

Power, Money, and Sex: The PLA and the Educational Campaign to Maintain the Advanced Nature of the Party

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In the course of consolidating his leadership, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Hu Jintao has moved to put his personal stamp on the content of political work in the party and in the army. The main theme calls for maintaining the “advanced nature” of all party members, particularly those in the military. As it is for their civilian counterparts, whose advanced nature is always “related to the party’s historic tasks for different periods,” the advanced nature of military party members is closely related to the army’s historic tasks at any given moment. Currently, those tasks include earnestly implementing “Jiang Zemin’s thoughts on national defense and army construction,” speeding up “military reform with Chinese characteristics,” preparing for “military struggle,” shouldering “the historic mission,” “fighting to win,” “resisting degeneration,” and improving “the fighting capability of the army in the information era.” This article explores each of these themes, providing textual exegesis of their probable meanings and assessing their implications for civil-military relations.¹

Introduction

In the course of consolidating his leadership, Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Hu Jintao has moved to put his personal stamp on the content of political work in the party and in the army. The main theme calls for maintaining the “advanced nature” of all party members, particularly those in the military. As it is for their civilian counterparts, whose advanced nature is always “related to the party’s historic tasks for different periods,” the advanced nature of military party members is closely related to the army’s historic tasks at any given moment. Currently, these tasks include earnestly implementing “Jiang Zemin’s thoughts on national defense and army construction,” speeding up “military reform with Chinese characteristics,” preparing for “military struggle,” shouldering “the historic mission,” “fighting to win,” “resisting degeneration,” and improving “the fighting capability of the army in the information era.”² The remainder of this article defines these concepts and analyzes their meanings in the context of civil-military relations.

The Advanced Nature Political Educational Campaign and the PLA

The term “advanced nature” is not a new concept within the ideological and political lexicon of the CCP; it has been supported by senior leaders for over a decade. Open sources describe former general secretary Jiang Zemin making reference to the idea as early as 1995, but the concept is likely much older.³ Similarly open sources link Hu Jintao to the concept in late June 1997, when he mentioned it extensively in his speech commemorating the 76th anniversary of the founding of the CCP.⁴ In both cases, the leaders warned that if the CCP did not “transform” itself along with the rest of Chinese society, then it might lose its advanced nature and therefore the mantle of leadership.⁵ In this respect, maintenance of the CCP’s advanced nature is a core requirement of Jiang Zemin’s theory of the “three represents,” which in part seeks to co-opt new social elites—such as entrepreneurs—into the party in order to improve governance while retaining the monopoly of single-party rule. That concept was enshrined as a central goal in the documents of the 16th Party Congress in 2002, and it figured prominently in Hu Jintao’s July 1, 2003, speech to the Central Party School on the 82d anniversary of the founding of the CCP.

In October 2004, the central authorities decided to launch an educational campaign for party cadres on maintaining the advanced nature of the CCP, centered on the draft “Regulation of the Chinese Communist Party for Inner-Party Supervision.”⁶ Following a meeting of the Political Bureau Standing Committee and a meeting of the Central Leading Group for Party-Building Work, Beijing established a central leading group for the campaign on October 1, 2004, headed by Political Bureau member and Organization Department head He Guoqiang. The central authorities also launched 52,000 grassroots party organizations with 1.035 million party members involving 12 provincial and municipal organizations to spread the campaign, as well as seven organizations at the CCP Central Committee and state levels.⁷ The campaign itself was officially launched on January 1, 2005, and was expected to last 18 months, ending in June 2006.⁸ Officials described it as the largest inner-party educational campaign since the initiation of economic opening and reform in the late 1970s.⁹ On January 14, 2005, Hu Jintao presided over a work meeting devoted to the campaign attended by all the members of the Politburo Standing Committee.¹⁰

This educational campaign has also been assiduously implemented within the armed forces. With the approval of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the General Political Department launched the internal military educational campaign on January 14, 2005, issuing three circulars.¹¹ At a People’s Liberation Army (PLA) delegates meeting at the National People’s Congress on March 13, Hu Jintao gave a speech exhorting the military to play a central role in the campaign.¹²

As it is for their civilian counterparts, whose advanced nature is always “related to the party’s historic tasks for different periods,” the advanced nature of military party members is closely related to the army’s historic tasks at any given moment. Indeed, a military political circular succinctly described the relationship between the two efforts:

When promoting the educational campaign on the fighting spirit, party committees and political institutions at all levels should focus on maintaining the advanced nature of party members and should vigorously inspire the enthusiasm of the majority of party members about acting as pioneers and the vanguards in accelerating the revolution with Chinese characteristics in military affairs and in being satisfactorily prepared for military struggles. Party committees and political institutions at all levels should do this to ensure that these two educational campaigns cooperate with each other, accelerate each other and both be effective.¹³

In late April, the military campaign moved into higher gear when the Central Military Commission held a “democratic life” meeting chaired by Hu Jintao to discuss educational activities to “maintain the advanced nature” of party members in the army.¹⁴ The meeting was attended by Guo Boxiong, member of the CCP Central Committee Political Bureau and CMC vice chairman; Cao Gangchuan, member of the CCP Central Committee Political Bureau, CMC vice chairman, state councillor, and defense minister; Xu Caihou, member of the CCP Central Committee Secretariat and CMC vice chairman; and CMC members Liang Guanglie, Li Jinai, Liao Xilong, Chen Bingde, Qiao Qingchen, Zhang Dingfa, and Jing Zhiyuan.

In the spirit of the educational campaign, the participants naturally conducted criticism and self-criticism about the state of the military’s main tasks. All of these efforts were subsumed under the overall goal of “the fulfillment of our military’s historical mission at a new stage in the new century.” In general, the good news appeared to outweigh the bad, reflecting the PLA’s increasing confidence in its modernization effort. Highlighted achievements included a “favorable situation” in army-building, “with advances on all fronts and coordinated development”; enhancements in ideological and political standards; “important results” in strategic planning; advances in preparing for “military struggle”; success in the twin goals of “fighting to win” and “resisting degeneration”; “remarkable” results in reforming the system of organization; and significant progress in pursuing a “revolution in military affairs with Chinese characteristics under informationized conditions.”

Many of these phrases are dialectical code words requiring translation. “Military struggle” (*junshi douzheng*), especially when paired with its dialectical complement “nonmilitary struggle” (*feijunshi douzheng*), is a Maoist revolutionary-era term that has been imbued with new meaning as a Taiwan contingency involving U.S. military intervention becomes viewed as increasingly likely.¹⁵ Similarly, the strange appearance of the goal of “fighting to win” (were they previously fighting to lose, or maybe just draw?) in the past few years emphasizes the desire to move from people’s wars of attrition against invading armies to preemptive, joint, power-projection warfare designed to deter or defeat modern militaries away from China’s borders. Finally, the newest phrase, “revolution in military affairs with Chinese characteristics” (*Zhongguo tese de junshi geming*) and the assessment that it is occurring under “informationized conditions” (*yi xinxihua tiaojian xia*) represents either (1) a sophisticated theoretical doctrinal synthesis of China’s increasingly modern C4ISR infrastructure with its platforms and

personnel or (2) an elaborate post-hoc rationalization of the constraints placed upon the PLA by its legacy equipment (or both, frankly). While the PLA's successes were loudly trumpeted, the participants also highlighted "problems and deficiencies in army-building," including the tendency of some cadres not to possess a "down-to-earth work style"; formalism and bureaucratism in some units; and the lack of overall quality among scientific and technological cadres. Taken together, however, the tone seemed to suggest clearly that efforts were definitely moving in the right direction.

Analysis

The advanced nature campaign within the PLA raises at least two interesting analytical questions:

Does this inner-party campaign reinforce or undermine Hu's civil-military consolidation?

The new phase of the advanced nature campaign within the CCP, launched on January 1, 2005, is likely part of Hu Jintao's efforts to place his personal stamp on the party. While it offers homage to Jiang Zemin's theory of the three represents, it also buttresses core themes of Hu's leadership, which have focused on improving the governance of the party-state system for all strata of society. Since China's army is a party-army, a corresponding advanced nature campaign among military party committees and political commissars was entirely expected; indeed, the absence of a parallel campaign would have been a very significant development. Yet as explored in previous issues of *China Leadership Monitor*, the jockeying between Jiang and Hu has often manifested itself in the arcane language of military political work. From this perspective, the lack of divergence in the language of the party and military campaigns is at least evidence of Hu's control of the political work apparatus within the PLA—and possibly evidence of the solid subordination of the PLA to the Hu-led party in the post-Jiang environment.

What are the possible benefits of the campaign for the army?

While one could posit a zero-sum relationship between political work and military modernization, measured in terms of hours per week devoted to one or the other by officers and the ranks, this is actually a false dichotomy, separating aspects of the PLA that are by definition inseparable and are often mutually reinforcing. The advanced nature campaign confirms the correctness of viewing the two initiatives as mutually beneficial, since PLA discourse points to the clear relationship between the political campaign and the armed forces' modernization goals, as outlined earlier. Moreover, the trumpeting of the successes of modernization and other military-related efforts like the manned space program suggest that the military is actually being held up as an exemplar of an advanced, party-led element of society. This status accrues both ideological and

concrete benefits to the PLA, measured in terms of domestic reputation and allocation of state financial resources, respectively.

Notes

¹ The analysis and opinions in this article do not represent the views of the DGI Center for Intelligence Research and Analysis or any of its wise and generous sponsors.

² “Chinese Military Urged to Maintain Advanced Nature in CPC Educational Campaign,” Xinhua News Agency, April 21, 2005.

³ Jo Fei, “Authority of Post-Deng Leadership Is Being Threatened,” *Ming pao*, May 8, 1995, sec. B, p. 3.

⁴ Wu Hangquan, Wei Chiya, and Chen Yan, “Hu Jintao Speaks to Mark CPC Anniversary,” Xinhua News Agency, June 20, 1997.

⁵ Willy Wo-lap Lam, “CPC Advocates Jiang Theory, Evolves toward Social Democratic Party,” *Ping kuo jih pao*, September 5, 2001.

⁶ “CPC Plans Educational Activities on Keeping Advanced Nature,” Xinhua News Agency, October 21, 2004.

⁷ Yu Mu, “Party Members Do Not Believe in Communism—What Are Hu and Wen to Do?” *Ching chi jih pao*, November 24, 2004, sec. A, p. 37.

⁸ “CPC Launches Education Campaign to Consolidate Ruling Status,” Xinhua News Agency, January 19, 2005.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “CPC Top Leader Calls on CPC Members to Keep Party’s Advanced Nature,” Xinhua News Agency, January 14, 2004, 1.

¹¹ “A Basic Project of Party-Building in the Military under the New Situation,” *Jiefangjun bao*, January 14, 2005, 1; “Raising Awareness to Promote Deepening [Educational Activities]—Second Commentary on the Basic Project of Party-Building in the Military under the New Situation,” *Jiefangjun bao*, January 24, 2005, 1; and “Leading Cadres Take the Lead in Promoting the Deepening of [Educational Activities]—Third Commentary on the Basic Project of Party-Building in the Military under the New Situation,” *Jiefangjun bao*, February 16, 2005, 1.

¹² “Hu Jintao Urges Chinese Military to Perform ‘Historical Mission,’” Xinhua News Agency, March 13, 2005.

¹³ “Fostering Combat Spirit with the Focus on Fulfillment of New Missions,” *Jiefangjun bao*, April 20, 2005, 1.

¹⁴ Cao Zhi and Li Xuanliang, “Central Military Commission Holds Meeting on Democratic Life Concerning Educational Activities to Maintain Communist Party Members’ Advanced Character; Hu Jintao Chairs Meeting; Guo Boxiong, Cao Gangchuan, Xu Caihou, Others Attend Meeting,” Xinhua News Agency, April 21, 2005.

¹⁵ For a traditional discussion of this dichotomy, see “Strategic Policy and Strategic Operational Principles,” in *Science of Strategy*, ed. Gao Rui (Beijing: PLA Academy of Military Sciences, 1987).