

**CCP's Collective Leadership and Power Succession:  
Constants and Variables**

**(Introduction)**

## **The Road to Zhongnanhai**

### **High-level Leadership Groups on the Eve of the 18th Party Congress**

In the early 1960s, an American leading scholar in Futurology Daniel Bell, when asked about what would happen in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in the United States, predicted with his typical quick wit that there would be a presidential election once for every four years from 1972 onward. He made the forecast at a time when institutionalized routine democratic elections were only held in a very small number of countries, mainly in Western Europe and North America. This political mechanism Bell described, by which power transition is peacefully completed through elections, is the key to forecasting a country's future development. (Note 1)

Over the past half a century, democratic elections have been practiced in the overwhelming majority of countries worldwide and is no longer exclusively for Western countries. The embrace of democracy by many countries in Eastern Europe and Southern America has changed the political landscape of the world. Asian countries like Japan and South Korea have also put in place a sound democratic system. The implementation of democratic elections in populous countries such as India, Indonesia, Brazil and Pakistan has made the majority of people in the world entitled to an equal right to vote (one person, one vote). The ongoing "Arab Awakening" is likely to further increase the number of democracies in the world. In spite of the varying degrees of effectiveness of the democratic system in different countries, what Sun Yat-sen famously said nearly one hundred years ago about democracy—"One cannot resist the trend of the world; whoever follows it will rise, and whoever opposes it will perish"—has become the political reality of the present-day world.

However, China's quest for democracy over the last century was filled with pitfalls and tragedies. In the more than three decades since reform and opening up, China has made giant political and social progress, but what the world generally acknowledges is that it's an economic takeoff rather than political development. In the words of Premier Wen Jiabao, China is now like a person with one leg long (economic reform) and the other leg short (political reform). (Note 2) Therefore, a discussion of China's political process, especially the CCP's development and changes, is of great importance.

Some may say that the CCP's power succession has been gradually institutionalized. The National Congress of the CCP and National People's Congress held once every five years and the generational leadership handover that occurs every ten years have been firmly established. However, the CCP's power succession is largely the result of factional (and often behind-closed-door) deal cuts rather than elections. China's political stagnation can be observed from the following three aspects: and borrowing Chinese official terms, the world situation, China's domestic environment, and the CCP's own conditions.

### **World Situation, China's Domestic Environment and the CCP's Own Conditions**

On the international stage, the negative image of a centralized one-party state has become a hindrance to China's development. China does not want to continue to be grouped with those few backward and isolated communist or authoritarian states. Besides, China has not yet established a value system generally recognized by the international community, something that is indispensable to the building of China's soft power. China's rise to prominence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will ultimately depend on its living up to world-recognized standards of governance covering such domains as pluralism, openness, rule of law, human rights, freedom of the press, freedom of faith, and transparency. In fact, no consensus, let alone defining characterization, has been reached on the much-talked-about "China Model" in recent years.

Domestically, China's political system has become increasingly unable to deal with the country's complicated and fast-changing problems as the gap keeps growing between urban and rural areas, coastal and inland regions, and the new economy and traditional economic sectors. The wide-ranging problems it faces – including shortages of natural resources, environmental degradation, the side effects of large-scale urbanization, the prospect of an aging society, inadequate health care and social welfare, rapid expansion of state-owned monopolistic enterprises at the expense of private enterprises, rampant government corruption, tensions between the central and local governments, and ethnic conflicts – all call for more effective and efficient governance and the transformation of the country's political system.

In terms of the CCP itself, the biggest challenge for its leadership will most likely come not from external forces, but from within the party. Over the past thirty years, China has gradually completed the transition from strongman politics in the eras of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping to collective leadership, putting to an end China's autocratic tradition. Collective leadership inherently involves more factional competition and coalition-building. In the absence of strongman politics, factional compromise has become more common. The CCP's institutional changes do not reduce factional tensions; quite the contrary, they make factional politics all the more dynamic. Political competition and lobbying activities occur in various forms. For some political elites and the public, it may not be easy to adapt to the new rules of the game. With increasing public dissatisfaction and expectations for a significantly different future, the CCP looks extremely vulnerable in the face of demagogic sentiment. Some political figures are always ready to utilize public resources for their own private gains. 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.

### **Spotlight on the 18<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress**

Although criticisms of China's slow political reforms are not without reason, they often neglect the positive, potentially far-reaching changes that have taken place inside the CCP. The most important of all is that a pluralistic interest system under a collective leadership is taking shape, in which different factions compete against each other for power, influence and control over policy. It is worth remembering that when Jiang Zemin, the third-generation CCP leader, handed the reins to his successor and the fourth-generation leader, Hu Jintao, during the 16<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress in 2002, it marked the first power transfer in the PRC's history that was carried out in a peaceful, orderly and institutionalized manner. If the upcoming power transfer can be completed as successfully as the last time and effectively rise to various challenges in the years to come, it will be a great encouragement to China's leadership and the whole nation. The successful power transfer for the second in this most populous country in the world will also present China in a new and favorable light to the international community.

The importance of the power transfer soon to be completed at the 18<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress in the fall of 2012 and at the 12<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress in the spring of 2013 is also reflected in the scale of personnel changes. In the three most important leadership organs – the Politburo Standing Committee, the State Council, and the Central Military Commission – about 70% of the total members will be replaced, mainly due to their age. 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, making this leadership turnover at the highest level the largest one in the past three decades.

Who are the most promising candidates for these supreme leadership bodies? What are the main characteristics and principal criteria for the advancement of these newcomers? Can one intelligently forecast the possible leadership lineup and factional distribution of power? To what extent will this new generation of leaders change the way Chinese politics operates? This book discusses the above issues from the perspective of personnel changes.

Like many other things that are happening in China, the country's leadership turnover is a paradox of hope and fear. By "hope", I mean that leaders of the next (fifth) generation, as compared with the fourth generation, are more diversified in terms of their academic and political backgrounds. On the one hand, having weathered the baptism of the "Cultural Revolution", they have stronger adaptability, and on the other hand, their experience receiving their higher education and working during the reform and opening up era gives them a broader global perspective. They may make far-reaching contributions to the progress of China's political system and democratic governance. By "fear", it means that the present-day Chinese society is much more ideologically pluralistic and represented by considerably segmented political elites, not only making it more difficult for consensus building but also raising serious concerns about the leadership's ability to maintain intra-party unity and national solidarity. The ideological split among the leadership may develop to the point of irreconcilability. The disagreement in policy preferences may make the decision-making process prolonged and complicated and even deadlocked. The competition for posts in the Politburo and its Standing Committee may become so fierce as to make factional infighting out of control. Therefore, before analyzing and predicting personnel changes in the CCP leadership, it is necessary to make a brief assessment of China's political institutionalization development in the past decade or so, especially the concept of intra-Party democracy and its practice.

### **Major Components of Intra-Party Democracy: Rhetoric or Reality?**

In the past ten years, the Chinese government and official media have made frequent use of the term "intra-Party democracy" in reference to a mechanism of institutional balances and checks of power inside the CCP. The 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the 17<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee held in September 2009, in particular, called for promoting democracy within the Party and highlighted intra-Party democracy as the "lifeblood" of the Party and the principal determinant of whether the Party will be able to maintain its position of primacy in the future. (Note 3) While there was no breakthrough decision at the Fourth Plenary Session of the 17th Central Committee to enhance the Chinese public's confidence in the prospect of intra-Party democracy, the session did produce a wide-ranging plan for improvements to CCP governance. It explicitly called for political reforms in three major areas: 1) more competitive inner-Party elections to choose CCP officials; 2) a more consensus based decision-making process called "decision by votes" (*piaojuezh*); and 3) more restrictive rules to regulate the tenure, transfer, and regional allocation of high-ranking leaders. In each of these areas one might presume that the reform measures proposed are largely political rhetoric and will remain subject to manipulation on the part of CCP authorities. At the same time, however, one can reasonably argue that these measures have great potential. Now more explicitly articulated than ever before, they may become enormously important in determining the behavior of CCP elites, the shifting contours of leadership politics in the coming years, and the transformation of the policy-making process.

### 1) Multi-candidate election (“more candidates than seats election”)

The core component of intra-Party democracy, as acknowledged by the top CCP leaders and their advisors in Chinese think tanks, lies in the expansion of inner-Party elections. The new directives specify that the Party should “improve inner-Party electoral methods, regulate electoral procedures and voting formats, cultivate new ways to introduce candidates, and gradually expand the scope of direct elections.” In fact, since the 13th National Congress of the CCP in 1987, the Chinese authorities have adopted a method of multi-candidate election known as a “more candidates than seats election” (*cha’e xuanju*), for the election of the Central Committee. For example, if the top leaders plan to have a 300-member Central Committee, they may place 310 names on the ballot. The 20 candidates who receive the fewest votes in a secret ballot will be eliminated.

CCP leaders have often implied that there would be an ever-increasing number of candidates in future elections for the Central Committee. The 2002 Party Congress had 5.1% more candidates than available full-membership seats and 5.7% more candidates for alternate-membership seats. In the 2007 Party congress, the delegates voted to elect 204 full members from the total number of 221 candidates (8.3% more) on the ballot. As for alternate members, the delegates voted to elect 167 alternates from the total number of 183 candidates (9.6% more) on the ballot. It has been widely noted that the eliminated individuals in these elections were usually leaders who came from the privileged families of high-ranking officials, known in China as princelings (*taizidang*). In the 1997 Party congress, for example, several princelings, including Chen Yuan, Wang Jun, and Bo Xilai, were among the 5% of candidates defeated despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that all of their fathers had served as vice-premiers. This also explains why leaders with princeling backgrounds are usually less enthusiastic about the intra-Party democracy than their non-princeling colleagues.

It is unclear whether a similar method will be applied to the selection of the Politburo, the next organization up in the Party’s power hierarchy, in the near future. In recent years, the official Chinese media have devoted extensive coverage to multi-candidate elections for other important positions at provincial and municipal levels of leadership. Jiangsu province, particularly its capital city, Nanjing, was an experimental area for multi-candidate elections in 2002–2007 under the leadership of then Jiangsu Party secretary Li Yuanchao. Several heads of counties or urban districts in Nanjing were elected through such a method. In September 2009, on the eve of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 17th Central Committee, a total of 363 Party committees of neighborhood communities in the city had direct elections for local Party leaders. According to the state-run media this large-scale experiment in direct elections “was unprecedented in the PRC’s history.” Li Yuanchao, now director of the CCP Organization Department, was apparently the principal supporter of this endeavor.

### 2) Decision by vote system

Major decisions of the Party should also be determined by a Party committee vote at any given level of leadership. New directives emphasize the principle of collective leadership in the decision-making process, specifying that all the major decisions regarding socioeconomic policies, large construction projects, major financial expenditures, and important personnel appointments should be made via a “decision by votes” during a meeting of the Party committee (*dangwei hui*) or executive committee (*changwei hui*) rather than at the whim of the Party secretary. This measure seeks to preclude an excessive accumulation of power by the Party secretary—in Chinese, the “No. 1 leader” (*diyì bāshǒu*) or “Party boss.” As part of these regulations, two-thirds of a committee’s members should be present at the meeting and a candidate for appointment must receive at least two-thirds of the votes in order to be confirmed. In March 2009, for example, members of the executive committee of the provincial Party committee of Zhejiang Province voted on the appointments of 56 municipal- and bureau-level leaders by secret ballot. This “one member, one vote” practice, as described in the Chinese media, grants members of the executive committee power equal to the Party secretary. And in 2011, the CCP Henan Provincial Committee also used the “decision by vote” method to determine the Party secretary and mayor of Zhengzhou, the provincial capital.

### 3) Institutional Regulations and Informal Norms

Institutional development in cadre management covers both formal regulations and informal norms to curtail various forms of favoritism and lingering instances of lifetime tenure. To a great extent, these institutional developments are already in use, and they include:

- Term limits. With few exceptions, a five-year term limit has been established for top posts in the Party and government. In addition, an individual leader cannot hold the same position for more than two terms. And no official shall hold any leadership positions of the same level for more than 15 years.
- Age limits for retirement. Based on CCP regulations and norms, leaders above a certain level of seniority cannot exceed a set age limit. For example, all the members who were born before 1940 retired from the Central Committee at the Party Congress in 2007. Major provincial leaders (Party secretaries and governors) are required to retire at 65 and provincial and ministerial deputies at 63.

- Regional representation in the full membership seats of the Central Committee. A strong political norm since the 1997 Central Committee has been that each province-level administration has two full membership seats (usually occupied by the provincial Party secretary and governor) on the Central Committee. Although provincial chiefs may be promoted later to the central government or transferred to other provinces, this distributional norm was strictly applied at the time the Central Committee was elected.
- “Law of avoidance” in selection of top local leaders. Party secretaries, secretaries of local discipline commissions, and police chiefs at provincial or municipal levels of leadership are often non-native outsiders who were transferred from the central administration or another province.

These institutional rules and norms not only generate a sense of increased consistency and fairness in the selection of leaders, but also make the circulation of the Chinese political elite through positions of authority very fast. Because of the fluidity of membership in these crucial CCP leadership bodies, no individual, faction, institution, or region is able to dominate the power structure. These developments have reinforced norms of checks and balances in the Chinese leadership and have a strong impact on elite behavior.

Despite these wide-ranging measures adopted by the CCP leadership to make intra-Party democracy more than mere political rhetoric, there are significant obstacles. Seats in the most powerful bodies of the Party-state are still decided by a very small number of top leaders through deal-making, not open competition. The absence of a free press and an independent judiciary seriously undermines both the credibility and effectiveness of supervision.

### **Intra-Party Partisanship: Not a Choice, but a Reality**

To some extent, the rise of intra-party factional competition is not a choice, but a reality and the natural result of the end of strongman politics. It is an indisputable characteristic of China’s current politics that the ruling party is no longer led by one strongman like Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping. Instead, the Politburo and its Standing Committee, China’s most powerful body, are run by two informal coalitions of comparative strength that compete against each other for power, influence, and control over policy. Competition in the Communist Party is, of course, nothing new. But the jockeying today is no longer a zero-sum game in which winner takes all.

The Communist Party’s power structure can be divided into two distinct factions or coalitions: “Populists” and “Elitists”. The populists are currently led by President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao. Members of their core group, including Li Keqiang, Director of Party Organization Li Yuanchao, and Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang, are known as *tuanpai*, leaders who advanced their careers through the ranks of the Chinese Communist Youth League. Most *tuanpai* – they now make up 23% of the Central Committee and 32% of the Politburo – served as local and provincial leaders, often in poor inland provinces, and many have expertise in organization, propaganda and legal affairs.

President Hu Jintao is himself a *tuanpai*, and the leaders of this faction are widely regarded as his longtime confidants; most of them worked directly under Hu in the early 1980s, when he headed the Youth League. *Tuanpai* are known for their organizational and propaganda skills, but they are lacking when it comes to handling the international economy and finance. Their credentials were not as highly valued in the Jiang Zemin era, when foreign investment and economic globalization were stressed above all else, but they are considered critical now as the risks of social unrest and political tensions increase.

The elitist coalition was born in the Jiang Zemin era, and though its two current leaders – Wu Bangguo, chairman of the national legislature, and Jia Qinglin, head of a national political advisory body – are little known outside China, they are among the country’s highest-ranking political leaders. Members of the core group of the fifth generation elitists, including Xi Jinping, Vice Premier Wang Qishan, and [former] Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai, are known as *princelings* because they are the children of former high-ranking officials. The fathers of Xi, Wang, and Bo, for example, all once served as vice premiers. *Princelings* command 28% of the seats in the Politburo today. Most *princelings* grew up in the richer coastal regions and pursued careers in finance, trade, foreign affairs, and technology. Although patron-client ties are not always strong among the *princelings* themselves, the shared need to protect their interests, especially in a time of growing public resentment against nepotism, is what binds them together.

Of the six members of the fifth generation serving on the Politburo today, three are *tuanpai* and three are *princelings*. All of them are leading candidates for the 18th Politburo Standing Committee. The policy differences between these factions are as significant as the contrasts in their backgrounds. To a great extent, their differences reflect the country’s competing socioeconomic forces: *Princelings* aim to advance the interests of entrepreneurs and the emerging middle class, while the *tuanpai* often call for building a harmonious society, with more attention to vulnerable social groups such as farmers, migrant workers, and the urban poor. This phenomenon can be described as the “one party, two coalitions” model.

In October 2007, the CCP leadership surprised many China watchers by abandoning the party’s normally straightforward succession procedure and designating not one but two heirs apparent. The Central Committee named Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang—two very different leaders in their early 50s – to the nine-member

Politburo Standing Committee, where the rulers of China are groomed. The future roles of these two men, who will essentially share power after the next party congress meets in 2012, have since been refined: Xi will be the candidate to succeed the president, and Li will succeed Premier Wen Jiabao. The two rising stars share little in terms of family background, political association, leadership skills, and policy orientation. But they are each heavily involved in shaping economic policy – and they are expected to lead the two competing coalitions that will be relied upon to craft China’s political and economic trajectory in the next decade and beyond.

The platforms of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, for example, are strikingly divergent. Xi’s enthusiasm for market liberalization and the continued development of the private sector is well known in the international business community. Not surprisingly, his primary policy concerns include making the economy more efficient, keeping GDP growth high, and deepening China’s integration into the world economy. Xi is particularly interested in keeping wealthy elites in China’s eastern coastal region happy.

By contrast, Li Keqiang is more concerned about the plight of the country’s unemployed. He has made affordable housing more widely available and understands the importance of developing a rudimentary social safety net, beginning with the provision of basic healthcare. The rejuvenation of the northeastern provinces, China’s old industrial base and one of its most labor-intensive areas, appears to be Li’s regional focus. For Li, reducing economic disparities is far more urgent than enhancing economic efficiency.

Diverging policy priorities are likely to differ even further as Xi and Li contemplate some pressing economic problems such as how China should respond to growing foreign pressure for the renminbi’s appreciation, how the government should proceed with the stimulus plan, and how to prevent the expansion of the housing bubble. But there is a good chance that these everyday rivals, with the shared understanding that the Party’s survival hangs in the balance of their rivalry, will put aside infighting to guide China out of crisis.

## **Chapter Topics and Structure**

It is too early, of course, to suggest that the political prospects of individual contenders for the Politburo or its Standing Committee are assured. It is also reasonable to point out that the transition of power from Hu and Wen to Xi and Li is not a foregone conclusion. A dark horse can emerge in Chinese politics, just as in American politics. It is for this reason, however, that we should pay greater attention to a broader group of potential contenders for power, especially the rising stars in provincial leadership. It is also important to note that the upcoming personnel changes at the 18th Party Congress will mark the full takeover of the so-called fifth generation of leaders in the country’s supreme leadership bodies. As PRC history has shown time and again, each generation of leaders tends to bring with it a distinctive perceived mandate, different approaches to governance, and idiosyncratic hot-button issues. To grasp the collective characteristics or generational traits of the upcoming fifth and sixth generations of Chinese leaders—especially among provincial chiefs, the most important source of recruitment for future leaders—is a task as important as identifying the top contenders for the supreme leadership bodies.

This work focuses on China’s five major high-level leadership groups: 1) provincial chiefs; 2) cabinet ministers; 3) military leaders; 4) top leaders of major state-owned enterprises; and 5) Party apparatchiks, covering a total of 340 officials who are in charge of some of the most important organs and institutions of the country. This empirical study of these leadership groups on the eve of the 18<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress not only reveals the characteristics of soon-to-be residents of Zhongnanhai but also sheds an informative light on the career paths and recruitment patterns of Chinese elites as well as the country’s changing political landscape.

Chapter 1 focuses on the 62 current provincial chiefs – Party secretaries and governors (or mayors) – of China’s 31 province-level administrative entities. Provincial chiefs are arguably the most important group to watch in the country’s ongoing midterm jockeying, as China’s provincial leadership is both a training ground for national leadership and a battleground for various political forces. China’s provincial chiefs currently carry enormous political weight in the governance of the country for three main reasons. First, the provinces and municipalities that these leaders govern are large socioeconomic entities. It is often said that a province is to China what a country is to Europe. Second, the top provincial leadership in China is also a political force in its own right, especially at a time when provincial governments have more autonomy to advance their regional interests. Although usually behind closed doors, they are constantly engaged in political networking, policy lobbying, and coalition-building both among themselves and with the central authorities. Third, and most importantly, the post of provincial chief has been the most pivotal stepping stone to top national leadership offices in post-Deng China.

Chapter 2 focuses on the 35 members of the State Council. Not only do its members hold a significant number of seats in the Politburo, but many of the council’s key players – premier, vice premiers, and councilors – work on the front lines of China’s domestic and foreign affairs. While the Party holds the role of ultimate decision-maker, the State Council is the source of many important policy initiatives. What are the demographic backgrounds, career paths, educational credentials, and factional affiliations of the 35 members of the State Council on the eve of its reshuffling? As Premier Wen and a few other senior government leaders will retire in two or three years, what will the post-Wen State Council look like? Who will be out, in, or up? What are the Chinese public’s main concerns regarding this upcoming changing of the guard? What are the most daunting challenges that the new leadership team will confront?

The PRC's civilian-military relationship has always been a central concern among China watchers. Although the political leadership's control over the military has not been challenged in the last two decades, several factors – a possibly ineffective civilian collective leadership, growing social tensions and public protests, and China's great power aspirations amid a rapidly changing global environment – may all enhance the military's influence and power in the years to come. The upcoming political succession in 2012 is expected to involve a large-scale turnover in both the civilian and military leadership. Based on in-depth analysis of the PRC's 57 currently highest-ranking military officers, this chapter aims to address the following important questions: Who are the most likely candidates to become the military's top leadership at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress? What are the group characteristics of these rising stars in the Chinese military? Will the tensions between military officers with *mishu* (personal assistant) and/or princeling backgrounds, on the one hand, and military officers without these backgrounds, on the other, become more acute in the years ahead? What might an analysis of who's in and who's out in the CMC reveal about the direction in which China's military modernization efforts are heading? An analysis of the professional backgrounds and political networks of China's top officers can help reveal the new dynamics between civilian and military elites and the possible challenges that lie ahead.

The remarkable presence of CEOs of SOEs among the young cohorts of the CCP reflects an important trend in elite recruitment in present-day China. As the Chinese flagship state-owned companies become increasingly formidable and assertive in both the domestic and international economy, so too are the chief executive officers (CEOs) of these firms becoming more aggressive in their jockeying for power in the leadership of the CCP. Compared with the other three elite groups (provincial chiefs, cabinet ministers, and military leaders) that have long constituted the principal components of the CCP Central Committee and its Politburo, the proportion of CEOs of China's large enterprises in the national leadership is still relatively small. But it is evident that younger, business-savvy, politically connected, and globally minded Chinese CEOs have recently become a new source of the CCP leadership. This development may not only broaden the channel of political recruitment in the PRC, but may also, in a significant way, change the rules of the game in Chinese elite politics in the years to come. Chapter 4 focuses on 131 top leaders of 121 companies under the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC), six state-run commercial banks and three large state-controlled insurance companies in the country, which are under the administrative supervision of the CBRC and CIRC. An empirical study of the characteristics of this distinct elite group can link to – and shed valuable light on – some of the most controversial issues in present-day China, including the public critique of the state monopoly, the role of vested corporate interest groups in decision-making, and the Chinese state capitalists' endeavor for global expansion.

Chapter 5 focuses on the apparatchiks, or functionaries, of the CCP. This group includes several heavyweight contenders for the new top leadership and is particularly important at a time when the Chinese leadership is undergoing a large-scale generational change. These party apparatchiks in fact control two of the most crucial functional domains of the Chinese political system: organization and propaganda. The Central Committee's Organization Department is responsible for supervising or coordinating the turnover of the five tiers of the Party leadership (town, county, municipal, provincial, and central), which began early this year and will conclude at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in the fall of 2012. This process involves the replacement of thousands of current CCP officials by their younger colleagues. Meanwhile, how to make CCP ideology relevant to the Chinese public, or perhaps just meaningful to the party officials at various levels of leadership, is a major challenge for party apparatchiks, especially those in the Central Department of Propaganda. The recent tightening of media control and the return of old-fashioned Maoist propaganda (as evident in Chongqing's propaganda fanaticism, which was endorsed by some top leaders) seem to reflect the growing gap between the Party's continuing effort at rigid ideological indoctrination and an increasingly pluralistic and rapidly changing society. This chapter analyzes 56 of the top Party apparatchiks in terms of their characteristics and differences in terms of career paths, factional identities, and political status. In conjunction with this analysis, the chapter also discusses a number of contending governance mechanisms in the 90-year-old CCP in its struggle for survival and revival.

### **Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang Face Daunting Challenges**

One of the most crucial questions concerning the upcoming political succession in China is whether Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, the two designated successors to President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, respectively, can fit into these formidable roles. The fact that Xi Jinping did not obtain the much-anticipated vice chairmanship of the Central Military Commission the fall of 2009 seems to reflect some concerns and reservations at least from certain top leaders or interest groups in the political establishment. Xi received that seat in the fall of 2010 and is set to become Hu's successor in 2012, but it is fair to say that as with other prominent figures in the fifth generation, his capacity and leadership skills have yet to be tested. Some of Xi's remarks, such as his harsh comments accusing Western politicians of "interfering in China's domestic affairs" during his visit to Mexico last year, were characterized even by many Chinese bloggers as "undiplomatic" and "non-statesmanlike." (Note 4)

In the case of Li Keqiang, there are fears that he has neither Zhu Rongji's political guts nor Wen Jiabao's charisma and human touch. Zhu and Wen were already known for their leadership talents and administrative achievements when they were vice premiers or even earlier in their careers. Wen Jiabao worked as a chief of staff for three secretary generals of the CCP, two of whom were purged while he managed not only to survive, but to continue to rise. Even more remarkable is the fact that Wen earned the reputation of never betraying his bosses. His recently published article commemorating former secretary general Hu Yaobang, which disclosed that Wen has visited Hu's family every Spring Festival since Hu's death in 1989, establishes the premier's integrity and decency as a human being. (Note 5) It is also interesting to note that Wen had gained broad administrative experience before becoming premier – coordinating power transitions, commanding the anti-flood campaign in 1998, supervising the nation's agricultural affairs, and overseeing financial and banking reform. Wen's talent as a superb administrator and his role as a coalition-builder explain his legendary survival and success. In particular, Premier Wen has been known, both at home and abroad, for his remarkably quick response to natural disasters and other crises. For instance, for each and every major earthquake that hit China over the past decade (including the periods when he was vice premier or a member of the Secretariat), Wen always arrived at the disaster area promptly.

In contrast, Li has become known for his slow reaction to crises, including the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 and the Yushu earthquake in early 2010. One may argue that as a rising star, he needs to be cautious and avoid receiving too much publicity, but this was certainly not the case for other leaders (such as Zhu Rongji and Wen Jiabao when they served as vice premiers, and Wang Qishan when he was a provincial-level leader). During Li's tenure as Henan's governor and party secretary, the province was notorious for its "AIDS villages," coal mine explosions, and widespread counterfeiting of various sorts of goods. In the case of the AIDS villages in Henan, only after then-vice premier Wu Yi visited some of these villages did Li begin to acknowledge these problems. AIDS activists and NGOs have been very critical of Li's lack of action as a provincial chief. (Note 6)

Li Keqiang, of course, has his strengths. His humble family background, low-profile personality, legal education, familiarity with economic issues, reputation for loyalty, strong political network (CCYL), and especially his provincial leadership experience will prepare him for the job. But it will be difficult for him to claim any major achievements as a provincial chief or vice premier. During his tenure as vice premier, he has been responsible for the structural reform of major ministries and commissions (*dabuwei gaige*), but this seems to have gone nowhere, which stands in sharp contrast to the substantial personnel changes and strong impact on the efficiency of the central government under Zhu Rongji's bureaucratic restructuring as vice premier. More recently, Li has taken a leadership role to handle the property bubbles in the country, and time will tell whether Li can gain political capital from this formidable task.

Also of concern is that, in the eyes of the Chinese public, Li may appear too "soft," even softer than Premier Wen Jiabao. It has been widely noted that the State Council has become less effective in controlling China's provinces, major cities, and even key state-owned enterprises when it comes to economic policies. A recently circulated barb, stating that "the premier cannot control a general manager" (*zongli guanbuliao zongjingli*), reflects this serious problem of the administrative capacity of the central government. (Note 7) Having a new premier with such a soft image would not fit well with the need for a more efficient and effective central government to coordinate all of the various policy initiatives.

Not surprisingly, some in the Chinese political establishment argue that Li Keqiang should give up the premiership to Wang Qishan, who is known for his toughness, and instead take the position of chairman of the NPC, which is technically No. 2 in the Politburo Standing Committee but attracts less of the spotlight. (Note 8) The problem with this approach is that Xi and Wang, two princelings, would become the dual successors to Hu and Wen. Given the rising resentment against princelings and political nepotism, such an arrangement would resonate very badly with the Chinese public.

All of these delicate political calculations are probably in the minds of China's top leaders, including Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao, and the elitist coalition's still-prominent patrons Jiang Zemin, Zeng Qinghong and Zhu Rongji. Such doubts and concerns almost surely create both a high degree of uncertainty and a sense of urgency to advance the interests of leaders' coalitions or factions at this time of "jockeying" in Chinese elite politics.

The establishment of such shifts during transitions at the top can create a healthy political dynamic that prevents one faction from wielding excessive power. What's more important is that intra-party politics is not stagnant but dynamic, which will inevitably make political lobbying more transparent, factional politics more institutionalized and elections more frequent and genuine. China's social classes, from the rapidly expanding middle class to migrant workers resenting their own marginalization, from young students growing up in the globalization era to the large number of senior citizens, will increasingly participate in the country's political life. The commercialization of the media will also make China's politics more transparent. If things go as expected, it can be envisaged that after 10 to 15 years of cooperation between the two coalitions, the division of the CCP into the populists and the elitists will make intra-party factional competition open and formal or result in a split of the CCP itself and the establishment of a multi-party political system. Moreover, some of today's fairly vibrant democracies, such as Japan and Mexico, first experienced a lengthy period of one-party rule with dynamic factional checks and balances within the ruling party. Because of the gradual nature of this evolution, the split may be achieved in a non-violent way. If this scenario materializes, it will be a blessing not only to China but to the world as well. This book, with its empirical study of the CCP's high-level leadership groups and analysis of the Party's factional composition, will facilitate a clearer view of China's future.



**Notes:**

1. Li Cheng, "The Emergence of Chinese-style Democracy", *Financial Times* (online Chinese edition), January 18, 2010, at <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001030851>
2. Wen Jiabao, "Addressing the Issue of 'Long Leg in Economic Growth and Short Leg in Social Development'", No. 7, *Seeking Truth* magazine, available at <http://kaiwind.com/xwzc/chimnews/sz/201003/t108149.htm>.
3. *Communiqué of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party*, September 18, 2009. Also see [http://news.xinhua.net.com/politics/2009-09/18/content\\_12076251.htm](http://news.xinhua.net.com/politics/2009-09/18/content_12076251.htm)
4. Vice President Xi Jinping made the following remarks during his visit to Mexico in 2009: "It seems there are some foreigners who've stuffed their bellies and don't have anything else to do but point fingers. First, China does not export revolution. Second, we're not exporting hunger or poverty. And third, we aren't making trouble for you. What else is there to say?" The quote was based on Joshua Cooper Ramo, "Hu's Visit: Finding a Way Forward on U.S.-China Relations," *Time*, April 8, 2010. Also see <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1978640-5,00.html>
5. Jason Dean, "Chinese Eulogy Bares Party Intrigue," *Wall Street Journal*, April 15, 2010. Also see <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304628704575185861979803430.html?KEYWORDS=JASON+DEAN>.
6. Source: the author's interviews with Beijing-based NGOs and AIDS activists.
7. *World Journal*, April 19, 2010, p. A10.
8. Nan Lei, *Zhulu Shibada* [The Competition for the 18th Party Congress] (Hong Kong: Art and Culture Press, 2010), p. 9.