

Hu Chunhua 胡春华

Born 1963



Current Positions

- Vice Premier of the State Council (2018–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2012–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Leading Group for “Belt and Road Initiative” Construction (2018–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).

After graduating from Peking University, Hu went to Tibet, where he 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 served as party secretary of Guangdong (2012–17). Hu 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 attend Peking University. Hu volunteered to work in Tibet after graduation, where he established his patron-mentor relationship with Hu Jintao, who was then serving 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.”¹ Both come from humble family backgrounds, served as student leaders during their college years, advanced their political careers primarily through the CCYL, worked in arduous environments like Tibet, served as provincial party secretaries at a relatively young age, and have low-profile personalities.

Not much information is available regarding Hu Chunhua’s family. He and his wife were married in Tibet and have one daughter.

Policy Preferences and Political Prospects

Hu Chunhua was selected as a Politburo member in 2012 and is considered a front-runner of the

so-called sixth generation leadership. Some analysts have viewed Hu's Politburo membership as a reflection of 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 to be the top leaders of the succeeding generations.² One could also make the argument that the top leader intentionally (or as a compromise) chooses his successor from the rival faction in order to unite the party leadership. In other words, the party boss selects a "team of rivals" (政敌团队) in order to consolidate power.³

Therefore, Chinese public expectations in the lead-up to the 19th Party Congress were that Hu Chunhua would ascend to the 19th Politburo Standing Committee, which presented a serious challenge for Xi. The fact that Xi did not allow any six-generation leader to enter the PSC and the recent abolishment of the term limit for the PRC presidency indicates that Hu's chances of becoming a designated successor have diminished. One could reasonably make the point that Xi has prevented Hu Chunhua from rising to the pinnacle of power.

Yet, as the youngest vice premier of the State Council and a two-time Politburo member, Hu is still the highest-ranking leader of the sixth generation. Further, prior to the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, Xi visited Guangdong twice. During these visits, Xi affirmed the good work carried out under Hu Chunhua's leadership, especially in the areas of supply-side economic reform, technological innovation, and social stability.⁴ Hu has also traveled abroad in recent years, undertaking visits to the United States and Mexico in 2016 and to the United Kingdom, Israel, and Ireland in 2017. In conjunction with his frequent meetings with foreign leaders in Guangdong, these trips abroad have helped to broaden Hu's international experience.

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

Notes:

¹ 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).

² Zhang Ping, "The sixth generation of leaders in the Chinese Communist Party was born out of speculations," *Deutsche Welle*, November 21, 2012.

³ Cheng Li, "China's Team of Rivals," *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2009, pp. 88–93.

⁴ *Nanfang ribao* [南方日报], April 12, 2017.