

# Preparing For the 18th Party Congress: Procedures and Mechanisms

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By now just about every China observer knows that the Chinese leadership will undergo a major generational change at the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in the fall of 2012. Knowledge of the leadership transition's actual procedures and mechanisms, especially the concrete steps and important variables that may shape its outcomes, is less widespread. A better understanding of the inner workings of the system—the rules (both old and new) of the game of Chinese elite politics—is necessary to arrive at a well-grounded assessment of the upcoming leadership change in China.

This essay describes the Chinese leadership's ongoing preparation for the transition on both the personnel and ideological fronts. It aims to address two specific and crucial questions: According to which steps will the delegates to the congress and the members of the new Central Committee be chosen? Through which channels will the party's ideological platform for the congress be formulated?\*

On November 1, 2011, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) issued a document, “The Communiqué on the Election of Delegates for the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP,” formally launching the preparation process for the leadership transition to take place at the upcoming national congress.<sup>1</sup> At roughly the same time, several province-level party leaderships, beginning with Liaoning Province in mid-October, held regional Party congresses to select top provincial leaders and form new party committees. According to the CCP Organization Department, all local levels (i.e., province, municipality, county, and town) of the party leadership have gone through or will complete major turnovers of their party committees (党委换届) between April 2011 and June 2012, involving 30 million party cadres in China's 31 province-level administrations, 361 cities, 2,811 counties, and 34,171 townships.<sup>2</sup> Presently, the CCP has a total of about 80 million members and 3.89 million grassroots organizations. In the first half of 2012, China's 31 province-level administrations, along with nine central organs in Beijing and special constituencies, will first elect their delegates and then form 40 delegations that will attend the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP (hereafter referred to as the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress) in the fall.

While turnover in personnel is understandably the central focus of the Party congress, the communiqués and resolutions approved at the meeting, especially the formal report delivered by outgoing General Secretary Hu Jintao, also deserve great

attention.<sup>3</sup> These party documents will determine the party's ideological tone, overall political direction, specific socioeconomic policies, and approach to foreign relations for years to come. As part of the preparation, a group of party theoreticians and policy specialists, under the direct supervision of the current Politburo Standing Committee, and especially the Secretariat, has begun to prepare these important documents. This essay will begin with a discussion of the recently announced plan for the composition of delegates to the Party congress. The essay will then analyze election and/or selection mechanisms that the CCP has adopted in the last two decades or so and discuss the effectiveness and limitations of these mechanisms. The third part of the essay focuses on the procedures and mechanisms associated with ideological preparation before the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. The essay will conclude with a discussion of the implications of the ongoing intellectual debates in the country and how challenges on the ideological front may intensify elite competition in 2012.

## Selecting Delegates and Forming Delegations to the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress

“The Communiqué on the Election of Delegates for the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP,” which was approved by the recently held Sixth Plenum of the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee, specified that there would be a total of 2,270 delegates to the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, 57 more than the total number of delegates (2,213) to the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress held in 2007.<sup>4</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress invited an additional 57 party members (primarily retired veteran Communist leaders) as special delegates (特邀代表), which is perhaps comparable to the “superdelegates” of American political party conventions. These Chinese special delegates, according to CCP regulations, have the same rights and privileges (including voting) as regular delegates. In contrast to earlier speculation in Beijing that the CCP leadership might consider abolishing the seats of special delegates, the Communiqué mentioned that there would be special delegates for the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, though their number was not specified.

All regular delegates are supposed to be elected in their constituencies. According to the press release issued by the CCP Organization Department, the process for selecting these delegates consists of the following five steps:<sup>5</sup>

1. *Nomination.* Nomination is supposed to begin within grassroots party branches, where party members are encouraged to recommend delegates. The full party committees at the county and municipal levels then decide the list of nominees. Finally, standing committee members make the final cut and prepare a list to be submitted to a higher-level party committee for further selection.
2. *Background check.* The organization department then conducts background checks in coordination with CCP committees at various levels, such as the institutions where candidates work as well as the party discipline committees and police departments in their localities.

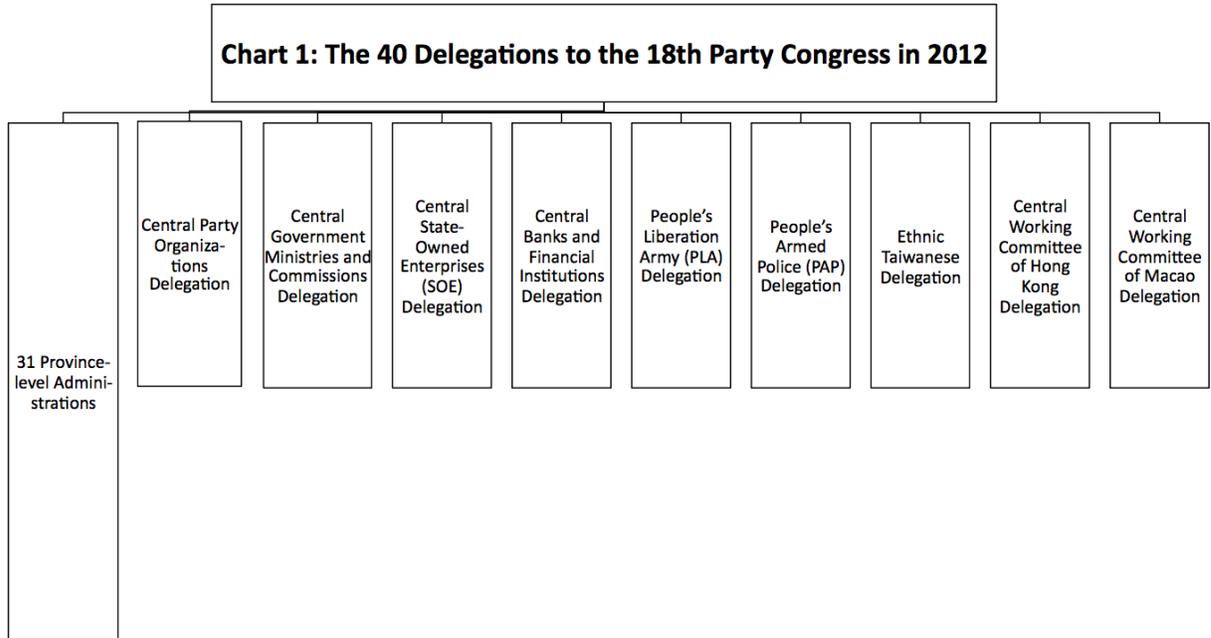
3. *Candidate announcement.* Next, the list of candidates is announced to the public in order to gauge potential opposition within the candidates' constituencies. For those candidates who come from financial institutions and industrial enterprises, evaluations and comments from their respective supervision departments are required.
4. *Selection of candidates.* The full committees at the province-level or the equivalent meet to decide the list of candidates by votes and then submit the list to the Central Organization Department for preliminary scrutiny.
5. *Multi-candidate election.* The Party congress at the province level or equivalent will then organize multi-candidate elections, known as "more candidates than seats elections" (差额选举). In the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress delegate elections in 2002, for example, the ballots had about 10 percent more candidates than seats available;<sup>6</sup> and for the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2007 the ballots generally had 15 percent more candidates than there were openings to fill. For the election of delegates to the upcoming 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, the ballots will be required to have at least 15 percent more candidates than the number to be elected.

Prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, the credentials committee of the congress will conduct the final qualification vetting of the candidates. The CCP Organization Department requires that party cadres at various levels of leadership should not exceed 68 percent of the total number of delegates in a given constituency. In other words, CCP members who work in production and other grassroots areas, such as workers, farmers, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals—must account for at least 32 percent of the delegates. This is a 2 percent increase of non-cadre delegates from the last Party congress.

The recently released "Communiqué on the Election of Delegates for the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP" also mentioned that there would be a total of 40 delegations to the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (in contrast to the 38 that attended the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress). Representing different constituencies, the 40 delegations include one from each of China's 31 province-level administrations, one from the central organizations of the party, one from the ministries and commissions of the central government, from the central state-owned enterprises, a delegation comprised of representatives from large banks and other financial institutions, one each from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) the People's Armed Police (PAP), a delegation of ethnic Taiwanese, one from the central working committee of Hong Kong, and a delegation from the central working committee of Macao (see chart 1, next page). The last two delegations are new additions to the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and were previously part of the delegation from Guangdong Province.<sup>7</sup>

The selection or election of delegates is routinely subject to manipulation by heavyweight politicians. For example, during the elections for delegates to the 15<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress in 1997 from Liaoning Province, Bo Xilai, then mayor of Dalian, failed to obtain delegate status in the Liaoning delegation. Eventually, Bo's

father, Bo Yibo, then a powerful member in the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Personnel Preparatory Work Leading Group, helped his son become a delegate from Shanxi Province, his native province.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, it was widely reported in the overseas media that Commander of the Beijing Military Region Fang Fenghui failed to gain a delegate seat within the PLA delegation to the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2007, but later became a full member of the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP.<sup>9</sup>



The number of delegates in a given delegation is determined primarily by the constituency's number of CCP members and grassroots organizations, but also according to the number of delegates that attended previous Party congresses. According to the official guidelines for the selection of delegates and the formation of delegations to the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, this process does not differ in significant ways from that employed in earlier Party congresses. Nevertheless, the increasing pressure for a stronger and more dynamic election mechanism from various segments of Chinese political life—including the public, certain interest groups, and some ambitious politicians—is notable. This trend is particularly important when it comes to the selection and/or election of members of the Central Committee, the Politburo, and the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC).

## Selection and Election Mechanism in CCP Leadership Politics

According to what process are the members of the Party leadership bodies (the Central Committee and above) chosen? In theory (as described by the 2007 CCP Constitution), all members—both full and alternate—of the Central Committee are elected by delegations to the Party congress, and all members of the Politburo, including its Standing Committee and the general secretary of the party, are elected by the members of the Central Committee of the CCP. The total number of seats on the Central Committee varies, but over the last four central committees it has averaged around 350. The 2007 Central Committee, for example, has a total of 371 members, including 204 full members and 167 alternate members. Based on the CCP constitution, members of the Politburo should come from the Central Committee, members of the PSC from the Politburo, and the PSC should in turn produce the CCP general secretary.

In practice, however, the process is top-down rather than bottom-up. The powerful CCP Organization Department controls the appointments of somewhere between 3,000 and 4,000 of the most important leadership positions in the country, known collectively as the *nomenklatura* system.<sup>10</sup> Members of leading party organs (often in the ad hoc form of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Personnel Preparatory Work Leading Group) guide the selection of members for lower-level leadership bodies such as the Central Committee, which then “approves” the slate of candidates for higher-level positions such as the next Politburo and its Standing Committee.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, to call the Central Committee’s selection of the Politburo an election is something of a misnomer. In current practice, members of the Politburo are actually selected by the outgoing Politburo Standing Committee. In the recent past, the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping made these selections.

Based on recent experience, it is expected that the outgoing Politburo and its Standing Committee will have a closed-door meeting sometime in the summer of 2012 at Beidaihe, a resort near Beijing, to decide the preliminary slate of leaders to be elected to the next Central Committee, Politburo, PSC, and the position of general secretary. Prior to and after their meeting, the outgoing PSC is likely to consult retired top leaders such as former president Jiang Zemin, former premiers Li Peng and Zhu Rongji, former vice president Zeng Qinghong, and other former PSC members. The outgoing PSC will then have another meeting in the fall, a couple of weeks prior to the convening of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, to finalize the list of candidates.

While this “black box” political manipulation among heavyweight politicians and dealmaking between competing factions remain the most defining characteristics of the selection of CCP leaders, Chinese authorities have adopted a number of election mechanisms for elite recruitment and promotion during the reform era.<sup>12</sup> It would be a mistake for China analysts to dismiss these mechanisms too hastily, as these new regulations may shape the behaviors of leaders and change the rules of the elite political game. Candidates for membership on committees at various levels of the party

(especially candidates for the posts of party secretary and deputy party secretaries of the committees) are usually first nominated and then approved by the organization departments of a higher-level party committee. But according to new regulations issued by the Central Organization Department, full party committees (with the attendance of at least two-thirds of the members) at the higher levels now often “vote on a secret ballot to decide” (票决制) the selection of the party secretaries and deputy party secretaries for the lower-level party committees.<sup>13</sup>

According to official CCP sources, especially “The Procedure and Regulation of the Appointments of Party and Government Officials adopted in 2002,” there are five types of elections in the party and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive:<sup>14</sup>

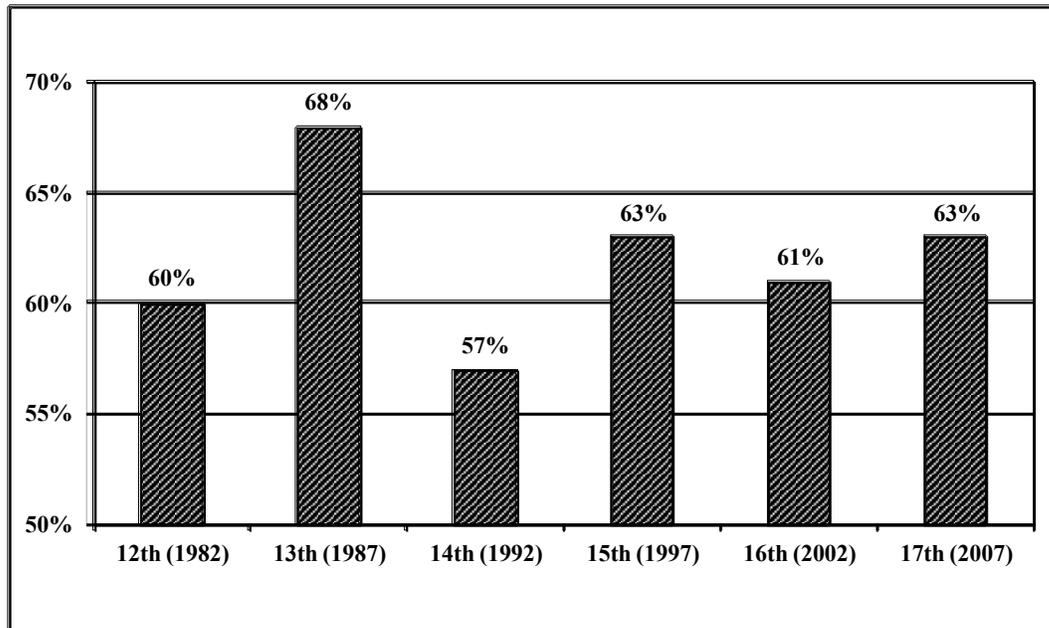
1. The direct election (直接选举), which occurs most often in grassroots party organizations when all party members directly vote to elect the members (including secretaries and deputy secretaries in most cases) of party branch committees; and once every five years, party members directly elect the delegates who will attend the higher level of the party delegation conference.
2. The indirect election (间接选举), which usually takes place at the county, municipal, provincial, and national conferences or congresses when the electoral college (delegates), on behalf of the party members in their constituencies, vote to elect members of the party committee and party discipline commission, and once every five years also elect delegates who will attend the higher level of the party conference or congress.
3. The multi-candidate (or “more candidates than seats”) election, which usually occurs in the context of the selection of members of the county, municipal, provincial, and central committees and delegates for the higher level of the party conference or congress. For example, if the top leaders plan to have a 370-member Central Committee, they may place 390 names on the ballot. The 20 candidates who receive the fewest votes in a secret ballot will be eliminated.
4. The single candidate (or no competition on the ballot) election (等额选举), in which the number of candidates on the ballot is equal to the number of officials to be elected. This type of election is the most common way to elect members of the Politburo (including its Standing Committee), secretary and deputy secretaries of the Central Commission of Discipline Inspection, and secretary and deputy secretaries of provincial, municipal, and county party committees.
5. The preliminary election (预选), in which party conference delegates first vote to confirm the candidates on the ballot (provided by the organization department) for the formal and final election. The preliminary election has

been widely used in elections for members of the Central Committee and the Central Commission of Discipline Inspection. Through the preliminary election, the CCP authorities intend to maximize the chance that those candidates in the ballot will have sufficient support to be elected.

These above-listed election mechanisms are not entirely new. It has been widely noted, particularly in China-study communities overseas, that China's political reforms, including inner-party elections, have made almost no progress at all since the Fourth Plenum of the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee in the fall of 2009. The promising ideas and plans approved in the Plenum have hardly been implemented or even further discussed. Many important institutional measures in inner-party elections were, in fact, adopted either at the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1987 or the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1997. For example, as early as 1987, the CCP adopted the "more candidates than seats election" for the formation of the Central Committee. The scope and scale of open competition in terms of the percentage of candidate selection (and elimination) have not increased much over the past two decades. At the elections for the Central Committee at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, 204 leaders out of the 221 names on the ballots were elected for full membership (8.3 percent extra candidates) and 167 leaders out of 183 names on the ballots were selected for alternate membership (9.6 percent extra candidates).<sup>15</sup> Important positions such as the top posts in local leaderships above the village level are still largely not determined by multi-candidate elections despite promises to implement such a selection process over the past decade.

A few more-liberal minded party leaders, including Wen Jiabao and some scholars who work in the political establishment (such as at the Central Party School) have recently claimed that the number of candidates for future elections to the Central Committee would increase, with a similar practice perhaps used at even higher levels of the CCP leadership. It remains to be seen whether this method of "more candidates than seats election" will also be applied to the selection of the Politburo at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Most likely, the Chinese authorities will continue some sort of a combination of the long-standing nomenklatura system and experiments in inner-party elections during the upcoming leadership change.

The leadership turnover at the upcoming 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress will likely be the largest one of the past three decades, especially within the highest-level decision-making bodies.<sup>16</sup> In the three most important leadership organs—the Politburo Standing Committee, the executive committee of the State Council, and the Central Military Commission—about 70 percent of the total members will be replaced, mainly due to their age.<sup>17</sup> The principal figures responsible for the country's political and ideological affairs, economic and financial administration, foreign policy, and military operations will thus largely consist of newcomers after 2012. For the entire Central Committee (371 members), the turnover rate at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress is expected to be somewhere between 60 and 65 percent. As a matter of fact, the turnover rate of the CCP Central Committee membership has been remarkably high for more than three decades, with newcomers constituting an average of 62 percent at each of the five Party congresses held during that period (see chart 2).

**Chart 2***Turnover Rate of the CCP Central Committee 1982–2007*

SOURCES: Cheng Li and Lynn White, “The Sixteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: Hu Gets What?” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (July/August 2002): 560. The data on the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee are updated by the author.

With such a large-scale leadership turnover on the one hand, and the growing self-promotion campaign of some ambitious politicians such as Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai and Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang on the other,<sup>18</sup> a number of proposals for new election mechanisms have emerged. Recently, for example, “the Association of Children of Yan’an,” a group of prominent figures from all walks of life in Beijing who come from families of veteran Communist leaders, proposed that 20 percent of the seats in all important elections (e.g., the delegates for the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, alternate and full members of the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee, members of the Central Military Commission, and members of the new Politburo and its Standing Committee, which means two of the total nine PSC members), should be directly chosen through multi-candidate or no “official candidate” elections.<sup>19</sup>

This proposal, though widely circulated in the Chinese social media and among bloggers, was not grounded in any serious reasoning or well-designed procedures. But interestingly enough, the proposal was put forward by a most unexpected group of people: “princelings,” who are generally the strongest opponents of real elections. The main author of the proposal was Hu Muying, daughter of Hu Qiaomu, a conservative Communist ideologue and former Politburo member who served as Mao’s personal secretary. This proposal may reflect the princelings’ desire to have a second chance to be elected to leadership bodies if they fail in the inner-party elections in the first place. This episode also illustrates the growing ideological alienation even within the CCP political

establishment, and the sense of urgency, on the part of the Chinese leadership, to search for new sources of legitimacy.

## Procedures for Ideological Preparation before the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress

At the upcoming 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, outgoing general secretary Hu Jintao will deliver a major (and lengthy) report, in keeping with CCP political norms, to the entire audience of delegates. This report should neither be seen merely as a review of his tenure as the party chief nor be regarded as his personal thoughts on important issues for the CCP in the future; rather, it is supposed to establish ideological guidelines and the political resolutions of the collective leadership. The report serves as a multipurpose platform for the CCP leadership, providing an official interpretation of the past, an assessment of the present, and an outlook for the future. Understandably, heavyweight politicians (including both soon-to-be retired leaders and newcomers), various factions, interest groups, and party theoreticians who represent different schools of thought have a stake in maintaining ideological taboos and old-fashioned doctrines or formulating new ideas and concepts for this report. Therefore, the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report Drafting Leading Group, another ad hoc group associated with the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Personnel Preparatory Work Leading Group, can exert enormous power and influence.<sup>20</sup>

The CCP leadership has usually not informed the public about the composition of these two powerful preparatory work leading groups, although from time to time the names of some key members have leaked to the media, as in the aforementioned case of Bo Yibo at the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Personnel Preparatory Work Leading Group. In recent years, the detailed process of the preparation for the drafting of the Party congress report and other important documents approved by the plenums of the Central Committee has become increasingly transparent. As Jing Yuejin, professor of political science at Tsinghua University in Beijing, recently observed:

A review of the process of drafting the Party congresses' reports and other important documents since the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress shows that the institutionalization of the political process has taken shape. It usually went through the following steps after some preliminary surveys and the establishment of a number of major issue areas: 1) to establish the report-drafting leading group; 2) to conduct extensive opinion poll surveys on these major issue areas; 3) to consult and seek inputs from various CCP functionary departments and other governmental institutions as well as grassroots party organizations; 4) to determine the themes of the report; 5) to circulate the plan of the report drafting for comments among the high-level leadership; 6) to conduct further surveys; 7) to circulate the draft of the report for comments and approval among the high-level leadership; 8) to circulate the draft of the report for comments both inside (the lower levels of the leadership) and outside (among non-CCP celebrities); 9) to circulate the draft of the report at the Party congress or the plenum for discussion; and 10) to deliver and approve the report.<sup>21</sup>

At a recent international conference on the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the CCP, Tian Peiyan, deputy director-general of the Party-Building Bureau within the Research Office of the CCP Central Committee, who participated in drafting the document of the Fourth Plenum of the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP in the fall of 2009, provided a detailed description of the whole process of preparatory work for the document.<sup>22</sup> In March, the Politburo and its Standing Committee held meetings in which the party leadership decided to hold the Fourth Plenary Session of the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee in the fall, with a focus on strengthening party building under the new circumstances of the domestic and international environments. The CCP leadership also decided to set up a drafting group for the party document (文件起草小组). Xi Jinping served as head of the group; Politburo Standing Committee member He Guoqiang and Politburo member Li Yuanchao served as deputy heads, and all other members of the Secretariat served as ranking members of the group. The entire group numbered 49 individuals and included heads of relevant CCP and government institutions as well as prominent scholars in the field of party building.<sup>23</sup>

According to Tian, the group went through several drafting phases:

- In March 2009, on behalf of the CCP Central Committee, the drafting group issued a notice on organizing discussions and soliciting opinions extensively among the CCP's province-level committees, party committees in the CCP central organs, and party committees of the PLA and PAP.
- Through the CCP United Front Work Department, the drafting group solicited opinions from such varied sources as the leadership bodies of other political parties, the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, and non-CCP celebrities.
- Through the above two steps, the drafting group received 121 written memos presenting suggestions and recommendations for the revision of the report.
- From late March to early April, the drafting group sent seven teams to carry out in-depth research projects in 12 provinces.<sup>24</sup> The teams organized 52 working meetings, exchanged views with 580 individuals (cadres, scholars, and grassroots CCP members), and conducted field studies in about 100 villages, communities, and enterprises. Meanwhile, the drafting group asked the 18 CCP central organs and government institutions to conduct further research on specific issue areas. The drafting group received a total of 25 written memos based on the findings of these research projects.
- In July, the CCP Central Committee disseminated the trial version of the report to solicit opinions among delegates to the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, retired leaders (especially former members of the PSC), and non-CCP celebrities, who in turn submitted altogether 1,767 articles of comments and suggestions. Based on this feedback, the drafting group made 320 changes to the draft.
- In August, General Secretary of the Party Hu Jintao chaired a working discussion with non-CCP representatives to listen to their feedback on the draft of the report.
- On September 15, at the Fourth Plenum of the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, the CCP Central Committee members and alternates discussed the final draft, proposing 191 suggestions for revision. The drafting group made 25 changes based on these suggestions. In the morning of September 18, during the delegation's discussion, an

additional 15 amendments were proposed. At noon, with the approval of the Politburo Standing Committee, the drafting group made four changes in a final revision. The report was then “passed in the afternoon unanimously.”<sup>25</sup>

As Tian meticulously recorded, over six months (March to September 2009) the Politburo Standing Committee held four meetings and the Politburo held two meetings to discuss the draft of the report. The drafting group held nine plenary sessions, dozens of group meetings, and 39 working meetings. The drafting group had outlined seven framework versions and made a total of 37 revisions. According to Tian, the preparation of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report should be far more comprehensive than the drafting of the report for the Fourth Plenum of the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.<sup>26</sup> Tian’s main argument is that the CCP “has established a comparatively mature democratic decision-making mechanism.”<sup>27</sup> Tian did not provide any information about the main areas of controversy in the drafting and discussion of the report. This fact profoundly undermined his claim that there was “democratic openness” in the decision-making process of the CCP leadership. Some other CCP theoreticians, for example, Li Zhongjie, deputy director of the Central Party History Research Center, who was a member of the drafting group of the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report, told foreign analysts of Chinese politics in 2008 that the use of the major new terms in the report such as Hu Jintao’s “harmonious society” and “scientific development” were all subject to serious debates within the CCP establishment.<sup>28</sup>

One can expect that the drafting group of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress will likely confront an even more daunting challenge than their predecessors in both formulating new ideas and concepts and displaying a coherent ideological line. The impact on China of the recent “Jasmine revolutions” in the Middle East and North Africa, especially at a time of growing economic and sociopolitical tensions in the country, has apparently prompted the regime to tighten media censorship. But in an era of revolutionary change in telecommunications and social media, the CCP official propaganda machine has become increasingly inadequate and unable to remain relevant and effective.

## Beyond Ideological Debates

A widely cited recent article in *Guangming Daily* stated that the CCP leadership has confronted five major challenges on the ideological front: Western anti-China forces that have used “universal values” to undermine China’s traditional value system; the new scientific and technological revolution that has put ideological work on the back burner; the market economy and pluralist social values that have diminished the role of ideology; the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European Communist system that has caused ideological confusion in China; and the rapid development of the Internet, which has weakened the CCP’s capacity to maintain ideological purity.<sup>29</sup>

Never has the PRC witnessed such extraordinary pluralism in ideological perspectives and intellectual divides as we see now on the eve of a generational transition of power in Beijing. Chinese intellectuals are deeply divided on virtually every major political and ideological issue. Table 1 (next page) displays the wide spectrum of distinct

views on five issue areas. On the issue of “China’s rise,” some intellectuals believe in the notion of the coming “Chinese century,” as they see the United States on a course of rapid decline, while others not only emphasize U.S. superiority in both hard and soft power but also compare present-day China with the period of “the end of the Qing Dynasty.” In a widely circulated article, Zi Zhongyun, a distinguished international relations scholar and former English interpreter for Zhou Enlai, launched a bold critique of the Chinese notion of “magnificent era” (盛世), a term used by some scholars with strong ties to Hu Jintao to characterize the Hu era.<sup>30</sup> Zi states bluntly that underneath this superficial “magnificent era” there is a profound sense of crisis in the making and deep concern about the decay of the regime.

In regards to the “China model,” a term often used to refer to the Chinese economic miracle, the resilience of CCP rule in the political system, and China’s growing influence in developing countries (the so-called Beijing consensus), some critics such as Xu Zhiyuan, a distinguished columnist for the Chinese edition of the *Financial Times*, argue that a model beset by a state monopoly within the economy, political bottleneck, ultranationalism at home, and international isolation abroad is hardly an ideal model.<sup>31</sup>

**Table 1**

*Major Areas of Intellectual and Ideological Debate in Present-Day China*

<i>Issue areas</i>	<i>One distinct view</i>	<i>The other distinct view</i>
China’s rise	The coming “Chinese Century”; “American decline”	The end of the Qing Dynasty; U.S. superiority in hard and soft power
The China Model	Economic miracle, political stability (CCP rule), the “Beijing consensus”	State monopoly, political bottle-neck, and international isolation
Democracy	Source of instability and chaos	Universal values and global trends
Mao and the Cultural Revolution	“China’s George Washington”; the Chinese utopian era	China’s Stalin; the dark age of contemporary China
Deng and reform	Economic disparity, official corruption, the side effects of globalization	Market reform (private sector), thought emancipation, opening China

SOURCE AND NOTE: Compiled by Cheng Li, the Brookings Institution.

On the issue of the feasibility and desirability of democracy in China, some well-known conservative scholars such as Zhang Musheng and Pan Wei assert that democracy could be a source of instability and chaos for China. Zhang Musheng, who has lately been regarded as an influential thinker among princelings, argues that “square democracy” (广场民主) would be the most dangerous system for the world’s most populous country.<sup>32</sup> Zhang believes that both ultra-left and ultra-right intellectuals are inclined to resolve their disputes through public protests and social movements. Pan Wei, professor of political science at Peking University, bluntly criticizes what he calls “democracy worship and election obsession” among his liberal-minded Chinese colleagues.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, Chinese liberal scholars see democracy not only as the natural

extension of universal values and global trends, but also the only political system that will provide enduring stability for China.<sup>34</sup>

Chinese intellectuals are noticeably divided in terms of their evaluations of Mao and his Cultural Revolution, on the one hand, and Deng and his reforms on the other. This comes as a surprise to many because Maoism is notoriously anti-intellectual. As a group, Chinese intellectuals were politically discriminated against or even persecuted during the Cultural Revolution; only after Deng's reform and opening-up in 1978 did Chinese intellectuals come to be seen as a "productive force" within the PRC. At a recent conference on "Mao and Marxism in China," former director of the CCP Organization Department Zhang Quanjing seemed to offer an explanation. Zhang argued that "if China had denied Mao or Maoism, China's tomorrow would be doomed to be the former Soviet Union today."<sup>35</sup>

He Bin, a 47-year-old professor and associate dean of the law school at the China University of Political Science and Law, has been one of the most outspoken liberal intellectuals challenging the resurgence of Mao fever and the remnants of the Cultural Revolution, especially in the case of Bo Xilai's campaign in Chongqing, which is known for its use of Cultural Revolution "red songs."<sup>36</sup> He Bin sarcastically asks what the Maoists' nostalgia has tried to glorify: the political persecution (the Anti-right movement)? the catastrophe (the Great Leap Forward)? or the chaos (the Cultural Revolution)?<sup>37</sup> In a widely publicized commencement speech delivered at the law school in the summer of 2011, He made a sharp observation: "This is a very absurd era: you are encouraged to sing revolutionary songs, but not encouraged to pursue revolution; you are asked to watch the movie *The Great Founding of the Party*, but you are not allowed to found a new party."<sup>38</sup>

The leading voice on the opposite end of the spectrum is another 47-year-old professor, Kong Qingdong, who teaches Chinese literature at Peking University. A 73<sup>rd</sup>-generation descendant of Confucius, Kong is ironically a big fan of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>39</sup> He has also been known for his unconditional support for Bo Xilai. According to Kong, Bo Xilai's "Chongqing model," which is known for its tough campaign measures dealing with "underground triads" (黑社会) on the political front, its "uplifting singing of red songs" on the cultural front, and its promotion of "common prosperity" on the economic front, has paved the way for China's future development.<sup>40</sup> Kong Qingdong is also known for his strong criticism of the "Guangdong model," which emphasizes the need for further market reform and changes in the mode of economic growth, and for his reservations about Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang (Bo's main political rival). Kong called the Southern Media Group (南方报系), the country's leading liberal media chain, the "traitors' media chain" (汉奸报系).<sup>41</sup> When the Xinhua News Agency asked Kong to apologize for using profanity to insult a reporter from the *Southern People Weekly*, Kong not only refused, but also publicly responded that "The Xinhua News Agency seems now to no longer be under the leadership of the Central Committee of the CCP, but instead under the leadership of the Southern Media Group, the Provincial Party Committee of Guangdong, or Guangdong Party Secretary Comrade Wang Yang."<sup>42</sup>

China's ongoing ideological debates go beyond the realm of ideas and values—they are closely linked to politics and the interests of heavyweight politicians and political factions. The debates are not about the past, but rather about the present and the future. The real controversy is not over the “China model,” the “Chongqing model,” or the “Guangdong model,” as they are all arguably contradictory and inconsequential, but about the way that individual leaders, factions, and the nation as a whole are searching for new identities with which they can enhance their power and influence. The Chinese public seems increasingly aware of the ongoing political tensions, ideological disputes, and policy differences within the leadership, especially between some of the most ambitious upcoming leaders such as Bo Xilai and Wang Yang. More than anything else, these debates reveal what political strategies some Chinese leaders are adopting to secure their political competitiveness in the months leading up to the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.

The detailed description of both the leadership selection mechanisms and ideological preparation procedures for the Party congress report presented earlier in the essay demonstrates a serious effort on the part of the CCP leadership to institutionalize the leadership transition and broaden participation in the development of the party's ideological platform. But these mechanisms and procedures should be constantly renewed, consolidated, or replaced by more effective ones as the CCP tries to keep up with what Chinese officials call “the changing environments in the party, the country, and the world” (党情，国情，世情). More importantly, the lack of consensus among the top leadership in Zhongnanhai has often led those who are in charge of personnel and propaganda to send mixed messages to the public. The large-scale leadership turnover expected for the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and the intensity of ideological disputes, as well as their mutual reinforcement, make this upcoming political succession a particularly challenging one for CCP authorities.

One can reasonably argue that the growing political transparency and open ideological disputes are healthy developments in China's governance. Despite the fact that it is still a one-party Leninist state, the CCP leadership is by no means a monolithic group whose members all share the same ideology and policy preferences, and it is also divided along factional, coalitional, and regional lines. But one can also assume that internal ideological disagreements and political infighting in the top leadership may become too divisive to reconcile, making the decision-making process lengthier and more complicated, and perhaps even resulting in deadlock.

These challenges, however, are not unique to China. They are common challenges for party politics and democratic institutions. The year 2012 will likely be an eventful year for many countries as they go through elections and heated political campaigns. Welcome, China, to the club of partisan politics!

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The Central Committee of the CCP, 关于党的十八大代表选举工作的通知 (Communiqué on the Election of Delegates for the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party), November 1, 2011. See <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64093/64094/16100085.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See the special website 聚焦2011年地方党委集中换届 (Focus on the 2011 Leadership Transition of Local Party Committees), 中国网络电视台 (China Internet TV), accessed on November 16, 2011 at <http://news.cntv.cn/special/dfhj/dfdwhj/index.shtml>.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the importance of both personnel and ideological fronts in the preparation for the Party congress of the CCP, see Cheng Li, “China’s Midterm Jockeying: Gearing Up for 2012. Part 5: ‘Party Apparatchiks,’” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 35 (Fall 2011): pp. 1–19.

<sup>4</sup> Among these regular delegates and special delegates (特邀代表), 2,237 physically attended the opening session of the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. “中国共产党第十七次全国代表大会在京开幕” (The 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party Opens in Beijing), Xinhua News Agency, October 15, 2007, text available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/misc/2007-10/15/content\\_6886280.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/misc/2007-10/15/content_6886280.htm).

<sup>5</sup> See “中组部负责人就党的十八大代表选举工作答问” (Questions and answers regarding the election of the delegates of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress by the representative of the CCP Organization Department), Xinhua News Agency, November 2, 2011, text available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2011-11/02/c\\_111141695.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2011-11/02/c_111141695.htm).

<sup>6</sup> In the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, the more candidates than seats election had 10 percent excess candidates on the ballots. See “中组部就党的十七大代表选举工作情况答人民日报记者问” (Responses to the People’s Daily reporter’s questions regarding the election process of the delegates of the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress), August 4, 2007, News Network of the Chinese Communist Party, text available at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64107/64109/6070469.html>.

<sup>7</sup> This discussion was based on the author’s interview with Chinese officials and is not verified by any official document. Another source asserted that the two newly added delegations represent party members who work in foreign and joint ventures and the party members who work in privately owned companies.

<sup>8</sup> See Li Ping (李平), “十八大代表的选举差额扩大不等于民主扩大” (The increase of the number of the extra candidates for the election of the delegates for the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress is not equal to the expansion of democracy). 苹果日报 (Apple Daily), November 3, 2011; also see Cheng Li, *China’s Leaders: The New Generation* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), pp. 165–166.

<sup>9</sup> Li Ping, “十八大代表的选举差额扩大不等于民主扩大。”

<sup>10</sup> For more discussion on the process of appointments for several thousand important leadership posts, which process is known in Communist terminology as *nomenklatura*, see Li, “China’s Midterm Jockeying,” pp. 6–7 (full citation in endnote 3).

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion of the selection of the members of the Politburo Standing Committee, see Cheng Li, “The Battle for China’s Top Nine Leadership Posts.” *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2011; forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> For more discussion of the new rules and regulations of elite recruitment in the CCP, see Cheng Li, “Intra-Party Democracy in China: Should We Take It Seriously?” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 30 (Fall 2009): pp. 9–10.

<sup>13</sup> Zhang Lizhou (张黎洲), “‘票决制’: 干部任用决策的重要改革。” (“Vote on a secret ballot to decide” is a major reform mechanism to select cadres), *People’s Daily* (人民日报), December 26, 2002. See also [http://news.xinhuanet.com/zonghe/2002-12/26/content\\_670280.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/zonghe/2002-12/26/content_670280.htm).

<sup>14</sup> The CCP Central Committee, “党政领导干部选拔任用工作条例” (The procedure and regulation of the appointments of party and government officials), Beijing, July 9, 2002, text available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/18/content\\_695422\\_1.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/18/content_695422_1.htm), and the website *News of the Communist Party of China*: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64156/64161/5168819.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See 中共十八大代表选举要求增加工农 (The CCP Leadership Requires More Workers and Peasants for the Delegates of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress), 多维新闻网 (Duowei News), November 2, 2011, text available at <http://18.dwnews.com/news/2011-11-01/58272244.html>.

<sup>16</sup> The leadership change in the State Council will not formally take place until the National People’s Congress in March of 2013, but the composition of the executive committee (premier, vice premiers, and state councilors) will be decided at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.

<sup>17</sup> In comparison, the turnover rate of the Politburo Standing Committee members at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress was 44 percent. For the State Council, the estimated 70 percent turnover rate is partly related to leaders' age and partly due to the need to transfer some leaders to other important decision-making bodies.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of the self-promotion campaigns by Bo Xilai and Wang Yang, see Yawei Liu, "Bo Xilai's Campaign for the Standing Committee and the Future of Chinese Politicking," *China Brief*, Vol. 11, No. 21 (November 11, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> See 延安儿女联谊会 (The Children of Yan'an Association), "我们对十八大的建议" (Our suggestions for the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress), February 17, 2011, text available at [http://www.yananernv.cn/news\\_2427.html](http://www.yananernv.cn/news_2427.html).

<sup>20</sup> My previous piece for *China Leadership Monitor* has a detailed discussion of the crucial roles of organization and propaganda in the Chinese political system. See Li, "China's Midterm Jockeying: Gearing Up for 2012. Part 5: 'Party Apparatchiks.'"

<sup>21</sup> Jing Yuejin, "演化中的利益协调机制: 挑战与前景" (China's interest coordinating mechanism: Challenges and prospects), paper presented at the international conference on "China's Political Development: The Perspectives of Chinese and American Scholars," which was organized by the China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics of Peking University and the John L. Thornton China Center of the Brookings Institution, and held in Beijing October 29–30, 2010. The numbers in the quote are added by Cheng Li. In the paper, Jing also provides the citations of the original Chinese articles on the subject: 李尚志、何平、张宿堂 (Li Shangzhi, He Ping, Zhang Sutong), "迈向新世纪的宣言和纲领—党的十五大报告诞生记" (Declaration and Guideline of the New Century: The Birth of the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report), 人民日报 (People's Daily), September 26, 1997; 夏林、张宿堂、孙承斌 (Xia Lin, Zhang Sutong, Sun Chengbin) "马克思主义的纲领性文献—党的十六大报告诞生记" (A Marxist guideline document: The birth of the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report), 新浪网 (Sina Newsnet), November 20, 2002, text available at <http://www.sina.com.cn>; 夏林、孙承斌、邹声文 (Xia Lin, Sun Chengbin, Zou Shengwen), "中共十七大报告诞生记" (The birth of the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report), 新浪网 (Sina Newsnet), October 27, 2007, text available at <http://www.sina.com.cn>; and 新京报 记者 (reporter of the New Beijing Daily), "十七大报告起草历时十月" (Ten-month drafting of the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress), 新浪网 (Sina Newsnet), October 28, 2007, text available at <http://www.sina.com.cn>.

<sup>22</sup> Tian Peiyan, "当代中国共产党如何实现民主决策" (Democratic decision-making in the contemporary period: What has the CCP has been doing?). [Paper presented at the International Workshop on CCP Party-building, Beijing, June 6–7, 2011]. The following discussion is extensively based on Tian's article in both the original Chinese and the English translation.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6. The deputy head statuses of He Guoqiang and Li Yuanchao were based on the author's interview.

<sup>24</sup> These 12 provinces were Hebei, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Shandong, Hunan, Guangxi, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Gansu. See Tian, "当代中国共产党如何实现民主决策," p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Tian, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> This was based on Tian's response to the author's question at the conference.

<sup>27</sup> Tian, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> This was based on the response of Li Zhongjie to the audience's questions at a public forum "An Insider's Look at the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP", hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, January 23, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Wang Yan and Du Rui, "我国意识形态建设面临的挑战" (Ideological challenges that China faces), 光明日报 (Guangming Daily), May 9, 2011. Also see [http://theory.gmw.cn/2011-05/09/content\\_1934061.htm](http://theory.gmw.cn/2011-05/09/content_1934061.htm).

<sup>30</sup> 经济观察报 (Economic observers), December 25, 2010. Also see [www.chinaelections.org/NewsInfo.asp?NewsID=195247](http://www.chinaelections.org/NewsInfo.asp?NewsID=195247).

<sup>31</sup> Xu Zhiyuan, "从中国特色到中国模式" (From Chinese characteristics to the China model), *Financial Times* Chinese Online, part 1, <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001031283>, February 11, 2010; and part 2, <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001031551>, March 4, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Zhang Musheng, "中国最大危险是广场民主" (The greatest danger for China is square democracy). See [http://club.china.com/data/thread/1011/2732/15/64/9\\_1.html](http://club.china.com/data/thread/1011/2732/15/64/9_1.html). October 3, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> For more discussion of Pan Wei's arguments, see "Toward a Consultative Rule of Law Regime in China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 12, no. 34 (February 2003), pp. 3–43; and also *Debating Political Reform in China: Rule of Law vs. Democratization*, edited by Suisheng Zhao. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2006.

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Yu Keping, *Democracy Is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society and Culture in Contemporary China* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> “捍卫毛泽东” (Defend Mao), 多维新闻网 (Duowei News), November 25, 2011; the conference was held at Guangzhou University in Guangzhou on November 21–22, text available at <http://18.dwnews.com/news/2011-11-24/58337697.html>.

<sup>36</sup> He Bin, “从‘学毛选’到‘唱红歌’” (From “study Mao’s work” to “sing red songs”), text available at his blog: <http://hebing1.blog.sohu.com/171382733.html>, April 24, 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Video of the June 22, 2011, speech, “何兵2011中国政法大学法学院毕业晚会精彩致辞” (He Bin 2011 China University of Politics and Law School graduation party speech), is available at <http://www.trans-chn.com/news/11575294.html>.

<sup>39</sup> “北大教授孔庆东力挺薄熙来” (Peking University Professor Kong Qingdong supports Bo Xilai), <http://www.wenxuecity.com/news/2011/08/23/1451756.html>, August 23, 2011.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.wenxuecity.com/news/2011/11/17/1537857.html>, November 17, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.