

Hu Chunhua 胡春华

Born 1963



Current Positions

- Vice Premier of the State Council (2018–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2012–present)
- Head of the State Council Leading Group on Poverty Alleviation and Development (2018–present)
- Head of the State Council Leading Group on Rural Works (2018–present)
- Head of the National Leading Group for Census on Poverty Alleviation (2019–present)
- Head of the National Leading Group for the Elimination of Wage Arrears for Migrant Workers (2019–present)
- Head of the State Council Leading Group on Employment Work (2019–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 on April 1, 1963, in Wufeng County, Hubei Province. Hu joined the Chinese Communist Party (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 (CPS) (1996–99). He also took cadre training programs at the CPS in 1996–97 and 2000.

After graduating from Peking University, Hu went to Tibet, where he worked as a clerk at the Organization Department of 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).

Hu 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 then 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.

Hu Chunhua 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 among 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.” 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 argue 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” in order to consolidate power.³

Therefore, Chinese public expectations in the lead-up to the 19th Party Congress in 2017 were that Hu Chunhua would ascend to the 19th Politburo Standing Committee. The fact that Xi did not promote any sixth-generation leader to enter the PSC in 2017 and Xi’s move to abolish term limits for the PRC presidency in 2018 indicates that Hu’s chances of becoming a designated successor have diminished.

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 (leaders who were born in the 1960s). In the past five years, Hu has played a pivotal role in Xi’s poverty alleviation campaign, agricultural modernization programs, and the Belt and Road initiative.⁴ He will likely obtain a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee at the 20th Party Congress. It is unclear what position he will hold in the government in 2023. The three positions he is most likely to assume are chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), premier, or executive vice premier.

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 Aadil Brar, “Hu Chunhua has a chance at Chinese premiership and why it will have implications for India”, *The Print*, August 24, 2022, <https://theprint.in/opinion/eye-on-china/hu-chunhua-has-a-chance-at-chinese-premiership-and-why-it-will-have-implications-for-india/1096425/>