

## Commemorating Deng to Press Party Reform

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The Hu Jintao leadership took advantage of the recent centenary of Deng Xiaoping's birth to lend authority to controversial proposals for reform of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that it seeks to ratify at the forthcoming Fourth Plenum of the party Central Committee. Preparations for the party plenum have stimulated more than the usual volume of rumors among Chinese of intensified leadership conflict, accompanied by a wave of related speculations in the Hong Kong and Western press. But available evidence from China's media provides little support for these speculations. Instead, the central leadership has sustained the public façade of unanimity and collective discipline that it has managed over the past several years, despite the disputes and debates over personnel and policy that may divide its members.

On July 23, 2004, a party Politburo meeting scheduled the 16th Central Committee's Fourth Plenum to meet in September. More recently, a Politburo meeting on September 7 refined that schedule, fixing the dates for the plenum as September 16–19. The July Politburo meeting stipulated that the plenum would review the program to reassert macroeconomic control, launched earlier this year, and would address major questions of “improving the party's governing capacity.” This phrase encapsulates proposals for decentralizing party decision-making procedures, institutionalizing party processes, enhancing the party's responsiveness and accountability, and rooting out corruption in the party ranks. All these reforms were authorized at the 16th Party Congress in fall 2002, and all have since become strongly identified with party General Secretary and People's Republic of China (PRC) President Hu Jintao. The September 7 Politburo meeting confirmed the party reform part of the plenum agenda, endorsing a draft resolution on these issues to be addressed by the plenum.

The plenum has been widely expected to take up other questions, including those concerning leadership appointments. The most important of these may be the retirement of Jiang Zemin from his remaining leadership posts as chairman of the CCP and PRC Central Military Commissions (CMC). Jiang retained these CMC positions—which he has held since Deng Xiaoping's retirement from them in 1989 and 1990—during the 2002–3 leadership turnover, when Jiang ceded his top party and state posts to Hu Jintao. There is no formal requirement that Jiang retire from the CMC at this juncture. But were he to stay in these top military positions, he would exceed the tenure of Deng Xiaoping himself in those posts beyond Deng's retirement from his other party and state leadership posts in 1987–88, violating an important precedent that was used in 2002 to justify Jiang's staying on in the CMC posts.

All these questions have without doubt stirred controversy within the party leadership. (On the controversy over economic policy, see the articles in this issue of *CLM* by Barry Naughton and Cheng Li.) What impresses, however, is how well the party leadership under Hu Jintao has galvanized momentum behind its party reform agenda going into the plenum and how little controversy over issues such as Jiang's future has spilled out into public view.

## Deng Centenary

The centerpiece of the campaign to prepare for the Fourth Plenum's party reform agenda came in the form of celebrations of the August 22, 2004, centenary of Deng Xiaoping's birth. Commemorations of the event were voluminous and various. They included:

- A “grand meeting” in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on the morning of August 22 that most of the Politburo and Jiang Zemin attended and that Hu Jintao addressed in a long commemorative speech;
- An editorial in the party newspaper *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao*) the same day;
- A formal ceremony to unveil a statue of Deng in his hometown in the southwestern province of Sichuan on August 13, attended by Hu Jintao;
- A major photographic and documentary exhibition in Beijing that opened on August 10 and that was visited successively by Hu, Jiang, and most of the Politburo on the 18th and 19th;
- Publication of a massive, two-volume chronicle of Deng's day-to-day political activities in the period 1975–97, as well as media publication of several briefer biographic surveys of Deng's life and accomplishments;
- Reminiscences by retired leadership elders, including articles in the party's policy journal *Seeking Truth* (*Qiushi*) by former premier and National People's Congress (NPC) chairman Li Peng and by former Politburo Standing Committee member Li Lanqing, and in *People's Daily* on August 17 by former People's Liberation Army (PLA) leader and Politburo Standing Committee member Liu Huaqing;
- Several reminiscences by other leaders and commentators about Deng's impact on PRC foreign policy—including articles on his contributions to normalizing U.S.-China relations in 1978 and Sino-Soviet relations in the 1980s—and on other important policy areas, including military affairs and economic development;
- Recollections of Deng's personal life by his children in the Hong Kong communist newspaper *Ta kung pao* on August 9 and in *People's Daily* on the 23rd;
- Convocation on August 21 of a seminar on Deng's life and thought—“Deng Xiaoping Theory”—sponsored by the party Propaganda Department, the Central Party School, and other institutions and addressed by Li Changchun, the Politburo Standing Committee member in charge of party ideology; and
- Reminiscences by the *People's Daily* editorial board on Deng's guidance of the newspaper, published in the paper on August 18.

As voluminous as these observances were, they replicated in general format and variety the celebration of the December 26, 1993, centenary of Mao Zedong's birth. Festivities on that occasion included a rally in the Great Hall of the People addressed by then-party general secretary and PRC president Jiang Zemin and attended by the Politburo; an editorial in *People's Daily*; the unveiling of a statue of Mao in his Hunan hometown of Shaoshan, attended by Jiang Zemin; reminiscences by elder leaders; and a broad array of exhibitions, seminars, and publications.

The overall treatment of Deng Xiaoping's life and ideas during the centenary observances did not depart dramatically from their presentation in his official obituary or in Jiang Zemin's long eulogy following Deng's death in 1997. In Hu's speech at the August 22 "grand meeting" in the Great Hall of the People—and uniformly throughout the centenary observances—Deng was referred to as "a great Marxist, a great proletarian revolutionary, a statesman, and military strategist and diplomat, a long tested communist fighter, the chief architect of China's socialist reforms, opening up, and modernization, and the creator of Deng Xiaoping Theory." In Jiang's 1997 eulogy, Deng was described in virtually identical terms as "a great Marxist, a great proletarian revolutionary, a statesman, and military strategist and diplomat, a long tested communist fighter, the chief architect of China's socialist reforms, opening up, and modernization, and the founder of socialism with Chinese characteristics."

While not departing in theme and emphasis from previous accounts, the reviews of Deng's career during the centenary observances in many instances offered greater detail than had been previously available about Deng's role at sensitive moments in PRC politics and policy. The reminiscences on his contributions to foreign policy, for example, elucidate Deng's long-presumed role in engineering the normalization of PRC-Japanese relations in 1978 and of Sino-Soviet relations in the 1980s, and they confirm accounts of his key role in normalizing U.S.-PRC relations in 1978. Li Peng's reminiscence in *Seeking Truth* provides an unusually explicit, though terse, acknowledgment of Deng's role in nominating then-Shanghai party secretary Jiang Zemin to replace Zhao Ziyang as party general secretary in June 1989. To the extent we can judge by Xinhua's August 15 description, the two-volume *Chronicle of Deng Xiaoping's Life (1975–1997)* promises a level of detail about Deng's political activities that surpasses what has been available previously in authoritative PRC sources.

Overall, the centenary observances served to bestow the broad authority of Deng Xiaoping on the present leadership and its policies in general ways. The clearest effort to press a specific political agenda beyond these broad purposes came in Hu Jintao's long speech on August 22, when, in reciting the party's priorities in several major policy areas, he represented "the great new project of party-building" as in step with Deng's ideas and policies. Reciting themes that have become staples in the ongoing push to "improve the party's governing capacity" heading into the upcoming Fourth Plenum, Hu called on the party to "resolve the two historic issues of improving the party's leadership standard and its governing standard" and "enhance its capacity to resist corruption and degeneration and withstand dangers." "With building the party's capacity to govern as the focus," Hu went on, the party must strive to improve "the concept, basis, strategy, structure, mode,

resources, and environment of party governance” and so improve the party’s “ideology, organization, work style, and system.” The day after Hu’s speech was delivered, on August 23, Li Zhongjie—formerly a prominent commentator on party issues at the Central Party School while Hu was the school’s president and now a deputy director of the Party Literature Research Office—and Qin Xuan—director of the Marxism Academy at People’s University—underscored the relevance of these new formulations for the upcoming Fourth Plenum in the Hong Kong communist newspapers *Wen wei po* and *Ta kung pao*, respectively.

## Party Reform Agenda

The effort by the Hu-Wen leadership to “improve the party’s governing capacity” was authorized by the 16th Party Congress in 2002. The political report to the congress delivered by outgoing party General Secretary Jiang Zemin outlined steps to “improve the party’s style of leadership and governance,” including greater transparency in decision making, changes in party procedure to reinforce collective leadership and “democratic” processes, greater accountability to law and to the governed, and curbs on corruption. Since the congress, Hu Jintao has been out in front in pressing these reforms, many of which trace their origins to the aborted political reform agenda of the 1987 13th Party Congress under Zhao Ziyang’s leadership. Hu, for example, has emphasized “people-centered” governance, stressed decision-making transparency in authorizing publicity on meetings of the Politburo, and stressed accountability in formally reporting on the work of the Politburo to the 16th Central Committee’s Third Plenum in October 2003.

The new steps in party reform that the Hu leadership seeks to ratify at the Fourth Plenum emerged into public view early this summer as part of an effort to depict a concerted leadership consensus behind them. On June 9, 2004, the Hong Kong communist newspaper *Wen wei po* reported that the Fourth Plenum would focus on “how the party should govern the party” as a “breakthrough” in launching larger political reform. The report cited comments by the author of a provocative June 2003 *Seeking Truth* article advocating party “democratization” that justified the party reforms to be presented to the Fourth Plenum as mandated in three key ways: by “the tide of political democratization sweeping the world,” by the lessons to be drawn from the failure of ruling political parties in other countries—in the Soviet Union and Mexico, for example—and by the economic and social changes under way in China. On June 18, *Wen wei po* reported that a drafting team had begun work on plenum documents and added that the plenum’s focus on “improving the pattern of governance” derived from “the new vision of development” called for in the 42-point decision on economic reform adopted at the Third Plenum in October 2003. A Politburo meeting on June 29 focused on issues of party recruitment and the removal of “unqualified” members, and a Politburo study session later the same day examined the topic of “improving the party’s governing capacity.” Signaling a leadership consensus behind placing this topic on the plenum agenda, a *People’s Daily* editorial on the 83rd anniversary of the CCP’s founding (July 1,

2004) focused on the topic of “improving the party’s governing capacity.” Thereafter, during a meeting on July 23, the Politburo formally put the topic on the plenum agenda.

After July 1, PRC and Hong Kong media began spelling out the plenum’s party reform agenda in greater detail. Specifically, the reform proposals would include:

- “*Permanent tenure*” for party congresses. According to this reform, party congresses at various levels would meet in annual session—or, when necessary, in ad hoc session—ending their present practice of meeting only once every five years. These congress sessions would review the work of their subordinate decision-making bodies and extend or deny them a vote of confidence, making the party congresses at each level “the party’s supreme organs of power.” The proposal, which goes back to 1988 during Zhao Ziyang’s tenure as top party leader, has been tested for several years at lower levels; according to press accounts, it will first be implemented at county levels and later extended to higher levels, presumably including the national level itself. (Xinhua News Agency, July 1; *Wen wei po*, July 13)
- *Disciplinary mechanisms and “purifying” the party ranks*. This reform would enhance the autonomy of and give teeth to the party’s discipline inspection commissions—the bodies at various levels formally charged with rooting out party corruption and punishing violations of party regulations. The reform proposal would make the discipline inspection commission at a particular level subordinate to the discipline inspection body the next level up the hierarchy, rather than to the leading party group and party committee at its own level. With their autonomy enhanced through “direct supervision,” party discipline organs will be better equipped to root out abuses of power by leaders and dismantle the networks of corruption that undergird the “family kingdoms” of “power-grabbing” top leaders. (*Ta kung pao*, July 14; *Wen wei po*, August 26)
- *Party voting procedures*. This reform aims at “returning to party organizations powers that are concentrated in the party committee leadership” and at “dividing and balancing the powers of the ‘number one man.’” The new, broadened voting procedures would apply to processes of appointing and promoting party officials and would reinforce collective decision making and undermine faction-building. (*Wen wei po*, August 11)

## Jiang Zemin and the CMC

That the Fourth Plenum would authorize changes in the leadership was made clear on June 21, 2004, when *Wen wei po* reported that three new members would be added to the party CMC. The three new members—Navy Commander Zhang Dingfa, Air Force Commander Qiao Qingchen, and Second Artillery Corps (China’s strategic forces) Commander Jing Zhiyuan—are already attending CMC meetings as nonvoting members. Their promotion to the CMC, the newspaper stated, both reflects the enhanced importance these services have in modern warfare and constitutes part of “a personnel reshuffle at the central level.”

PRC media have offered no clear indications that this pending reshuffle would also involve the retirement of Jiang Zemin from the CMC and the promotion of Hu Jintao to CMC chairman, or the addition of Politburo Standing Committee member and PRC Vice President Zeng Qinghong to the CMC. Media attention to Jiang continues to follow patterns evident since Jiang retired as top party and state leader in favor of Hu during the 2002–3 transition. Specifically:

- Contrary to some accounts of leadership power struggles in Hong Kong and Western media that suggest that Jiang’s effort to assert himself politically is indicated by his increased visibility, Jiang’s public appearance profile has not changed. Over the five months since March 2004, Jiang’s appearance pattern conforms to the relatively reduced profile he has maintained since his partial retirement at the party and people’s congresses in 2002–3. As he had previously, Jiang has continued to meet occasional prominent international leaders—since April 1, he has met six, including Vice President Richard Cheney, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, U.S. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, and Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. He has attended three military occasions—twice accompanied by Hu Jintao, who, following military protocol, was listed after Jiang. As in 2003, he participated in the annual leadership tree-planting activities in April, and he attended the Deng centenary celebration in August; on all of those occasions, he was listed after Hu, following party-state protocol.
- Also contrary to accounts in some Hong Kong and Western media, media publicity on decade-old inscriptions by Jiang for exemplary military units—such as on July 12, concerning an inscription Jiang wrote in 1991 for a Shenyang Military Region unit, and on September 4, concerning a 1990 inscription to a logistics unit—is not new. PRC media have been publicizing such Jiang inscriptions—usually of early 1990s vintage—over the past several years.
- There has been no perceptible effort in the media to salute Jiang’s leadership—either to signal his imminent departure or to tout his continued indispensability—beyond the routine attention given his overall leadership in the 1990s or given the continuing value of his “expositions” on military affairs, over which he currently presides.
- An early August meeting of Zeng Qinghong and several other leaders in Beidaihe has also been adduced in some Hong Kong and Western media as evidence that Jiang and his presumed cronies in the present leadership are asserting themselves against the Hu Jintao–Wen Jiabao leadership. The meeting, according to this view, marks a resumption by Jiang’s “Shanghai Gang” of the party leadership’s long tradition of late-summer meetings at the seaside resort, after the tradition was abandoned in 2003 as part of Hu’s “people-centered” political reforms. This interpretation is not compelling. On June 23, *Wen wei po* specifically rebutted “rumors” that the central leadership would resume summer meetings at Beidaihe as “not true.” With respect to the early August meeting itself, as accounts in *Renmin ribao* and other PRC media make plain, Zeng hosted the meeting to extend thanks “on behalf of the Central Committee and State Council” to several scientists, technicians, and other intellectuals who have rendered meritorious service to China’s modernization. This meeting, moreover, is only the latest in what has been an annual occasion for several years. In August 2003, concurrent with media attention to the Hu leadership’s

decision to abandon the tradition of Beidaihe meetings, the media reported Zeng hosting a comparable reception for medical personnel and scientists involved in the work of suppressing the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic in the preceding months. In reporting Zeng's meeting this time, *People's Daily* noted on August 19 that this was the fifth such reception at Beidaihe for meritorious intellectuals since 1998. Finally, the list of other leaders accompanying Zeng appears more convincingly to reflect their specific policy portfolio responsibilities relevant to the occasion than it does a representative assembly of Jiang's Shanghai clique.

The most significant reminder that Jiang might be expected to retire from the CMC was the Deng centenary observances' frequent reference to Deng Xiaoping's exemplary retirement from his last posts to allow the younger generation of leaders to govern without complication and interference. As in other respects, statements during the centenary observances recalling Deng's retirement first from the Politburo in 1987 and then from his CMC posts in 1989 and 1990 replicated the formulations used in Deng's obituary and Jiang Zemin's eulogy in February 1997. But the occasion of the centenary itself, on the eve of the Fourth Plenum, could not have been timelier in serving to remind Jiang and the broader leadership of the precedent Deng provided with respect to Jiang's own retirement.