (.21)	-.24** (.11)	3.8*	-.60** (.28)	-.41*** (.13)	.52
School	.05 (.14)	.15 (.15)	.25	-.23 (.33)	.33** (.14)	2.8*
<i>Controls</i>						
Male	.05 (.13)	-.12 (.13)	.97	-.17 (.34)	-.16 (.13)	0
Education	.02 (.03)	-.04 (.02)	3.00*	-.04 (.10)	.05** (.02)	.76
Cadre rank	.00 (.02)	-.02 (.01)	.58	-.02 (.04)	-.01 (.02)	.05
Age	-.05 (.04)	-.09*** (.03)	.81	-.12 (.09)	-.03 (.04)	.75
Board size	.68*** (.02)	.78*** (.02)	8.70***	.44*** (.06)	.19*** (.03)	15***
<i>#Observations</i>	277	431		277	431	
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	.51	.70		.11	.14	

Notes: Dependent variable = Network degree. PC is the base group for political affiliation. Network degree, age, and board size are transformed to z-scores. Bootstrap standard errors are in parentheses (Snijders and Borgatti 1999). χ^2 column shows the results of Wald test. CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CYL = Communist Youth League; MO = Mass Organization; PC = People's Congress; PCC = Political Consultative Conference; CSOE = Central state-owned enterprise; LSOE = Local state-owned enterprise. * $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, two-tailed tests.

administration. But during Xi's presidency, such a privilege disappears, and current CYL leaders were also marginalized in the polity.

Another concern is the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), which has occupied a unique role between the party-state and civil society since its creation (Wang 2016).⁹ Melting it with other organizations in the MO category may introduce a heterogeneity problem to the measure. I tested this concern by removing ACWF cadres from the regression analysis, and Table S7 in the appendix shows no substantial difference. According to my analysis, ACWF individuals are not heavily embedded in nonprofit foundations. This finding is congruent with their operating strategy—"the politics of concealment": they camouflage their agenda using the party's language and efface themselves by attributing accomplishments to the party's leaders (17–18). Although this robustness test does not alter the findings, it cautions us that the negotiation between political and civil actors can happen through other channels and that the findings should thus not be overgeneralized.

Qualitative member checking

Following the member checking procedures described earlier, I conducted a series of interviews and focus groups. The fieldwork generally confirmed the findings, and the appendix has more details.

Discussion

By studying over two hundred high-profile political elites embedded in Chinese nonprofit foundations from 2011 to 2015, I conceptualized a framework of differentiated embeddedness to understand the relationship between the state and the nonprofit sector in China at the meso and micro levels. Table S5 summarizes the framework and primary results. According to the elites' embeddedness in the civil and political domains, they can be grouped into four categories. 1) Those who have strong horizontal connections in nonprofits are excellent state agents when it

Table 6: ROBUSTNESS CHECK: EMBEDDEDNESS OF POLITICAL ELITES IN NETWORKS

	Nonprofit Embeddedness			Political Embeddedness		
	<i>Hu</i>	<i>Xi</i>	χ^2	<i>Hu</i>	<i>Xi</i>	χ^2
<i>Political Affiliation</i>						
CCP	-.03 (.12)	-.00 (.09)	.04	.25 (.24)	.04 (.06)	.78
CYL	1.13* (.65)	1.18*** (.37)	.01	-.29 (.26)	-.21** (.11)	.09
CYL exp.	.10 (.17)	.16 (.11)	.08	.45** (.20)	.09 (.06)	3.4*
Judicial	.03 (.14)	-.12* (.07)	1.20	-.62 (.49)	.10 (.15)	2.5
LSOE	-.12 (.11)	-.16** (.08)	.11	.17 (.26)	.09 (.12)	.09
MO	-.01 (.20)	-.10 (.10)	.16	.10 (.30)	.24** (.11)	.24
PCC	.04 (.10)	-.06 (.07)	.81	-.24 (.21)	.01 (.07)	1.4
State Council	.13 (.17)	-.10 (.08)	1.6	-.10 (.25)	.02 (.06)	.24
CSOE	.09 (.21)	-.21* (.12)	2.1	.10 (.23)	-.22** (.11)	1.9
School	.10 (.15)	.19 (.15)	.21	-.27 (.25)	.15* (.09)	3.0*
<i>Controls</i>						
Male	.06 (.13)	-.13 (.13)	1.3	-.27 (.21)	-.21** (.09)	.07
Education	.02 (.03)	-.04 (.02)	3.3*	-.04 (.06)	.02 (.02)	.83
Cadre rank	.01 (.02)	-.01 (.01)	.72	-.04 (.03)	-.02 (.01)	.84
Age	-.05 (.05)	-.08** (.03)	.29	-.01 (.07)	-.03 (.03)	.08
Board size	.74*** (.03)	.78*** (.02)	2.3	.10** (.04)	.10*** (.02)	.00
Embed. diversity	.15*** (.05)	.03 (.03)	5.1**	-.99*** (.09)	-.44*** (.03)	33***
<i>#Observations</i>	277	431		277	431	
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	.52	.71		.57	.57	

Notes: Dependent variable = Network degree. PC is the base group for political affiliation. Network degree, age, board size, and embeddedness diversity are transformed to z-scores. Bootstrap standard errors are in parentheses (Snijders and Borgatti 1999). χ^2 column shows the results of Wald test. CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CYL = Communist Youth League; CYL Exp. = Cadres with previous CYL work experience; MO = Mass Organization; PC = People's Congress; PCC = Political Consultative Conference; CSOE = Central state-owned enterprise; LSOE = Local state-owned enterprise. * $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, two-tailed tests.

comes to reaching civic resources (i.e., the CYL). 2) Those who have strong vertical connections in the polity can serve as access points to the party-state (i.e., Mass Organization, intellectuals, and government bureaucracy). 3) Those who are less connected in nonprofits are weak state agents (i.e., the legal system, state-owned business, and the government bureaucracy). And 4) those who are less connected in the polity are ineffective access points to political resources (i.e., the CYL and state-owned business). The four groups of political elites constitute a strategy of differentiated embeddedness, which reminds students studying the relationship between the state and the nonprofit sector to shift their theoretical lens from a conventional dyadic paradigm to a network paradigm.

There are still a few lingering questions, first of which is the role of CCP in the differentiated framework. As the ruling party, it is not a dominant actor in all networks. Second, the special role of CYL should be detailed. Third, directions for future studies are worthy of discussion. The remaining sections clarify these questions.

CCP as the Vanguard: Strategy for Supervising Foundations

Veering away from conventional thoughts about authoritarianism, the Chinese political network leaves room for pluralism. As Figure 3 shows, CCP leaders are not dominant actors in all political networks. Moreover, political leaders with different affiliations are widely interconnected, which provides a structural basis for the negotiations between different political groups. Meanwhile, CCP leaders are not the most connected political group in the foundations' board interlocking network either. The degree of CYL leaders' connections is twice as great as that of the CCP leaders', indicating that many more social elites are connected with CYL cadres than CCP cadres. We can speculate that the CCP's influence in the nonprofit sector may be mostly "behind the scenes," so it is not as direct as we conventionally assume.

However, if we conclude that the nonprofits and the polity are sufficiently pluralistic to threaten the CCP's control, we are missing the unique features of the multilayered network system—in the party's official narrative, the CCP should serve as the vanguard of the polity, and

its leadership, even without having direct control over all works, is the most essential feature of “socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

One strategy is to build the CCP as an essential broker to reach the PC, the legislative authority in the political network. The institutional space in Figure 4 is separated into two: the left PCC space for political participation and the right PC space for legislation. By routing all connections through CCP, the party creates room for political participation while securing access to legislation. Yan (2011, 75) suggested that the CCP needs to “have an overwhelming majority in the PC to control legislative power, but intentionally keeps itself as minority in the [PCC].” I advance this control strategy further—it is not only the number of individuals that matters but also how they are organized.

Another strategy is to embed party branches in nonprofits directly. As the *Regulations on the Operation of the Party Branches* states, any “unit” with three or more CCP members shall establish a party branch. The party branches are independent political organizations and only report to the CCP system. Although not examined in this paper, it would be intriguing to study how these party branches function.

Differentiated Embeddedness and the Chinese Youth League

The CYL cadres were far younger than the non-CYL cadres at the same rank, indicating that they gained a substantial age advantage in promotion that may have helped them institutionalize the formation of the CYL Clique (Kou and Tsai 2014, 162). As a result, although the CYL is meant to prepare youths to be the CCP’s “assistants and reserve army,” it is also a potential rival to the CCP in the polity. Many anecdotal papers have reported the CYL to be one of the major factions within the Chinese political system (Li 2009, 2012; Chen 2015). This paper supports these claims with empirical results—although political elites could not enter the political network while they were active CYL cadres, those with previous CYL work experience were significantly favored in Hu’s administration (Table 6).

The CYL system plays important roles in developing volunteerism and grassroots nonprofits (Xu 2012; Tsimonis 2018), but such roles are limited to the grassroots level and are marginalized, even isolated, in the political network. This study reveals that the CYL cadres are the most connected political leaders in nonprofit networks but that their connections are unquestionably restricted—CYL leaders have no connections in the political network. Their cadre ranks tend to be low as well: all CYL leaders in this study were Bureau/Department leaders at the local level (Table 3), indicating that they were unable to reach the center of the polity directly.

The CYL actors are marginalized in political networks because of numerous institutional and promotional arrangements. For example, CYL leaders have to “reenter” the regular party or governmental departments through other political channels (Doyon 2017; Pringsheim 1962). As of 2019, all CYL leaders in my dataset had been reassigned to CCP or bureaucratic positions. Moreover, Xi made a series of reforms to “keep CYL leaders grassroots” (Buckley 2018) and required CYL leaders to be “youths’ friends but not young cadres” (People’s Daily 2018). The youth organizations are also decentralized, preventing CYL leaders from forming cohesive political groups (Doyon 2017, 439). In all scenarios, we can expect that 1) the CYL leaders’ future political careers and decisions can be influenced by their social roles and experience obtained from nonprofits and that 2) these leaders are strategically placed by the CCP so that their autonomy is limited in the party-state.

Policy Implication and Future Directions

The connections between the party-state and nonprofits have already been institutionalized following a strategy of differentiated embeddedness. However, this embeddedness is inefficient. Effective communication between the state and the nonprofit sector requires elites to have strong connections in both the civil and political domains, but the Chinese political elites who are well embedded in the nonprofit sector are disconnected from the polity, and those connected in the polity are weakly tied to nonprofits. The CYL elites are the most promising group that can bridge the civil and political spaces because they are widely connected in nonprofits. However, the

party-state cannot effectively absorb social elites and receive feedback from the nonprofit sector if it keeps marginalizing CYL leaders in the polity.

Mass Organizations, intellectuals, and the government bureaucracy are all limited in serving as brokers. For example, Mass Organizations have been criticized as being institutionally bureaucratic and “out of touch with the people” (Xinhua News Agency 2015). Intellectuals, especially political scientists, can be widely co-opted by the state (Noakes 2014). Moreover, government officials have been strictly regulated with regard to their involvement in the nonprofit sector (Xinhua News Agency 2016).

Governing the relationship between the state and the nonprofit sector in authoritarian China is not an easy task, and the framework of differentiated embeddedness may only serve as a stimulus for future projects. As discussed previously, this study has numerous limitations regarding data sources and concept operationalization, and the findings and conclusions should be interpreted within the context of nonprofit foundations. Scholars can advance this topic from two general perspectives to improve the research design and generalizability. First, future studies should include data that can better describe the elites’ connections within political domains (e.g., their coappearances in political events; Huhe, Gallop, and Minhas 2021). Second, the longitudinal observation of the embedding strategy is worth tracking. The *Charity Law of the People’s Republic of China* was officially released in early 2016 and represents a landmark in the development of the Chinese nonprofit sector. Furthermore, many sociopolitical situations have changed since 2015. Has the embedding strategy stayed consistent after 2015, and will it stay so throughout Xi’s presidency? How do the elites’ roles evolve over time? This study provides a snapshot of the pre-2015 period, which future studies can compare their findings to.

Notes

¹Nonprofits in China can register in different legal forms that are administered by different regulations. For example, the *Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations* introduced in 1998 and the *Regulations on the Registration and Management of Foundations* introduced in 2004 all employ the “dual registration” system.

² Source: Central Committee Documents (<http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/wenjian/zhongyang.htm>). Coding criteria: 1) “CCP Central Committee” (*zhonggong zhongyang*) is in the title, 2) “State Council” (*guowuyuan*) is not in the title, and 3) double angle quotation marks (《 》) are in the title.

³These public-fundraising foundations usually have closer relationship to the state (Wang 2018).

⁴The Herfindahl index is calculated as $\sum_{i=1}^n s_i^2$, where s_i is the share of all institutional connection i , and n is the total types of institutional connections. For example, individual a has four total connections, in which $n = 3$ and $i_1 = 2$, $i_2 = 1$, and $i_3 = 1$, the embeddedness diversity of individual a is $(\frac{2}{4})^2 + (\frac{1}{4})^2 + (\frac{1}{4})^2$.

⁵The CPED indexes a political elite’s curriculum vitae by time, and the dataset for this study is panel. Therefore, I am able to capture some grassroots carders. For example, an individual promoted to “Province/Ministry Deputy” in 2015 may be “Bureau/Department Deputy” in 2011.

⁶As CSOE and CYL leaders have disappeared almost entirely, they accounted only for a very small proportion (< 5%).

⁷Transitivity for the other years: 2012, 0.21 and 2014, 0.10.

⁸In general, more observations can generate smaller standard errors in regression analysis, resulting in more significant estimates. Accepting these estimates as significant can increase the risk of false positive conclusions (i.e., false claims accepted as true). Given the relatively small number of observations we have here, we are susceptible to the risk of false negative conclusions (i.e., true claims not supported by the analysis) but not false positive conclusions. This actually adds more confidence to the findings because the significant estimates are less likely to be false.

⁹I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

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Online Supplementary Material: Data Preprocessing and Validation

Dataset Compilation and Structure

The two datasets are linked by matching an individual's name, gender, and year of birth. Because the CPED codes an individual's work experience over time, I am able to identify individuals' political positions while they were serving as foundation board members.

Table S1: DESCRIPTION OF LINKED DATASET

Year	Yearbook	RICF	Board Dataset (%Population)	#Board Mbr (Turnover)	#Political elites (Turnover)
2010	2,200	2,040	591 (27.88%)	7,923 (-)	68 (-)
2011	2,614	2,430	2,287 (90.68%)	27,589 (74.36%)	141 (55.32%)
2012	3,029	2,880	2,540 (85.97%)	30,313 (31.60%)	138 (25.36%)
2013	3,549	3,344	3,156 (91.57%)	36,553 (29.11%)	150 (24%)
2014	4,117	4,233	3,577 (85.68%)	35,515 (21.53%)	147 (11.56%)
2015	4,784	4,895	3,454 (71.37%)	36,595 (31.14%)	139 (17.99%)

Notes: The table suggests data from 2011-2015 are of good quality with respect to the consistency of turnover rate and board dataset completion. Yearbook = *2017 China Statistical Yearbook* by National Bureau of Statistics of China (2017); RICEF = Research Infrastructure of Chinese Foundations by Ma et al. (2017); Mbr = Member. Population is calculated as the average number of foundations recorded by Yearbook and RICEF (e.g., for 2010, $27.88\% = 591 / (\frac{2200+2040}{2}) \cdot 100\%$).

Table S1 presents the structure of the linked dataset for this study. If we take the year 2013 as an example, the table presents the following: the *2017 China Statistical Yearbook* (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2017) shows that there are 3,549 foundations in China, the RICEF records 3,344 foundations, and the average population is 3,446.5 (i.e., $\frac{3549+3344}{2}$) foundations. I have the board member information of 3,156 foundations, which accounts for 91.57% of the average population. There are 36,553 unique board members, and 29.11% of them are new

Table S2: PANEL STRUCTURE OF DATASET BY YEARS SITTING ON BOARD AND HOLDING THE SAME POLITICAL AFFILIATION

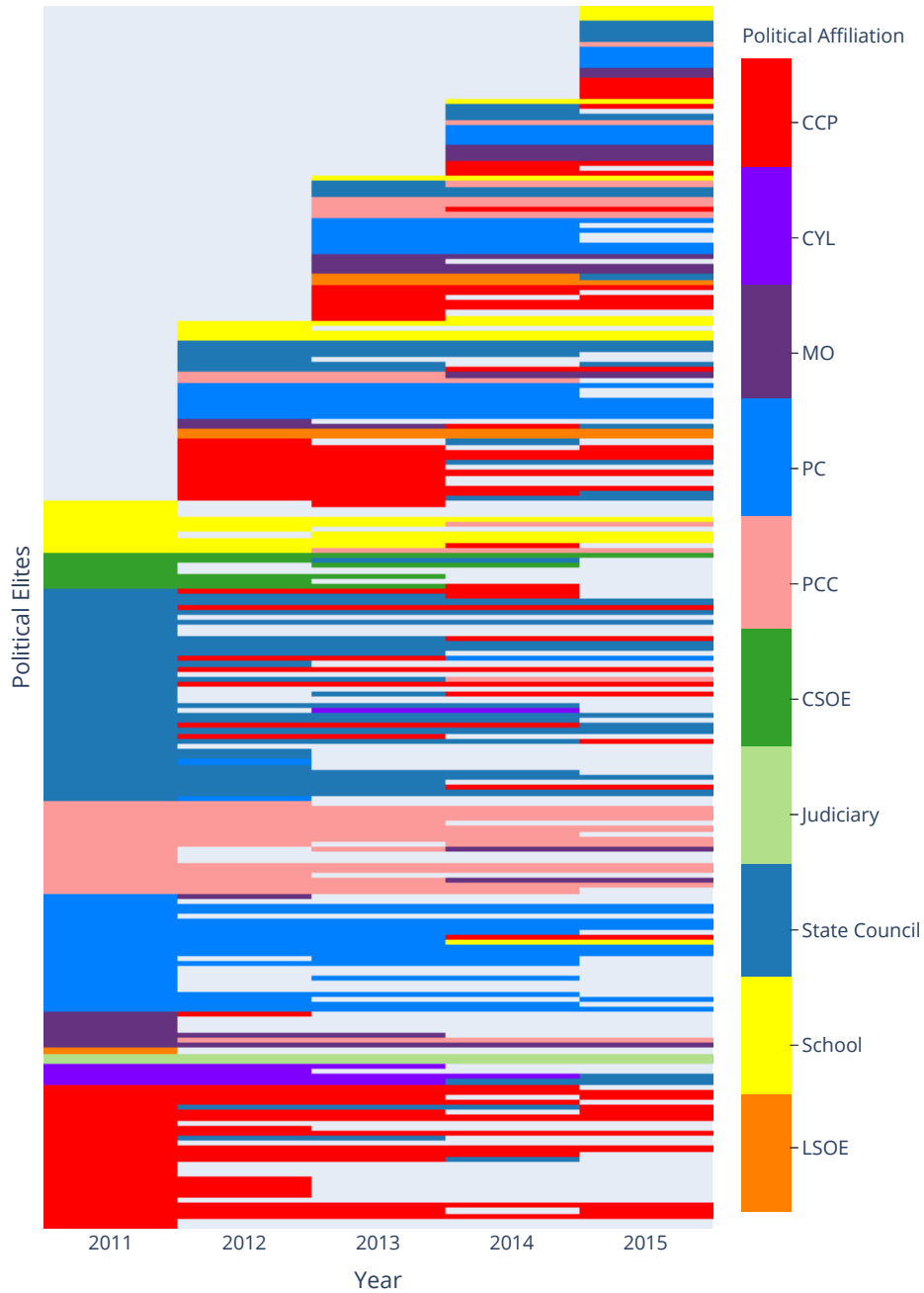
		Years on foundations' boards					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Years holding the same political affiliation while on board	1	55 (100%)	14 (29.2%)	7 (14.9%)	8 (12.9%)	7 (9.6%)	91 (31.9%)
	2	–	34 (70.8%)	7 (14.9%)	15 (24.2%)	13 (17.8%)	69 (24.2%)
	3	–	–	33 (70.2%)	6 (9.7%)	11 (15.1%)	50 (17.5%)
	4	–	–	–	33 (53.2%)	6 (8.2%)	39 (13.7%)
	5	–	–	–	–	36 (49.3%)	36 (12.6%)
	Total*	55 (19.3%)	48 (16.8%)	47 (16.5%)	62 (21.8%)	73 (25.6%)	285 (100%)

Note: Nearly half the political elites did not change their political or governmental affiliations while serving on foundations' boards. The table shows the counts of political elites by the years they stayed on foundations' boards and held the same political affiliation. For example, a government official stayed on a foundation's board for 5 years, was CCP for the first two years, PC for the second two years, and CYL for the last year, in which case she generates two counts for the 5-year-stay and 2-year-hold category, and one count for the 5-year-stay and 1-year-hold category. *Percentages are by row, all other percentages are by column.

additions. There are 150 foundation trustees who also are political leaders, and 24% of them are new additions.

Figure S1 and Table S2 present more details on the dataset's structure. As the figure shows, the within-category variations are small, but turnover rates are large. The table shows that nearly half of the political elites did not change their political or governmental affiliations while serving on foundations' boards and that the observations are distributed fairly evenly with respect to the amount of time the political elites remained on a board and held the same position. In general, the analysis of the data structure suggests that, although the dataset is a panel, a fixed- or random-effect regression is not appropriate if we use the original position categories (e.g., the CCP and CYL) as independent variables.

Figure S1: PANEL STRUCTURE OF THE DATASET



Notes: Each line on the Y-axis represents a political elite. As the figure shows, within-category variations are small, but turnover rates are high. CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CYL = Communist Youth League; MO = Mass Organization; PC = People's Congress; PCC = Political Consultative Conference; CSOE = Central state-owned enterprise; LSOE = Local state-owned enterprise.

Data Validation

I validated the linked dataset's quality manually based on two considerations: disambiguating people and identifying political or governmental backgrounds. By manually checking five 50-observation bootstrap samples, the precision of identifying records with the same name, gender, and birth year as belonging to the same person is 83.2% and that of identifying political or governmental background is 77.2%. Existing network studies rarely report these numbers of accuracy, so it is difficult to make comparisons. But I checked the misidentified records and found that they tended to be for less known and inactive individuals. Therefore, these misidentified records should generate limited influence on the analysis because these people tend to be isolated individuals who will not appear in the networks I am studying anyway. I used the records from 2011 to 2015 in the final analysis because they are more consistent and are of higher quality with respect to sample size and turnover rates (Table S1). The turnover rate for 2012 is the highest, suggesting that the political system had already begun to prearrange some postings before the year of a presidential change (i.e., 2013). There are flaws in the dataset, yet I made the utmost effort to minimize their impact.

Qualitative Member Checking of Findings

Following the member checking procedures described earlier, I conducted a series of interviews and focus groups. Table S3 lists the key informants and activities. The fieldwork generally confirmed the findings, and two cases are worth highlighting.

I interviewed a key informant who is a faculty member at the Central School of Communist Youth League (CSCYL). The CSCYL is the highest research and educational center of the CYL system that was established in 1948 to train CYL cadres and students. The informant agreed that CYL cadres are required to "keep grassroots," but he is confused by the finding that CYL leaders are the most connected political elites in the civil society network because Xi has criticized them as "being out of touch with the people."

Table S3: KEY INFORMANTS AND FIELDWORK ACTIVITIES

Date	ID	Informant / Activity Background
2019/05	1	Current faculty member of a university affiliated think-tank.
2019/06	2	Current faculty member of a university affiliated think-tank.
2019/06	3	Current faculty member of a university affiliated think-tank.
2019/06	4	Presentation and focus group in a prestigious university in Beijing, group size 30 people, audience mainly from universities and think-tanks.
2019/07	5	Current faculty member of a prestigious university in Beijing.
2019/07	6	Former cadre in the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.
2019/07	5	Current faculty member of a prestigious university in Beijing.
2019/07	7	Presentation and focus group in a prestigious university in Beijing, group size 15 people, audience mainly from the Party and Youth League's cadre education system.
2019/08	8	Current faculty member of the Central School of Communist Youth League.
2019/08	7	Former cadre in the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

The CSCYL faculty member concurred with my explanation that their perception of Xi's critiques and the results do not actually conflict. Being a CYL cadre can help an individual obtain a substantial "age advantage" later in his political career. Moreover, as this paper finds, cadres with previous CYL experience were significantly favored in the political network during Hu's presidency. These circumstances do not mean that "the current CYL cadres have been out of touch with the people" but instead may encourage "political opportunism"—this is what the CCP Central Committee fears (Kou and Tsai 2014).

I also interviewed another key informant who was a cadre at the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (also known as the Central Party School). The Central Party School is the highest research and educational center of the CCP system and was established in

1933 to train future and incumbent CCP officials. He confirmed the results for the CYL, MO, CSOE, and School leaders. He particularly emphasized that intellectuals (i.e., the School category), especially political science scholars, began to assume more important roles under Xi's administration (e.g., Wang Huning, one of the CCP's top leaders and an influential political theorist).

Online Supplementary Material: Additional Tables and Figures

Table S4: LEADING POSITIONS (I.E., CADRES) IN CHINA'S CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM

Rank	Name	Example Positions
<i>National</i>		
1	State Leader (<i>guojiaji zhengzhi</i>)	General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, Premier of the State Council
2	State Deputy (<i>guojiaji fuzhi</i>)	Members of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China, Vice Chair of the Political Consultative Conference
<i>National or Provincial</i>		
3	Province/Ministry Head (<i>shengbuji zhengzhi</i>)	First Secretary of the Communist Youth League, Chair of national mass organizations (e.g., All-China Federation of Trade Unions), Chair of a Provincial-level People's Congress
4	Province/Ministry Deputy (<i>shengbuji fuzhi</i>)	Deputy Secretary of Party Committees of Provinces, Vice Chair of a Provincial-level People's Congress, Presidents of key state universities (e.g., Peking University)
<i>Provincial or Municipal</i>		
5	Bureau/Department Head (<i>tingjuji zhengzhi</i>)	Party Secretary of prefecture-level cities, President of provincial universities, Chair of People's Congress of prefecture-level cities
6	Bureau/Department Deputy (<i>tingjuji fuzhi</i>)	Deputy Party Secretary of Prefecture-level cities, Deputy Chairs of provincial mass organizations (e.g., All-China Women's Federation)
<i>County</i>		
7	Division/County Head (<i>xianchujuzhengzhi</i>)	Party Secretary of counties, Party Secretary of districts of prefecture-level cities, Chair of County-level People's Political Consultative Conference
8	Division/County Deputy (<i>xianchujufuzhi</i>)	Members of county-level Party Standing Committee, Vice Mayor of counties
<i>Township</i>		
9	Section/Township Head (<i>xiangkeji zhengzhi</i>)	Party Secretary of towns, Chair of township-level People's Political Consultative Conference
10	Section/Township Deputy (<i>xiangkejifuzhi</i>)	Deputy Heads of county-level party or government organizations

Source: PRC National People's Congress (2005, Article 16), Kou and Tsai (2014, 157), and Chan and Li (2007, 393).

Table S5: BRIDGING CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITY: DIFFERENTIATED EMBEDDEDNESS OF CHINESE POLITICAL ELITES

		Civil society embeddedness (<i>horizontal connection</i>)	Political embeddedness (<i>vertical connection</i>)
Embeddedness of political elites	Strong	CYL (<i>excellent state-agents for mobilizing civic power</i>)	MO, School, State Council (<i>excellent access points to political power</i>)
	Weak	LSOE, CSOE Judiciary, State Council (<i>marginalized state-agents in civil society</i>)	CYL, CSOE (<i>ineffective access points to political power</i>)

Notes: CYL = Communist Youth League; MO = Mass Organization; PC = People's Congress; PCC = Political Consultative Conference; CSOE = Central state-owned enterprise; LSOE = Local state-owned enterprise.

Table S6: PATTERNS OF LINKAGE BETWEEN CHINESE POLITICAL ELITES

Linkage	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
State Council–CCP	27% (21)	25% (20)	15% (6.0)	21% (6.0)	21% (8.0)
State Council	13% (10)	11% (9.0)	12% 5.0	–	–
PC–State Council	10% (8.0)	–	–	–	–
CCP	–	10% (8.0)	–	–	–
PC–CCP	–	13% (10)	–	–	–
PCC–State Council	–	–	15% (6.0)	10% (3.0)	–
PCC–CCP	–	–	–	17% (5.0)	10% (4.0)
<i>Cross category</i>	71% (56)	72% (57)	76% (31)	86% (25)	85% (33)

Notes: Showing links above 10% of total connections. Raw counts are in parentheses. CCP = Chinese Communist Party; PC = People's Congress; PCC = Political Consultative Conference.

Table S7: ROBUSTNESS CHECK: EXCLUDING ALL-CHINA WOMEN'S FEDERATION CASES

	Nonprofit Embeddedness		Political Embeddedness	
	<i>Hu</i>	<i>Xi</i>	<i>Hu</i>	<i>Xi</i>
<i>Political Affiliation</i>				
CCP	-0.044 (0.13)	-0.0053 (0.090)	0.24 (0.24)	0.046 (0.060)
CYL	1.1* (0.67)	1.2*** (0.40)	-0.31 (0.27)	-0.21** (0.11)
CYL Exp.	0.12 (0.18)	0.16 (0.10)	0.44** (0.19)	0.089 (0.056)
Judicial	0.026 (0.17)	-0.12* (0.071)	-0.62 (0.53)	0.11 (0.16)
LSOE	-0.12 (0.11)	-0.16** (0.075)	0.17 (0.25)	0.10 (0.12)
MO	0.090 (0.27)	-0.072 (0.11)	0.25 (0.36)	0.28** (0.12)
PCC	0.043 (0.091)	-0.061 (0.074)	-0.25 (0.21)	0.0046 (0.074)
SC	0.12 (0.17)	-0.10 (0.079)	-0.10 (0.23)	0.031 (0.056)
CSOE	0.085 (0.20)	-0.22** (0.11)	0.082 (0.24)	-0.23** (0.12)
School	0.098 (0.14)	0.19 (0.14)	-0.27 (0.23)	0.16* (0.088)
<i>Controls</i>				
Male	0.024 (0.13)	-0.16 (0.14)	-0.31 (0.22)	-0.25*** (0.097)
Education	0.023 (0.025)	-0.036 (0.023)	-0.041 (0.063)	0.016 (0.018)
Cadre rank	0.0063 (0.022)	-0.011 (0.011)	-0.045 (0.031)	-0.014 (0.011)
Age	-0.056 (0.049)	-0.079** (0.031)	-0.014 (0.070)	-0.026 (0.027)
Board size	0.73*** (0.027)	0.78*** (0.023)	0.099** (0.050)	0.10*** (0.019)
Embed. diversity	0.15*** (0.050)	0.029 (0.032)	-0.99*** (0.096)	-0.44*** (0.029)
<i>#Observations</i>	272	426	272	426
<i>Adj. R²</i>	0.52	0.71	0.57	0.57

Notes: Dependent variable = Network degree. PC is the base group for political affiliation. Network degree, age, board size, and embeddedness diversity are transformed to z-scores. Bootstrap standard errors are in parentheses (Snijders and Borgatti 1999). χ^2 column shows the Wald test results. CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CYL = Communist Youth League; CYL Exp. = Cadres with previous CYL work experience; MO = Mass Organization; PC = People's Congress; PCC = Political Consultative Conference; CSOE = Central state-owned enterprise; LSOE = Local state-owned enterprise. * $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, two-tailed tests.

Figure S2: A SAMPLE OF LINKED DATASET

Foundation ID	Year	Name	Gender	Birth Year	Position
54	2011	XKJ	M	1973	Morgan Stanley Huaxin Securities C
67	2015	XKJ	M	1973	Shanghai Municipal Investment Grc
67	2014	XKJ	M	1973	Shanghai Tower Construction & De
67	2013	XKJ	M	1973	Morgan Stanley Huaxin Securities C
67	2012	XKJ	M	1973	Morgan Stanley Huaxin Securities C
67	2011	XKJ	M	1973	Morgan Stanley Huaxin Securities C
138	2014	XKJ	M	1973	Shanghai Tower Construction & De
138	2013	XKJ	M	1973	Morgan Stanley Huaxin Securities C
138	2012	XKJ	M	1973	Morgan Stanley Huaxin Securities C
138	2011	XKJ	M	1973	Morgan Stanley Huaxin Securities C
250	2013	CJS	M	1956	Federation of Social Science Assoxi:
250	2012	CJS	M	1956	Federation of Social Science Assoxi:
250	2011	CJS	M	1956	Ministry/ Department/Bureau of W
250	2010	CJS	M	1956	State Council
1387	2012	CJS	M	1956	Federation of Social Science Assoxi:
1387	2013	CJS	M	1956	Federation of Social Science Associ:
1387	2014	CJS	M	1956	Work Committee for Departments
1387	2015	CJS	M	1956	Work Committee for Departments
253	2015	LXM	M	1951	Politburo / Standing Committee, Pc
253	2013	LXM	M	1951	Politburo / Standing Committee, Pc
253	2012	LXM	M	1951	Politburo / Standing Committee, Pc
253	2011	LXM	M	1951	Major Projects Construction Headq
253	2010	LXM	M	1951	Major Projects Construction Headq
554	2015	LXM	M	1951	Politburo / Standing Committee
554	2014	LXM	M	1951	Politburo / Standing Committee
554	2013	LXM	M	1951	Politburo / Standing Committee

Notes: The final linked dataset of Ma et al. (2017) and Jiang (2018) can track a political elite's foundation membership and political position in a given year. For example, the political elite CJS were on two foundations' boards (i.e., Foundation ID 250 and 1387) between 2010 and 2015, and he changed his primary position four times during the same time period.

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