

China's New Party Leadership

Alice Miller

The 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) consolidated the power and policy directions promoted by General Secretary Hu Jintao and strengthened his hand in managing leadership processes and in shaping future decisions about leadership appointments. The Congress also followed precedent in initiating the process of preparing Hu's successor, who is intended to take power in 2012–15. Finally, the Congress continued the effort to institutionalize collective leadership decision-making among the Politburo oligarchy.

The Party's 17th Congress met in Beijing on 15–21 October. As anticipated, the congress heard and endorsed a long report on the work of the outgoing 16th Central Committee delivered by Hu Jintao on the 15 October. As every congress has done since 1982, the 17th endorsed several amendments to the Party constitution. The most significant of these was the incorporation into the Party constitution's preamble of the "scientific development concept"—the notion fostered by the Hu Jintao leadership since 2003 that development policymaking must encompass not only pursuit of high-speed economic growth but also take due account of the social, environmental, and other consequences of growth.

On its final day, the congress elected a new 204-member Central Committee. The newly elected 17th Central Committee met on 22 October—the day after the Party congress closed—to re-appoint Hu Jintao as general secretary and to appoint the membership of the Party's top bodies, including the Politburo and its Standing Committee (the top decision-making bodies), the Secretariat (which coordinates implementation of Politburo decisions), and the Party's Central Military Commission (CMC).

Leadership Turnover

Overall, the scale of turnover in the Party's top leadership bodies was more limited than at the 2002 16th CCP Congress. That congress had seen a sweeping turnover of leadership generations, and so the scale of leadership changes was dramatic. This time, there were fewer retirements and fewer new additions to the top leadership.

- At the 2002 16th Congress, six out of seven members of the outgoing Politburo Standing Committee retired; at the 17th Congress, four out of nine members of the outgoing Politburo Standing Committee retired.

- At the 2002 Party congress, eight members were added to the Politburo Standing Committee, all of whom were promoted from among the outgoing Politburo's regular members. At the 2007 Party congress, four new members were appointed, two of whom—Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang—had not served previously on the larger Politburo.
- Among the 25 members of the Politburo appointed in 2002, 15 were new; only 9 of 25 members of the Politburo appointed at the 17th Congress are new.
- In 2002, seven out of eight members of the Party Secretariat were new; in 2007, four of six members of the new Secretariat are new to that body.

As the 17th Party Congress convened, the outgoing Politburo was already down two members—Standing Committee member Huang Ju, who died in June 2007, and regular member Chen Liangyu, the Party chief in Shanghai who was suspended on charges of corruption and ultimately dismissed in July 2007. At the congress, seven more Politburo members retired, as indicated in table 1. The age of all seven was 68 or older, repeating the pattern set at the 2002 16th Party Congress and so confirming the expected age of retirement from the Politburo at 68 or older. Three of the seven retirees were Politburo Standing Committee members.

Table 1
The 16th Central Committee Politburo

<i>Standing Committee (listed by rank order)</i>	
HU JINTAO 胡锦涛 (65)	PRC president; chairman, CCP & PRC Central Military Commissions
WU BANGGUO 吴邦国 (66)	Chairman, National People's Congress
WEN JIABAO 温家宝 (65)	State Council premier
JIA QINGLIN 贾庆林 (67)	Chairman, CPPCC
*ZENG QINGHONG 曾庆红 (68)	Secretariat; PRC vice president; president, Central Party School
[HUANG JU 黄菊] (69)	Executive vice premier (deceased June 2007)
*WU GUANZHENG 吴官正 (69)	Secretary, CDIC
LI CHANGCHUN 李长春 (63)	Supervises the ideology-propaganda system
*LUO GAN 罗幹 (72)	Supervises security work
<i>Regular Members (listed by stroke order)</i>	
WANG LEQUAN 王乐泉 (63)	Secretary, Xinjiang UAR CPC
WANG ZHAOGUO 王兆国 (66)	Executive vice chairman, NPC SC; president, ACFTU
HUI LIANGYU 回良玉 (63)	Vice premier
LIU QI 刘淇 (65)	Secretary, Beijing CPC
LIU YUNSHAN 刘云山 (60)	Secretariat; director; CPC Propaganda Department
*WU YI 吴仪 (69)	Vice premier
*ZHANG LICHANG 张立昌 (68)	(Replaced as secretary, Tianjin CPC March 2007)
ZHANG DEJIANG 张德江 (61)	Secretary, Guangdong CPC
[CHEN LIANGYU 陈良宇] (61)	Secretary, Shanghai CPC ("Suspended" Sept 2006; expelled July 2007)
ZHOU YONGKANG 周永康 (65)	Secretariat; minister of public security; state councilor
YU ZHENGSHEG 俞正声 (62)	Secretary, Hubei CPC

(continues)

Table 1 (*continued*)

<i>Regular Members (listed by stroke order)</i>	
HE GUOQIANG 贺国强 (64)	Secretariat; director, CPC Organization Department
GUO BOXIONG 郭伯雄 (65)	Vice chairman, CMC
*CAO GANGCHUAN 曹刚川 (72)	Vice chairman, CMC; minister of national defense; state councilor
*ZENG PEIYAN 曾培炎 (69)	Vice premier
<i>Alternate Member</i>	
WANG GANG 王刚 (65)	Secretariat; director, CPC General Office

*Retired as of the 17th CCP Congress. Brackets indicate removal from the Politburo prior to the 17th Party Congress.

The New Politburo

As table 2 indicates, the new Politburo includes two members—Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang—who were elevated directly onto the Standing Committee and seven newcomers to the Politburo’s regular membership. In addition, former Politburo alternate Wang Gang was promoted to full membership.

Table 2

The 17th Central Committee Politburo

<i>Standing Committee (listed by rank order)</i>	
HU JINTAO 胡锦涛 (65)	PRC president; chairman, CCP & PRC Central Military Commission
WU BANGGUO 吴邦国 (66)	Chairman, National People’s Congress
WEN JIABAO 温家宝 (65)	State Council premier
JIA QINGLIN 贾庆林 (67)	Chairman, CPPCC
LI CHANGCHUN 李长春 (63)	Supervises ideology-propaganda system
*XI JINPING 习近平 (54)	Executive Secretary, Secretariat; president, Central Party School
*LI KEQIANG 李克强 (52)	
**HE GUOQIANG 贺国强 (64)	Chairman, Central Discipline Inspection Commission
**ZHOU YONGKANG 周永康 (65)	State councilor
<i>Regular Members (listed by stroke order)</i>	
WANG GANG 王刚 (65)	
WANG LEQUAN 王乐泉 (63)	Secretary, Xinjiang UAR CP Committee
WANG ZHAOGUO 王兆国 (66)	Exec. vice chairman, NPC SC; president, ACFTU
*WANG QISHAN 王岐山 (59)	
HUI LIANGYU 回良玉 (63)	Vice premier
LIU QI 刘淇 (65)	Secretary, Beijing CP Committee
LIU YUNSHAN 刘云山 (60)	Secretariat; director; CCP Propaganda Department
*LIU YANDONG 刘延东 (62)	
*LI YUANCHAO 李源潮 (57)	Secretariat; director, CCP Organization Department
*WANG YANG 汪洋 (52)	Secretary, Guangdong CP Committee
*ZHANG GAOLI 张高丽 (62)	Secretary, Tianjin CP Committee

(*continues*)

Table 2 (*continued*)

<i>Regular Members (listed by stroke order)</i>	
ZHANG DEJIANG 张德江 (61)	
YU ZHENGSHENG 俞正声 (62)	Secretary, Shanghai CP Committee
* XU CAIHOU 徐才厚 (64)	Vice chairman, CCP CMC
GUO BOXIONG 郭伯雄 (65)	Vice chairman, CPC CMC
*BO XILAI 薄熙来 (58)	Secretary, Chongqing CP Committee

* Newly added to the Politburo.

** Promoted onto the new Standing Committee from the outgoing Politburo.

Taken as a group, the new Politburo in many respects shares the attributes of the outgoing membership. Specifically, the new Politburo's members embody the “post-revolutionary” characteristics sought by Deng Xiaoping in promoting Party leaders since the early 1980s—that they be “younger, better educated, and more competent” and so suited to the progress of China's modernizing reforms and not to Mao's priority on waging class warfare.

- *Age*: The new Politburo continues the pattern established in the 1990s of electing leaders who on average are in their early 60s. The average age of the new Politburo's members is 62. The average age on appointment of the Politburo elected with Hu Jintao as general secretary at the 16th CCP Congress was 60, and of the Politburo appointed at the 15th Party Congress in 1997—when Jiang Zemin consolidated power as Party leader—was 63. By contrast, the average age of the Politburo membership elected at the 12th Party Congress in 1982, when Deng Xiaoping consolidated power, was 72.
- *Education*: The new Politburo furthers the trend of the 1990s of electing leaders possessing university degrees. Among the new Politburo's 25 members, 23 have university degrees. Among the group elected to the Politburo in 2002, 22 had university degrees, while the 24 members of the Politburo elected in 1997 with Jiang Zemin included 17 degree-holders. By contrast, no one in the 1982 Politburo had a university degree.
- *Regional origins*: The new Politburo membership shows a rough balance between leaders who hail from the coastal provinces—the backbone of economic reform—and those in the interior. Ten leaders come from the coastal provinces, 15 from the central provinces, and none from the western provinces. The 2002 Politburo leadership showed a similar balance, with 11 hailing from the coastal provinces and the rest from the interior.
- *Military experience*: As has been the case since the 1990s, the new Politburo leadership continues to be strongly civilian. Among the 25 members of the new Politburo, 22 have no military experience at all, either through service in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) or through work in the military bureaucracies. The three exceptions include two professional military men concurrently serving in high military posts and, significantly, Xi Jinping.

There are also some new elements among the attributes of the new Politburo's membership. For one thing, 12 among the 25 members joined the CCP during the

Cultural Revolution decade (1966–1976) and another 3 joined in its aftermath. The remainder joined in the early '60s, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. The group elected in 2002 with Hu Jintao as general secretary had predominantly become Party members in the decade preceding the Cultural Revolution. Those who joined the CCP during and after the Cultural Revolution decade undoubtedly share the judgment of those who, like Hu Jintao, joined the Party before it with respect to the disastrous consequences of Mao's "revolutionary" movement. But their experiences at the very beginning of their Party careers are also likely to have been different from those of their older colleagues and may lead them to alternative perspectives and preferences in current politics.

Second, the new Politburo leadership for the first time includes a smaller proportion of "technocratic" leaders—those with university degrees in engineering or the hard sciences. The 1997 Politburo counted 16 of 17 degree-holders in those fields, including 14 engineers. The 2002 Politburo counted 17 engineers and one geologist among its 22 degree-holders. Among the 23 degree-holders on the new Politburo, only 11 are engineers and two are in the hard sciences or mathematics. The remaining 10 degree-holders include four economists, one political scientist, and three in the humanities.

Finally, the new Politburo for the first time counts several holders of advanced degree among its number. Three members—Xi Jinping, Li Yuanchao, and Liu Yandong have law degrees, Li Keqiang has a doctorate in economics, and two members have master's degrees.

In summary, the new Politburo leadership extends trends evident in leadership attributes over the past two decades. It is the best-educated leadership in PRC history, less thoroughly technocratic, and still starkly civilian in experience.

Military Representation

As was the case with the Politburo leaderships appointed in 1997 and 2002, the new Politburo includes only two professional military leaders—Guo Boxiong, who was reappointed from the 16th Central Committee Politburo, and Xu Caihou, who was promoted from the outgoing Secretariat to replace the retiring defense minister Cao Gangchuan. Both Guo and Xu were reappointed as vice chairmen of the Party's new Central Military Commission (CMC).

The 17th Central Committee's First Plenum did not appoint a replacement for Xu Caihou on the Party Secretariat. The implications of this omission are not clear. Beginning from the time when the Politburo and Secretariat began their current configuration—in 1956—the historical record of military representation on the Party Secretariat has been ambiguous. No PLA leader sat on the Secretariat from 1956 to 1966 and from 1982 until 1989. Yang Baibing served on the Secretariat from 1989 (in the immediate wake of the Tiananmen crisis) until 1992, but no PLA representative sat on the body from 1992 to 1997. Zhang Wannian served from 1997 to 2002, and Xu Caihou

served from 2002 to 2007. The tally shows 22 years without a PLA representative on the Secretariat and 13 years with one.

From an institutional perspective, having a PLA representative on the Secretariat is anomalous. The Secretariat is charged with supervision and coordination of leadership decisions throughout the Party and other hierarchies, and it accomplishes this through the leading small groups that coordinate implementation in the major policy sectors. The leading small groups are institutionally subordinate to the Secretariat, but they are presided over by PBSC leaders having overall responsibility for the major policy sectors. For example, Li Changchun presided over the Party's ideology-propaganda work and chaired the Ideology-Propaganda Leading Small Group from 2002 until 2007 and presumably continues to do so in the wake of the 17th Party Congress.¹ Similarly, Premier Wen Jiabao has presided over the Finance and Economy Leading Small Group. There is, however, no leading small group for military affairs; the Party CMC, which is constitutionally charged with running the Party apparatus in the PLA, serves in that role. From that perspective, the role of a PLA representative serving on the Secretariat is not clear.

The other anomaly in military appointments in the wake of the 17th Party Congress was the reappointment of Li Guanglie as merely a member of the new Party CMC, rather than his being appointed its vice chairman. Li was replaced as PLA chief of staff in September, a move suggesting that he is slated to become Cao Gangchuan's replacement as defense minister at the 11th National People's Congress (NPC) in March 2008, a post that has in the past merited simultaneous appointment as CMC vice chairman. At the same time, Li will reach 68 in 2008, the age of mandatory retirement for generals serving on the CMC at member level. There are no mandatory retirement provisions for generals serving as CMC vice chairman. It is not clear how this anomalous arrangement will be clarified.

However the Li Guanglie situation plays out, the pattern of military representation on the Party Politburo and Secretariat underscores the role of Hu Jintao as the link between the PLA and Party leadership. In some sense, perhaps, this enhances his power in the Party leadership, and it also may say something important, if ambiguous, about PLA confidence in him and his authority in the army.

Preparing for Succession to Hu Jintao

The elevation of Xi Jinping directly onto the Politburo Standing Committee without prior service on the Politburo and the concurrent appointments he has been given confirm that the Party leadership is using the precedent of Hu Jintao's preparation to succeed Jiang Zemin as the pathway for Xi's succession to Hu himself, probably in 2012–15. Hu's preparation progressed over a decade, beginning in 1992, when he was elevated onto the Politburo Standing Committee without previously serving in the Politburo. Hu was given concurrent appointments as executive secretary of the Secretariat and as president of the Central Party School—appointments that allowed him to build up relationships

throughout the CCP apparatus. In 1998, he was appointed vice president of the PRC, a post that gave him international visibility and the opportunity to greet visiting foreign heads of state and to travel on PRC state business. In 1999, Hu was appointed vice chairman of the CMC. This array of appointments placed Hu directly behind Jiang Zemin at the top of China's Party, state, and military hierarchies. They also gave him ten years' experience running the Party apparatus and five years' experience as vice president and CMC vice chairman before succeeding Jiang in the top state and military posts.

Xi's appointment as the sixth-ranking member of the Politburo Standing Committee—first among the four newcomers to that body—and his concurrent appointments as executive secretary of the Secretariat and, in December, as president of the Central Party School, indicates that he is being prepared to succeed Hu using the same procedures that prepared Hu himself, though truncated to a five-year rather than a ten-year process. On this basis, Xi will be appointed PRC vice president at the upcoming 11th NPC in March 2008 and vice chairman of the Party and state CMCs in 2009–2010. If all goes well in this preparation, Xi would succeed Hu as Party general secretary at the 18th CCP Congress in 2012, as PRC president at the 12th NPC in 2013, and as chairman of the Party and state CMCs in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

A number of factors likely favored Xi's selection as Hu's prospective successor. He is the son of Xi Zhongxun, a prominent veteran communist revolutionary and longtime supporter of Deng Xiaoping, and so a "princeling"—a person of reliable communist bloodlines.² His education combines a degree in chemical engineering from China's top engineering school, Qinghua University, with postgraduate study in Marxist theory and a law degree. He has extensive provincial experience, having risen through the ranks to the top of Fujian's Party and government hierarchy over the years 1985–2002, followed by five years' experience as governor and then Party secretary of Zhejiang and a brief six months' tenure as Party chief of Shanghai. By all accounts, he has a clean record without blemish of corruption in his years in the provinces. He was 54 on appointment to the Politburo Standing Committee at the 17th Party Congress, and so would be 59 upon succession to Hu Jintao as Party general secretary in 2012 and eligible for two five-year terms in that post before retiring. He has important military experience, having served, according to his official biography, three years as "an active duty officer" in the CMC General Office, giving him firsthand acquaintance with the top-level processes of Party-military relations. He is a protégé of neither the so-called Shanghai Gang that predominated during Jiang Zemin's tenure as Party leader nor of Hu Jintao, thus satisfying a critical element in oligarchic politics—that the reigning paramount leader not dictate his own successor. Finally, he has a glamorous wife—the folksinger Peng Liyuan.

Also promoted to the Politburo Standing Committee was Li Keqiang, a crony of Hu Jintao's who was widely speculated in foreign media to have been Hu's choice as successor. It is possible that Li is intended as back-up successor should Xi Jinping fail, physically or politically. It is also clear, however, that Li is being prepared to succeed Wen Jiabao as PRC premier, most likely at the 12th NPC in 2013. This is the implication of a 17 December report in the Hong Kong communist newspaper *Wen Wei Po* report

that highlighted Li's role "at the helm" of pending reform of the State Council at the upcoming 11th NPC in March 2008.

Hu's Power and Authority

Hu Jintao has emerged from the 17th CCP Congress with his hand strengthened in leadership politics for several reasons. First, as has been widely observed, the "Shanghai Gang" long associated with former top leader Jiang Zemin has been significantly diminished by the leadership changes at the congress. Foremost among these is the retirement of Zeng Qinghong, Jiang's closest crony in the leadership, from the Politburo Standing Committee. The removal of Shanghai Party chief Chen Liangyu before the congress also contributed to the decline of the "Shanghai Gang," as did the death of Politburo Standing Committee member Huang Ju in June 2007. Most of the purported adherents of the Jiang group who remain in the current leadership, such as Politburo Standing Committee member Jia Qinglin and Politburo member Liu Qi, are weak figures and likely cannot mount much opposition to Hu's power.

Second, and complementing the decline of the "Shanghai Gang," has been Hu's ability to promote his own allies onto the Politburo. These include Li Keqiang on the Standing Committee, as well as Organization Department director Li Yuanchao, Guangdong Party chief Wang Yang, and former United Front Work Department director Liu Yandong on the larger Politburo.

Third, Hu has managed to install his own man, his personal staff chief Ling Jihua, as director of the Party General Office. The General Office plays key roles in managing the logistics and support work for the entire Politburo leadership, including communications and paper flows, office and housing assignments, and travel and security arrangements. Control over this body is critical to the power of the Party general secretary to steer the leadership in directions to his liking. Jiang Zemin placed his own man in this key post with the accession as director of his office chief, Zeng Qinghong, in 1993, followed by the outgoing director Wang Gang in 1999.

Finally, Hu has established a surer hold over the Party nomenklatura with the appointment of his ally Li Yuanchao as Organization Department director immediately after the 17th Party Congress. If the Party's appointment process works as it has in the past, a trio composed of the general secretary, the executive secretary of the Secretariat, and the director of the Organization Department will manage the process in nominating personnel changes sanctioned by the Politburo and its Standing Committee. During his first term as general secretary, the process was thus managed by Hu, Zeng Qinghong, and former Organization Department chief He Guoqiang—a lineup that Hu likely could not unilaterally dominate. The current lineup would bring Hu together with Xi Jinping and Hu's ally Li Yuanchao. In this trio, Xi as presumptive successor has an incentive to work with Hu, and so the current trio works to Hu's advantage.

While Hu appears to have consolidated power thanks to the 17th Party Congress and gained a stronger hand in leadership decision making in key areas, it is also notable that his authority has not been comparably enhanced. One of the remarkable developments of Hu's first term as the Party's top leader was the denial to Hu of the trappings of paramount leadership previously accorded to Deng Xiaoping and, after Deng, Jiang Zemin. While Jiang was routinely referred to in PRC media as "the core" of the "15th Central Committee leadership collective," Hu Jintao after 2002 was not accorded such stature. Instead, he was referred to consistently by an alternative formulation that suggested that Hu has been simply *primus inter pares* in the Politburo—"the 16th Central Committee leadership collective with comrade Hu Jintao as general secretary." In addition, throughout Hu's first term as the Party's top leader, none of the ideological departures of the era of Hu's leadership—people-centered governance, the effort to develop a "new socialist countryside," building a "socialist harmonious society," and promoting a "scientific development concept" with respect to economic growth—has been hailed as the contribution of Hu's individual genius or as his sole intellectual property. Instead, they have been advertised as products of the collective leadership as a whole.

Before the Party congress, it might have been plausibly argued that the absence of these trappings of paramount power were denied Hu because he had not yet consolidated sufficient power as the Party's top leader to merit them. By that line of interpretation, Hu might have been expected to gain the trappings of predominant power once he consolidated his hold over the Party leadership. Alternatively, the formulations according Hu status only as first among equals in the leadership and the attribution of theoretical advances to the broader collective leadership rather than Hu alone might have been interpreted as comporting with a newly promoted political dynamic—or at least an image—of collective leadership.

The persistence of the trappings of collective leadership rather than those of Hu's dominant power in the wake of the 17th Party Congress, even while Hu strengthened his actual power in the leadership at the congress, underscores that the latter interpretation is correct. If indeed Hu has backed an effort to project a public image of collective leadership processes at the top of the Party from the beginning of his term as general secretary, it provides further grist for the argument that Chinese leadership politics has undergone a process of increasing institutionalization. This larger argument about Chinese leadership dynamics will be assessed in the next issue of the *China Leadership Monitor*.

Notes

¹ With the sole exception of a listing in a Hong Kong communist newspaper of the members of the Taiwan Affairs Leading Small Group after 2002, PRC media have not publicized the leaders and membership of any of the Party's leading small group, including the roles of Li Changchun and Wen Jiabao. See Alice Miller, "Party Politburo Processes Under Hu Jintao," *China Leadership Monitor* 11 (Summer 2004), 11–12.

² For what it's worth, I resist referring to Xi as a member of a "princeling faction," as often asserted in the Hong Kong China-watching press, because I detect no evidence in support of the conclusion that "princelings" act in concert on the basis of ideology of self-interest as a faction.