

# Li Zhanshu 栗战书

Born 1950



## Current Positions

- Member of the Politburo Standing Committee (2017–present)
- Director of the General Office of the CCP Central Committee (2012–present)
- Secretary of the Central Work Committee for Organs of the CCP Central Committee (2012–present)
- Director of the Office of the National Security Committee (2013–present)
- Head of the Central Confidential Commission of the CCP Central Committee (2013–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2012–present)
- Secretariat member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2012–2017)
- Full member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2012–present)

## Personal and Professional Background

Li Zhanshu was born on August 30, 1950, in Pingshan County, Hebei Province. Li was a “sent-down youth” at an agricultural commune in his native county (1968–72).<sup>1</sup> He joined the CCP in 1975. He studied at the Shijiazhuang Institute of Commerce in Shijiazhuang City, Hebei (1971–72), and received an undergraduate education in politics from Hebei Normal University in Shijiazhuang City (via part-time studies and night school, 1980–83). He also attended the graduate program in business economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (1996–98) and received an EMBA from the Harbin Institute of Technology in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province (2005–06), both on a part-time basis.

Li began his political career as a clerk and later served as deputy director in the office of the commerce bureau of the Shijiazhuang prefecture government in Hebei (1972–76). He moved on to become a clerk and division head of the information division of the general office of the CCP Committee of Shijiazhuang Prefecture (1976–83). He was then promoted to party secretary of Wuji County, Hebei (1983–85). He next served as deputy party secretary and head of Shijiazhuang Prefecture (1985–86) and secretary of the Hebei Provincial Chinese Communist Youth League Committee (1986–90), during which time he attended a six-month program on CCP theoretical work at the Central Party School (1988). He served as deputy party secretary and head of Chengde Prefecture, Hebei (1990–93), and secretary-general (chief of staff) of the CCP Provincial Committee of Hebei (1993–97), during which time he studied economics in a correspondence program at the Central Party School (1992–94). He later served as deputy director of the Rural Work Office of the CCP Provincial Committee of Hebei (1997–98). In 1998, he was transferred to Shaanxi Province, where he served as deputy director of the Rural Work Office of the CCP Provincial Committee of Shaanxi (1998–2000), director of the Organization Department (2000–02) of the CCP Provincial Committee of Shaanxi, and party secretary of Xi’an City (2002–03). He also served as deputy party secretary of Shaanxi Province (2002–03). In 2003, Li was transferred to Heilongjiang Province, where he served as deputy party secretary (2003–10), vice-governor (2004–07), and then governor (2008–10). In 2010, he was transferred to Guizhou Province, where he served as party secretary (2010–12).

On the eve of the 18th Party Congress in September 2012, at the nomination of Xi Jinping, Li was appointed director of the General Office of the CCP Central Committee, replacing Ling Jihua, a top aide to then-general secretary Hu Jintao. Li was first elected to the Central Committee as an alternate member at the 16th Party Congress in 2002.

## **Family and Patron-Client Ties**

Li comes from a family of Chinese communist veterans. It has been reported that 27 members of Li Zhanshu's extended family joined the CCP during the communist revolution.<sup>ii</sup> His great-uncle, Li Zaiwen, joined the CCP in 1927 while a student at Peking University and later served as secretary of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and vice-governor of Shandong. Li Zaiwen was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution and died under harsh treatment in 1967. He was rehabilitated and named a revolutionary martyr in 1979.<sup>iii</sup> Li Zhanshu's father, Li Zhengxiu, and his uncle, Li Zhenotong, both joined the CCP in the 1930s. Li Zhenotong died on a battlefield during the civil war in 1949 at the age of 26.

No information is available about Li Zhanshu's wife. The couple has a daughter, Li Qianxin, who lives in Hong Kong, where she is a director of CCB International Asset Management. Li Qianxin previously served as vice-president of CITIC Capital in Hong Kong.

Li Zhanshu is one of Xi Jinping's most trusted long-time friends. Their friendship began over three decades ago, when Xi served as deputy party secretary and then party secretary of Zhengding County in Hebei from 1982 to 1985. Li Zhanshu served as party secretary of Wuji County in the same province during roughly the same period.<sup>iv</sup> Both counties belong to Shijiazhuang Prefecture and are close geographically, so Xi and Li developed a good working relationship. Li is also widely seen as a member of the "Shaanxi Gang," Xi's most important power base.<sup>v</sup>

In addition to their longtime friendship and similar family backgrounds, some of Li's work experiences are particularly valuable for Xi. First, Li has served as a provincial leader in many parts of the country: in Hebei as secretary-general of the provincial party committee, in Shaanxi as deputy party secretary, in Heilongjiang as governor, and in Guizhou as party secretary. These connections to the northern, northeastern, northwestern, and southwestern regions of the country could help Xi mobilize broad regional support. Second, Li's CCYL leadership background could help Xi reconcile factional tensions in the CCP's top leadership and, thus, assist with his coalition-building efforts.<sup>vi</sup>

## **Political Prospects and Policy Preferences**

Not only is Li Zhanshu a leading candidate for the 19th Politburo Standing Committee; he is also a Wang Qishan-like figure who offers Xi Jinping advantages on numerous fronts. He may serve as chairman of the National People's Congress, which would rank him third in the leadership hierarchy, behind Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang.

As Xi's chief of staff for the past five years, Li has been beside his boss at almost all pivotal meetings, including the Xi-Obama summit at Sunnylands in 2013, Xi's meeting with Ma Ying-jeou in Singapore in 2015, and the Xi-Trump summit at Mar-a-Lago in 2017. As Xi Jinping's personal emissary, Li Zhanshu has also visited Moscow to meet President Vladimir Putin twice (in March 2015 and April 2017).

When he was governor of Heilongjiang almost ten years ago, Li told a Chinese reporter for CCTV that he expected to retire in a few years.<sup>vii</sup> It was Xi Jinping who carried Li forward. Unsurprisingly, Li has made a concerted effort to help consolidate Xi Jinping's power and "core" status within the CCP leadership. Li, who is known for his expertise on rural development, has also worked extensively across various other domains, including personnel, ideology, party discipline, security, and foreign affairs. Whereas Wang Qishan was a history major in college and often analyzes the present and future through the lens of historical precedent, Li Zhanshu is fond of poetry and literature. It remains to be seen whether this difference will have any impact on the governance of the country as Li assumes a central role in Chinese politics.

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**Notes:**

- <sup>i</sup> “Sent-down youth” (插队知青) refers to young, educated urbanites who left their home cities to serve as manual laborers in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution.
- <sup>ii</sup> Zi Yang, “Meet China’s Emerging Number 2: A biography of Li Zhanshu, the right-hand man to Xi Jinping,” *The Diplomat*, May 6, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/meet-chinas-emerging-number-2>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Si Fan, “Portrait of the 18th Party Congress Leader Li Zhanshu: A Seasoned Chief of Staff” [十八大人物之栗战书: 多重历练的“大内总管”], *Dagong Daily*, September 3, 2012, [http://www.takungpao.com/mainland/content/2012-09/03/content\\_1036483.htm](http://www.takungpao.com/mainland/content/2012-09/03/content_1036483.htm).
- <sup>iv</sup> Xiang Jianguo, *Xi Jinping’s Team* [习近平的团队] (New York: Mirror Books, 2013).
- <sup>v</sup> Cheng Li, “Xi Jinping’s Inner Circle (Part 1: The Shaanxi Gang),” *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 43, Spring 2014.
- <sup>vi</sup> Cheng Li, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era: Reassessing Collective Leadership* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2016), pp. 216–17.
- <sup>vii</sup> “Interview with Heilongjiang Governor Li Zhanshu,” CCTV Online, March 27, 2008, <http://cctvenchiridion.cctv.com/special/C20768/20080327/103474.shtml>.