

THE POLITICS OF PROMOTION IN CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY BUREAUCRACY

Supplementary Appendix

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1 PRC Foreign Affairs Personnel Dataset

1.1 Codebook

1.1.1 MFA Personnel Dataset

- `cname`: Chinese name
- `ename`: English name
- `birth_year`: year of birth
- `birth_place`: province in which individual was born
- `male`: male or female
- `civilcollege`: completed college at a civilian institution
- `abroad`: evidence that the individual spent time abroad before joining the MFA
- `military`: served in the military
- `long_march`: participated in the Long March
- `ild`: served in the International Liaison Department during their career
- `ildstart`: started career in the International Liaison Department
- `preprc_diplomat`: served in a diplomatic role (in CCP or otherwise) prior to 1949
- `princeling`: parent(s) was/were a senior MFA official (defined as being in the dataset) or member of the Central Committee
- `arts_major`: higher education major in arts
- `language_major`: higher education major in language
- `science_major`: higher education major in science
- `socialscience_major`: higher education major in social science
- `careerstart`: the year individual began their career
- `purged`: removed from a position due to criticism or investigation by the party at any point during their career
- `yrpurged`: the year the individual was purged during their career
- `seniorpurged`: removed from a senior position (ambassador, assistant minister, vice minister, minister, or state councillor) due to criticism or investigation by the party
- `yrseniorpurged`: the year the individual was removed from a senior position during their career

1.1.2 MFA Appointments Dataset

- **cname:** Chinese name
- **ename:** English name
- **clean_title:** standardized position title
- **title:** position/department in which the individual worked
- **type:** Ambassador; Ministry (all positions in MFA headquarters below senior level); Senior Ministry (Assistant Minister, Vice Minister, Foreign Minister); Supraministry (Politburo, State Council, etc), Embassy
- **start:** year appointment began
- **end:** year appointment ended
- **location:** location where the individual held the position
- **keyamb:** ambassadorship to a country with vice minister rank
- **unamb:** ambassador to the United Nations
- **vminsupra:** vice minister rank position in a position above the ministry
- **minsupra:** minister rank position in a position above the ministry
- **ildstart:** started career in the International Liaison Department
- **exit_type:** retirement; retire to an adviser position; transfer to another department (e.g. military); purge (identified by exit from position under criticism or investigation by the party); death in office
- **expertise:** professional specialization of the position, based on its associated department or regional focus

1.1.3 PRC Foreign Affairs Leadership Dataset

- **organization:** name of the organization in the foreign affairs system
- **eposition:** English name of the position within the organization
- **cposition:** Chinese name of the position within the organization
- **cname:** Chinese name of the individual leader
- **ename:** English name of the individual leader
- **start:** year the leader started the position
- **end:** year the leader ended the position
- **dip_background:**
 - Yes (MFA): previously served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 - Yes (ILD): previously served in the International Liaison Department
 - No

1.2 Example Coding (Han Nianlong 韩念龙)

Table 1: Example Coding for Han Nianlong

<i>Position #1</i>	Ambassador to Pakistan
· <i>Start/End Dates</i>	1951 to 1956
· <i>Type of Position</i>	Ambassador
· <i>Exit Type</i>	Within
<i>Position #2</i>	Ambassador to Sweden
· <i>Start/End Dates</i>	1956 to 1958
· <i>Type of Position</i>	Ambassador
· <i>Exit Type</i>	Within
<i>Position #3</i>	Assistant Minister
· <i>Start/End Dates</i>	1958 to 1964
· <i>Type of Position</i>	Senior Ministry
· <i>Exit Type</i>	Within
<i>Position #4</i>	Director of General Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
· <i>Start/End Dates</i>	1958 to 1964
· <i>Type of Position</i>	Ministry
· <i>Exit Type</i>	Within
<i>Position #5</i>	Vice Minister
· <i>Start/End Dates</i>	1964 to 1982
· <i>Type of Position</i>	Senior Ministry
· <i>Exit Type</i>	Retire
<i>Gender</i>	Male
<i>Birth Place</i>	Guizhou
<i>Birth Year</i>	1910
<i>Princeling</i>	0
<i>College</i>	1
<i>Major</i>	Political Economy
<i>Prior Experiences</i>	Abroad: 0 Long March: 0 Diplomatic: 1 Political: 1 Military: 1 ILD: 0

1.3 List of Substantive Issue Areas

- Academic (*MFA-affiliated University*)
- Administrative (*MFA Administrative Department*)
- Africa
- Archive
- Arms Control
- Asia
- BDS (*Beijing Diplomatic Service*)
- Boundary (*MFA Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs*)
- CIIS (*China Institute of International Studies*)
- Consular (*MFA Department of Consular Affairs*)
- Courier
- East Europe
- East Germany
- Education
- Europe
- European Union
- External Security
- Finance
- Foreign (*MFA Department of Foreign Affairs Management*)
- General (*in charge generally*)
- General Affairs (*MFA Department of General Affairs, dissolved*)
- Hong Kong
- Information
- International Econ (*MFA Department of International Economic Affairs*)
- IOs (*MFA Department of International Organizations and Conferences*)
- Japan
- Latin America
- Logistics (*Department of Services for Foreign Ministry Home and Overseas Offices*)

- Macao
- Middle East
- Multilateral Organization
- North America
- Oceania
- Office (*MFA General Office*)
- Other
- Personnel (*MFA Department of Personnel*)
- Political (*Party Affairs, Supraministry Positions*)
- Protocol
- Research (*Policy Planning Department. Formerly Policy Research Office, Policy Research Department*)
- Retirement (*MFA Bureau for Retired Personnel*)
- Russia
- Soviet Union
- Supervision (*Discipline Inspection*)
- Taiwan
- Translation
- Treaty (*MFA Department of Treaty and Law*)
- United States

1.4 Summary Statistics

Table 2: Summary Statistics of Time-Series Variables in Regression Analysis

Variable	Min	Median	Mean	Max	Number Missing	Complete Rate
Male	0	1	0.956	1	103	0.988
Higher Civilian Education	0	1	0.786	1	0	1
Military Background	0	0	0.242	1	526	0.937
Started in ILD	0	0	0.014	1	543	0.935
Princeling	0	0	0.011	1	280	0.966
Share of Time Abroad	0	1	0.851	1	0	1
International Disputes (count)	0	0	0.049	7	0	1
Diplomatic Treaties (count)	0	2	3.330	56	0	1
Priority Experience (junior)	0	0	0.807	10	1,236	0.852
Current Beijing Assignment	0	0	0.135	1	0	1
Experience Count	2	3	3.100	10	0	1

Table 2 reports the summary statistics of our data in time series format. We initially collected data on 1,357 diplomats. First, we noted seven individuals in the sample had served for only a few assignments (sometimes only one) for which information on the start and end dates was not available. Since our main explanatory variable measures share of time, we excluded these individuals from the analysis, reducing the sample to 1,350. Next, we removed diplomats who entered the MFA at the vice minister level position, leaving us with 1,342 diplomats. We then restricted our dataset to the period before 2014, ensuring consistency with the availability of Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) data. The analyzed sample includes 1,171 diplomats and 8,335 individual-years.

In the time-series data used in our regression analysis, 7,028 out of 8,335 observations have complete demographic and time-series information. The remaining 759 observations have one missing value (mostly junior assignments), 53 observations have two, 256 observations have three, 140 observations have four, and 99 observations have five missing values. Missing data reflect the unavailability of information despite exhaustive searches through multiple sources, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) website, 中国外交辞典 [*Dictionary of Chinese Diplomacy*], 五星红旗下的大使们 [*Ambassadors under the Five-Star Red Flag*], 当代中国使节外交生涯 [*The Diplomatic Careers of the Envoys of Modern China*], online encyclopedias, and other archival sources.

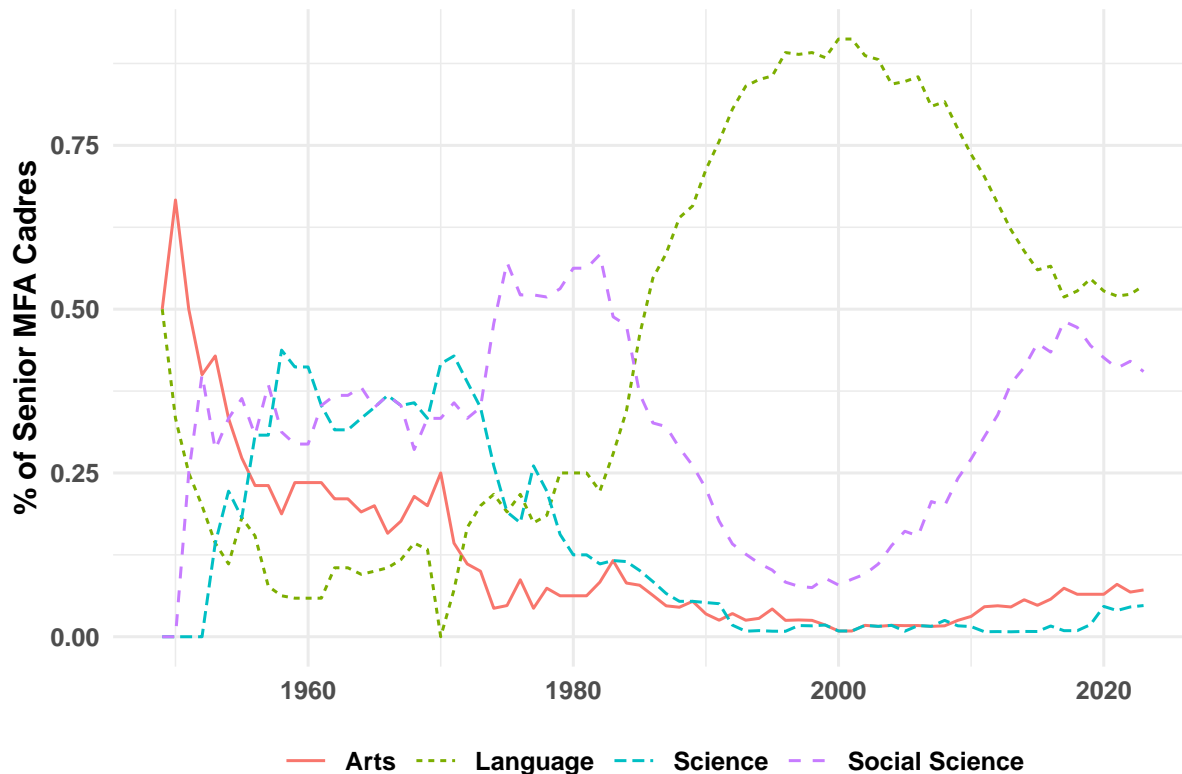
One question about the missingness is whether and how this might bias our findings. In our data,

we note that diplomats with missing data are often those who had only one or two assignments, usually overseas, after which they were not promoted. Since this career pattern is consistent with our main finding — but missingness means that these individuals are dropped from the fully specified models — it suggests that the regression analysis underestimates the relationship between foreign postings and promotion.

2 Additional Analyses

2.1 Higher Education in the Senior Diplomatic Corps

Figure 1: Higher Level Education in Senior Diplomatic Corps



2.2 Cross-Sectional Analysis

To supplement our study on prospects for promotion with panel data, we conduct cross-sectional analyses. For our first set of cross-sectional analyses, the dependent variable is senior foreign posting share. As summarized in Table 3, we first analyze the relationship between each type of

junior assignments and senior foreign posting share. Model 1 presents the results of parsimonious model without controls examining the relationship between junior assignments and senior foreign posting share. The result shows a negative and statistically significant relationship between junior assignments in Beijing and larger shares of senior assignments in China's embassies. A one standard deviation increase in the number of junior assignments in Beijing decreases 8% in the share of senior foreign postings. In model 2, we estimate our model with the full set of controls. The observed relationship between junior assignments in Beijing and larger shares of senior assignments abroad remains the same: diplomats who served more postings in Beijing during their junior career were less likely to be assigned to overseas positions in their senior career.

Table 3: Cross-Sectional Analysis of Ambassadorial Pool

	<i>Dependent Variable: Senior Share of Time Abroad</i>	
	(1)	(2)
Junior Home Posts (count)	−0.028*** (0.005)	−0.025*** (0.005)
Junior Abroad Posts (count)	0.007 (0.005)	0.005 (0.005)
Junior Priority Posts (count)	−0.016** (0.007)	−0.016** (0.007)
Male		−0.051 (0.034)
Military Background		0.040 (0.031)
Started in ILD		−0.320*** (0.087)
Higher Civilian Education		−0.060* (0.032)
Princeling		−0.302** (0.118)
Party Congress Fixed Effects	✓	✓
Experience Count Fixed Effects	✓	✓
McFadden Pseudo-R ²	0.75	0.68
Observations	1,179	1,079

Note: Heteroskedasticity-Robust standard errors.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Next, we analyze the relationship between senior foreign posting share and promotion to

vice minister rank. We report the findings of our statistical analysis in Table 4. Model 1 presents the results of parsimonious model without controls estimating the relationship between senior foreign postings share and promotion. We find that greater share of senior foreign postings is significantly negatively associated with promotion. A one standard deviation increase in the share of senior foreign postings abroad decreases the odds of promotion by 72%. In model 2, in addition to the full set of controls, we estimate our model with our two measures of performance: counts of treaties signed and international disputes managed up to that year. The observed relationships between senior foreign postings share and diplomatic promotion remain the same as the parsimonious model: diplomats who spend more time abroad in their senior career were significantly less likely to be promoted to vice minister rank.

Overall, our cross-sectional analysis of the ambassadorial pool suggests that, consistent with our panel data findings, diplomats who had more postings in Beijing during their junior careers were more likely to be promoted to vice minister rank.

Table 4: Cross-Sectional Analysis of Ambassadorial Pool

	<i>Dependent variable: Promotion to Vice Minister Rank</i>	
	(1)	(2)
Senior Share of Time Abroad	−4.791*** (0.394)	−4.478*** (0.406)
International Disputes (count)		1.706 (1.302)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)		−0.021 (0.029)
Junior Priority Posts (count)		0.170** (0.070)
Male		1.096 (1.117)
Military Background		0.525 (0.384)
Started in ILD		1.651** (0.767)
Higher Civilian Education		0.101 (0.401)
Princeling		0.006 (1.166)
Party Congress Fixed Effects	✓	✓
Experience Count Fixed Effects	✓	✓
McFadden Pseudo-R ²	0.37	0.39
Observations	1,179	1,079

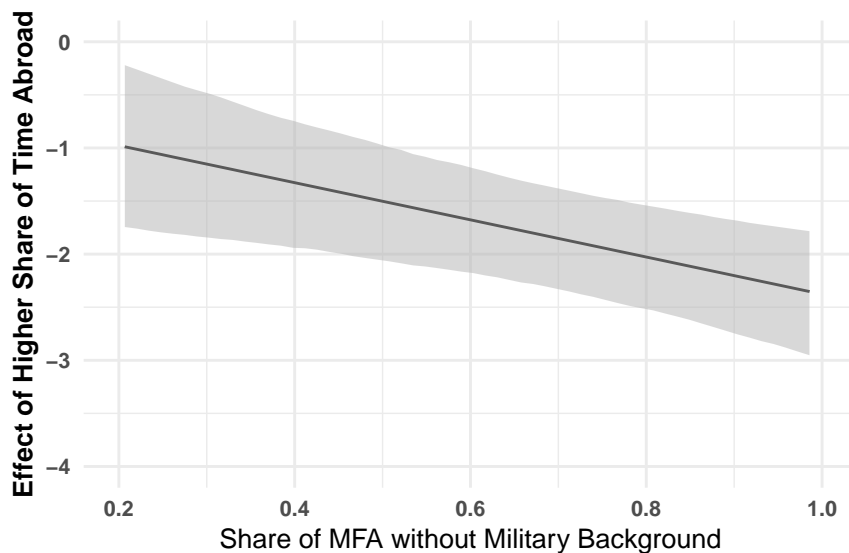
Note: Heteroskedasticity-Robust standard errors.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

2.3 Interaction Model: Foreign Ministry Professionalism

To further probe professionalization dynamics, we estimate a model that interacts foreign posting share with the foreign ministry’s level of professionalization over time. To measure the professionalization over time, we use the overall share of the senior diplomatic corps that were *not* military officers, as the retirement of early Chinese diplomats with the military backgrounds of early Chinese diplomats is commonly identified as an important benchmark in the MFA’s overall professionalization. Table 5 reports the findings of our statistical analysis showing that the interaction term between the two variables is statistically significant. To ease interpretation, Figure 2 plots the marginal effect of foreign postings on promotion prospects under different levels of professionalization (i.e., increased civilian make-up) within the foreign ministry, ranging from periods when a greater share of senior diplomats rotated through the Chinese military to periods when virtually no senior diplomats did so. The plot suggests that, as the foreign ministry has become more specialized, the negative effect of foreign postings on promotion has increased.

Figure 2: Marginal Effect of Foreign Postings on Promotion, by MFA Professionalism Level



Note: This figure shows the varying marginal effect of senior time abroad on vice ministerial promotion prospects across levels of overall specialization within the ministry.

Table 5: MFA Professionalization, Assignments, and Promotion to Vice Minister Rank

	<i>Dependent variable: Promotion to Vice Minister Rank</i>
Senior Share of Time Abroad	−0.604 (0.592)
Share of MFA without Military Background	2.407 (1.961)
Senior Share Abroad x MFA Share without Military Background	−1.779** (0.703)
International Disputes (count)	1.276*** (0.313)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)	−0.022 (0.025)
Junior Priority Posts (count)	0.136*** (0.037)
Male	0.818 (0.749)
Military Background	0.469* (0.270)
Started in ILD	1.039 (0.638)
Higher Civilian Education	−0.010 (0.246)
Princeling	0.506 (0.450)
Party Congress Fixed Effects	✓
Experience Count Fixed Effects	✓
McFadden Pseudo- R^2	0.14
Observations	7,752

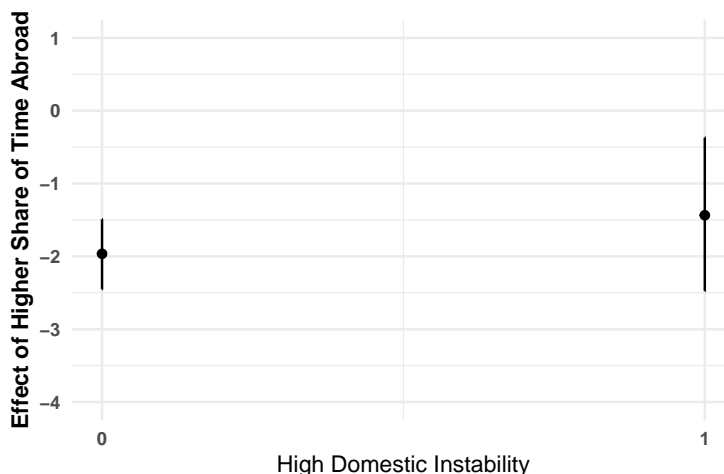
Note: Robust standard errors are clustered by individual.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

2.4 Interaction Model: Domestic Stability

As noted in the main text, one potential interpretation of our results is that foreign postings may raise suspicions about an individual diplomat’s political loyalties. If true, we might expect the effects of foreign assignments to be greater during periods of domestic political instability in China, when a bureaucrat’s political credentials are more closely scrutinized.

Figure 3: Foreign Postings and Promotion, by Domestic Instability Level



Note: This figure shows the marginal effects of greater senior time spent abroad on vice ministerial promotion prospects under conditions of low and high levels of domestic instability.

To probe this possibility, we estimate a model that examines the interaction between the share of senior foreign postings and domestic instability. We code the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962), Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Tiananmen Square incident (1989), and the power transition in the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (2012) as periods of instability. The independent variable of Domestic Instability is coded as a 1 if it falls within these three designated periods and as a 0 if not. As summarized in Table 6, the results suggest that there is no significant difference in the effect of senior foreign posting share and treaty negotiations on improving promotion prospects between periods of high and low domestic instability. Overall, it may be the case that foreign assignments raise concerns about political loyalty in more complex ways, but our analysis finds no direct support for the contention.

Table 6: Effect of Foreign Postings and Domestic Stability on Vice Minister Promotions

	<i>Dependent variable: Promotion to Vice Minister Rank</i>
Senior Share of Time Abroad	−1.960*** (0.248)
Domestic Instability	−0.941** (0.474)
International Disputes (count)	1.266*** (0.332)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)	−0.018 (0.025)
Senior Share of Time Abroad x Domestic Instability	0.546 (0.587)
Junior Priority Posts (count)	0.142*** (0.036)
Male	0.961 (0.774)
Military Background	0.549** (0.265)
Started in ILD	1.205** (0.599)
Higher Civilian Education	−0.089 (0.251)
Princeling	0.487 (0.495)
Party Congress Fixed Effects	✓
Experience Count Fixed Effects	✓
McFadden Pseudo-R ²	0.13
Observations	7,752

Note: Robust standard errors are clustered by individual.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

2.5 Social Ties Results

Another possible interpretation of our results is that assignments to Beijing allow diplomats to build a more dense network of social ties, which may in turn assist in promotion, relative to assignments abroad. To probe this possibility, we examine the relationship between network connections and assignments at both the junior and senior level. Table 7 reports the results.

Model 1 reports the relationship between junior assignments and the density of social ties that

Table 7: Cross-Sectional Analysis of Social Ties

	<i>Dependent variable: Total Connections</i>	
	Junior Level Assignments	Senior Level Assignments
	(1)	(2)
Junior Home Posts (count)	3.904*** (0.263)	
Junior Abroad Posts (count)	2.208*** (0.313)	
Senior Share of Time Abroad		−23.297*** (2.387)
Male	−0.797 (2.448)	−4.175 (3.016)
Military Background	1.476 (1.322)	1.662 (1.222)
Started in ILD	−7.398*** (2.210)	−18.765*** (3.771)
Higher Civilian Education	0.115 (1.160)	0.258 (1.107)
Princeling	8.432 (5.381)	5.828 (5.584)
Party Congress Fixed Effects	✓	
Experience Count Fixed Effects	✓	✓
McFadden Pseudo-R ²	0.09	0.05
Observations	1,079	1,079

Note: Robust standard errors are clustered by individual.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

diplomats are able to build within the Foreign Ministry in model 1.¹ Model 2 relationship between senior foreign posting share and the density of social ties. The regression analyses suggest that there is a systematic relationship between posting history and senior ties within the MFA. A one standard deviation increase in the number of junior assignments in Beijing is associated with 11 additional senior ties among diplomats. However, a one standard deviation increase in the number of junior assignments abroad is only associated with 5 more senior ties within the foreign ministry. Turning to senior foreign posting share, consistent with our previous findings, diplomats who spend more time abroad in their senior career are considerably less likely to establish connections within the foreign ministry. A one standard deviation increase in the share of senior foreign postings is

¹Details regarding the network tie measure are provided in the main text.

associated with 6 less senior connections within the MFA.

2.6 Alternative Analyses of International Disputes

Our main analyses examine the relationship between assignments in which diplomats helped to manage international disputes and career advancement. However, the favorability of a dispute outcome could matter significantly. As a preliminary probe into this possibility, we leverage the Militarized Interstate Dispute data’s codings of dispute outcomes to construct an alternative measure of experience handling disputes with favorable outcomes. We code a dispute outcome as favorable if it resulted in a Chinese victory, if the opposing state yielded, or if the outcome was a compromise (MID outcome codes 1, 4, and 6); all other outcomes are treated as unfavorable. As reported in Table 8, we find little evidence that experience handling disputes that resolved in China’s favor systematically shape promotion prospects. Finally, we note that none of the officials who promoted to the rank of minister possessed experience successfully managing international disputes while in postings at the vice minister level, underscoring the limited role of dispute resolution in promotion.

2.7 Alternative Analyses of International Treaties

In the main text, we find limited evidence that experience managing international treaties is associated with better promotion prospects. Similar to our discussion of dispute outcome in the previous section, however, one might rightly wonder if *which* countries diplomats helped to negotiate a treaty with matters to prospects for promotion. Experience managing treaty negotiations with geopolitically important countries might matter more than with less important ones. We base our definition of geopolitical priority countries—consistent with how we define priority experience in the promotion analyses—on those to which China has historically assigned ambassadors with vice minister rank, such as the Soviet Union/Russia, United States, United Kingdom, France, or Japan, North Korea. We find little evidence that this is the case, however. In fact, no officials promoted to minister rank had experiences overseeing the signature of treaties with these countries during their vice minister level tenure.

Table 8: Dispute Management Performance and Promotion to Vice Minister Rank

	<i>Dependent Variable: Promotion to Vice Minister Rank</i>					
	1949–2014				1982–2014	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of Time Abroad	−2.078*** (0.210)		−2.057*** (0.228)	−1.838*** (0.234)	−2.632*** (0.259)	−2.299*** (0.284)
China-Favored Dispute Outcomes (count)		−0.269 (1.205)	−0.201 (1.153)	−0.264 (1.293)	1.210 (0.804)	1.551 (1.000)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)		−0.066** (0.031)	−0.005 (0.026)	−0.015 (0.025)	−0.028 (0.044)	−0.038 (0.039)
Priority Experience (junior)				0.141*** (0.037)		0.146*** (0.039)
Male				0.981 (0.801)		0.678 (0.633)
Military Background				0.594** (0.262)		0.125 (0.388)
Started in ILD				1.201** (0.592)		0.876 (0.674)
Higher Civilian Education				−0.123 (0.252)		0.436 (0.483)
Princeling				0.451 (0.511)		0.780 (0.502)
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

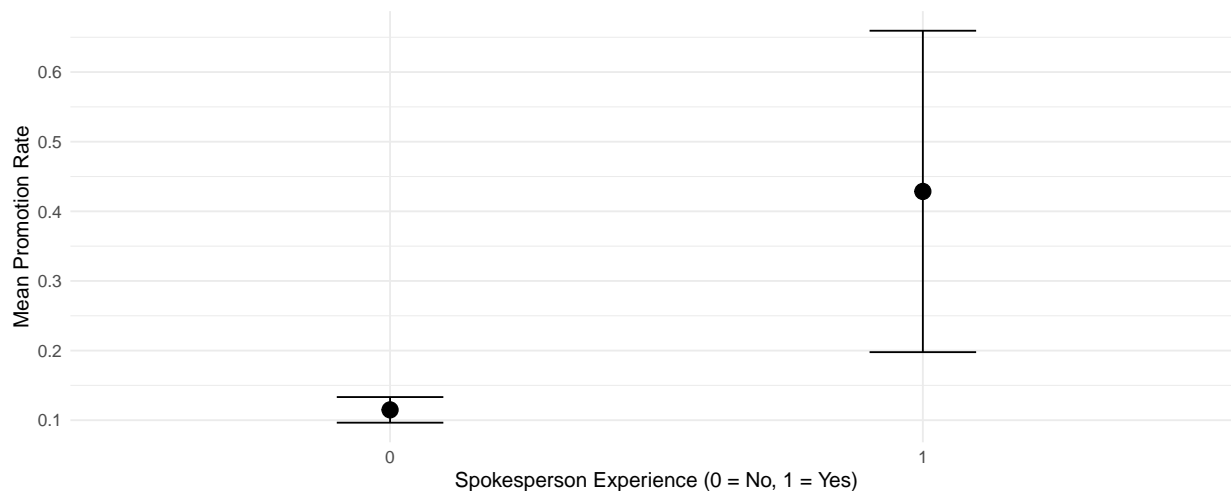
Note: Robust standard errors clustered by individual.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

2.8 Spokesperson Analysis

Another possibility worth considering is whether specific positions are key to career advancement. The MFA spokesperson is particularly important possibility, as the position has a prominent public profile in recent years, which might provide a distinct advantage for promotion. To explore this possibility, we first performed a difference-in-means test that compared promotion rates of those who served as MFA spokespersons versus those who did not. As seen in Figure 4, individuals who held the spokesperson position indeed have a higher average promotion rate, possibly suggesting a relationship between the role and career progression.

Figure 4: Spokesperson Experience and Promotion



Note: This figure illustrates the differing rates of promotion to the vice minister level between individuals who served as spokespersons and those who did not.

However, a cross-sectional regression analysis as shown in Table 9 finds no statistically significant relationship between serving as a spokesperson and being promoted to vice minister rank once controlling for other factors that might affect appointment to the spokesperson position. These findings suggest that the observed promotion advantage likely stems from the characteristics of those appointed to the role — such as their background or prior experience — rather than the visibility or influence gained while serving as a spokesperson.

We can also probe whether MFA spokespeople gain a promotion advantage specifically from managing international disputes or crises by conducting an interaction analysis. This approach evaluates whether exposure to dispute management as a spokesperson influences promotion prospects

Table 9: Cross-Sectional Analysis of Spokesperson and Vice Minister Promotions

	<i>Dependent variable: Promotion to Vice Minister Rank</i>
Senior Share of Time Abroad	−5.058*** (0.543)
MFA Spokesperson	0.420 (0.556)
International Disputes (count)	1.886 (1.205)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)	−0.020 (0.052)
Junior Priority Posts (count)	0.151** (0.073)
Male	0.699 (0.886)
Military Background	−0.346 (0.515)
Started in ILD	1.582* (0.820)
Higher Civilian Education	0.433 (0.628)
Princeling	−0.398 (1.504)
Party Congress Fixed Effects	✓
Experience Count Fixed Effects	✓
McFadden Pseudo-R ²	0.4
Observations	971

Note: Heteroskedasticity-Robust standard errors.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

differently compared to ambassadors. For spokespersons, we aggregated all disputes during their term, assuming they had exposure to these events. For ambassadors, we attributed disputes based on the country in which they were stationed.

As shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6, the results indicate that, if anything, it is ambassadors and not spokespersons whose careers benefit from experience with dispute management. The regression table confirms these findings. Specifically, as shown in Table 10 model 1, while managing a higher number of disputes positively influences promotion, the interaction term between spokesperson status and dispute exposure is null. Similarly, the interaction term in model 2 suggests that the potential career benefits of resolving disputes in China’s favor are significantly lower for spokespersons

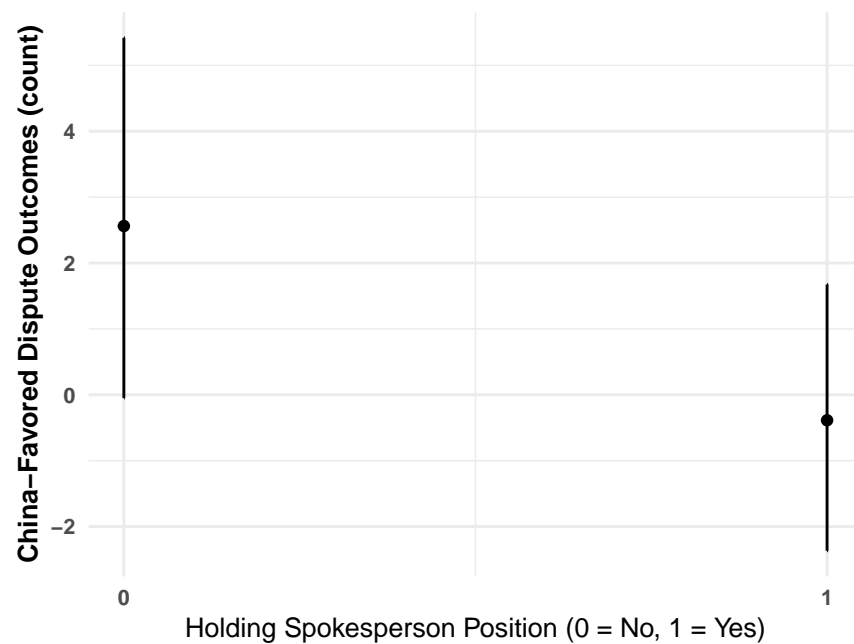
compared to ambassadors. Overall, these results suggest that exposure to disputes as a spokesperson does not confer the same career advantages as managing disputes in an ambassadorial role. This underscores the distinction in how responsibilities and visibility are rewarded across different diplomatic positions, with ambassadors being more directly linked to promotion benefits from successful crisis management.

Figure 5: Marginal Effect of Exposure to International Disputes Management on Promotion, by Holding Spokesperson Position



Note: This figure shows marginal effects of exposure to International Disputes management on vice ministerial promotion prospects under conditions of whether holding MFA Spokesperson position.

Figure 6: Marginal Effect of Exposure to Successful International Disputes Management on Promotion, by Holding Spokesperson Position



Note: This figure shows marginal effects of exposure to successful International Disputes management on vice ministerial promotion prospects under conditions of whether holding MFA Spokesperson position.

Table 10: Interaction Model: Spokesperson's Exposure to Dispute Management

	<i>Dependent variable: Promotion to Vice Minister Rank</i>	
	(1)	(2)
Senior Share of Time Abroad	-5.007*** (0.548)	-4.951*** (0.542)
Spokesperson	0.339 (0.908)	0.594 (0.659)
International Disputes (count)	0.414* (0.244)	
Spokesperson x International Disputes (count)	-0.404 (0.248)	
China-Favored Dispute Outcomes (count)		2.463* (1.336)
Spokesperson x China-Favored Dispute Outcomes (count)		-2.781** (1.393)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)	-0.015 (0.048)	-0.017 (0.048)
Junior Priority Posts (count)	0.160** (0.073)	0.160** (0.073)
Male	0.814 (0.834)	0.975 (0.802)
Military Background	-0.145 (0.478)	-0.132 (0.486)
Started in ILD	1.542* (0.807)	1.517* (0.797)
Higher Civilian Education	0.154 (0.530)	0.185 (0.531)
Princeling	-0.170 (1.924)	-0.146 (2.087)
Party Congress Fixed Effects	✓	✓
Experience Count Fixed Effects	✓	✓
McFadden Pseudo-R ²	0.39	0.39
Observations	971	971

Note: Heteroskedasticity-Robust standard errors

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

2.9 UN and General IO Experience Analysis

One of our primary findings is that diplomats who spend their careers in assignments abroad are less likely to be promoted to higher ranks than those who remain in domestic roles. However, given the importance and visibility of postings to the United Nations (UN), it is possible that UN assignments are systematically different from other foreign postings. To explore whether postings to prestigious international organizations like the UN influence career advancement differently than bilateral foreign assignments, we replicated our analyses with measures that differentiate between UN and non-UN assignments.

Table 11: UN Experience, Bilateral Foreign Postings, and Promotion to Vice Minister Rank

	<i>Dependent Variable: Promotion to Vice Minister Rank</i>					
	1949–2014				1982–2014	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of Time Abroad in UN	−0.202 (0.520)		−0.188 (0.525)	0.349 (0.539)	−0.677 (0.610)	−0.171 (0.636)
Share of Time Abroad Non-UN	−2.115*** (0.214)		−2.128*** (0.231)	−1.908*** (0.240)	−2.760*** (0.267)	−2.422*** (0.296)
International Disputes (count)		0.177 (0.145)	0.288* (0.150)	0.274* (0.157)	0.382** (0.164)	0.383** (0.169)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)		−0.067** (0.031)	−0.005 (0.025)	−0.015 (0.024)	−0.020 (0.043)	−0.031 (0.038)
Priority Experience (junior)				0.154*** (0.036)		0.158*** (0.039)
Male				0.953 (0.805)		0.533 (0.682)
Military Background				0.653** (0.267)		0.234 (0.393)
Started in ILD				1.259** (0.597)		0.936 (0.679)
Higher Civilian Education				−0.125 (0.255)		0.329 (0.492)
Princeling				0.466 (0.515)		0.780 (0.503)
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	0.12	0.06	0.12	0.13	0.16	0.17
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

As reported in Table 11 finds no significant association between UN postings and promotion to vice minister rank. In contrast, time spent in non-UN foreign postings remains consistently nega-

tively associated with promotion, reinforcing the main findings. Analysis of UN experience is not feasible for minister rank promotions, as no officials promoted to minister rank had served in UN postings during their vice minister level tenure. We performed a parallel analysis disaggregating experience in any international organization and foreign assignments in embassies abroad. We find similar results, which are presented in Table 12. We similarly find that none of the officials who promoted to minister rank had previously served in international organization postings during their vice minister level tenure. Overall, these results suggest that while postings to prestigious organizations, such as the UN, may enhance visibility and international experience, they do not translate into career advantages within the Chinese foreign affairs system. Instead, domestic postings and assignments in Beijing continue to hold greater strategic value for promotion.

Table 12: IOs Experience, Embassy Postings, and Promotion to Vice Minister Rank

<i>Dependent Variable: Promotion to Vice Minister Rank</i>						
	1949–2014				1982–2014	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of Time Abroad in IOs	−0.346 (0.530)		−0.340 (0.538)	0.169 (0.541)	−0.844 (0.615)	−0.350 (0.628)
Share of Time Abroad in Embassy	−2.115*** (0.214)		−2.126*** (0.231)	−1.907*** (0.239)	−2.755*** (0.266)	−2.419*** (0.295)
International Disputes (count)		0.177 (0.145)	0.285* (0.150)	0.271* (0.158)	0.377** (0.164)	0.379** (0.169)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)		−0.067** (0.031)	−0.005 (0.025)	−0.015 (0.024)	−0.021 (0.043)	−0.032 (0.038)
Priority Experience (junior)				0.154*** (0.036)		0.158*** (0.039)
Male				0.958 (0.803)		0.545 (0.684)
Military Background				0.646** (0.267)		0.226 (0.393)
Started in ILD				1.260** (0.597)		0.936 (0.679)
Higher Civilian Education				−0.122 (0.254)		0.337 (0.492)
Princeling				0.466 (0.515)		0.780 (0.503)
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	0.12	0.06	0.12	0.13	0.16	0.17
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

2.10 Robustness Check: Dropping Active Diplomats

Table 13: Diplomatic Postings, Performance, and Promotion to Vice Minister Rank

<i>Dependent Variable: Promotion to Vice Minister Rank</i>						
	1949–2014				1982–2014	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of Time Abroad	−2.112*** (0.211)		−2.122*** (0.229)	−1.906*** (0.236)	−2.715*** (0.264)	−2.391*** (0.288)
International Disputes (count)		0.179 (0.145)	0.280* (0.149)	0.266* (0.156)	0.370** (0.164)	0.367** (0.169)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)		−0.067** (0.031)	−0.005 (0.026)	−0.015 (0.025)	−0.023 (0.043)	−0.034 (0.039)
Priority Experience (junior)				0.146*** (0.036)		0.149*** (0.039)
Male				0.944 (0.794)		0.533 (0.676)
Military Background				0.592** (0.263)		0.168 (0.386)
Started in ILD				1.177* (0.613)		0.827 (0.696)
Higher Civilian Education				−0.099 (0.253)		0.363 (0.486)
Princeling				0.439 (0.499)		0.731 (0.489)
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	8,032	8,032	8,032	7,497	6,123	5,594

Note: Analysis excludes currently active MFA diplomats who have not yet been promoted to Vice Minister level. Robust standard errors are clustered by individual. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

One feature of our main analyses is that they include some officials who were still active at the time of our analysis. To ensure this feature of the data is not driving our results, we conducted a robustness check that excludes officials who are still active in their positions and may still be eligible for future promotions. As shown in Table 13 and Table 14, the findings remain consistent even after excluding active diplomats from the sample.

Table 14: Diplomatic Postings, Performance, and Appointment to Minister Rank

<i>Dependent Variable: Promotion to Minister Rank</i>						
	1949–2014				1982–2014	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of Time Abroad	−2.373*** (0.696)		−1.857** (0.826)	−1.776* (1.001)	−4.379*** (1.237)	−5.900*** (1.877)
International Disputes (count)		−0.064 (0.213)	0.108 (0.244)	0.093 (0.238)	0.427* (0.225)	0.415* (0.230)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)		−0.167*** (0.063)	−0.101* (0.052)	−0.138** (0.065)	−0.069 (0.068)	−0.190 (0.193)
Priority Experience (junior)				0.195** (0.079)		0.265** (0.104)
Male				−2.264* (1.372)		−6.480*** (1.791)
Military Background				0.490 (0.726)		−0.566 (0.787)
Started in ILD				3.859*** (1.016)		6.418*** (1.521)
Higher Civilian Education				0.234 (0.705)		0.844 (1.265)
Princeling				−0.178 (0.817)		1.781** (0.904)
Experience Count Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clusters	18	18	18	18	11	11
McFadden Pseudo-R ²	0.15	0.13	0.17	0.22	0.3	0.43
Observations	285	285	285	285	215	215

Note: Analysis excludes currently active MFA diplomats who have not yet been promoted to Minister level.
Robust standard errors are clustered by year. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

2.11 Robustness Check: Foreign Minister Fixed Effect

Another possibly to consider is that promotion patterns may have followed different logics under different foreign ministers, whose tenures do not necessarily align with party congresses. To explore this possibility, we replicated the analysis using a model specification that includes foreign minister fixed effects. The results remain unchanged, confirming the robustness of our findings regardless of the inclusion of these controls.

Table 15: Diplomatic Postings, Performance, and Promotion to Vice Minister Rank

<i>Dependent Variable: Promotion to Vice Minister Rank</i>					
	1949–2014				1982–2014
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	(6)				
Share of Time Abroad	−2.063*** (0.215)		−2.062*** (0.231)	−1.833*** (0.239)	−2.692*** (0.262)
International Disputes (count)		0.182 (0.142)	0.283* (0.146)	0.268* (0.152)	0.370** (0.164)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)		−0.068** (0.031)	−0.008 (0.026)	−0.018 (0.025)	−0.025 (0.043)
Priority Experience (junior)				0.145*** (0.036)	0.146*** (0.039)
Male				1.034 (0.789)	0.642 (0.685)
Military Background				0.545** (0.260)	0.083 (0.388)
Started in ILD				1.194** (0.594)	0.859 (0.676)
Higher Civilian Education				−0.100 (0.251)	0.442 (0.466)
Princeling				0.429 (0.523)	0.816 (0.501)
Foreign Minister Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Experience Count Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clusters	1,179	1,179	1,179	1,179	1,070
McFadden Pseudo-R ²	0.11	0.06	0.11	0.12	0.15
Observations	8,287	8,287	8,287	7,752	6,378

Note: Robust standard errors clustered by individual.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

2.12 Robustness Check: Current Beijing Assignment

Another possibility to consider whether *current* assignment to Beijing, rather than simply the share of past assignments an individual spent abroad, shapes promotion. Table 16 replicates our analysis with an additional control specifying whether the individual was currently assigned to

Table 16: Current Assignment in Beijing and Promotion to Vice Minister Rank

	<i>Dependent Variable: Promotion to Vice Minister Rank</i>			
	1949–1976		1977–2014	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Current Beijing Assignment	4.538*** (0.894)	4.551*** (0.905)	1.427*** (0.399)	1.330*** (0.395)
Share of Time Abroad	3.417*** (0.941)	3.101*** (0.992)	−1.653*** (0.425)	−1.486*** (0.427)
International Disputes (count)	−0.289 (0.458)	−0.438 (0.458)	0.273* (0.146)	0.294** (0.145)
Diplomatic Treaties (count)	0.033 (0.027)	0.036 (0.026)	0.042 (0.029)	0.033 (0.028)
Junior Priority Experience (number of posts)		−0.639 (0.554)		0.114*** (0.036)
Male		0.373 (1.312)		0.607 (0.642)
Military Background		0.819* (0.494)		0.232 (0.302)
Higher Civilian Education		−0.564 (0.405)		0.424 (0.356)
Princeling		0.810 (1.726)		0.743* (0.451)
Party Congress Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Experience Count Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clusters	182	182	1,118	1,118
McFadden Pseudo-R ²	0.21	0.22	0.17	0.17
Observations	1,328	1,325	7,062	6,529

Note: Robust standard errors clustered by individual.

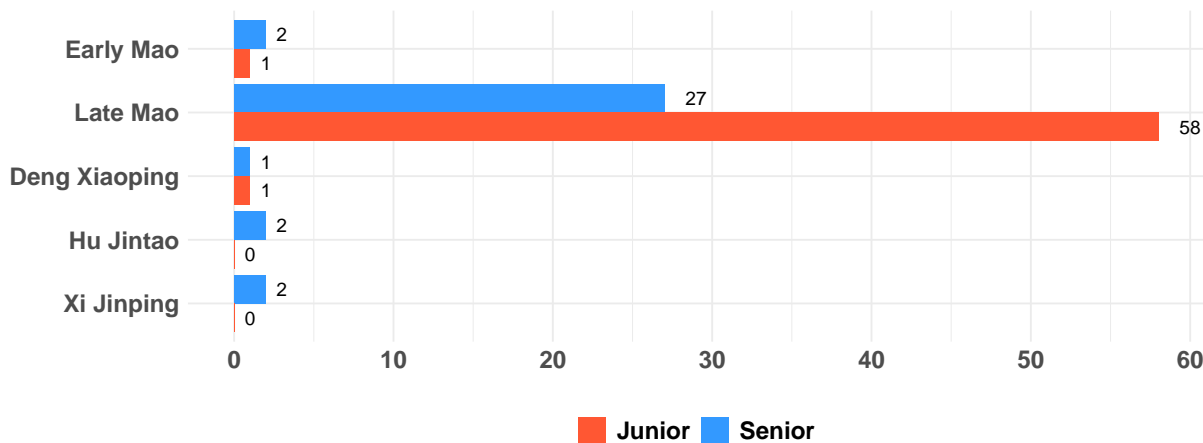
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Beijing. The table subsets the results into two periods: (1) the Mao era (1949 to 1976); and (2) the post-Mao era (1977 to 2014). Across both time periods, we see that current assignment to Beijing is positively associated with promotion, a finding consistent with our argument about the benefits of diplomatic assignments in the headquarters. We note, however, that once we control for current assignment to Beijing, the relationship between foreign postings share and promotion depends on the time period: foreign postings are positively associated with promotion during the Mao era and negatively associated with promotion during the post-Mao era. This might be interpreted as evidence consistent with our findings regarding MFA professionalization presented in Appendix §2.3. However, we caution against this interpretation given high levels of colinearity between foreign posting share and current Beijing assignment during the Mao era.

3 Disciplinary Removal from the Foreign Ministry

Finally, we consider how often diplomats have been removed from their posts for disciplinary reasons. As part of our coding process, we coded whether the diplomat was removed as part of a disciplinary investigation for corruption, mishandling state secrets, or other political errors. Figure 7 plots the distribution by period of the 118 diplomats who were removed from their posts since 1949. The distribution is plotted by the country’s leader at the time, with the Mao era divided into early (1949–1962) and late (1963–1976) periods.² The blue bars report removals from senior positions (ambassador, assistant minister, vice minister, minister, or state councillor) and the red bars report removals from junior ones. Note that our counts of junior-level removals should be interpreted with considerable caution, as our underlying sample only includes individuals who were eventually promoted to senior positions.

Figure 7: Number of Diplomatic Removals, By Leader



Two points are immediately apparent. First, disciplinary removal is rare in the MFA. Outside of the late Mao era, we were only able to document six cases in which a senior diplomatic official was removed from their post for disciplinary reasons. Second, most removals in the Mao and Deng era involved political rectitude, whereas most since then have involved corruption. Zhang Wentian and his wife Liu Ying were removed in the wake of the internal policy debate at the 1959 Lushan

²We used the following dates: Deng Xiaoping (1979–1989); Jiang Zemin (1989–2002); Hu Jintao (2003–2012); Xi Jinping (2013–2023). A number of purged diplomats are excluded from the figure due to missing data on the year of purge.

Conference. Of the 28 diplomats who were disciplined during the late Mao era, twenty occurred during the first three years of the Cultural Revolution, during which time the political loyalties of many diplomatic cadres were under close scrutiny.³ Since the beginning of the Reform Era, however, the stated reason for removal of most cases — Zhang Kunsheng, Li Bin, Shen Guofang — was corruption, rather than a political mistake.⁴

One potential question, however, is whether some diplomats may have been quietly removed on disciplinary grounds, such that our coding approach could not identify them. To probe this possibility, we review diplomats who held a senior position for less than two years (the typical duration is three years). Only 160 of the Chinese diplomats had a career assignment that matched these criteria. Of them, 9 had died in office, 19 had reached retirement age, and 132 had been rotated to an assignments of comparable status.

³During the Cultural Revolution, all but one ambassador were summoned back to China. Our data collection suggests, however, not all recalled diplomats were sent to labor at cadre schools or disciplined. Three individuals were simply recalled to the country to participate in the Cultural Revolution, with no specific information on whether they were subsequently purged or subjected to other forms of censure. Six others experienced gaps in their diplomatic careers during this turbulent period, suggesting potential interruptions or challenges they faced in the midst of the Cultural Revolution.

⁴At the time of writing, the grounds for Foreign Minister Qin Gang's remain unclear.