

Wang Huning 王沪宁

Born 1955



Current Positions

- Member of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) (2017–present)
- Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee (2017–present)
- Director of the Central Policy Research Center of the CCP Central Committee (2002–present)
- Secretary-General (Chief of Staff) and Director of the General Office of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (2013–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2012–present)
- Full member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2002–present)

Personal and Professional Background

Wang Huning was born on October 6, 1955, in Shanghai. His ancestral/family home is in Laizhou County, Shandong Province. Wang joined the CCP in 1984. He studied French language as part of the Cadre Training Class at Shanghai Normal University in Shanghai (1972–77) and attended the graduate program in international politics at Fudan University in Shanghai (1978–81), where he also received a master’s degree in law (1981). He has been a visiting scholar at the University of Iowa, the University of Michigan, and the University of California at Berkeley (1988–89). He speaks French fluently.

Wang began his career as a cadre in the Publication Bureau of the Shanghai municipal government (1977–78). After receiving his master’s, he stayed on at Fudan University and served as an instructor, associate professor, and professor (1981–89), then as chairman of the Department of International Politics (1989–94), and finally as dean of the law school (1994–95).

Wang moved to Beijing in 1995 and served as head of the Political Affairs Division of the Central Policy Research Center (CPRC) of the CCP Central Committee (1995–98), followed by a position as deputy director of the CPRC (1998–2002). He was first elected to the Central Committee as a full member at the 16th Party Congress in 2002.

Family and Patron-Client Ties

Wang Huning is one of only a few leaders unanimously favored by the three most recent party bosses: Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping. Accordingly, Wang has earned the nickname “chief advisor of Zhongnanhai” (中南海首席智囊) and “China’s Kissinger.”¹ Wang is thought to have served as an informal conduit between Jiang and Hu during Hu’s leadership. In the late 1980s, he established his patron-mentor relationship with Jiang Zemin and Zeng Qinghong, who were then top leaders in Shanghai, and thus he earned membership in the “Shanghai Gang.” Since Hu succeeded Jiang as general secretary of the CCP and president of the PRC in 2002 and 2003, Wang became a top aide to Hu and frequently accompanied him on domestic and international trips. Similarly, like Xi’s chief of staff Li Zhanshu, Wang Huning has often been beside Xi Jinping throughout his first term, taking part in almost all important trips and meetings, both domestically and internationally.

Wang’s ex-wife, Zhou Qi, is the daughter of a vice-minister-ranked leader who worked in state security and intelligence. Wang and Zhou were classmates in the master’s program at Fudan, and Zhou later received a Ph.D. in political science from Johns Hopkins University’s Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). She worked as a research fellow in the Institute of American Studies at the

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) for many years. She currently serves as executive director of the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University. The couple divorced in 1996 and do not have any children. Wang recently was remarried to a nurse in Zhongnanhai, and the couple has one child.

Political Prospects and Policy Preferences

Wang is believed to have been a principal drafter of the theory of “three represents” that was expounded by Jiang.ⁱⁱ In his early career as a political science professor and law school dean at Fudan University in the 1980s, Wang published many books and was considered a leading scholar advocating neo-authoritarianism.ⁱⁱⁱ Wang Huning recently republished a 1986 article in which he argued that “public security, prosecutors, and the court merging into one” was one of the main reasons for prevalent human rights violations such as torture and vandalism during the Cultural Revolution. He stated unambiguously that “the Cultural Revolution could happen only in a country without an independent judicial system.”^{iv} Wang’s primary policy concerns may include promoting rule of law and political reforms.

The fact that Wang Huning had served almost exclusively as an adviser to top leaders (Jiang, Hu, and Xi) seemed to put him at a slight disadvantage when it came to winning a seat on the PSC. Over the past three decades, virtually all PSC members have served either in provincial or municipal leadership roles or as governmental leaders in the State Council, and most have served in more than two province-level administrations. But as a leader who has advanced his political and professional career primarily through think tank work, Wang Huning represents a new channel for elite recruitment. His rise to the top leadership is very much in line with Xi Jinping’s recent call for building new think tanks with Chinese characteristics that will help further China’s strategic mission and integrate the Western-style “revolving door” into China’s political system.^v

In addition to obtaining a seat on the 19th Politburo Standing Committee, Wang may take over Liu Yunshan’s positions as executive secretary of the Secretariat and president of the Central Party School. Wang’s expertise in law and public policy could be enormously helpful for advancing a new slate of priorities during Xi’s second term.

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

Notes:

ⁱ Pratik Jakhar, “China party congress: The rising stars of China’s Communist Party,” BBC Online, October 8, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-41322178>.

ⁱⁱ In contrast to the Marxist notion that the Communist Party should be the “vanguard of the working class,” Jiang’s theory claims that the CCP should represent the “developmental needs of the advanced forces of production,” the “forward direction of advanced culture,” and the “fundamental interests of the majority of the Chinese people.”

ⁱⁱⁱ For the early career of Wang Huning and his writings, see “Hu Jintao’s two mysterious right-hand men: Ling Jihua and Wang Huning” [胡锦涛身边的神秘左右手：令计划和王沪宁], *Social Perspective* [社会聚焦], posted on April 7, 2010, http://bbs.tiexue.net/post2_4181927_1.html.

^{iv} Wang Huning, “Reflections on the Cultural Revolution and the Reform of China’s Political System” [文革反思与政治改革], *Readers’ Digest* [文摘], February 23, 2012, originally appeared in *The World Economic Herald* [世界经济导报], May 1986.

^v Cheng Li and Lucy Xu, “Chinese Think Tanks: A New ‘Revolving Door’ for Elite Recruitment,” *China-US Focus*, January 26, 2017, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/political-social-development/chinese-think-tanks-a-new-revolving-door-for-elite-recruitment>.