

A Biographical and Factional Analysis of the Post-2012 Politburo

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This essay offers data about the new Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party—the 25 highest-ranking leaders in the party, government, and military in present-day China.¹ This biographical data includes distributions of age, gender, and birthplace; educational and occupational credentials; bureaucratic portfolio and career patterns; and political affiliations and factional backgrounds. Norms of elite selection can be induced from such data, which allows a broad-based quantitative and qualitative analysis of the changes within the top leadership. Findings include the ascendancy of leaders with experience as provincial party secretaries, a swift decline of technocrats, and the appearance of a new form of the factional balance of power. The essay concludes with a preview of the leading contenders for the next Politburo and its supreme Standing Committee.*

With the conclusion of both the 18th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the 12th National People's Congress (NPC), China's new top leaders in the party, government, and military have assumed their official positions with a pronounced leadership portfolio. The most important of these new leaders serve on the 25-member Politburo.

What does the composition of the post-2012 Politburo tell us about selection criteria, demographic trends in elite circulation, and strengths and weaknesses of these new leaders? What are the challenges for China's political institutionalization, including the degree of political nepotism and various forms of patron-client ties? Does the new Politburo maintain the factional balance of power that has characterized Chinese elite politics since the end of the strongman era in the mid-1990s? Who are the rising stars in the sixth generation of leadership and how do they differ from preceding generations? Based on an analysis of the current Politburo, who within the large pool of power contenders will likely serve on the next Politburo? Who are the leading candidates for seats on the next Politburo Standing Committee (PSC)? This essay aims to shed valuable light on these important questions.

Institutionalized Norms vs. Patron-Client Ties

China's leadership politics in the post-strongman era is filled with several seemingly contradictory phenomena. Informal networks, such as the *taizi* (太子, princelings), *tuanpai* (帮派, Youth League faction), *tongxiang* (同乡, fellow provincials), *tongxue* (同学, fellow schoolmates), and the so-called *Shanghai bang* (上海帮, Shanghai Gang) are ubiquitous in the formation of the new leadership.² Such nepotism and favoritism have, however, caused a growing demand—even within the political establishment—for a more representative leadership. Regional representation on the Central Committee of the CCP, for example, has become more institutionalized since the 15th Party Congress in 1997, with each provincial-level administration usually obtaining the two full membership seats occupied by the party

secretary or the governor/mayor. Although these provincial chiefs are sometimes promoted to the central government or transferred to other provinces, this distributional norm was strictly in force at the time the Central Committee was initially elected.

Those who were eliminated or scored poorly in the multi-candidate election for membership of the Central Committee at the party congress were usually princelings and leaders known for their “helicopter-like rise” that resulted from strong patron-client ties. However, the selection of the most important leadership bodies, such as the PSC and the Politburo, still comes about through the traditional “black-box” manipulation on the part of either departing PSC members or powerful retired leaders such as former party chief Jiang Zemin. These contradictory trends were particularly evident in the leadership formation of the 18th Party Congress.

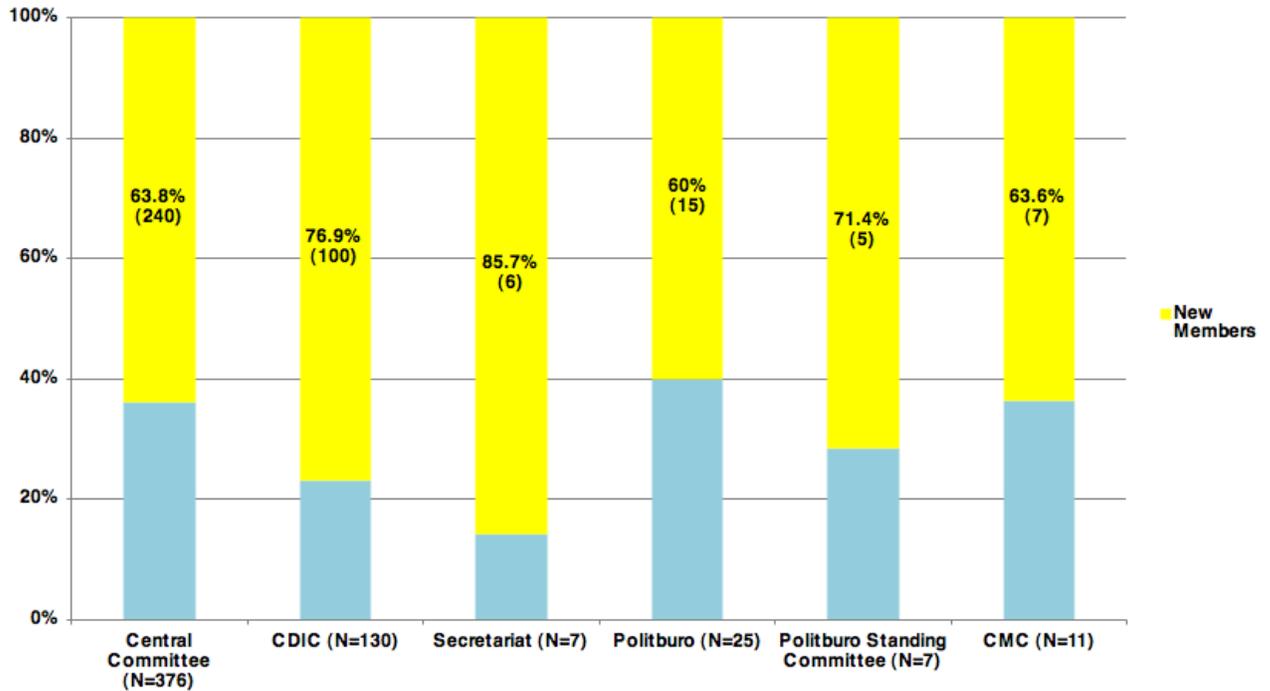
The leadership change at the 18th Party Congress primarily followed the extant rules and norms regarding age limits, and all members and alternates of the previous Central Committee who were born in or before 1944 no longer serve on the new Central Committee. As a result, the turnover rates in important leadership organs selected at the congress are remarkably high. Chart 1 (next page) shows that newcomers comprise 64 percent of the Central Committee (the leadership body made up of the most important national, provincial, and military leaders in the country), 77 percent of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI, the country’s top anti-corruption agency), 86 percent of the Secretariat (the crucial CCP organ that handles daily administrative affairs of the country, decides top leaders’ activities, and sets the agenda before major meetings), 60 percent of the Politburo, 71 percent of the PSC, and both 64 percent of all members and 70 percent of military members of the CMC.

This much-anticipated leadership transition was supposed to constitute a generational change of the top leadership in the CCP—from the fourth generation of leaders, who were mostly born in the 1940s and completed their college education prior to the Cultural Revolution, to the fifth generation of leaders, the majority of whom were born in the 1950s and lived their formative years during the Cultural Revolution. Ironically, however, CCP Secretary General Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang—the youngest members of the PSC formed at the 17th Party Congress over five years ago—have remained the youngest members of this latest PSC selected at the 18th Party Congress. Xi and Li are the only two leaders in the new PSC who were born in the 1950s (see table 1, on page 4). Xi and Li are now surrounded by five new members of the 18th PSC who are roughly three to five years younger than outgoing top leaders Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. The average age of the 18th PSC is 63.4, which is older than the average age (62.3) of the 17th PSC.

The incomplete nature of this generational leadership transition reveals that there has been a lengthy, constant, and excessive power struggle at the top. This intense elite contention reflects the strong desire for many senior leaders to stay in power—even if their victory comes at the expense of the Party’s ability to present to the country a fresh new leadership team for the next decade. The poor representation of the fifth generation in the PSC will likely also increase the political anxiety and resentment of the younger generations of elites. Due to age limits, five of the seven members of the PSC will retire at the 19th Party Congress that will take place in 2017. In a sense, the recent leadership change at the 18th Party

Chart 1

Turnover in Top Leadership Organs at the 18th Party Congress



NOTES: CDIC = Central Commission for Discipline Inspection; CMC = Central Military Commission.
 SOURCE: Cheng Li, “Opportunity Lost? Inside China’s Leadership Transition,” *Foreign Policy*, November 16, 2012.

Congress can be seen as a prelude to the full-fledged generational transition of power that will take place at the 19th Party Congress. Apparently, the upcoming round of vicious fighting for seats on the PSC will begin much earlier than expected. In fact, it has likely already begun.

In terms of gender, ethnicity, and birthplace of the members of the Politburo, for the first time since the 13th Party Congress in 1987, there are now two female members (Vice Premier Liu Yandong and Tianjin Party Secretary Sun Chunlan) serving on the Politburo. There were no female members in the 13th and 14th Politburo (1992), and only one in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Politburos (Vice Premier Wu Yi for the first two and State Councillor Liu Yandong for the 17th Politburo). Most of the previous Politburos since the founding of the PRC included at least one ethnic minority representative; the 18th Politburo, in contrast, lacks an ethnic minority member. Fifteen leaders who were born in the eastern region dominate the 18th Politburo, including four from Jiangsu and three each from Shanghai, Anhui, and Shandong; together they constitute 60 percent of total membership. No current Politburo member was born in Guangdong, China’s most populous province with over 100 million residents. There are also no members who were born in China’s populous southwest region (including Sichuan, Chongqing, Yunnan, and Guizhou).

(text continues on page 5)

Table 1*Factional Identity of Members of the New Politburo (as of 2013)*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>Leadership post (responsibilities)</i>	<i>Factional camp (background)</i>
Xi Jinping*	1953	60	Beijing	Party secretary general, chairman of CMC, PRC president	Jiang (princeling)
Li Keqiang*	1955	58	Anhui	Premier, State Council	Hu (tuanpai)
Zhang Dejiang*	1946	67	Liaoning	Chairman, National People's Congress	Jiang (princeling)
Yu Zhengsheng*	1945	68	Zhejiang	Chairman, CPPCC	Jiang (princeling)
Liu Yunshan*	1947	66	Shanxi	Executive secretary, Secretariat (Party affairs)	Jiang
Wang Qishan*	1948	65	Shanxi	Secretary, CCDI (anti-corruption)	Jiang (princeling)
Zhang Gaoli*	1946	67	Fujian	Executive vice premier, State Council (macroeconomic affairs, energy, environment)	Jiang
Ma Kai	1946	67	Shanghai	Vice premier, State Council (finance, transportation, telecommunication)	Jiang (princeling)
Wang Huning	1955	58	Shanghai	Director, CCP Policy Research Center (domestic and foreign policy formation)	Jiang (Shanghai Gang)
Liu Yandong (f)	1945	68	Jiangsu	Vice Premier, State Council (education, public health, science and technology)	Hu (tuanpai)
Liu Qibao	1953	60	Anhui	Head of CCP Propaganda Department	Hu (tuanpai)
Xu Qiliang	1950	63	Shandong	Vice Chairman, CMC	Jiang
Sun Chunlan (f)	1950	63	Hebei	Tianjin Party Secretary	Hu
Sun Zhengcai	1963	50	Shandong	Chongqing Party Secretary	Jiang
Li Jianguo	1946	67	Shandong	Vice chairman, NPC	Hu
Li Yuanchao	1950	63	Jiangsu	Vice president of PRC	Hu (tuanpai)
Wang Yang	1955	58	Anhui	Vice premier, State Council (commerce, agriculture, prevention of natural disasters)	Hu (tuanpai)
Zhang Chunxian	1953	60	Henan	Xinjiang Party Secretary	Jiang
Fan Changlong	1947	66	Liaoning	Vice chairman, CMC	Hu ?
Meng Jianzhu	1947	66	Jiangsu	Secretary, Commission of Political Science and Law (law and order, public security)	Jiang (Shanghai Gang)
Zhao Leji	1957	56	Shaanxi	Head of CCP Organization Department	Jiang ?
Hu Chunhua	1963	60	Hubei	Guangdong party secretary	Hu (tuanpai)
Li Zhanshu	1950	63	Hebei	Director, CCP General Office	Jiang ?
Guo Jinlong	1947	66	Jiangsu	Beijing party secretary	Hu
Han Zheng	1954	59	Shanghai	Shanghai party secretary	Jiang (Shanghai Gang)

* Politburo Standing Committee member

KEY: CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CDIC = Central Commission for Discipline Inspection; CMC = Central Military Commission; CPPCC = Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; (f) = female

SOURCE: Cheng Li, "Opportunity Lost? Inside China's leadership transition," *Foreign Policy Online*, November 16, 2012. Updated on May 25, 2013.

(continued from page 3)

All but three clearly belong to one of two factional camps. Jiang's protégés (especially the princelings and Shanghai Gang) and Hu's protégés (especially the tuanpai leaders) are both well represented in the 18th Politburo. One of the three exceptions is Executive Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission Fan Changlong, whose factional affiliation is not entirely clear (although many analysts consider him as a member of the Hu camp). The other two are director of the General Office of the CCP Central Committee Li Zhanshu and director of the Organization Department Zhao Leji, both of whom seem to have strong ties with both the Jiang camp and the Hu camp.

Provincial Leadership Experience: A Key Credential for Politburo Membership

Provincial or municipal leadership experience, especially the credential of serving as party secretary in China's 31 province-level administrations, has long been seen as an important stepping-stone for China's national leaders. The same is true for those selected for the 18th PSC and Politburo. Six of the seven PSC members have served as provincial chiefs (party secretary, governor, or mayor of the 31 province-level administrations) before ascending to the supreme decision-making body. The sole exception is Executive Member of the Secretariat Liu Yunshan, who, although never having served as a provincial chief, did serve as deputy party secretary of Inner Mongolia.

As shown in chart 2, there has been an increase over the past 20 years in Politburo members with provincial chief experience: beginning at 50 percent in 1992, the rate rose to 59 percent in 1997, 67 percent in 2002, and then to 76 percent in both 2007 and 2012. More than three-quarters of current Politburo members (19 out of 25 members) have provincial chief leadership experience. Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang both served as party secretaries in two provincial administrations (Xi in Zhejiang and Shanghai, and Li in Henan and Liaoning). The provincial leadership experience of Zhang Dejiang is even broader than his colleagues on the PSC: he has served as provincial chief in four provincial administrations (Jilin, Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Chongqing).

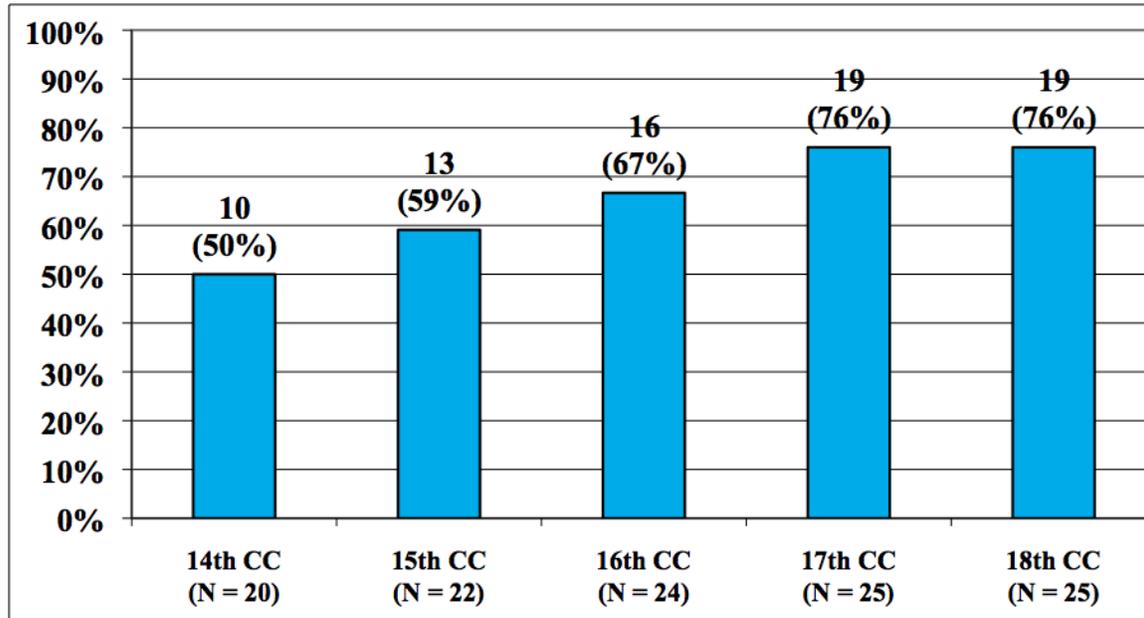
In what appears to be an emerging political norm, the party secretaries of the four major cities that are under the direct leadership of the central government—Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing—are apparently now entitled to seats on the Politburo. This also seems the case for Guangdong Province, where three current PSC or Politburo members (Zhang Dejiang, Wang Yang, and Hu Chunhua) have currently or previously served as Party boss. Two other PSC members, Wang Qishan and Zhang Gaoli, also served as vice governor of Guangdong Province earlier in their careers.

A majority (52 percent) of current Politburo members obtained their seats in November 2012 while serving as party secretaries in provincial administration, a much higher rate than the corresponding 22.7 percent in the 14th Politburo, 20.8 percent in the 15th Politburo, and 40 percent in both the 16th and 17th Politburos (see table 2, next page). The high representation of local leaders in both the PSC and Politburo reflects the growing power and influence of top politicians of the country's 31 provincial administrations, especially major cities and big provinces such as Guangdong. Meanwhile, top national leaders also need to build political

capital and resources through close ties with some of the most important regions in the country. This prioritization of leadership experience as party secretary, especially in the major provinces and cities, for entrance into the top national leadership thus further enhances the political weight of local power in present-day China.

Chart 2

The Percentage of Politburo Members with Provincial Chief Experience



SOURCE: Research by Cheng Li, Brookings Institution, 2013.

Table 2

Principal Bureaucratic Affiliation of Politburo Members prior to Politburo Tenure (from the 14th to the 18th Party Congress)

Principal post during the congress	14 th Politburo		15 th Politburo		16 th Politburo		17 th Politburo		18 th Politburo	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Central Party Organization	5	22.7	6	25.0	8	32.0	6	24.0	4	16.0
Central Government Organization	10	45.5	11	45.8	5	20.0	7	28.0	6	24.0
Provincial Administration	5	22.7	5	20.8	10	40.0	10	40.0	13	52.0
Military	2	9.1	2	8.3	2	8.0	2	8.0	2	8.0
Total	22	100.0	24	99.9	25	100.0	25	100.0	25	100.0

NOTE: Due to rounding, percentages do not add up to 100. 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 2003): 574. The data on the 17th and 18th CCs were calculated by Cheng Li, Brookings Institution, 2013.

Local demand for an even distribution of membership seats across provinces and regions in both the Central Committee and the Politburo has become increasingly institutionalized. Although provincial and municipal leaders in economically advanced coastal regions were chosen for more seats in the new Politburo, their advantage is far less evident on the Central Committee, for which membership seats are more evenly distributed as previously discussed. In an important way, the dynamics and tensions among local leaders and between the center and provinces in terms of elite selection contribute to a more pluralistic and collective leadership in the country.

The End of Technocrat Dominance

A primary explanation for the ability of the CCP to retain power (and especially to survive in the wake of the recent waves of collapse of other authoritarian regimes) is the rapid circulation of its elite members that has occurred over the past three decades. Under the direction of Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s, the CCP made great efforts to recruit “new blood,” especially members with technical rather than ideological expertise, into the party leadership. This “technocratic turnover”—as analysts have called the rapid rise of engineers-turned-politicians—occurred during the 14th and 15th Party Congresses.³ The CCP actually reformed its leadership from one consisting of peasants and soldiers during the revolutionary era to one consisting primarily of engineers during the 1990s and early 2000s.

The rapid rise—and subsequent swift decline—in power and influence of technocrats over the past three decades has been a remarkable development in Chinese elite politics. One may define technocrats as political elites who received higher education in engineering (or the natural sciences) and practiced as engineers (or engaged in scientific research). In 1982, technocrats constituted just two percent of the Central Committee, but by 1987 they made up 25 percent of the Central Committee. By 1997 they comprised over half (52 percent). The percentage of technocrats on the Central Committee then began to decline in 2002 (46 percent).⁴

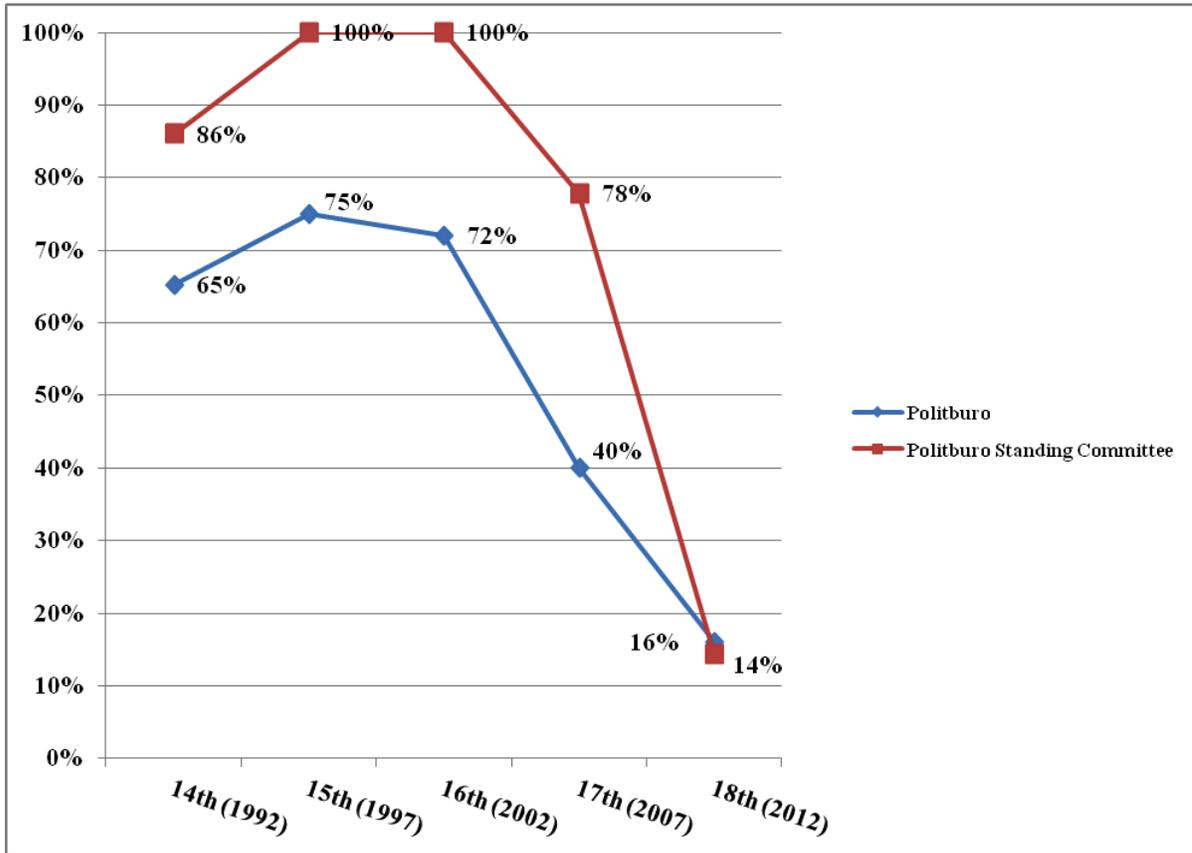
Chart 3 (next page) shows the dramatic decline of technocrats in the Politburo and the PSC. Most interestingly, members of the 15th and 16th PSC were all trained as engineers. The representation of technocrats in the 18th PSC and Politburo is 14 percent and 16 percent, respectively—a sharp drop from 100 percent and 76 percent in the 16th PSC and Politburo 10 years earlier. In the 18th PSC, only one member, Chairman of the CPPCC Yu Zhengsheng, held an engineering degree and practiced as an engineer earlier in his career. Among the Politburo members, only three (Beijing Party Secretary Guo Jinlong, Chongqing Party Secretary Sun Zhengcai, and Xinjiang Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian) obtained their highest degrees in natural sciences or engineering. Most of the other members hold their highest academic degrees in economics, law, politics, and the humanities.

In contrast to the fourth-generation leaders, most of whom had completed their college education (often in engineering or natural sciences) by the time the Cultural Revolution began, fifth-generation leaders were in elementary and middle school. During the Cultural Revolution the Chinese school system was largely paralyzed, with students engaged in political campaigns and ideological indoctrination rather than in academic studies. Deprived of the opportunity for formal schooling, fifth-generation leaders characteristically belong to the so-called lost generation. This age cohort suffered extraordinary hardships during

adolescence, as many were rusticated and forced to work in the countryside as farmers; they were the “sent-down youths” (插队知青, *chadui zhiqing*) A large number of the 18th Politburo members, including five PSC members (Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Zhang Dejiang, Liu Yunshan, and Wang Qishan), were sent-down youths.

Chart 3

Change of Percentage of Technocrats in the Politburo and PSC (1992–2012)

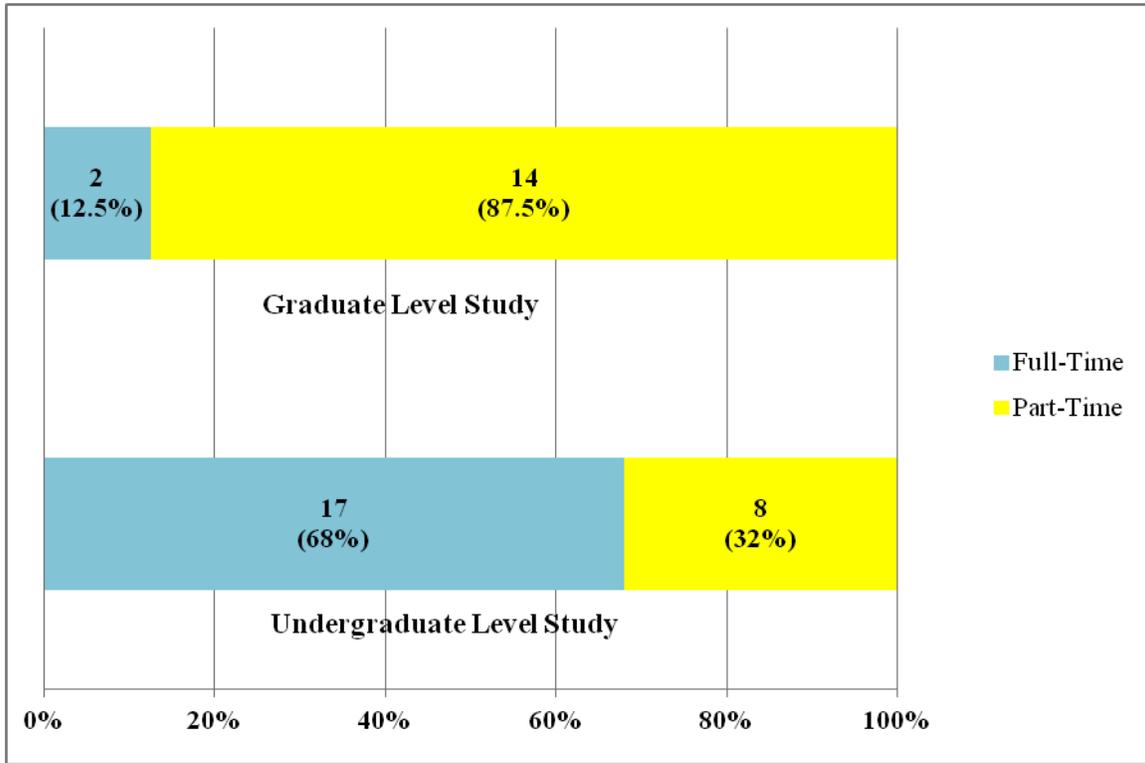


SOURCE: Research by Cheng Li, Brookings Institution, 2013.

As a result of Deng Xiaoping’s policy initiatives, in 1977 China resumed the use of college entrance exams. Many fifth-generation leaders entered college then in their mid- or late 20s. They majored in a wide range of newly resumed or established academic disciplines rather than concentrating on engineering and natural sciences as the third- and fourth-generation leaders had. A significant number of 18th Politburo members later pursued postgraduate studies on a part-time basis. Among the 16 current Politburo members who obtained advanced degrees, 14 (87.5 percent) did so on a part-time basis (see chart 4). More interestingly, eight Politburo members (32 percent) received their undergraduate degrees on a part-time basis. It is widely believed in China that many of these part-time degree programs, especially those offered to party officials, do not meet high academic standards. Some of these part-time academic degrees may turn out to be a political liability.

Chart 4

Educational Background of Members of the 18th Politburo: Ratio of Part-time and Full-time Study



SOURCE: Research by Cheng Li, Brookings Institution, 2013.

It also remains to be seen whether the growing diversity in educational and occupational backgrounds of China’s leaders will contribute to political pluralism and a more accountable decision-making process. The fact that some top leaders hold law degrees may also improve the prospects for legal and judicial development in the country.

New Forms of Factional Balance of Power?

Although the CCP monopolizes power in China, the party leadership is not monolithic. Since the late 1990s, two main political coalitions within the CCP leadership have been competing for power, influence, and control over policy initiatives. This bifurcation—a dynamic structure of “one party, two coalitions” (一党两派)—has created something approximating a mechanism of checks and balances in the decision-making process.⁵

One of the two intra-party camps in China is the “elitist coalition” (or the “Jiang camp”), which emerged in the Jiang Zemin era. This coalition was originally headed by Jiang and is currently led by new party chief Xi Jinping. The core group of the elitist coalition consists mainly of princelings: leaders who come from families of either veteran revolutionaries or high-ranking officials (both Jiang and Xi are princelings). The other camp is the “populist coalition” (or the Hu camp), which was led by President Hu Jintao prior to the 18th Party Congress and is now headed by his protégé Li Keqiang. The core group of the populist

coalition are *tuanpai*: leaders who advanced their political career primarily by way of the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL), as did both Hu and Li.

Before the announcement of the composition of the new guard, many analysts both in China and abroad believed that the new PSC would continue to maintain a roughly equal balance of power between these two coalitions. Yet in the end, the Jiang camp won a landslide victory by obtaining six of the seven seats on the PSC while only one leader in the Hu camp—Li Keqiang—was able to keep a seat on this supreme decision-making body (see table 1). The factional balance of power now appears to be broken on this most powerful decision-making body. There were three eligible candidates (all of whom served on the previous Politburo and met the age requirement) who failed to be elevated to the PSC at the 18th Party Congress—all were *tuanpai* leaders. These include the only female candidate, then State Councilor Liu Yandong, and two rising stars, former Guangdong party chief Wang Yang and former director of the CCP Organization Department Li Yuanchao.

The dominance of Jiang's men in the new PSC, however, does not necessarily mean that again "the winner takes all" in Chinese elite politics. It should be noted that Hu's protégés are still well represented in other important leadership bodies. Although the Jiang camp dominates the new PSC, the other 18 Politburo seats are divided equally between the Jiang and Hu camps, at nine apiece (see table 1).

On the seven-member Secretariat, five members advanced their careers largely from the ranks of the CCYL, and three (director of the CCP Organization Department Liu Qibao, former director of the CCP United Front Work Department Du Qinglin, and Minister of Ethnic Affairs Yang Jing) are Hu Jintao's *tuanpai* protégés. On the 10-member executive committee of the State Council, four leaders—Premier Li Keqiang, Vice Premier Liu Yandong, Vice Premier Wang Yang, and State Councillor Yang Jing—are prominent *tuanpai* leaders.

It is particularly worth noting that in each and every of the nine most important leadership organs in the PRC, namely the PSC, PRC presidency (president and vice president), State Council, CMC, CCP Secretariat, NPC, CPPCC, Supreme People's Court, and Supreme People's Procuratorate, the number one (第一把手) and number two (第二把手) leaders come from the two competing coalitions (see table 3). This suggests that under collective leadership in present-day China, there is a deliberate effort on the part of the top leadership to maintain factional balance of power in various forms.

Also importantly, many *tuanpai* leaders have made it onto the new 376-member Central Committee. *Tuanpai* leaders who previously worked within the CCYL national or provincial leadership when Hu Jintao or Li Keqiang was in charge of the CCYL now occupy 96 seats on the new Central Committee, constituting 25.5 percent of this crucial decision-making body. This increase is relatively steep when compared with the *tuanpai*'s 86 seats on the previous Central Committee (23.2 percent of its 371 members).⁶

Prominent *tuanpai* leaders who failed to obtain a PSC membership at the 18th Party Congress, such as the aforementioned Li Yuanchao and Wang Yang, will still meet the age requirement for the 19th PSC in 2017. As the "one party, two coalitions" dynamic appears to be a new experiment in Chinese elite politics, it is possible the CCP may also experiment with a new

mechanism of “factional rotation” (派系轮换, *paixi lunhuan*). This may explain why the Hu camp quietly acquiesced to its very disadvantageous power distribution at the 18th PSC.

Table 3

Factional Affiliation of Top Two Leaders in the Most Important PRC Leadership Organs (2013)

Leadership Organs	Number 1 Leader		Number 2 Leader	
	Name	Faction	Name	Faction
PSC, two highest ranking members	Xi Jinping	Jiang camp (princeling)	Li Keqiang	Hu camp (tuanpai)
PRC Presidency (president & vice president)	Xi Jinping	Jiang camp (princeling)	Li Yuanchao	Hu camp (tuanpai)
State Council (premier & executive vice premier)	Li Keqiang	Hu camp (tuanpai)	Zhang Gaoli	Jiang camp
CMC (chairman & executive vice chairman)	Xi Jinping	Jiang camp (princeling)	Fan Changlong	Hu camp
CCP Secretariat (two highest ranking members)	Liu Yunshan	Jiang camp	Liu Qibao	Hu camp (tuanpai)
NPC (chairman & executive vice chairman)	Zhang Dejiang	Jiang camp (princeling)	Li Jianguo	Hu camp
CPPCC (chairman & executive vice chairman)	Yu Zhengsheng	Jiang camp (princeling)	Du Qinglin	Hu camp (tuanpai)
Supreme People’s Court (president & executive vice president)	Zhou Qiang	Hu camp (tuanpai)	Shen Deyong	Jiang camp
Supreme People’s Procuratorate (president & executive vice president)	Cao Jianmin	Jiang camp (Shanghai gang)	Hu Zejun	Hu camp (tuanpai)

SOURCE: Research by Cheng Li, Brookings Institution, 2013. KEY: CMC = Central Military Commission; NPC = National People’s Congress; PSC = Politburo Standing Committee;

Top Contenders for the 19th PSC and Politburo

Given that the CCP is set to undergo a major turnover in leadership at the 19th Party Congress in the fall of 2017, it is critically important to grasp the changes likely to occur on the PSC. Two norms in CCP leadership selection are very helpful for identifying who will be in or out on the next PSC. The first norm is the age requirement for retirement from the CCP Central Committee. At the 2007 party congress, all leaders born before 1940 were barred from continuing to serve on the Central Committee. Similarly, at the 2012 Party Congress, all leaders who were born before 1945 retired. Extrapolating from this norm, leaders who were born before 1950, including five of seven current PSC members, will not be considered for the next Central Committee and are therefore also out of the race for a seat on the Politburo or PSC in 2017. The second norm, primarily based on the 18th Party Congress, is that all new PSC members will be promoted from the previous Politburo.

Based on these two norms, there will be 14 eligible candidates for the 19th PSC (see table 4, next page). Barring something entirely unforeseen, Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang will likely stay (*text continues on page 13*)

Table 4*Factional Background of Leading Candidates for the Next Politburo Standing Committee*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 2017</i>	<i>Current position</i>	<i>Tenure in Politburo and PSC</i>	<i>Factional background</i>
Xi Jinping	1953	64	CCP secretary general, member of PSC, CMC chair, PRC president (designate)	Two terms as Politburo member, one term as PSC member	Jiang camp (princeling)
Li Keqiang	1955	62	Member of PSC, premier (designate)	Two terms as Politburo Member, one term as PSC member	Hu camp (tuanpai)
Li Yuanchao	1950	67	Politburo member, PRC vice president (designate)	Two terms as Politburo member	Hu camp (tuanpai, also princeling)
Wang Yang	1955	62	Politburo member, vice premier (designate)	Two terms as Politburo member	Hu camp (tuanpai)
Hu Chunhua	1963	54	Politburo member, Guangdong party secretary	One term as Politburo member	Hu camp (tuanpai)
Sun Zhengcai	1963	54	Politburo member, Chongqing party secretary	One term as Politburo member	Jiang camp
Zhang Chunxian	1953	64	Xinjiang party secretary	One term as Politburo member	Jiang camp
Liu Qibao	1953	64	Politburo member, head of CCP Propaganda Dept.	One term as Politburo member	Hu camp (tuanpai)
Zhao Leji	1957	60	Politburo member, head of CCP Organization Dept.	One term as Politburo member	Jiang camp
Li Zhanshu	1950	67	Politburo member, director of the CCP General Office	One term as Politburo member	Jiang camp
Sun Chunlan (f)	1950	67	Politburo member, Tianjin party secretary	One term as Politburo member	Hu camp
Wang Huning	1955	62	Politburo member, state councilor (designate)	One term as Politburo member	Jiang camp (Shanghai Gang)
Han Zheng	1954	63	Shanghai party secretary	One term as Politburo member	Jiang camp (Shanghai Gang)
Xu Qiliang	1950	67	Politburo member, CMC vice chair	One term as Politburo member	Jiang camp

KEY: CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CMC = Central Military Commission; (f) = female; Dept. = Department, PRC = People's Republic of China; PSC = Politburo Standing Committee. SOURCE: Research by Cheng Li, Brookings Institution, 2013.

on for another five-year term. Among the remaining 12 candidates, some may have a better chance than others. Li Yuanchao and Wang Yang have served two terms on the Politburo, which makes them more competitive than the others. For the sake of leadership continuity beyond the 19th Party Congress, there will be a tremendous incentive on the part of the CCP leadership to select two sixth-generation leaders as part of a dual-succession model similar to Xi and Li during the 2007 party congress. In that case, Hu Chunhua and Sun Zhengcai are undoubtedly two leading contenders for power in the sixth generation of leaders.

The top six leaders on the list (Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Wang Yang, Li Yuanchao, Hu Chunhua, and Sun Zhengcai) seem to have a better chance to serve on the next PSC than the others. This will leave only one position open (assuming that the PSC maintains its seven-seat composition), and the competition for that position among the eight candidates will therefore be very intense. This intensity of power struggle also suggests that there will be serious challenges even to those listed among the top six, as many ambitious politicians may want to seize any opportunity to take over these highly contentious seats in the PSC.

It should be noted that the number of seats on the PSC could very well change, as the CCP Constitution does not specify a fixed number. The PSC formed at the 13th Party Congress in 1987 had only five members, the PSCs formed at both the 14th Party Congress in 1992 and 15th in 1997 had seven, and both the 16th and 17th PSCs had nine members.

Xinjiang Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian has often been regarded as a capable leader who gets things done. During his tenure as minister of communications from 2002 to 2005, he made significant contributions to the rapid growth of China's highways and sea transportation. While he was Hunan party secretary, the province was ranked first in the country for attracting foreign direct investment. An official with a reputation for being media savvy, Zhang has been among the most accessible leaders at the annual NPC meetings over the past decade. He is also one of the very few leaders who have pledged to make available to the public his financial asset documents (and those of his family). Zhang's "flexible iron-fisted rule" in Xinjiang, which stands in contrast to his predecessor's "pure iron-fisted rule," seems to resonate well with both the CCP leadership and the Chinese public. Zhang possesses broad leadership experience in the central government (in the Ministry of Communications and the Ministry of Machinery and Electronics Industry), in top provincial posts (Xinjiang and Hunan), and in running a major state-owned enterprise (the China National Packaging Corporation). This combination of diverse leadership experiences has prepared him very well for further promotion.

In recent years there has been much discussion in China about the need to have a woman serve in the nation's highest decision-making body. Tianjin Party Secretary Sun Chunlan is well positioned to take that seat as the first female member of the PSC in CCP history.

Director of the CCP Propaganda Department Liu Qibao, director of the CCP Organization Department Zhao Leji, and director of the CCP General Office Li Zhanshu, each of whom heads a very important party organization, are also well-positioned in the Chinese political system. Their performance and personal ties with Xi or Li will be crucial in their possible ascent to the PSC.

(text continues on page 15)

Table 5*Candidates for the Next Politburo (as of 2013)*

<i>Name (gender and/or ethnicity)</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 2017</i>	<i>Current Leadership Post</i>	<i>Credentials</i>	<i>Factional background</i>
Wang Anshun	1957	60	Beijing mayor	Mayor of capital	Jiang camp (oil faction)
Wang Dongming	1956	61	Sichuan party secretary	Party secretary in a major province	Hu camp (tuanpai)
Jiang Yikang	1953	64	Shandong party secretary	Party secretary in a major province	Unclear
Qiang Wei	1953	64	Jiangxi party secretary	Provincial secretary twice	Jiang camp?
Zhang Baoshun	1950	67	Anhui party secretary	Provincial secretary twice	Hu camp (tuanpai)
Wang Min	1950	67	Liaoning party secretary	Provincial secretary twice	Jiang camp?
Zhang Qingwei	1961	56	Hebei governor	Top 6 th -generation candidate, CEO of SOE	Unclear
Su Shulin	1962	55	Fujian governor	Top 6 th -generation candidate, CEO of SOE	Jiang camp (oil faction)
Zhang Guoqing	1964	63	Chongqing deputy party secretary	Top 6 th -generation candidate, CEO of SOE	Unclear
Lu Hao	1967	50	Heilongjiang governor	Top 6 th -generation candidate, CEO of SOE	Hu camp (tuanpai)
Chen Min'er	1960	57	Guizhou governor	Top 6 th -generation candidate	Jiang camp (Xi's confidant)
Li Bin (female)	1954	63	Minister, National Health and Family Planning Commission	Top female candidate	Hu camp (Li's confidant)
Liu Hui (female, Hui)	1959	58	Ningxia governor	Top female candidate	Hu camp (tuanpai)
Yang Jing (Mongolian)	1953	64	State councilor and secretary general of State Council	Top State Council candidate	Hu camp (tuanpai)
Wang Yong	1955	62	State councilor	Top State Council candidate	Jiang camp
Wang Chen	1950	67	NPC vice chairman and secretary general	Top NPC candidate	Jiang camp (Xi's confidant)
Fang Fenghui	1951	66	Chief-of-Staff, PLA	Top military candidate	Hu camp (tuanpai)
Zhang Yang	1951	66	Director, PLA Political Department	Top military candidate	Unclear
Zhang Youxia	1950	67	Director, PLA Logistic Department	Top military candidate	Jiang camp (princeling)
Zhou Qiang	1960	57	President of Supreme People's Court	Sixth Generation	Hu camp (tuanpai)

SOURCE: Research by Cheng Li, Brookings Institution, 2013.

(continued from page 13)

Wang Huning is remarkable in that he previously served as a top aide to both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Under Xi's leadership, he continues to play an important role in domestic and foreign policy, which enhances his chances for further promotion. Shanghai Party Secretary Han Zheng has been a popular and effective leader in Shanghai for many years. Several times over the past two or three decades, the post of party chief in Shanghai has been a stepping stone for a seat in the PSC (as in the cases of Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, Zeng Qinghong, Wu Bangguo, Huang Ju, Xi Jinping, and Yu Zhengsheng). Because Han has never had any leadership experience outside of Shanghai and Wang has never served as a provincial or municipal leader, neither is as competitive as other candidates.

Due to the recent absence of military figures on the PSC, General Xu Qiliang, the only military representative who is eligible to stay on as part of the next Politburo, has the weakest chance to obtain a seat on the PSC. But the role of the military on the domestic and foreign policy fronts may increase significantly in the next few years, which would make him a credible contender for the 19th PSC as well.

Assuming the 19th Politburo will remain the same size as the three previous Politburos, 11 new members will be able to serve on this very important decision-making body. While the candidates for the Politburo are somewhat less obvious than those for the PSC, the pool of candidates is in fact also reasonably small. All candidates will likely have served on the 18th Central Committee as full or alternate members. Those who have had leadership experience as provincial party secretary in major provinces or in more than two provinces will be considered favorable candidates. Other factors that will be considered include representation on other national leadership bodies (e.g., the State Council and NPC); generational, gender, and ethnic minority status; and military leadership. Based on these criteria, table 5 (next page) presents 20 leading candidates and their biographical and factional backgrounds.

Six of these candidates were born in the 1960s and thus belong to the so-called sixth generation. Four of them previously served as CEOs of major state-owned enterprises. Hebei Governor Zhang Qingwei previously served as the chairman of the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC), the Chinese aerospace manufacturer that builds mid- to large-size passenger aircraft and aims to challenge the dominance of Boeing and Airbus in the global marketplace. From 2001 to 2007, Zhang served as the general manager of the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation, making him the youngest CEO of any of the country's flagship companies at the time. Fujian Governor Su Shulin previously served as the chairman of the China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec), which was ranked fifth on the 2012 Fortune Global 500 list of the world's largest corporations. Zhang and Sunday are both in their third terms as members or alternates of the 18th Central Committee. When they gained membership on the 356-member Central Committee at the 16th Party Congress in 2002, Zhang was only 41 years old, the youngest full member in the Central Committee, and Su was one of the three youngest alternates on the committee. In fact, their tenure on the Central Committee has been even longer than some of the widely recognized sixth-generation front-runners, including Politburo members Hu Chunhua and Sun Zhengcai. Neither, however, joined the Central Committee until 2007.

Top leaders in the fourth and fifth generations were also noted for their early entry onto the Central Committee. Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao joined the Central Committee in 1982 when they were 40 years old, and Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang became an alternate and a member, respectively, of the Central Committee in 1997 when they were both in their early 40s. This early Central Committee membership helped advance the position of these fourth- and fifth-generation front-runners in their rise to the top of the Chinese leadership. It remains to be seen whether the leaders who have backgrounds as CEOs of business enterprises will become top contenders for CCP leadership in the years to come.

Final Thoughts

Unexpected events and unpredictable circumstances can dramatically change both the game of elite politics and the potential leadership lineup in this rapidly changing country. One should not forget that three top contenders for the 18th PSC—Bo Xilai, Ling Jihua, and Li Yuanchao—were all removed from consideration a few months (or even weeks) prior to the 18th Party Congress. Bo was purged as a result of his wife’s murder case, Ling was demoted as a result of both the car crash that killed his son and his alleged coverup of the incident, and Li mysteriously lost the battle only one month prior to the party congress.

In addition, many unforeseen events and developments may change the trajectory on which political succession is set. This could include a military conflict in the East China Sea or South China Sea, the economic performance of the Xi-Li administration, the ongoing campaign against official corruption, increased social unrest exacerbated by environmental pollution, public health and food safety issues, growing public demand for political reform and constitutionalism, central-local tensions over tax division and local debts, problems with civilian control over the military, and the ever-changing international economic environment. All of these factors will play a role in determining China’s political future, including who emerges on top in the next round of political succession. Yet well-positioned members in the Politburo and rising stars in the CCP leadership will always be important players regardless of whether the Chinese political landscape changes in any manner, be it drastic or incremental.

Notes

*The author thanks Andrew Marble and Ryan McElveen for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article. Chinese leaders’ biographical information and career experiences are primarily based on information from the official Chinese news agency Xinhua. <http://www.news.cn/>

¹ For a more detailed discussion of the role of and the selection process for the Politburo, see Cheng Li, “The Battle for China’s Top Nine Leadership Posts,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Winter 2012): 131–145; and Li Cheng, *The Road to Zhongnanhai* (通往中南海之路; New York: Mirror Books, 2012). For other recent studies of the Politburo and its Standing Committee, see Alice Miller, “The Work System of the Xi Jinping Leadership,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 41; Alice Miller, “The New Party Politburo Leadership,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 40 (14 January 2013); and Cheng Li, “Rule of the Princelings,” *Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, No. 8 (Winter, 2013): 34–47.

² For further discussion of various forms of informal networks, see Cheng Li, *China’s Leaders: The New Generation* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001); David M. Finkelstein and Maryanne Kivlehan (eds.), *Chinese Leadership in the Twenty-first Century: The Rise of the Fourth Generation* (Armonk,

NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002); and Cheng Li, “The ‘Shanghai Gang’: Force for Stability or Cause for Conflict?” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 1, Part II (Winter 2002).

³ For a detailed discussion of the “technocratic turnover” of the 14th and 15th Party Congresses, see Cheng Li and Lynn White, “The Army in the Succession to Deng Xiaoping: Familiar Fealties and Technocratic Trends,” *Asian Survey*, vol. 33, no. 8 (August 1993), pp. 757–786; and Cheng Li and Lynn White, “The Fifteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: Full-Fledged Technocratic Leadership with Partial Control by Jiang Zemin,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (March 1998), pp. 245–247.

⁴ 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 2003): 583.

⁵ For more discussion of the “one party, two coalitions,” see Cheng Li, “The New Bipartisanship within the Chinese Communist Party.” *Orbis*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer): 387–400.

⁶ Research by Cheng Li, Brookings Institution. For a similar observation, also see Willy Lam, “Communist Youth League Clique Maintains Clout Despite Congress Setback.” *China Brief*, Vol. 12, No. 23 (November 30, 2012).