

Beijing Sets the Stage to Convene the 16th Party Congress

H. Lyman Miller

After a summer of last-minute wrangling, Beijing moved swiftly to complete preparations for the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) 16th Party Congress. Since the leadership's annual summer retreat at the north China seaside resort at Beidaihe, leadership statements and authoritative press commentary have implied that the congress, scheduled to open on November 8, 2002, will see the long-anticipated retirement of "third generation" leaders around party General Secretary Jiang Zemin and the installation of a new "fourth generation" leadership led by Hu Jintao. Chinese press commentary has also indicated that the party constitution will be amended to incorporate the "three represents"--the controversial political reform enunciated by Jiang Zemin nearly three years ago which aims to broaden the party's base by admitting the entrepreneurial, technical, and professional elite that has emerged in Chinese society under two decades of economic reform.

The relative clarity of political trends since the Beidaihe leadership retreat contrasts starkly with their uncertainty immediately preceding it. Weeks before the annual Beidaihe leadership retreat, a torrent of rumors erupted in Beijing and found voice in the noncommunist Hong Kong and foreign press alleging that Jiang Zemin was having second thoughts about the congress. For unclear reasons that were nevertheless widely speculated upon, Jiang was said to be retreating from long-established plans for succession and seeking to retain some or all of his top posts. In addition, opposition among the party's rank and file to the proposed incorporation of the three represents into the party constitution remained strong, despite two years' worth of efforts by the party leadership to dispel it.¹

The course of leadership discussions at Beidaihe cannot be assessed with any certainty. As in past years, People's Republic of China (PRC) media were silent with regard to the Beidaihe meetings, and the rumors and speculations recorded in Hong Kong and foreign media have been too diverse, divergent, and contradictory to be reliable. Nevertheless, it seems clear from the authority and consistency of PRC media treatment of political issues relevant to the congress, at least since the leadership retreat closed, that the Beidaihe meetings restored momentum behind the long-planned agenda of the congress.

Scheduling the Congress

The 16th Party Congress will open later in the fall than any previous party congress since the reform era began in the late 1970s.² The lateness of the 16th Party Congress's opening date suggests the seriousness of political differences still dividing the leadership as the congress season approached.

The decision to schedule the party congress in November undoubtedly emerged from discussions during the leadership's annual retreat at Beidaihe. Judging by leaders' public

appearances reported in PRC media, these discussions at Beidaihe took place over a week--perhaps from August 6-12.

Some leaders were already at Beidaihe in late July--the official news agency Xinhua reported National People's Congress (NPC) Chairman Li receiving a foreign visitor there on July 24. But Premier Zhu Rongji toured flood disaster areas in Heilongjiang from July 24-27, met a Sri Lankan special envoy in Beijing on the 29th, and received the Panchen Lama on the 31st. The full Politburo turned out for Army Day events on July 31 and August 1 in Beijing, and Li Peng appeared in Beijing as late as the 5th. However, no Politburo Standing Committee leaders appeared publicly from the 6th until the 13th, when Li Lanqing appeared in Beijing.

On August 25, Xinhua reported that the Politburo had decided at a "recent" meeting that, subject to approval by a Central Committee plenum, the party congress would open on November 8. That decision received immediate endorsement the next day in a *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao*) editorial, which broadly forecast the tasks the congress would address.³

Congress Preparations

After the Politburo had set a date for the congress, concurrent national conferences of party propaganda and organization directors convened in Beijing from August 26-28, with Jiang Zemin addressing them jointly. At the propaganda conference, party propaganda chief Ding Guangen set out themes that the media should focus on in preparation for the party congress. These themes included:

- launching "a new upsurge in studying, propagating, and implementing the important thinking of the 'three represents'";
- playing up the party's achievements since the 1997 15th Party Congress and since the 1989 Fourth Plenum of the 13th Central Committee (at which Jiang Zemin was appointed party chief); and
- giving prominence to party cadres and party rank and file who display the "new demeanor" of "emancipating their minds, seeking truth from facts, . . . and advancing with the times."⁴

On September 8, Xinhua reported that election of all 2,210 delegates to the upcoming congress had been completed in June. According to Xinhua, Beijing had issued a circular in October 2001 calling for the selection of congress delegates according to new, revised procedures throughout the party that specified competitive elections and secret balloting.⁵ Thereafter, in May and June 2002, PRC media began reporting elections of delegates to the party congress by congresses of party, state, and military hierarchies.⁶

In addition, party congresses were held in all 31 of China's provinces, autonomous regions, and province-level cities between September 2001 and June 2002. In 27 of these cases, the party congresses reappointed incumbent provincial party secretaries; new party

secretaries were appointed in four. All of these provincial leaders are likely to be included in the 16th Central Committee elected at the 16th Party Congress.

The reappointed incumbents include all four who have concurrently been members of the present Politburo--Li Changchun in Guangdong, Huang Ju in Shanghai, Wu Guanzheng in Shandong, and Jia Qinglin in Beijing. But, two of these people--Jia and Huang--were replaced and transferred to unspecified central responsibilities in late October, on the eve of the congress, leading to new appointments to the posts of party chief in Beijing and Shanghai municipalities. In addition, a concurrent shuffle of Central Committee department chiefs brought Chongqing party chief He Guoqiang to Beijing, leading to a new party boss in that province-level city.⁷

Beijing advertised both the election of party congress delegates and the selection of provincial party leaders at the round of provincial party congresses as the implementation of new procedures intended to curb corrupt promotion practices, introduce competitive election processes, and enhance turnover in favor of younger candidates. In particular, they put into practice procedures codified in new "Regulations on the Selection and Appointment of Party and Government Leading Officials." The "Regulations," promulgated by the Central Committee on July 9 and publicized on July 23, are a revision of a 1995 code and, according to a *People's Daily* editorial on July 24, are intended to promote cadres who meet the requirements of the three represents.⁸

Political Report and Constitution

PRC media have affirmed explicitly and repeatedly that the political report that Jiang Zemin delivers at the 16th Party Congress on behalf of the outgoing 15th Central Committee will be based on his speech at the 80th anniversary of the party's founding on July 1, 2001, and his speech to the Central Party School on May 31, 2002.⁹ The media have not, however, provided any account of the report's drafting, review, and revision.

PRC media have also stated explicitly that the party constitution will be revised to accommodate the requirements of the three represents. On June 13, for example, *Wen wei po* (one of two communist newspapers in Hong Kong) stated that the party constitution would be amended to incorporate the three represents formulation alongside Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and Deng Xiaoping Theory as the party's guiding ideology. *Wen wei po* added that the constitution would also be revised to redefine the CCP as the "vanguard of the Chinese nation and Chinese people," supplementing its previous definition as the "vanguard of the Chinese working class," and would provide for the admission of "elites from the new social strata" into the party.

To explain the need to revise the party constitution--and also to justify such revision in the face of persisting resistance in the party ranks to the changes in the party that ratification of the three represents portends--PRC media have reviewed the circumstances of past constitutional amendments. On July 15, for example, Huang Yibing, a researcher at the Central

Committee's Party History Research Center, reviewed past revisions of the party constitution from its adoption in 1922 down to the amendments adopted at the 1997 15th Party Congress in order to "clarify" the necessarily evolutionary nature of the document.¹⁰ Central Party School Professor Ye Duchu similarly underscored the propriety of revising the party constitution in a long article in *Outlook (Liaowang)*, a weekly newsmagazine published by the official Xinhua News Agency. Striking a starkly defensive note, Ye asserted:

The history of the revisions that have been made to the party constitution demonstrates that our party, while being steadfast in maintaining the creative and scientific spirit of Marxism and the attitude of seeking truth from facts, did not stick slavishly to conventional and outmoded practices in terms of how the constitution has been formulated and in terms of the law; nothing has been regarded as a dead formula that cannot be changed. Yet these revisions have also followed a strict, scientific attitude to guarantee the principles of the constitution and the stability of its contents. Except for incidental circumstances (such as the Cultural Revolution), revisions have never been done over and over again or in a disorganized manner, and certainly they have never led to disputations, divisions, or even the danger of chaos or fragmentation that has occurred in some communist parties because of revisions made to the party constitution.

"The creation of the party constitution and its supplementation, revision, and completion in all actuality synthesize internal party experience in the course of reaching a common understanding" that, Ye continued, helps to "overcome erroneous thinking."¹¹

Revisions to the party constitution to incorporate the three represents concept will likely be made without explicit reference to Jiang Zemin. Authoritative commentary through the post-Beidaihe months has routinely referred to "Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and Deng Xiaoping Theory and the important thinking of the 'three represents'"--and not to "Jiang Zemin's important thinking of the three represents"--as the party's guiding ideology. This phrasing has been standard since the spring of 2000--two months after Jiang first enunciated the three represents during a tour of Guangdong and Shanghai--when a *People's Daily* editorial signaled leadership endorsement of the concept.¹² It was also the formulation incorporated into authoritative commentary on the speech Jiang Zemin delivered at the party's 80th anniversary on July 1, 2001, and it was employed in the party Central Committee's Sixth Plenum communiqué in September 2001. Central Party School Vice President Li Junru has stated subsequently that the "important thinking of the three represents" and Jiang's party anniversary speech were approved "unanimously" by the Politburo Standing Committee and by the full Politburo.¹³ Thus, the concept of the three represents has had the force of leadership consensus behind it for more than two years and is not Jiang's personal political property, even if he first enunciated it.

Jiang Zemin

Post-Beidaihe treatment in PRC media of key themes associated with Jiang Zemin strengthen the judgment that he will step down from his leadership posts at the 16th Party Congress in November 2002 and at the 10th National People's Congress in spring 2003. One such theme is the call to sum up the party's achievements not only in the five years since the 1997 15th Party Congress--a routine task leading into a party congress--but also over the 13 years since the 1989 13th Central Committee's Fourth Plenum, at which Jiang was first appointed party leader. As noted above, this call was designated one of the main themes for media attention in preparation for the party congress by party propaganda chief Ding Guangen at the August propaganda directors conference in Beijing.

Even before the August conference, Central Party School Vice President Li Junru declared that summing up the "achievements and contributions of the party Central Committee with Jiang Zemin as the core in the past 13 years" is a major task in party history research in preparation for the 16th Party Congress.¹⁴ Beginning in September, a steady stream of reviews have appraised work in a broad array of policy sectors under the Jiang leadership:

- On September 18, *Liberation Army Daily (Jiefangjun bao)* carried a long review of the party's guidance of the army under Jiang's leadership since 1989.¹⁵
- On the same day, Xinhua transmitted a long review of the enhancement of living standards in the PRC since 1989.¹⁶
- On September 20, State Planning Commission Chairman Zeng Peiyan reviewed achievements in China's overall economic development over the past 13 years.¹⁷
- On September 21, Xinhua carried a review of the party's successes in the past 13 years by Party History Research Center Director Sun Ying.¹⁸
- Also on the 21st, Xinhua transmitted an interview with Li Junru on the party's success since 1989 in "keeping up with the times" in all areas of work.¹⁹
- The same day, Xinhua also transmitted an interview with Huang Hong, director of the Marxism Research Institute at the National Defense University, who reviewed the party's achievements in "theoretical innovation" since 1989.²⁰
- On September 23, *Outlook* magazine published a long interview with Lu Xianfu, director of the Central Party School's Party-Building Department, who summed up the Jiang leadership's achievements in advancing the party's organizational affairs.²¹
- At a meeting in Beijing on October 8, Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan reviewed the PRC's successes in international diplomacy since 1989.²²
- On October 9, *Liberation Army Daily* published a long review by the National Defense University's Deng Xiaoping Theory Research Center of Jiang Zemin's pronouncements on military affairs over the past 13 years. On the 14th, it published a long review of advances in modernization of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) weapons and equipment over the same period.²³
- On the 16th, *People's Daily* reviewed advances in the party's ideology and propaganda work since 1989.²⁴

- On October 21, Xinhua transmitted a long review of 13 years' progress toward national reunification.²⁵

Although these reviews were frequently interpreted in Hong Kong and Western media as making the case for Jiang's indispensability and paving the way for him to stay on in his leadership posts, their thrust appears quite opposite. They almost uniformly gave credit not to Jiang personally, but to the "central leadership collective with comrade Jiang Zemin as the core." It appears, therefore, that the reviews are intended as a salute not just to Jiang Zemin, but also to the entire third generation leadership slated to retire at the upcoming congress.

A similar message seemed to be conveyed by commentary attending the publication of a new compilation of excerpts from Jiang Zemin's writings and speeches since 1989. Titled *Jiang Zemin on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*, the book incorporates 1,300 excerpts from among 370 of Jiang's writings, letters, and speeches and arranges them into 25 topical categories. The book was publicized on August 27, while the party propaganda conference was in session, and on September 4, the party General Office disseminated a circular issued on August 27 by the party's Central Propaganda and Organization Departments calling for party-wide study of the new book.²⁶

The book's title recalls a 1985 compilation of Deng Xiaoping's writings and speeches on the topic of "socialism with Chinese characteristics"--the official designation of the CCP's brand of Marxism-Leninism--and the new book is the successor and complement to a comparable compilation of extracts of Deng's writings and remarks on the topic, which was published by the party's Document Research Office in 1993. As such, publication of the book advances Jiang's elevation into the pantheon of China's core leaders, alongside Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

Commentary on the book, however, explains the book's significance differently. According to Li Zhongjie, director of the Central Party School's Scientific Research Department and an ubiquitous commentator on the three represents and the upcoming party congress, the contents of the book are "not one person's achievement, but the achievement of the whole party," and they reflect "the precious achievements in innovation in theory and practice" of the "third generation central leadership collective with comrade Jiang Zemin as the core" over the past 13 years.²⁷

The Seventh Plenum

The Central Committee's Seventh Plenum, which closed on November 5, only three days before the 16th Party Congress was scheduled to open, confirmed many of the political trends that have emerged since the August Beidaihe meetings. The plenum communiqué stated that in its deliberations, the Central Committee had endorsed the Politburo's August proposal to set a date of November 8 for the opening of the congress. The plenum also approved the completed draft of the political report to be delivered at the congress and the draft amendments

to the party constitution to be introduced there. In addition, as if to mark a pending moment of generational transition in the party leadership, the plenum saluted the work of the “third generation central leadership collective with comrade Jiang Zemin as the core” over the preceding 13 years.²⁸

November 6, 2002

Notes

¹ See Lyman Miller, “Beijing Blunts Intraparty Dissent in Preparing for 16th Party Congress,” *China Leadership Monitor* 3 (summer 2002).

² Among the previous congresses of the reform period, the 1982 12th Party Congress, the 1992 14th Party Congress, and the 1997 15th Party Congress all met in September or October. The 1987 13th Party Congress was the latest, opening on October 25 and closing on November 1, 1987. Preparations for that congress were begun in the fall of 1986, but they were presumably delayed by the demotion of then-party general secretary Hu Yaobang and the momentary sidetracking of Deng Xiaoping’s reform agenda by a campaign--under the rubric of “criticizing bourgeois liberalization”--to silence demands by intellectuals and students for greater political freedom.

³ Xinhua News Agency (English), August 25, 2002, in World News Connection (WNC), FBIS CPP-2002-0825-000042, and Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), August 25, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0825-000085.

⁴ Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), August 28, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0828-000173, and Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), August 28, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0828-000165.

⁵ Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), September 8, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0908-000043, and *Beijing Review*, September 5, 2002, 16-18.

⁶ For example: from the Central Committee departments (Xinhua News Agency [Chinese], May 11, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0511-000122); among Taiwan “compatriots” (Xinhua News Agency [English], May 21, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0521-000151); among centrally managed state-owned enterprises (Xinhua News Agency [Chinese], May 22, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0522-000155); among central finance departments (Xinhua News Agency [Chinese], June 15, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1615-000067); and from the People’s Liberation Army (Xinhua News Agency [Chinese], June 16, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0616-00007).

⁷ Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), October 22, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1022-000140.

⁸ For the text of the “Regulations” and the Central Committee circular, see Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), July 23, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0807-000184 and CPP-2002-0723-000043. For the July 24 *Renmin ribao* editorial, see Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), July 23, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0723-000208.

⁹ For example, see Tseng Shu-wan, “The Political Report of the 16th CCP National Congress Will Be Based on Jiang’s ‘1 July’ Speech,” *Wen wei po*, May 9, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0509-000063, and Li Junru, “Ideological and Theoretical Preparations for the 16th Party Congress,” *Liaowang*, 2002, no. 31 (July 29): 3-6, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0808-000065.

¹⁰ Huang Yibing, “The First Constitution of the CPC Emerged on 16 July 1922,” *Renminwang* (The People’s Net), July 15, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0718-000020.

¹¹ Ye Duchu, “Revising and Completing the Party Constitution: How Can We Make the Party Constitution into a Document That Strengthens Unity, Displays Vitality, Is Principled, and Is Full of Hope?” *Liaowang*, 2002, no. 30 (July 22): 20-23, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0730-000073.

¹² “Comprehensively Strengthening the Great Program of Party-Building,” *Renmin ribao*, May 22, 2000, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2000-0521-000098.

¹³ Ma Ling, “Li Junru on Ideological Preparations for the 16th Party Congress,” *Ta kung pao*, July 17, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0718-000022.

¹⁴ “Li Junru Discusses Study of CPC History,” *Wen wei po*, July 31, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0731-000063.

-
- ¹⁵ Rao Hongqiao and Cao Ruilin, "Achievements in Party Theory Guide China's Army in Advancing with the Times," *Jiefangjun bao*, September 18, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0919-000039.
- ¹⁶ Xinhua News Agency (English), September 18, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0918-000121.
- ¹⁷ Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), September 20, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0920-000122.
- ¹⁸ Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), September 21, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0921-000013.
- ¹⁹ Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), September 21, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0921-000002.
- ²⁰ Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), September 21, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0921-00010.
- ²¹ *Liaowang*, 2002, no. 39 (September 23): 6-8, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1003-000065.
- ²² Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), October 8, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1008-000155.
- ²³ *Jiefangjun bao*, October 9, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1009-000039, and *Jiefangjun bao*, October 14, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1014-000026.
- ²⁴ *Renmin ribao*, October 16, 2002, 1, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1016-000097.
- ²⁵ Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), October 21, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1021-000031.
- ²⁶ Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), August 27 and September 4, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0827-000120 and CPP-2002-0904-000070, respectively.
- ²⁷ Li Zhongjie, "A Prolific Theoretical Achievement," *Liaowang*, 2002, no. 36 (September 2): 2-3, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-0910-000072.
- ²⁸ Xinhua News Agency (Chinese), November 5, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1105-000137.