

Cai Qi 蔡奇

Born 1955

Current Positions

- Party Secretary of Beijing (2017–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2017–present)
- Full member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2017–present)



Personal and Professional Background

Cai Qi was born on December 5, 1955, in Youxi County, Fujian Province. He joined the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1975. He received an undergraduate education in political education (1975–78), a post-graduate degree in economic law (via part-time studies, 1994–97), and a doctorate in political economy (via part-time studies, 1999–2001) from Fujian Normal University in Fuzhou City, Fujian Province. He also attended a four-month training program for department/prefecture-level cadres at the Central Party School in Beijing (1996).

Cai began his career as a “sent-down youth” in the Xiyang Commune in Yong’an County, Fujian Province (1973–75).¹ After completing his undergraduate studies at Fujian Normal University, Cai stayed on as an official in the university’s party committee office (1978–83). In 1983, he was transferred to the Fujian Provincial Party Committee, where he served as a clerk (1983–85), division deputy head (1985–87), and personal assistant (*mishu*) with the rank of division head in the General Work Department (1987–91). Cai then became deputy director of the Office of Political Reform (1991–92), deputy director of the Party Building Department (1992–93), and deputy director of the General Office (1993–96). During this latter post, Cai was primarily a personal secretary to Chen Guangyi, who was party secretary of Fujian Province at that time. Cai also worked as deputy party secretary of Sanming City, Fujian Province (1994–99) and, concurrently, mayor of Sanming City (1997–99).

In 1999, Cai moved to Zhejiang Province. Cai first served as deputy party secretary and mayor (1999–2002) and then party secretary (2002–04) of Quzhou City, Zhejiang. He next served as party secretary of Taizhou City, Zhejiang Province (2004–07). After that, he concurrently served as deputy party secretary and deputy mayor (2007) and then concurrently as party secretary and mayor of Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province (2007–10). He then became director of the Organization Department of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee (2010–13) and executive vice governor of Zhejiang (2013–14). In March 2014, Cai was transferred to Beijing, where he served as deputy director (2014–15) and executive deputy director (2015–16) of the newly established General Office of the National Security Commission. Most recently, Cai served as mayor and deputy party secretary of Beijing (2016–17). In May 2017, he was appointed party secretary of Beijing. Cai served as deputy director of the Beijing 24th Winter Olympic Games Central Leading Group and chairman of the Beijing 24th Winter Olympic Games Organizing Committee (2017–2022).

Family and Patron-Client Ties

Cai is one of Xi Jinping’s most trusted confidants. Although his early experience as *mishu* to Fujian Party Secretary Chen Guangyi aided his advancement to municipal-level leadership, it was Xi Jinping who appointed Cai to some of the country’s most important leadership positions. These positions include executive deputy director of the General Office of the National Security Committee, party secretary of Beijing, and member of the Politburo.

Cai was working in the General Office of the Fujian Provincial Party Committee when Xi arrived in Fujian in 1985. The two would work together in the municipal and provincial leadership in Fujian over the following 15 years. Cai worked directly under Xi in the mid-1990s, when Cai served as deputy director of the General Office of the Fujian Provincial Party Committee and Xi served as deputy party secretary. Cai Qi also worked with Xi in Zhejiang Province from 2002 to 2007, serving as party secretary and mayor of several counties and cities, including Hangzhou, while Xi was Zhejiang party secretary.²

Cai Qi's wife was a bureau-level official in Zhejiang before her recent retirement. The couple has a son who previously served as a subdistrict level official in Hangzhou and a staff member of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

Policy Preferences and Political Prospects

It is very unusual for a party secretary of Beijing to have never previously served on the CCP Central Committee. The fact that Cai was promoted four times over the past four years suggests his importance to Xi Jinping. Cai has played a key role in the establishment of Xiong'an New District, a satellite area near Beijing and the third largest special economic zone in China (the other two being Shenzhen and Pudong, Shanghai). However, the abrupt and large-scale police campaign to remove the so-called "low-end population" from Beijing in November 2017 damaged Cai's reputation.

Cai is also known for energetically supporting "absolute loyalty" to Xi Jinping and endorsing Xi's status as "core leader."³ On the policy front, Cai's areas of focus over the past five years have included green development in the capital (environmental protection, in particular) and national security issues (such as cyber security).⁴ He received much praise for his leadership role in successfully hosting the Beijing Winter Olympics. He is a candidate for the Politburo Standing Committee this October. If he obtains a seat on this supreme decision-making body, Cai will likely serve in one of these three positions: chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), executive secretary of the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee, or secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI).

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 Cheng Li, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era: Reassessing Collective Leadership* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2016), pp. 341–42.

³ "19th Party Congress Battle to Defend Its Politics, Cai Qi Names Three Red Lines," [十九大政治保卫战 蔡奇三个决不划红线] *Duowei News*, August 29, 2017, (<http://news.dwnews.com/china/news/2017-08-29/60009666.html>).

⁴ Victor Shih, "Beijing's Game of Thrones: Signaling Loyalty Before the Party Congress," *China Focus*, September 11, 2017, (<http://chinafocus.us/2017/09/11/beijings-game-of-thrones-signaling-loyalty-before-the-party-congress>).