

Sun Chunlan 孙春兰

Born 1950



Current Positions

- Vice Premier of the State Council (2018–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2012–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Leading Group for United Front Work (2015–present)
- Head of the State Council Leading Group of Deepening Medical and Health System Reform (2018–present)
- Deputy Head of the Central Coordination Group for Hong Kong and Macao Affairs (2016–present)
- Full member of the CCP Central Committee (2007–present)

Personal and Professional Background

Sun Chunlan was born on May 24, 1950, in Raoyang County, Hebei Province. She joined the CCP in 1973. She received a technical education from the Anshan Institute of Iron and Steel Technology in Anshan City, Liaoning Province (1965–69).¹ She later studied economic management in the Department of Economics at Liaoning University in Shenyang, Liaoning Province (via correspondence studies, 1981–84); participated in a program in economic management at the Liaoning Party School in Shenyang City, Liaoning Province (via correspondence studies, 1989–91); and attended a one-year training program at the Central Party School in Beijing (1992–93). Sun also completed a master’s program in management at Liaoning University in Shenyang (via part-time studies, 1992–95) and a master’s program in politics at the Central Party School (via part-time studies, 2000–03).

Sun began her career as a worker in a watch factory in Anshan (1969) and, eventually, became a party official in the same factory (1971–74). She served as secretary of the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL) of the Light Industry Bureau of Anshan City (1974–77), and served as a manager and party official of the Anshan Textile Factory (1977–88). She was head of the Women’s Association of Anshan City (1988–91), deputy head of the Workers’ Union of Liaoning Province (1991–93), head of the Women’s Association of Liaoning (1993–94), head of the Workers’ Union of Liaoning (1994–97), and deputy party secretary of Liaoning (1997–2005). She also served as party secretary of Dalian, Liaoning (2001–05), and as first secretary of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) (2005–09). She then served as party secretary of Fujian (2009–12) and party secretary of Tianjin (2012–14). Most recently, she served as director of the Central United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee (2014–17). She was first elected to the Central Committee as an alternate member at the 15th Party Congress in 1997.

Family and Patron-Client Ties

Sun Chunlan comes from a humble background. Her father was a factory worker. No further information is available on Sun’s family. Sun is widely considered a protégé of Hu Jintao, but it is unclear where and when Sun established her patron-client

relationship with Hu. Their political connection likely began or was consolidated during her studies at the Central Party School in the early 1990s, when Hu served as president of the school.² According to some Chinese observers, Sun effectively constrained the power and influence of Bo Xilai in Dalian after she took over as the city's party chief from 2001 to 2005.³

Policy Preferences and Political Prospects

Like her mentor Hu Jintao, Sun is known for her keen interest in promoting a harmonious society, supporting policy initiatives for affordable housing, social welfare for low-income families, and poverty reduction.

Sun is the only woman leader whose age allowed her to stay on the Politburo for another term, through the 19th Party Congress. Moreover, Sun Chunlan has some political leverage in promoting policy initiatives among her peers in the Politburo. First, her leadership experience running an important province (Fujian) and two major cities (Tianjin and Dalian), as well as her tenure as first secretary of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and director of the Central United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee, have prepared her for even more important posts in the national leadership. Second, her low-profile personality and her demonstrated tenacity and political acumen, most notable in removing Bo Xilai's protégés in Dalian even before Bo's downfall, are indicative of her potential for leadership and political nerve.⁴ She also took over Ling Jihua's post when Ling was under investigation in 2014. Given her age, Sun will likely retire in the next leadership transition in 2022-23.

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

Notes:

¹ In 2002, the school was renamed the Anshan Institute of Science and Technology. Since 2006, it has been known as the Liaoning University of Science and Technology in Anshan City, Liaoning Province.

² Hu Min, *Hu Jintao's Five Golden Flowers* (Hong Kong: Beiyunhe Press, 2012), pp. 159–63.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Mandy Zuo, "Party's number two woman Sun Chunlan named chief of Tianjin," *South China Morning Post*, November 22, 2012, (<http://scmp.com/news/china/article/1087831/partys-number-two-woman-sun-chunlan-named-chief-tianjin>).