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Regional Outlook

CHINA'S NEW TOP LEADERS: A PREVIEW OF THE
CCP'S EIGHTEENTH NATIONAL CONGRESS

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Executive Summary

The upcoming Eighteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will witness the emergence of China's new top leaders. That will mark the formal transition of political power from the 'fourth generation' to the 'fifth generation' of CCP leadership. Scholars tend to view the CCP's regular and orderly generational change and leadership succession as the result of institutionalised political process in China. CCP's power transition has now become structured, stable and basically predictable – indeed, much more predictable than possible in a genuine democratic system.

Both the Party and State constitutions stipulate not more than two consecutive five-year terms of office for top Party and State positions, and top leaders are to retire when they turn 68 (the official age limit for retirement). A fundamental change occurred at the Fourteenth National Congress in 1992 when Deng Xiaoping announced his decision to withdraw from politics completely. Trends towards institutionalisation of retirement and rejuvenation were accelerated under Jiang Zemin. The Sixteenth Congress in 2002 saw perhaps the most extensive transformation of China's leadership since reforms were begun in 1978. The CCP has thus successfully managed leadership transition from one generation to another every ten years since Deng Xiaoping came to the helm of the nation in 1982.

If everything goes according to plan, current Vice-President Xi Jinping will become the Party's next General Secretary in November 2012 and China's president in March 2013, to succeed Hu Jintao. Ever since he was elevated to the Politburo Standing Committee, the CCP top leadership body, at the Seventeenth Party Congress in 2007, and was made executive secretary of the Party's Secretariat, Xi has been regarded as Hu's heir apparent and has been groomed as the paramount leader. Meanwhile, Li Keqiang has been training to succeed Wen Jiabao as China's next premier. Like Xi, Li was elevated to the PSC at the last Party Congress in 2007, and he is now executive vice premier.

Seven other current Politburo members are also likely to obtain a seat in the new PSC; they include Li Yuanchao, the head of the Party's Organisation Department; Wang Yang, the current Party Secretary of Guangdong province; Liu Yandong, a State Councillor and the highest-ranked female politician in China; Wang Qishan, a vice premier; Zhang Dejiang, a vice-premier and Chongqing's Party chief; Liu Yunshan, director of the Party's Propaganda Department; and Yu Zhengsheng, the current Party chief in Shanghai. All these top leaders have been well educated, are reform-minded and obtained considerable experience working in localities as well as in the centre. They reflect the Party's criteria for selecting its leaders: high level of education, professional training, political reliability and relatively youthful.

Broadly speaking, the institutionalisation of generational change and leadership succession has wrought profound and substantial political change in China. Moreover, political institutionalisation has resulted in a political structure in which formal institutions play more important roles than informal networks do. Factionalism has not disappeared, but it has, over time, become less lethal and more politically conventional. The CCP has thus evolved from a revolutionary party to a governing party. In Weberian terminology, this constitutes a transformation from charismatic authority to legal-rational authority. It is this significant development of political institutionalisation that ushered in the fourth generation of CCP leadership under Hu ten years ago, and now the Party has been able to continue its transition power to the next generation in the same orderly and smooth fashion.

1. Introduction

The upcoming Eighteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which will be convened in Beijing on 8 November 2012 will witness the emergence of China's new top leaders and leadership succession in China. According to the CCP's constitution, the Party convenes a national congress every five years. One of the hallmarks of the event is generational change, including renewal of the Party's top leadership. A main task in this respect is to elect a new Central Committee and a new Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), which is the Party's watchdog. The day after the Congress closes, the new Central Committee convenes its first plenum, the sole function of which is to appoint a new Party leadership. These appointments include a new Politburo and its Standing Committee (the Party's top decision-making bodies), a new Central Military Commission (CMC), the presiding CCDI secretary, and the Party's paramount leader, the general secretary.

As the CCP has been the ruling party in China since 1949, the Party's top leaders, i.e., its Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) members, have been elected as state leaders as well. Currently the PSC's nine members include the Party's General Secretary Hu Jintao, who serves as China's president; Wu Bangguo, chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC); Wen Jiabao, premier of the State Council; and Jia Qinglin, chairperson of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). However, both the Party and State constitutions stipulate fixed terms of office of not more than two consecutive five-year terms for top Party and State positions, and that leaders retire when they turn 68 (official retirement age). As Hu, Wu, Wen, Jia and other three PSC members (save Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang) have served two terms, and (or) reached retirement age, the upcoming Party Congress will elect the new PSC members as the CCP's top leaders, and, subsequently, they will be elected as China's new leaders at the Twelfth National People's Congress in March 2013. That will mark the formal and complete transition of political power from the 'fourth generation' to the 'fifth generation' of Chinese governance since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The CCP describes the history of its leadership in terms of generations. The towering figure Mao Zedong led the first generation of Party leaders who created the Communist regime. Heading the second generation was Deng Xiaoping, who initiated China's reform and opening up in 1978. Leading, and regarded as the core of the third generation after the Tiananmen Incident of 1989, was Jiang Zemin. Current CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao is a prominent figure of the fourth generation, leading the Party since 2002. By all measures, Hu's smooth succession to top leadership of the Party's fourth generation has been hailed as a great achievement of the CCP's political reform, and has served to institutionalise leadership succession.¹

Institutionalisation of China's leadership succession started in Deng's later years, especially after the 1989 Tiananmen Incident. The Party's reform-minded leaders had been pushing for leadership renewal through retiring veteran leaders and promoting younger technocratic leaders. New selection criteria were set for young leaders: high-level education and professional training, relatively youthful and politically reliable. Meanwhile, Deng also favoured young leaders embracing his theory of socialist market economy, with work experience in the commercial centres on the nation's eastern coast, and having served in posts at both local and national levels. These trends in institutionalising retirement and promotion were accelerated under Jiang and Hu.² As a result, the CCP's leadership succession in November 2012 will be as orderly and smooth as it was ten years ago at the Sixteenth National Congress.

The dramatic fall from grace of one-time top leadership aspirant Bo Xilai early in 2012 had threatened to torpedo the whole process of generational succession. Certainly,

there have been some doubts and rumours in that respect, for Bo has been a controversial as well as influential senior leader in the Party. As Chongqing Party chief and a powerful Politburo member, Bo was eligible for promotion to the PSC until his downfall. But as court cases in recent months have revealed, he is in many ways a bad apple: power-hungry, egotistic, allegedly corrupt and with little respect for the law. The unfolding case has exposed the dark and weak underbelly of the CCP apparatus, in which local Party bosses run their cities and provinces like personal fiefdoms.

However, as pointed out by Alice Miller, a leading US scholar on elite politics in China, from the Party's procedural perspective, the removal of Bo from his post as Chongqing Party chief resembles the 2006 purge of Shanghai Party chief Chen Liangyu and the 1995 takedown of Beijing municipality Party boss Chen Xitong. Bo's removal in that respect therefore does not indicate a departure from the 'rules of the game' as played in the last two decades in China. From a political perspective, each of the three purges – of Bo Xilai and the two Chens (both were Politburo members too) – removed an irritant to the top leadership at an important moment of transition. The Politburo leadership has, publicly at least, maintained its usual façade of unity through the Bo affair, and Bo's removal likely strengthens rather than disrupts preparations for convocation of the Eighteenth Party Congress.³

Shortly after the Party's decision to remove Bo as Chongqing Party chief and put him under investigation by the CDIC for 'suspected serious disciplinary violations', the Party's main mouthpiece *People's Daily* followed up with three successive Commentator Articles – an authoritative level of comment: on April 11 calling for Party-wide support for the Politburo's decision to remove Bo; on April 12 calling on the nation to focus on economic work 'without distraction'; and on April 13 stressing that everyone is equal before law and emphasising the need for strict Party discipline.

Meanwhile, the Party's Politburo acted quickly with damage control as the unfolding scandal disclosed that Bo's wife, Gu Kailai had murdered British businessman Neil Heywood. In August, his wife was brought to trial and given a suspended death sentence after confessing to the murder. A month later, Bo's former aide, Chongqing Police Chief Wang Lijun, was tried and given a 15-year prison term for initially covering up the murder and other misdeeds. Days later an official statement announced in state media that the disgraced Bo had been expelled from the Communist Party and is to face corruption and other criminal charges, including abuse of power, bribe-taking and improper relations with a number of women. In late October 2012, the Party reported Bo's expulsion in late September from his position on the NPC Standing Committee, stripping Bo of his last official post. Apparently, the Politburo's criticisms and allegations against Bo Xilai amount to throwing the book at him, and Bo will certainly face judicial process similar to the two Chen cases before him.

Against this background, let us consider broadly how the CCP has tried to achieve its leadership succession in 2012 in an orderly and smooth manner. This paper explores the institutionalisation of China's political process and power transition and examines how the Party selects and elects its leaders. It then takes a close look at the emergence of the new generation of CCP top leaders, and discusses implications and prospects. I argue that because of the CCP's reforms and opening up in recent years and particularly ongoing political institutionalisation, China's top leadership succession has become progressively more orderly, smooth, and predictable over time.

2. Institutionalised Political Process

Scholars tend to view political institutionalisation within the context of political development, but the definition of political development can be highly controversial. Depending on the definition, it may imply political transparency, democratisation, institutionalisation, expanding political participation and competition, strengthening state capacity, modernising political culture, some mix of these, or even beyond. Korean political scientist Hochul Lee considers political institutionalisation to be an important aspect of political development in contemporary China.⁴ This is because the leaders of Chinese reform have consistently stressed the need for institutionalisation or legalisation as a way to maintain political stability, which in turn is a crucial precondition for continuous economic growth and building socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The important issue here is how to promote political institutionalisation of changing guards. For most of the PRC's history, leadership succession has been recognised as one of the critical failings of China's political system. The designation of Liu Shaoqi implicitly and later of Lin Biao explicitly as Mao's successors failed amid the ferocious power politics of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The hitherto obscure Hua Guofeng emerged as Mao's successor as Party chairman after Mao's death in 1976 on only the thinnest justifications and his tenure ended soon after his control over the Party agenda was broken by Deng Xiaoping at the watershed Third Plenum of 1978. And Deng's first two successors, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, also fell victim to leadership power struggles in 1987 and 1989 respectively. Only in Jiang's case were the Party's efforts to ensure an orderly transition in leadership successful. Thus, political process and generational succession became a vital part of reforming and institutionalising the nation's political system.⁵

Political institutionalisation in China over the last three decades can be measured at two levels: external and internal. External institutionalisation implies an evolution over time and the regular convening of political organisations according to the Constitution and laws, through which political organisations gain more stability, regularity, continuity and predictability. The most outstanding aspect of external institutionalisation in the post-Mao reform era is the regular convening of Party Congresses and NPCs according to the Party and state constitutions. After the devastation of the Cultural Revolution, the reform leadership of Deng Xiaoping moved quickly to restore and revise political organisations and institutions of the Party and the state.⁶

The CCP focused its initial efforts on restoring Party leadership, then rehabilitating the authority of the central government, and then restoring state organisations and their normal operations, all of which were reflected in the new Constitution of 1982. Since the Eleventh Party Congress in 1977, held a year after Mao's death, the Party Congress has been held every five years, without exception. At the same time, since its fifth meeting in 1978, the NPC has been held regularly every year, and reconstituted every five years, without exception. Regular convening of major political organisations has, in and of itself, contributed tremendously to the stability, continuity and predictability of Chinese politics.⁷

Internal institutionalisation refers to the changes in hierarchy, relationships, and operations of political organisations, through which political organisations of the Party and the state are to acquire more efficiency, functionality, autonomy, transparency and accountability. Internal institutionalisation may not be as apparent as external institutionalisation. Thus it was more difficult to implement and therefore the process has been undertaken cautiously and gradually over the last three decades. It has been focused on four major areas: institutionalising political process and leadership succession,

undertaking Party–government separation, strengthening rule of law, and building intra-party democracy.⁸

Leadership change in China is not institutionalised as explicitly as it is in democratic countries. Instead, it has been decided through informal and factional politics, with inevitable conflict and instability as a result. Recognising this problem, Deng Xiaoping openly raised the issue of reforming the party system and state leadership at the 1980 meeting of the Politburo. He emphasised two important leadership reforms: tenure and a retirement system. Deng enforced a limit of two five-year terms for Party and state leaders. He also enforced the retirement of a whole generation of veteran incumbents who were over certain age limits. Accordingly, the 1982 constitution stipulated fixed terms of office of not more than two consecutive five-year terms for top state positions, including the PRC president, Chairman of the NPC, and premier of the State Council.⁹ Since then the Party has generated a massive turnover in leadership generations, as shown in Figure 1.

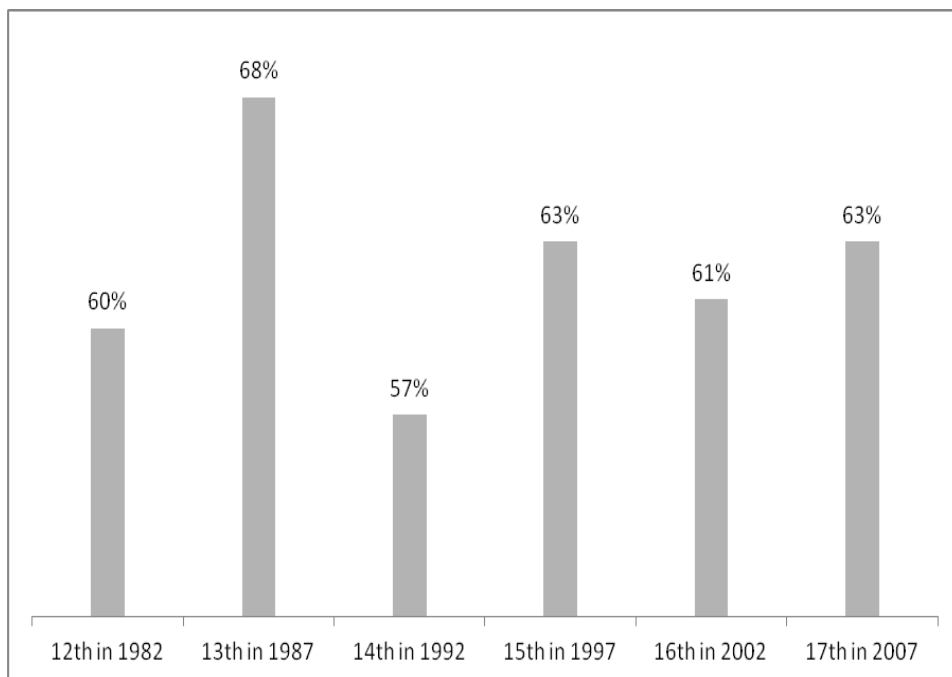


Figure 1 Turnover Rates of the CCP Central Committee since the Twelfth National Congress in 1982

Source: Cheng Li, 'Preparing For the 18th Party Congress: Procedures and Mechanisms', *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 36, 2012, p. 8.

A fundamental change occurred at the Fourteenth Congress in 1992 when Deng Xiaoping decided to withdraw from politics completely, and the Central Advisory Commission, the shadow Politburo of the old guards, was abolished. Consequently, although informal networks still played some accessory roles, formal institutions became dominant in Chinese politics. These moves to institutionalise retirement and rejuvenation were accelerated under Jiang Zemin. Jiang's personal administration, like Deng's, focused on ingress and egress, creating vacancies and improving turnover through increasingly rigorous enforcement of term and age limits, resulting in a relatively young elite with the highest educational attainments in the history of the PRC. The Sixteenth Congress in 2002 has seen perhaps the most extensive transformation of China's leadership since reform was begun. More than half of the CC members were phased out in accordance with age limits, 14 of the 24 full Politburo members were new faces and only one (Hu

Jintao) of the nine PSC members has remained in office. The CCP had thus successfully and smoothly managed leadership transition from one generation to another.¹⁰

3. Selection and Election

As the result of ongoing institutionalisation of China's leadership succession, the CCP's power transition and generational change have become structured, stable and basically predictable – indeed, much more predictable than possible in a genuine democratic system.¹¹ Intraparty democracy has also been significantly institutionalised. It has included increasing transparency within the Party, evolving checks and balances among Party organisations, expanding Party presentation and people's participation, introducing competitive elections of Party leaders, formalising decision-making processes, and more. In particular, the measures to develop intra-party democracy have centred on institutionalising intra-party selection and election procedures for Party cadres. To institutionalise competitive elections in choosing local Party leaders and selection procedures for Party cadres, a series of rules and regulations were proclaimed, including the 'Regulation on Local Election of the CCP' and the 'Regulation on Selection of the Party Cadres and Leaders' (2002). It is a critical dimension in political development in China, considering the pivotal role of the CCP within Chinese politics.¹²

It is worth noting that all measures of intra-party democracy have been applied in preparing the organisation of Party congresses. In principle, the national congress is the most authoritative body in the CCP's institutional line-up and is therefore the most important political convention in China. The Party's national congress brings together some 2,000 delegates from all levels of the CCP for a week each five years. Over the course of this week, the congress sets down a consensus evaluation of the Party's work over the five-year period since the preceding congress and an assessment of the Party's present situation, and it sets forth general guidelines for the Party's priorities, emphases, and tasks for the coming five-year period until the next congress. All of these ideological guidelines and political resolutions of the collective leadership are incorporated into a long 'political report' delivered by the Party's top leader in the name of the outgoing Central committee. Party congresses also have the authority to revise the Party constitution. Most importantly, the Party congress will change the Party's top leadership itself. The congress's three main tasks of setting down broad guidelines for the Party's upcoming work, revising the Party constitution, and changing the Party's top leadership are fundamentally intertwined.¹³

This is why the Party has always attached great importance to preparing its congresses, as has been the case for the upcoming Eighteenth National Congress of the CCP. As early as on 1 November 2011, the CCP's Central Committee issued a document, 'The Communique on the Election of Delegates for the Eighteenth National Congress of the CCP' formally launching the preparation process for the power transition to take place at the national congress one year later. At roughly the same time, a preparatory committee has been established, presided over by Party General Secretary Hu Jintao. It oversees four basic tasks: selection of all Party delegates to the congress; drafting of the political report that Hu will deliver at the congress; managing the constitution amendment group; and nomination the membership of a new Central Committee, as well as of new top leadership bodies. Each of these tasks takes several months to complete.¹⁴

Election of Party congress delegates takes place among 'electoral units' designated by the Party's Politburo. In preparation for the Fifteenth National Congress in 1997, delegate elections were held among 36 electoral units – one for each of the PRC provinces and Taiwan, one for Hong Kong and Macao, and one each for central Party organs, national state institutions, and the PLA. For the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Congresses in 2002 and 2007 respectively, two new units were added – one for centrally directed state-owned enterprises and another for central banking and finance institutions. For the upcoming Eighteenth Congress, two more electoral units, one for

social management and the other for the public service sector, have been added, bringing the total to 40.¹⁵

It has been specified that a total of 2,270 delegates will attend the Eighteenth Party Congress, 57 more than the total number of delegates to the Seventeenth Congress. This increase is partly to reflect subsequent growth in Party membership, which now stands at 82 million. The Party has stipulated that 68 per cent of delegates come from the ranks of officials – a decrease of 2 per cent – and that 32 per cent are drawn from grassroots Party units. And 10 per cent of all delegates must be workers drawn from both public and private enterprises. The last Congress also invited an additional 57 Party members (primarily retired veteran leaders) as special delegates, which is perhaps comparable to the 'super-delegates' of American political party convention. This time, although their number has not been mentioned, some special delegates will attend the Congress. According to Party regulations, these delegates have the same rights and privileges (including voting) as regular delegates.¹⁶

All regular delegates are supposed to be elected in their constituencies. The process for selecting these delegates consists of the following steps: First is nomination, which begins within grassroots Party branches where Party members are encouraged to recommend delegates. Next is background check by the Party's organisation department in coordination with CCP committees at various levels, such as the institutions where candidates work as well as the Party discipline committees and police. The list of candidates is announced to the public to gauge potential opposition within the candidates' constituencies. Then the full committees at province level or the equivalent make the final selection and prepare the list of candidates, submitting it to the Central Organisation Department for scrutiny. Finally, the Party congress at the province level or equivalent will vote to decide the delegates for its electoral unit.¹⁷

Once an initial list of candidates had been selected, the first stage – selection – is over; the second stage – election – then begins. The chosen 2,270 delegates of the 40 electoral units will be required to elect the CCP's new leadership at the November Eighteenth National Congress. First, they will elect the Party's new Central Committee (CC) for a term of five years. The Party constitution vests in the CC the supreme power to govern Party affairs and to enact Party policies when the Party's National Congress is not in session. The total number of seats on the CC varies, determined by the National Congress. Over the last four CCs it has averaged around 350. The current Seventeenth CC, for example, has a total of 371 members, including 204 full members and 167 alternate (non-voting) members. They are truly the elite cadres of the CCP. They include senior government ministers, top military leaders, prominent intellectuals, trade union and youth league leaders, as well as provincial and prominent municipal Party chiefs. The CC has a number of functional departments of its own, but its primary task is to ratify policy decisions and to choose the Party's leadership team – mainly the Politburo and its Standing Committee members.¹⁸

According to the Party constitution, when the CC is not in session, the Politburo and PSC exercise the functions and powers of the CC. So the Politburo has been regarded as CCP's power centre, and it functions as a quasi-cabinet in charge of the country on day to day matters. The current Politburo has 25 members. Within the Politburo, its Standing Committee, which exerts overarching authority, operates as an 'inner cabinet' comprising nine leading Party figures. An important adjunct to the Politburo is the six-member Secretariat, operating under the direction of the CCP's General Secretary. It provides administrative backup and support with coordination. It also plays a key role in the detailed formulation of new policies, and vetting of personnel for Party, state, military and diplomatic posts. All members of the Secretariat, Politburo and PSC come from and are elected by the CC in secret ballots.¹⁹

Some scholars would argue that calling the CC's selection of the Politburo an 'election' is something of a misnomer, for in practice the process is top-down rather than bottom-up, and the Politburo members are actually selected by either the outgoing Politburo

Standing Committee, or by powerful political figures known as paramount leaders, such as Deng and Jiang. In the past two decades, the nomination process has been supervised by a three-person group composed of the Party general secretary, the executive secretary of the Party Secretariat, and the head of the Party Organisation Department. If the leadership continues that practice, the three-person group managing nominations presented to the Eighteenth Congress will include General Secretary Hu Jintao, Executive Secretary Xi Jinping, and Organisation Department chief Li Yuanchao.²⁰

But it is incorrect to assert that there is no intra-party competition for CC seats. Since the Twelfth Congress in 1982, the Party has followed the method of *Cha'e xuanju* (multiple candidates, i.e. more candidates than available seats) for the election of the CC. For example, if the top leaders plan to have a 300 member CC, they may place 330 names on the ballot. The 30 candidates who receive the lowest number of votes will be eliminated. For the Seventeenth Congress in 2007, the ballots had 15 per cent more candidates than seats available. Party leaders claim there will be an increasing number of candidates in future elections of the CC. It is intended that in the near future this method will also be applied to election of the Politburo. These mechanisms of intra-party selection and election are important components of the CCP's broader political reform strategy and ongoing institutionalisation, to gradually make China's party-state system more transparent, competitive and representative, without weakening its 'leading role'.²¹

4. Making the CCP's Top Leaders

If everything goes according to plan, following the institutionalised political process, the CCP's new leadership team will emerge at the upcoming Eighteenth National Party Congress. It is not by coincidence that the Congress has been scheduled to open on 8 November 2012. Ten years ago, exactly on that day, the Party held its Sixteenth Congress which witnessed, for the first time in the CCP's history, the orderly and smooth succession from Jiang's third generation to Hu's fourth generation of Party leadership. Now, with their mission accomplished, Hu and his team will hand over political power to the new generation of CCP leaders. Who are those leaders? Are they really the best and brightest to be entrusted with leadership for the next decade? Perhaps it is too early to answer the second question and answers are anyway debatable. So let us just take a close look at who are the CCP's emerging top leaders.

First, just weeks out from the CCP's Eighteenth Congress nearly all China-watchers agree that Xi Jinping (习近平) will be elected the Party's next General Secretary to succeed Hu Jintao after the CCP's Eighteenth Congress. Indeed, ever since he was elevated to the Politburo Standing Committee at the Seventeenth Party Congress in October 2007, and was made executive secretary of the Party's Secretariat, Xi has been regarded as Hu's heir apparent and has been groomed as the paramount leader. Remarkably, Xi appeared to replicate precisely the precedents established in the 1990s by Hu Jintao as he prepared to succeed Jiang to the top Party, state and military positions. Xi was appointed Vice-President of the PRC in March 2008, paralleling Hu's appointment to that post in March 1993. Xi has held a broad range of portfolios. He was put in charge of the comprehensive preparations for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, as well as being the central government's leading figure in Hong Kong and Macau affairs. He was also appointed as the new President of the Central Party School, the cadre-training and ideological education wing of the Communist Party. Xi was also assigned the post of Committee Chair of preparations for the Sixtieth Anniversary Celebrations of the founding of the PRC. Interestingly, Xi Jinping is already beginning to act like the top leader, although scrupulously polite and respectful to current top leader Hu Jintao.²²

It appears that Xi is popular with and appeals to the Chinese people, both inside and outside the Party. Xi Jinping was born in 1953, the second son of Xi Zhongxun, one of the founders of the Communist guerrilla movement in northern China and former Vice-Premier. When Xi was 10, his father was purged and sent to work in a factory in Luoyang, and in 1968 his father was jailed during the Cultural Revolution. Without his father's protection, Xi went to work as a 'sent-down youth' (1969–1975) at an agricultural commune in the countryside. He joined the CCP in 1974 and received his undergraduate education from 1975 to 1979, majoring in chemical engineering at Beijing's prestigious Tsinghua University. He graduated with a PhD in law (through part-time studies, 1998–2002) from the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences also at Tsinghua University.²³

Early in his career, from 1979 to 1982 he served as secretary for his father's former subordinate Geng Biao, the then vice premier and minister of defence. Subsequently, Xi served as deputy Party secretary and secretary of Zhengding County, Hebei Province (1982–85); in Fujian Province as an executive vice mayor of Xiamen City (1985–88), Party Secretary of Ningde Prefectural Committee (1988–90), Party Secretary of Fozhou (1990–96), deputy Party Secretary of Fujian Province (1996–9), Governor of Fujian Province (1999–2002); and then in Zhejiang Province as Governor (2002) and Party Secretary (2002–2007). Xi was transferred to Shanghai in March 2007 to become the new Party Chief of Shanghai, following the dismissal of Shanghai Party Chief Chen Liangyu.²⁴

Xi's father re-emerged in the post-Mao era, became a vice-premier and a Politburo member, was a strong supporter of Deng's reform and opening up policy, and was one of the architects of China's Special Economic Zones in the early 1980s. But Xi Jinping is widely regarded as a protégé of both former PRC president Jiang Zemin and vice president Zeng Qinghong. Senior leaders consider Xi to be an emerging figure who is open to serious dialogue about deep-seated economic reforms and even political reform. He is generally popular with foreign dignitaries, who are intrigued by his openness and pragmatism. Former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, described him as 'a thoughtful man who has gone through many trials and tribulations'. Lee observed: 'I would put him in the Nelson Mandela class of persons. A person with enormous emotional stability who does not allow his personal misfortunes or sufferings [to] affect his judgment. In other words, he is impressive'.²⁵ Former US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson described Xi as 'the kind of guy who knows how to get things over the goal line'. Xi visited the United States in February 2012, meeting at the White House with US President Barack Obama and with Vice President Joe Biden, whom he had met in China in August 2011.²⁶

Xi was named one of the most influential people in the world in the 2009, 2011 and 2012 Time '100' list. The British magazine *New Statesman* listed Xi Jinping at number 4 in its annual survey of 'The World's 50 Most Influential Figures 2010'. In a 2011 *Washington Post* article Xi was described by those who know him as 'pragmatic, serious, cautious, hard-working, down to earth and low-key'. They say he is a problem-solver and a leader seemingly uninterested in the trappings of high office'.²⁷ In 1987 Xi married the famous Chinese folk singer Peng Liyuan who was a household name in China, much better known to the public than Xi until his political elevation. They have a daughter who enrolled at Harvard University in 2010.²⁸

While Xi Jinping has been positioning to succeed Hu as Party General Secretary and president of the PRC, Li Keqiang (李克强) has been training to succeed Wen Jiabao as China's next premier. Like Xi, Li was elevated to the PSC at the last Party Congress in 2007, and he is now executive Vice-Premier. Also like Xi, Li obtained considerable political experience working at the local level before his elevation.²⁹

Li was born in 1955 and is two years younger than Xi. His father was a local official in Anhui. During the Cultural Revolution, Li was sent for rural labour in Fengyang County, Anhui, where he eventually joined the CCP in 1976 and made his way to becoming the Party head of the local production team. When universities were reopened in the post-Mao era, Li entered the School of Law at Peking University (Beida) in 1978, where he received his LLB and became President of the University's Student Council. He would go on to acquire a PhD in Economics (1994, while an on-the-job postgraduate at Beida). Li is married to Cheng Hong, a professor of English language and literature at Capital University of Economics and Business in Beijing.³⁰

In 1980 he became the Communist Youth League Secretary at Peking University. He entered the top leadership of China's Communist Youth League (CCYL) in 1982 as a member of its Secretariat, and has worked closely with current General Secretary Hu Jintao, who also rose through the ranks of the CCYL. Li served as the CCYL's General Secretary (1993–1998). Li became China's youngest governor when appointed to the position of Governor of Henan, one of China's most populous provinces, in June 1998, at the age of 43. He was transferred to work as the CCP Committee Secretary in Liaoning (2004–2007).³¹

Since his ascendancy to the PSC, Li has taken on the most important portfolios in the Chinese government, ostensibly being groomed for his upcoming premiership. Some critics may comment that Li lacks former premier Zhu Rongji's political courage and decisiveness, and Wen Jiabao's charisma and popularity, but Li seems to have his own style of scholar-officer with broad knowledge of modern political economy. Li's first major appearance internationally was at the 2010 World Economic Forum (WEF) in

Davos, Switzerland. The event was seen as an 'acid test' for Li, whereby he succinctly presented China's long-term vision for development in front of world business and political leaders. In particular, Li briefed the WEF on China's new model of economic growth – Scientific Outlook on Development, emphasising sustainable development, green energy, decreasing the income gap, and the modernisation of key strategic industries. While reiterating China's commitment to peaceful development and its focus on increasing domestic demand in the face of external pressures during the global financial crisis, Li also warned against protectionism, touched upon the importance of international development and international financial reform, and called for a global governance structure 'more reflective of the changes in the global political and economic landscape'.³²

Domestically, Li has been emphasising the importance of changing China's economic structure so that it is better poised for future growth. In one of his speeches, published with minor omissions in the Party's political theory publication, *Qiushi*, on 1 June 2010, Li said that China has come to a historical juncture whereby a change in the economic structure must take place for the country to continue its path of growth. Li particularly pointed to the need to boost domestic consumption, and said that urbanisation is crucial in this phase. He has also reiterated the importance of industrialisation, urbanisation and agricultural modernisation in China in order to improve its competitiveness, food security, energy security, affordable housing and health care. Li also emphasised that China should be moving towards a more middle-class oriented society with an olive-shaped wealth distribution, with the majority of the country's population and wealth belonging to the middle class.³³

Li Yuanchao (李源潮), who is also almost certain to obtain a seat in the new PSC, is likely to be No. 3 in the Party's hierarchy. Even today, he is a prominent politician in China, serving on the Politburo of the CCP and as the head of its Organisation Department, a powerful position that puts him in charge of the whole process of leadership transition. Some China-watchers believe that Li could take over any area of leadership responsibility assigned to a member of the PSC. Most likely he will serve as chairman of the NPC, since when Li was Party secretary of Jiangsu province, he also acted as chairman of the Provincial People's Congress.

Li was born in 1950; his father Li Gancheng served as a vice mayor of Shanghai in the early 1960s. Li joined the CCP in 1978, having done his 'sent-down' work in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. He graduated with a bachelor degree in Mathematics from Fudan University in 1982, a master's degree in economic management from Peking University in 1990, and a doctoral degree (on a part-time basis) in law from the Central Party School in 1998. He pursued mid-career training at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in 2002. Li's wife, Gao Jianjin, is a professor of music at the Institute of Musicology of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing.³⁴

Like Li Keqiang, Li started his political career with CCYL, and has been an ally of General Secretary Hu Jintao. After serving as secretary of the CCYL in Shanghai in 1983, he became secretary of the Secretariat of the CCYL Central Committee (1983–1993). He served as deputy director of the International Office of the State Council and of the General Office of Foreign Publicity of the CCP Central Committee (1993–96), and vice minister of the Ministry of Culture (1996–2000). From 2002 to 2007, Li served as the Party's Secretary of Jiangsu province, the first-in-charge of an area that has been of significant economic development in recent years. During this period, he was one of the most visible provincial Party leaders for his political innovations and bold reform policies. He emphasised that the Party needs to show the people that it really is working on their behalf. He also tried to make his provincial administration responsive to the public, setting up a system to allow them to evaluate local leaders. Making sure Party officials behave properly is a theme he has continued to champion in the organisation department. 'Education, supervision, punishment and reform are all of essential importance in preventing misconduct in recruiting government personnel', he is quoted

to have said. He is one of the few fifth-generation leaders who have called for serious political reforms, intra-party democracy, and tough measures to deal with official corruption.³⁵

Wang Yang (汪洋), the current Party Secretary of Guangdong province, has been regarded as one of the emerging leaders of China's next generation of leaders. As the holder of one of the most important regional posts in China, Wang has also held a seat on the Politburo since 2007. Wang is seen as one of the leading reformers in China's top leadership, and is often credited with pioneering the Guangdong model of development, characterised by an emphasis on private enterprise, economic growth and a greater role for civil society. Wang is also seen as an advocate for market-based solutions to problems in economic development. He said that the priority should be to 'bake a cake' rather than to divide it, that is, economic growth takes precedence over wealth redistribution. This was in stark contrast to the 'Chongqing model' advanced by Bo Xilai, which, along with other radical policies, suggests that wealth should be redistributed fairly first. Wang won praise for his handling of the Wukan protests in 2011. Under his leadership the provincial government offered concessions to protesting villagers and allowed local elections for a new village chief. So it will be desirable for Wang to succeed Jia Qinglin as chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the fourth most important position in China. Alternatively, Wang may serve as secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.³⁶

Wang also has extensive local and central experience. He was born in 1955 into a humble family and joined the CCP in 1975. He received a bachelor degree in public administration from the Central Party School (CPS), and a master degree in management science through part-time studies at the China University of Science and Technology in 1996. Wang also pursued mid-career cadre training at the CPS twice (1997 and 2001). He began as a worker in a food factory, and advanced his career through the CCYL, becoming deputy secretary of the CCYL Anhui provincial committee (1983–4). At the age of 38, Wang was appointed executive vice governor of Anhui. He was then transferred to the central government to serve as vice minister of the National Reform and Development Commission (1999–2003), and deputy secretary-general of the State Council (2003–5). He served as Party secretary of Chongqing (2005–7). Wang has been widely considered a protégé of Hu Jintao, with whom he developed strong patron-client ties in the early 1980s when Hu headed the CCYL and Wang worked for the Anhui Provincial Committee of the CCYL. Some Chinese journalists recently reported that it was Deng Xiaoping who 'found' Wang Yang in 1992 when Deng visited Anhui and met this 37-year-old mayor of Tongling City. Deng was quoted as saying: 'Wang Yang is an exceptional talent'.³⁷

Liu Yandong (刘延东), as the only woman currently serving on the Politburo, has been regarded as a strong candidate for the next PSC. She also holds the post of State Councillor. Since the retirement of Wu Yi, she has been the highest-ranked female politician in China. A native of Jiangsu, Liu was born in 1945 and her father was a former vice minister of agriculture. She joined the CCP in 1964, and graduated from Tsinghua University in 1970 with a degree in chemistry. Liu also took courses as a part-time student at People's University (1990–94) and at Jilin University (1994–98), obtaining a master degree in sociology and PhD in law, respectively. In 2009, Stony Brook University in New York conferred Liu Yandong with an Honorary Doctor of Laws. Liu's husband, Yang Yuanxing, is currently president of China Southeastern Commerce and Technology Corporation.³⁸

Liu started as a technician at a chemical plant in Tangshan, then worked at the Beijing Chemical Experiment Plant (1972–1980), serving as its deputy Party secretary. Liu became a cadre in the Organisation Department of the CCP Committee of Beijing (1980–81), and deputy Party secretary of Chaoyang District of Beijing (1981–82). She was a member and then the executive member of the CCYL Central Committee Secretariat and concurrently vice chairperson, and then chairperson of the All-China

Youth Federation (1982–1991). It was during this period that she worked closely with Hu Jintao, who was then executive secretary of the CCYL. Liu joined the Central United Front Department of the CCP as deputy secretary-general in 1991, and between 2002 and 2007 she served as its head. Liu is seen widely as a protégé of Jiang Zemin, Zeng Qinghong and Hu Jintao, very well connected with Party senior leaders, and popular both inside and outside the Party. She is often regarded as liberal-minded, and may call for the greater political participation of other parties, interest groups, and NGOs in China's political process. If Liu obtains a seat on the PSC, she is likely to become vice president of the PRC, or chairperson of the CPPCC. Because of her age, she can only serve one term, but that will be good enough to set the example for women to join the CCP leadership.³⁹

Wang Qishan (王岐山) is another talented, experienced and popular CCP leader who most likely will be elevated to the next top leadership, becoming the executive vice premier. In 2007, he became a member of the Politburo, and in 2008 he became vice premier of the State Council. In 2009, Wang was appointed by President Hu Jintao as his special representative to chair the Economic Track of the US–China Strategic and Economic Dialogue for the Chinese side. Wang was named as one of the most influential people in the world in the 2009 *Time* 100 list.⁴⁰

Born in Qingdao in 1948, Wang graduated from the History Department of Northwest University in 1976. He joined the CCP in 1983. Early in his career, Wang worked as a researcher and director at the Institute of Contemporary History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (1979–82) and then moved to the Rural Policy Research Office of the CCP Central Committee (1982–88). Subsequently, Wang served as general manager of the Agriculture Credit and Investment Company (1988–89), vice governor of the China Construction Bank (1989–93), vice governor of the People's Bank of China, and became the Governor of the China Construction Bank from 1994 to 1997. Wang was transferred to Guangdong Province in 1997 to serve as vice governor. In 2000, he was appointed director of the State Council General Office of Economic Reform. Wang then became Party secretary of Hainan Province (2002–3). At the peak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), he was appointed Mayor of Beijing.⁴¹

Wang's father was a professor at Tsinghua University, and he is the son-in-law of Yao Yilin, a former PSC member and vice premier. Wang is considered to be a protégé of former Premier Zhu Rongji. The Chinese public regard Wang as a leader who is capable and trustworthy during times of emergency or crisis. Former US Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson observed Wang as 'decisive and inquisitive ... an avid historian, enjoys philosophical debates and has a wicked sense of humour'. And 'He is a Chinese patriot, but he understands the US and knows that each of our two countries benefits from the other's economic success. And he is bold — he takes on challenges, does things that have never been done before and succeeds. Wang managed the largest bankruptcy restructuring in China's history in 1998 and thereby prevented a banking crisis that could have crippled the country's growth'.⁴²

Zhang Dejiang (张德江), as a two-term Politburo member and a vice-premier since 2008, is most likely to be promoted to the new PSC. This possibility was enhanced when Zhang was appointed to lead Chongqing's Party committee in March 2012 following the removal of Bo Xilai as local Party chief. Li Yuanchao, head of the Party's Organisation Department, said Zhang's appointment as Party secretary was made through 'discreet consideration'; and 'Comrade Zhang Dejiang is politically competent, fair, righteous, democratic and responsible'. Immediately after taking office in Chongqing, Zhang made statements to ease concerns of the business community, declaring that 'Chongqing has achieved remarkable economic and social development since becoming a municipality in 1997. One valuable lesson we have learned is that we need to stick to reform and opening up'. Zhang also said that Chongqing welcomed investment from overseas.⁴³

Zhang was born in 1946, the son of Zhang Zhiyi, a former PLA major general. He joined the CCP in 1971. Zhang attended Yanbian University, where he studied Korean language. He received a degree in economics from Kim Il-sung University in North Korea in 1980. Zhang's degree in economics makes him something of a rarity among the Chinese leadership. His connections to North Korea and his handling of illegal immigration from that country as a local official in Jilin are believed to be key factors in his rise to power. He served as deputy Party Secretary of Yanji City (1983–85), and of Yanbian Prefecture in Jilin Province (1985–86). He was transferred to Beijing, where he served as vice minister of Civil Affairs (1986–90). Later, Zhang was elected Party Chief of Jilin Province (1995–98), and was transferred to the same post in Zhejiang Province (1998–2002). Zhang is considered as a Jiang Zemin protégé. Zhang may be promoted as secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) to succeed He Guoqiang.⁴⁴

Liu Yunshan (刘云山), as a two-term Politburo member, is likely to be promoted to the PSC to succeed Li Changchun and become the new 'propaganda tsar' in China. He was born in 1947 and worked in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region for 20 years. Liu joined the CCP in 1971. He received an undergraduate education from Jining College (1964–68), and took courses in public administration (on a part-time basis) at the Central Party School (1989–1992). He was a clerk in the Propaganda Department of the CCP Committee of the Tumd Right Banner, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region before joining the Inner Mongolia branch of the Xinhua News Agency, where he was a reporter and division head (1975–82). Liu was deputy Party secretary of the CCYL Committee in Inner Mongolia (1982–84), then deputy head and head of the Propaganda Department of the CCP Committee of Inner Mongolia, and became deputy Party secretary of Inner Mongolia (1992–93) before he was transferred to Beijing to serve as deputy director of the CCP Propaganda Department in 1993 and, since 2002, as its director. He formed close ties with Hu Jintao when both of them worked for the CCYL in the 1980s.⁴⁵

Yu Zhengsheng (俞正声, born in 1945) is also a two-term Politburo member and the current Party chief in Shanghai. This makes him eligible for promotion and likely to succeed Zhou Yongkang as secretary of the Central Political and Legislative Committee. Yu joined the CCP in 1964. He graduated from Harbin's Military Engineering Institute specialising in the design of automated missiles. He started working as a technician, and joined the Research Institute for the Promotion and Application of Electronic Technology under the Fourth Ministry of Machine-Building Industry, where he served as engineer and assistant chief engineer (1975–1982). Subsequently, Yu served as mayor of Qingdao and Yantai in Shandong (1985–1997). He became vice minister and minister of Construction, and remained in that position in Zhu Rongji's cabinet from 1998 to 2001. Yu then served as Party chief of Hubei Province (2001–7).⁴⁶

5. Implications and Prospects

It should be noted that all nine abovementioned leaders are currently Politburo members, including Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, who are PSC members as well. Ten years ago when the generational change and leadership succession took place at the Sixteenth Congress, all PSC members save one (Hu Jintao) stepped down because they had served two-terms or had met age limits, and those who were elected to the new PSC came from the Politburo of the time. This means all the current Politburo members are eligible for and are most likely to be elevated to the next PSC, if they have not reached the term and age limits. In this regard, Zhang Gaoli (张高丽, born in 1946), the other Politburo member and Party chief of Tianjin, is also eligible for entering the new PSC. But, if the leadership decides to make the new PSC younger, consisting primarily of fifth-generation leaders, then some younger and prominent members from the Secretariat, or even from the CC, could be promoted to the top leadership team.⁴⁷ There has been speculation that the size of the PSC may be reduced from nine to seven members, but some former top leaders have argued that the current size of nine members should be maintained.⁴⁸

The four likely new leaders (Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Li Yuanchao and Wang Yang) were born in the 1950s so they are roughly ten years younger than the current four top leaders (Hu, Wu, Wen and Jia), and thus will be eligible to serve two terms. This would enhance the collective leadership's stability, unity and cooperation, which has been seen as the hallmark of Hu's generation. The other five leaders would be likely to serve one term because of age restrictions, and hence step down at the next Congress. This would be desirable in terms of a ten-yearly handover of a generation of leaders, for it would leave room for the Party to choose potential new top leaders for the coming generation, as happened in the shape of Xi and Li at the Seventeenth Congress in 2007. This means Hu Jintao's ten years as heir apparent will be replaced by Xi Jinping's five years model of leadership succession; the CCP's paramount leader could now be chosen in the middle of the generational change and then groomed for five years to be elected in the next Congress, as it has been in the case of Xi Jinping.

Broadly speaking, the institutionalisation of generational change and leadership succession has wrought profound and substantial political change in China. Some scholars argue that Chinese elite politics in the 21st century is fundamentally different from that of earlier eras because of political institutionalisation, in which the authority of position is restored at the expense of the authority of personal power, and the authority of expertise is restored at the expense of the authority of dogma. Moreover, political institutionalisation results in a political structure in which formal institutions play more important roles than informal networks do. The structure of the Chinese political system consists of both formal and informal substructures, both of which are hierarchically organised. The formal structure, because of its clearly articulated superordinate–subordinate relationships, may be represented by a pyramid with the core at the top; the informal substructure, because of its irregular connections, may be represented by a spider web with the core at the centre.⁴⁹

Factionalism has not disappeared, but over time has become less lethal, more politically conventional and less prone to resort to coups and other illegal and desperate manoeuvres. In terms of those who staff Party and government structures, here we see a transformation from cadres, whose job is to mobilise people, to functionaries, whose job is to administer society. The CCP has thus evolved from a revolutionary party to a governing party. In Weberian terminology, this is a transformation from charismatic authority to legal–rational authority (which differs from the routinisation of charisma).⁵⁰

It is this significant development of political institutionalisation which ushered in Hu's fourth generation of CCP's leadership ten years ago, and now the Party has been able to transition power to the next generation in the same orderly and smooth fashion. However, this fundamental change as the result of the CCP's political reform has been either overlooked or ignored by mainstream scholars in the West. We need to keep in mind that just before the Sixteenth Party Congress and the Ninth NPC, some China watchers questioned whether or not the institutionalisation of Party leadership would survive the generational succession from Jiang to Hu.⁵¹ Even though Hu was elected the CCP's new General Secretary at the Sixteenth Congress in 2002, and subsequently became president of the PRC in 2003, some scholars have still argued that the political succession did not occur, because, chiefly, Jiang had packed the PSC with his allies and retained his position as head of the Party CMC so he could manipulate power from behind the curtains.⁵²

This argument has been proven wrong. It underestimated the strength of the CCP's political institutionalisation while it overstated Jiang's role in the leadership succession. First, those who had been elevated onto the PSC all have their own credentials, are highly experienced and competent, and had been members of the Fifteenth Politburo; this means they had been selected and fostered to be the next leadership team. Second, passing the office of Party General Secretary from Jiang to Hu represents a meaningful power transfer, for the office has been institutionalised to a large extent and the officeholder has significant power not only in name but also in reality. So the incumbent General Secretary is now the CCP's paramount leader. Third, one critical conceptual distinction should be made between institutional and personal loyalty. Institutional loyalty can be separated from personal loyalty and may supersede personal loyalty. Jiang very likely promoted some of his cronies to the PSC because of their personal loyalty. Yet it is equally likely that these ambitious politicians expressed their personal loyalty to Jiang not as a person but as General Secretary. This implies top leaders now direct their loyalty first and foremost to the Party and the institution.⁵³

Neither is it accurate to assume that Jiang's retention of the CMC chairmanship after the Sixteenth Congress made Hu's succession incomplete. Some even suggested that this would create 'two centres' of power, or worse, it could open a division between the Party and the gun.⁵⁴ However, contrary to the speculations of the time among some China watchers, the arrangement for Hu to take the CMC helm proceeded rather successfully. It was Hu who proposed to the Politburo that Jiang should retain the CMC chair for a period of time beyond the Sixteenth Congress. Hu's unusual initiative was politically astute. It surely reduced personal distance between the two top leaders. Hu's positive support to Jiang was reciprocated by Jiang's willingness to act as a shield to protect Hu when he was making tough decisions. Their mutual understanding was that in this phased-succession process Jiang should hand over his other key posts to Hu before the top military job, and Jiang obliged in good faith. In a sense, Jiang may have followed Deng's suit. In 1987, Deng set the precedent of retaining the CMC chair as a way to tackle uncertainty in the post-succession period after he had given up his civilian positions, and then he handed over the helm to Jiang in 1989.⁵⁵

Accordingly, two years later, Jiang resigned the CMC chairmanship at the Fourth Plenum of the Sixteenth CC in 2004. On the occasion, Hu paid homage to Jiang for his 'outstanding contribution to the Party, the state, and the people', and thanked Jiang for his 'support and assistance' to the new central collective leadership of the Party. On his part, Jiang praised Hu's rich leadership experience and excellent qualifications, calling Hu 'completely qualified for the post'. Jiang observed that 'the top leadership of our Party, state, military has completely and smoothly realised an old-to-new transfer and transition... Now I have accomplished my historical mission and fulfilled my historical duty'.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, critics argue that despite good reasons for the phased succession, Jiang's stay at the CMC helm caused some problems for the fourth generation leadership, for it disrupted the transition from the third to the fourth generation, at least in terms of

military leadership. It is well known that Jiang was the core of the third generation leadership in China. Since Jiang remained as commander in chief of the PLA, it could not be said that the CCP's whole leadership had fully transited to the fourth generation. Thus, with only one exception, no scholars or news media sources in Mainland China used the term 'fourth generation leadership' in China before or after the Sixteenth Congress. Instead Hu's leadership has been often referred to as a new generation of collective leadership.⁵⁷

Moreover, these observers saw that Jiang wielding power while he was not in any civilian positions may have held back China's political progress for a few years. [That is] Such a move was against the trend in China's ongoing institutionalisation of leadership succession. If the Party's office of general secretary has been institutionalised, why has the CMC not been institutionalised? It is anyway the Party that commands the gun. Some have even suggested that the argument that Jiang's stay might have enhanced leadership stability and served the best Party interests might have been deliberately exaggerated.⁵⁸

This type of criticism would surely have had an impact on shaping the next generational succession. There has even been speculation in Beijing that at the imminent Eighteenth Congress, Hu Jintao will stage a *luo tui* (full retirement), retiring at one stroke rather than in a few small steps as in Jiang's model. Such a move would enable his successor to take all three top posts (general secretary, national president and chairman of the CMC) at once. Many believe this would be Hu's great contribution to making the CCP's leadership succession not only orderly and smooth, but complete and authoritative as well – in the interests of Party unity and political stability in China. That would be seen as another milestone in China's political reform and institutionalisation.

6. Conclusion

The upcoming Eighteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will witness the emergence of China's new top leaders. That will mark the formal transition of political power from the 'fourth generation' headed by Hu Jintao to the 'fifth generation' CCP leadership. Most likely Xi Jinping will be the new General Secretary and thus next president of the PRC.

Scholars tend to view the CCP's regular and orderly generational change and leadership succession as the result of institutionalised political process. Over the last three decades, political institutionalisation in China can be measured at two levels: external and internal. External institutionalisation implies an evolution over time and the regular convening of political organisations, according to the national Constitution and laws, by which political organisations gain more stability, regularity, continuity and predictability.

Internal institutionalisation refers to the changes in hierarchy, relations, and operations of political organisations, through which political organisations of the party and the state are to acquire more efficiency, functionality, autonomy, transparency and accountability. In the PRC this has been focused on four major areas: institutionalising political process and leadership succession, Party–government separation, rule of law and intra-party democracy.

Significantly, both the Party and State constitutions in the PRC stipulate fixed terms for national leadership positions – not more than two consecutive five-year terms of office for top Party and State positions, and retirement of top leaders when they turn 68 (the official age limit). Deng Xiaoping introduced a fundamental but so far one-off change at the Fourteenth Congress in 1992 when he withdrew from politics completely. Trends in institutionalising retirement and rejuvenation of the national leadership were accelerated under Jiang Zemin. The Sixteenth Congress in 2002 saw perhaps the most extensive transformation of China's leadership since reform was introduced. The CCP has thus successfully managed leadership transition from one generation to another every ten years.

Intra-party democracy has also been significantly institutionalised, centred on institutionalising intra-party selection and election procedures for Party cadres. In practice, the process is top-down rather than bottom-up, and the final list of candidates is actually selected by the outgoing PSC, but it would be incorrect to assert that there is no intra-party competition for CC seats. Since the Twelfth Congress in 1982, the Party has followed the method of *Cha'e xuanju* (multiple candidates) for election of the CC. For the Seventeenth Congress in 2007, the ballots had 15 per cent more candidates than seats available and Party leaders claim there will be an increasing number of candidates in future elections of the CC. It is intended that this method will also be applied to election of the Politburo in the near future. These mechanisms of intra-party selection and election are important components of the CCP's broader political reform strategy and ongoing institutionalisation, to gradually make China's party-state system more transparent, competitive and representative, without weakening its 'leading role'.

If everything goes according to plan, Xi Jinping will become the Party's next General Secretary to succeed Hu Jintao. Since he was elevated to the Politburo Standing Committee at the Seventeenth Party Congress in 2007 and made executive secretary of the Party's Secretariat, Xi has been regarded as Hu's heir apparent and has been groomed as the next paramount leader. Meanwhile, Li Keqiang has been training to succeed Wen Jiabao as China's next premier. Like Xi, Li was elevated onto the PSC at the last Party Congress in 2007, and he is now executive vice premier.

Seven other current Politburo members are also likely to obtain a seat in the new PSC; they include Li Yuanchao, head of the Party's Organisation Department; Wang Yang, current Party Secretary of Guangdong province; Liu Yandong, a State Councillor and the highest-ranked female politician in China; Wang Qishan, a vice premier; Zhang Dejiang, a vice-premier and Chongqing Party chief; Liu Yunshan, director of the Party's Propaganda Department; and Yu Zhengsheng, currently Party chief in Shanghai. All these top leaders have been well educated, are reform-minded and obtained considerable experience working at the local level as well as in the centre.

Broadly speaking, the institutionalisation of generational change and leadership succession has wrought profound and substantial political change in China. These forms of political institutionalisation result in a political structure in which formal institutions play roles more important than informal networks do. Factionalism has not disappeared, but over time it has become less lethal and more politically conventional. The CCP has thus evolved from a revolutionary party to a governing party. In Weberian terminology, it is a transformation from charismatic authority to legal-rational authority. It is this significant development of political institutionalisation that ushered in Hu's fourth generation of CCP's leadership ten years ago, and now the Party is set to transition power to the next generation of leaders in the same orderly and smooth fashion at the Eighteenth National Congress.

Notes

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