

Hu Chunhua 胡春华

Born 1963



Current Positions

- Party Secretary of Guangdong (2012–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2012–present)
- Full member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2007–present)

Personal and Professional Background

Hu Chunhua was born in April 1963 in Wufeng County, Hubei Province. Hu joined the CCP in 1983. He received a bachelor's degree in Chinese literature from Peking University (1979–83) and a master's degree (via part-time studies) in world economics from the Central Party School (1996–99).

Hu went to Tibet after graduating from Peking University and worked as a clerk at the Organization Department in the CCP Committee of Tibet (1983–84), as an official at the newspaper *Tibet Youth Daily* (1984–85), and as an official at the Tibet Hotel (1985–87). Hu advanced his political career largely through the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL). He served as deputy secretary (1987–92) and secretary (1992–95) of the CCYL in Tibet. He also worked as deputy head of Linzhi Prefecture, Tibet (1992), and as deputy party secretary and head of Shannan Prefecture, Tibet (1995–97). He then served as a member of the Secretariat of the CCYL National Committee and vice-chairman of China's Youth Federation (1997–2001). In July 2001, Hu returned to Tibet, where he served as secretary-general (chief of staff) of the CCP Committee of Tibet (2001–03) and deputy party secretary and executive vice-governor of Tibet (2003–06). He then served as the first secretary of the Secretariat of the CCYL Central Committee (2006–08). After that, Hu served as governor and deputy party secretary of Hebei Province (2008–09). In 2009, he was transferred to Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, where he served as party secretary (2009–12) and chairman of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Regional People's Congress (2010–12). He was first elected to the Central Committee as a full member at the 17th Party Congress in 2007.

Family and Patron-Client Ties

Hu Chunhua was born into a family of very humble means. His parents were farmers in a poor and remote village within an ethnic minority autonomous county in Hubei Province. Hu Chunhua has six siblings. He was the first person from his county to matriculate to Peking University. Hu volunteered to work in Tibet after graduation, where he established his patron-mentor relationship with Hu Jintao while Hu served as party secretary (1988–92). Hu Chunhua has been widely characterized as “a carbon copy of Hu Jintao” and has even been called “little Hu.”ⁱ Both come from humble family backgrounds, both served as student leaders during their college years, both advanced their political careers primarily through the CCYL, both worked in arduous environments like Tibet, both served as provincial party secretaries at a relatively young age, and both have low-profile personalities.

Not much information is available regarding Hu Chunhua's family except that he and his wife were married in Tibet and have one daughter.

Political Prospects and Policy Preferences

As the only sixth-generation leader (by definition, someone born in the 1960s) in the current Politburo, Hu Chunhua is well positioned to obtain a seat on the 19th Politburo Standing Committee. According to some analysts, Hu Chunhua's selection as a Politburo member in 2012 reflected Deng

Xiaoping’s political design for a “grandpa-designated successor” (隔代指定接班人). This refers to the pattern whereby Deng designated Hu Jintao, Jiang Zemin designated Xi Jinping, and Hu Jintao designated Hu Chunhua as top leaders of the succeeding generations.ⁱⁱ From a somewhat different perspective, one could also argue that the top leader intentionally chooses his successor from the rivaling faction in order to unite the party leadership. In other words, the party boss selects a “team of rivals” (政敌团队) to consolidate power.ⁱⁱⁱ

To a certain extent, public expectations that Hu Chunhua will ascend to the 19th Politburo Standing Committee present a serious challenge for Xi and his team. If Xi prevents Hu Chunhua from rising to the pinnacle of power, he needs to find some justification for doing so. Xi may successfully persuade the political establishment that the prevailing norm of selecting a successor between the first and second terms of an administration tends to undermine the power and authority of the current top leader. Further, he could argue that candidates for designated successor should be more carefully scrutinized. Based on these considerations, Xi could choose to reduce the number of PSC seats from seven to five in order to prevent Hu Chunhua from entering the PSC at the 19th Party Congress, or he could increase the number of PSC seats to nine in order to include around three sixth-generation leaders, thus making the successor less clear.

But if Xi does select a sixth-generation leader for the PSC in order to extend the continuity of leadership and prepare for his succession, Hu Chunhua will be a prime candidate. Not only is Hu the front-runner among his age cohort, but his ascension would be a significant step toward uniting the party leadership. Xi recently visited Guangdong twice, where he affirmed the good work occurring under Hu Chunhua’s leadership, especially in the areas of supply-side economic reform, technological innovation, and social stability.^{iv} Hu Chunhua has also taken a number of foreign trips over the past couple of years, including visits to the United States and Mexico in 2016, and to the United Kingdom, Israel, and Ireland in 2017. Apparently, these foreign visits—in addition to his frequent meetings with foreign leaders in Guangdong—have helped to broaden Hu’s international experience, which will be an asset as he moves to Beijing.

If Hu Chunhua indeed obtains a seat on the next PSC, his assigned portfolio will signal his political prospects. He could become executive secretary of the Secretariat and vice-president of the PRC, the same positions that Xi held as heir apparent from 2007 to 2012, or he may serve as executive vice-premier of the State Council or chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)—posts which are usually not held by a rising party boss.

Compiled by Cheng Li and the staff of the John L. Thornton China Center at Brookings

Notes:

ⁱ For more discussion about Hu Chunhua’s patron-client ties with Hu Jintao, see Ren Huayi, *The Sixth Generation: The CCP’s Last Generation of Successors* [第六代：中共末代接班群] (New York: Mirror Books, 2010), and Ke Wei, *The Rising Stars of the CCP’s Sixth Generation* [中共第六代明星传] (Hong Kong: New Culture Press, 2010).

ⁱⁱ Zhang Ping, “The sixth generation of leaders in the Chinese Communist Party was born out of speculations,” Deutsche Welle website, November 21, 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cheng Li, “China’s Team of Rivals,” *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2009, pp. 88–93.

^{iv} *Nanfang ribao* [南方日报], April 12, 2017.