

Han Zheng 韩正

Born 1954



Current Positions

- Executive Vice Premier of the State Council (2018–present)
- Member of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) (2017–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (2018–present)
- Head of the Three Gorges Project Construction Committee (2018–present)
- Head of the South-North Water Diversion Construction Project Committee (2018–present)
- Head of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Joint Development Leading Group (2018–present)
- Head of the Central Leading Group for “Belt and Road Initiative” Construction (2018–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2012–present)
- Full member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2002–present)

Personal and Professional Background

Han Zheng was born in April 1954 in Shanghai. His ancestral home is Cixi City, Zhejiang Province. Han joined the CCP in 1979. He was a “sent-down youth” at a collective farm in Chongming County, Shanghai, during the Cultural Revolution (1972–75).¹ Han attended a two-year college program at Fudan University in Shanghai (1983–85), completed his undergraduate degree (via part-time studies) in politics at East China Normal University in Shanghai (1985–87), and graduated with a master’s in international political economy from East China Normal University (1994–96).

Han spent much of his early career working at the grassroots level. Han worked in the warehouse of a lifting installation company in Shanghai, and as a clerk in the supply and marketing division of the same company. Han then served as deputy secretary of the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL) (1975–80) and as a clerk of the Shanghai Chemical Equipment Industry Co., Ltd (1980–82). Han was then made secretary of the CCYL committee of the Chemical Industry Bureau of the Shanghai Municipal Government (1982–86), deputy party secretary of the Shanghai School of Chemical Engineering (1986–87), party secretary and deputy director of Shanghai No. 6 Rubber Shoes Factory (1987–88), and party secretary and deputy director of the Dazhonghua Rubber Plant in Shanghai (1988–90).

Subsequently, Han served as deputy secretary (1990–91) and secretary (1991–92) of the CCYL Shanghai Municipal Committee. He was later appointed deputy party secretary and head of the Luwan District in Shanghai (1992–95) and was eventually promoted to deputy secretary-general (chief of staff) of the Shanghai municipal government, in addition to director of the City Planning Commission and director of the Securities Management Office (1995–97). He became a member of the Standing Committee of the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee while continuing to work as deputy secretary-general (1997–98).

Han continued to advance his career in Shanghai, serving as vice-mayor (1998–2003), deputy party secretary (2002–12), mayor (2003–12), acting party secretary (2007), and finally party secretary (2012–17). He also served as deputy head of the 2010 Shanghai World Expo Organizing Committee and head of the Executive Committee (2004–11). He was first elected to the Central Committee as a full member at the 16th Party Congress in 2002.

Family and Patron-Client Ties

Prior to the 19th Party Congress in the fall of 2017, Han spent his entire career working in Shanghai. It was during his time in Shanghai that Han met five of his patron-mentors, namely Huang Ju, Wu Bangguo, Zhu Rongji, Zeng Qinghong, and Yu Zhengsheng, all of whom later served as members of the Politburo Standing Committee.² Han has been widely recognized as a member of the Jiang Zemin-Zeng Qinghong “Shanghai Gang.” Although Han served as a top CCYL official in Shanghai, his promotions have been more closely aligned with Jiang’s Shanghai Gang than with the Hu Jintao-Li Keqiang CCYL faction.³ He also developed good relations with Xi Jinping when Han served as Xi’s deputy in Shanghai in 2007, before Xi moved to Beijing to serve as a member of the Politburo Standing Committee. Han appears to have earned Xi’s support, obtaining a Politburo seat after Xi became general secretary of the CCP in 2012.

Not much information is available about Han Zheng’s family. According to an unverified source, Han Zheng’s wife, Wan Ming, previously served as vice-chair of the Shanghai Charity Foundation. The couple has one daughter.

Policy Preferences and Political Prospects

Having served for two decades as a top administrator of China’s pacesetter city, Shanghai, Han Zheng emerged from the 19th Party Congress as a top economic decision-maker in national leadership. Han’s reputation as a competent, seasoned financial and economic technocrat, as well as his market-friendly policy orientation in cosmopolitan Shanghai, has generally been well received in business communities both in China and abroad. According to the current CCP regulations and norms, Han will most likely serve only a single term in the Politburo Standing Committee and then retire in 2022–23. If, for some reason, Li Keqiang steps down from his position as premier of the State Council before the end of his term, Han may be a leading candidate for that position.

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

Notes:

¹ “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.

² In 1988, for example, Zhu Rongji, then mayor of Shanghai, visited the city’s Dazhonghua Rubber Plant, where Han Zheng was employed. During the visit, Zhu lauded Han’s work. See Xu Yanyan 许燕燕, “Han Zheng recalls Zhu Rongji’s visit to factory” [韩正回忆朱镕基下工厂], *Yicai Web* [第一财经网], August 14, 2013, (<http://yicai.com/news/2939288.html>).

³ Cheng Li, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era: Reassessing Collective Leadership* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2016), p. 281.