



CHINA'S RULERS: THE FIFTH GENERATION TAKES POWER (2012–13)

Michael Dillon



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Foreword

The leadership transition from what has come to be called the ‘fourth generation’ of Chinese leaders (although this is a term that, at least in the official Chinese press, has never formally been accorded to President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and the colleagues around them) to that of the fifth has become one of the most carefully watched issues in recent Chinese studies. This is a little odd, given the stress placed by the current leaders on the idea of collective leadership, the importance of policy over personality, and efforts to conceal the individual personalities and interests of elite political leaders behind a unified Party front.

The Communist Party of China has been preparing for a transition of elite leadership for some years. As Michael Dillon makes clear in this paper, part of this is because of the trauma of previous leadership changes. Since 1949, the record has been patchy. Mao struggled to identify a successor, and the individual he finally selected (Hua Guofeng) lasted only a few years before being gently supplanted by Deng Xiaoping. Deng’s own attempts ended in failure, twice. But since the era of Jiang Zemin, things have got better. A focus on institutionalising the transition process has made it more rules-based and predictable.

Despite this, the process remains complex. In this paper, Dillon thus focuses on two critical areas: process and personalities. The process by which the new leadership is appointed is important as, after all, it will be central to the new leadership’s legitimacy. Getting it right matters and will offer a precedent for the future. In terms of personalities, the grey technocratic facade of modern China looks likely to break up. There are new leaders who we will need to become very familiar with who, from their provincial records and their previous career paths, show distinct differences from one another. Dillon offers interesting data on where these individuals come from, what their interests might be, and how they might differ when they are elevated into the supreme decision making body of modern China – the Standing Committee of the Politburo.

As Dillon comprehensively shows, while the leadership transition is an internal issue for China, its implications extend way beyond China’s shores. As and when the transition occurs, the new leaders will begin a decade of stewardship over the world’s second largest economy and one of its major geopolitical players. We must try to understand these individuals, as the ways in which they decide

to deal with China's problems will impact on us. By giving insights, flesh and form to the sometimes illusive figures at the centre of this political universe, Dillon does great service in shedding light on one of the most interesting, but possibly least understood, aspects of modern China's remarkable and continuing rise. He does so with an unparalleled knowledge of China's recent history, using a range of Chinese and English sources.

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Executive Summary

- The planned transition to the fifth-generation leadership will take place between autumn 2012 and spring 2013.
- Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang will succeed Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao as President/General Secretary and Premier respectively.
- Hu Jintao is expected to retain control of the Central Military Commission for some time after the transition.
- The identity of the new members to be selected for the powerful Politburo Standing Committee and the size of the committee are less certain.
- Li Yuanchao, Wang Qishan, Wang Yang, Yu Zhengsheng and Zhang Dejiang are serious contenders for membership of the Politburo Standing Committee.
- The candidates for membership of the Politburo Standing Committee are skilled in central and provincial CCP politics but few have significant international experience.
- Bo Xilai is no longer a contender since the attempted defection of his Chongqing assistant Wang Lijun and the allegations of Bo's involvement in the death of Neil Heywood.
- There will be no immediate alteration of Beijing's policies or attitudes as a result of the changes.
- The emphasis will remain on economic growth and the robust defence of China's interests internationally.
- In the longer term, some concessions to democracy within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and, more widely, in society are possible.

Key PRC Political Bodies*

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CC Central Committee	Its 350 members and alternate members meet annually in full (plenary) session.
CCP National Congress	Formally the highest authority of the CCP; it meets every five years.
CMC	Central Military Commission. Its 12 members exercise CCP control over the People's Liberation Army.
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The advisory 'second chamber'. It represents non-Party and minority interests and meets annually.
NPC	National People's Congress. The 3,000 members of this quasi-parliamentary legislature meet annually.
Politburo	Its 25 members meet monthly.
Politburo Standing Committee	The centre of real political power; its currently nine members meet weekly.

*Membership figures are approximate and vary from time to time.

Timetable for Leadership Changes

Date	Meeting	Generation	Leadership
2017 Autumn/winter	19th CCP Congress	Sixth-generation core leadership provisionally announced	
2013 Spring	National People's Congress	Fifth-generation leadership to be formally ratified	Xi takes office as President and Li as Premier
2012 Autumn/winter	18th CCP Congress	Fifth-generation leadership to be approved	Xi takes office as CCP General Secretary
2012 March	National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee		
2011	Process for electing delegates to CCP Congress begins		
2011 Summer	Provincial reshuffle and attack on corruption		
2007 15–21 October	17th CCP Congress	Fifth-generation leadership announced	Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang introduced
2002 8–15 November	16th CCP National Congress	Fourth generation takes office	Hu Jintao CCP General Secretary

Introduction

As the Central Committee (CC) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) met in Beijing on 15 October 2011, some commentators optimistically suggested that this was not just the drawing to a close of one administration and the beginning of a new one dominated by the fifth generation of the leadership but the dawn of a new era of profound political change. Formally it was the 17th CC of the CCP meeting in its Sixth Plenary Session, which nomenclature indicates the importance of continuity and tradition in what was once a revolutionary party.

In anticipation of the forthcoming leadership changes in 2012–13, there has been a rush to publish books in Chinese (mostly in Hong Kong) on the likely composition of the emerging generation of leaders and the process from which they have emerged. These books vary in depth of coverage and reliability of sources; and with the exception of the rise of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, there is only limited agreement on the outcome. These sources have been underused in English-language accounts of China's change of leadership. They yield much new information and analytical perspectives from individuals who have close connections with insiders, but they must be treated with caution. Many are speculative, and the Hong Kong media are frequently used by factional and departmental interests in China to enhance their standing.¹

Decisions on the composition of the 'core leadership' of the CCP's fifth generation will be approved formally at the meeting of the 18th CCP National Congress in autumn 2012. The positions of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang as respectively President and Premier will be reaffirmed at the National People's Congress (NPC), which is expected to take place in March 2013. However, negotiations and feverish battling for position are already under way. The Chinese-language media outside China is obsessed by this struggle but the *People's Daily* and the rest of the official media in the People's Republic of China (PRC) refer to it only obliquely. After the spectacular and unexpected dismissal of Bo Xilai as Chongqing Party Secretary, there has been speculation that the 18th National Party Congress might be delayed. But the regional congresses that routinely precede a Party congress are in progress and the

¹ The author is grateful to Krzysztof Szumski, a former ambassador of Poland to the People's Republic of China, for sharing his insights on the leadership changes and also to the anonymous reviewers for ECRAN and to Kerry Brown of Chatham House. Their suggestions have been incorporated as far as time and space have permitted. Information available up to 5 September 2012 has been taken into account in what has become a rapidly changing situation.

published timetable for this congress, in the second half of 2012, can still be adhered to.

During summer 2011, many provincial officials were replaced or transferred in preparation for the 18th National Party Congress. In a statement released by the CCP Central Committee for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), it was revealed that in the course of this reshuffle, 72 CCP officials had been punished for 'irregularities' in order to ensure that only 'ethically sound officials' would be promoted in the forthcoming leadership changes. Strict discipline and the elimination of corrupt officials was also the theme of a speech made by President Hu Jintao to a session of the CCDI on 9 January 2012. This was an indication of how seriously the CCP leadership takes the problem of corruption within the Party and the government, and particularly its impact on the widespread unrest that China has experienced as a result of land confiscation.²

² *Asia Times*, 22 July 2011; *China.org.cn* (Xinhua), 5 January 2012; *China Daily*, 10 January 2012; and *South China Morning Post*, 15 March 2012.

1 Change and Continuity

Radical or fundamental political change in China is far from inevitable but it is unlikely that the CCP's 62-year monopoly of government can remain unchanged indefinitely in the wake of the country's extraordinary economic development. The CCP is not willing to permit independent organisations to represent the aspirations of emerging social groups and has every intention of retaining the current system of one-party control. A statement issued on 1 July 2011 during celebrations of the ninetieth anniversary of the CCP's establishment made it clear that Western-style multi-party democracy was not considered suitable for China's 'national conditions' and that it could even precipitate a repeat of the 'chaos and factionalism' of the Cultural Revolution. It claimed that 30 years of economic growth proved that the CCP had the welfare of the people at heart and guaranteed its legitimacy. The spectre of chaos à la the Cultural Revolution was also invoked by Premier Wen Jiabao in his press conference at the end of the National People's Congress in March 2012, although his remarks were also an attack on Bo Xilai's 'Maoist revival' in Chongqing.³

The current leadership of the CCP is determined that future political change will remain under its control. Central control by the Party collapsed briefly in the early stages (1966–67) of the Cultural Revolution, but this was quickly remedied by military intervention and the reconstruction of the CCP in 1969. Since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, and especially since the final retirement of Deng Xiaoping in 1992, political change has been institutionalised; and the leadership intends that the risks and conflict associated with the uncertainty of succession should be a thing of the past.⁴

The process of selecting the new top leadership is still opaque and restricted to the inner circle of the CCP's Politburo and Organisation Department, but in recent years the results have been made known and the names of preferred candidates have been publicised well in advance – five years – of their likely assumption of power, although only indirectly. The successful candidates are usually relatively unknown outside China. They are typically drawn from the pool of provincial governors and Party secretaries but also from other senior

³ Xinhua via *South China Morning Post*, 3 July 2011.

⁴ Deng relinquished his final official position as Chairman of the Central Military Commission in 1989, but his continuing authority was evident from the impact of his 'southern tour' in 1992. The clash between Bo Xilai and Wang Lijun in Chongqing and Bo's eventual removal are a clear indication that the risks of succession remain but they also reveal the firm resolve of the CCP leadership to eliminate them.

Party functionaries and state officials, so they are well known within the CCP and to the wider public.⁵ There is a determination to avoid the appointment of one dominant individual – another Mao or even another Deng. As a result, the leadership may appear weak, divided and lacklustre.

The key question for China's future is whether political change can be confined within the 80-million-strong Party (with reserves of over 20 million applicants annually and probably 75 million in the Communist Youth League [CYL]⁶) or whether non-Party organisations will be permitted to play a role. For the foreseeable future, the CCP will play the leading role. It is not a monolith: factional differences and conflicts are key drivers in the development of policy but there is no open acknowledgement that these factions even exist. Indeed they are not factions in the Western sense, as they do not have distinctive political programmes. They are patronage groups operating on the basis of personal loyalty and are based on regions or influential organisations such as the CYL. There are differences in political outlook among them but these are not reflected unambiguously in factional divisions.

Since the death of Mao in 1976 and the move towards a more open economic system, discussions of the history of the Chinese Communist Party have become more open; and the role of reform-minded individuals who were defeated politically by Mao is being re-examined. This has a direct impact on the current leadership changes in that some of the key candidates appear to draw on the tradition of those reformers.⁷

Zhou Enlai, whose political position was always difficult to characterise, is considered by some to have been the first significant reformer after the foundation of the PRC. He was the first powerful advocate of the 'four modernisations', for which Deng Xiaoping is often given credit, although he remained close to Mao and did not press for political reform. Deng Xiaoping, who for all his enthusiasm for economic reform was a political conservative on the question of modernising the Chinese Communist Party and the overall political structure, developed Zhou's economic reform agenda.

⁵ It can be assumed that senior military officers and officials of the intelligence services, among others, will have some input into the selection process but there is no reliable information on this.

⁶ According to the *China Daily* of 5 April 2007, the CYL's membership is 73,496 million.

⁷ Details of the ongoing discourse on Party reform and the legacy of Hu Yaobang and others can be found in successive issues of the critical journal *Yanhuang chunqiu* [The Spring and Autumn Annals of the Emperors Yan and Huang], Volumes 1-12 2011 and 1-8 2012, and passim.

However, it is Hu Yaobang, Zhao Ziyang and, arguably, Wen Jiabao who have been seen as the standard-bearers of political reform. It would not be accurate to describe them as 'liberal' or even 'pro-democracy' but they do personify a current within the CCP that has been willing to take seriously the need for political reform. The precise nature of this reform has not been clearly articulated because of the resistance of conservative elements in the Party. The reformist current has been gaining ground in recent years but since the forced retirement of Hu Yaobang in 1987 after accusations that he was too indulgent with student demonstrators against corruption, senior political figures have been reluctant to identify openly with this current. Even so, many appear to associate themselves to some extent with Hu's legacy, including both Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang.⁸

On 18 January 2012, Hu Yaobang's eldest son, Hu Deping, convened a forum on political reform on the twentieth anniversary of Deng Xiaoping's 1992 'southern tour', the mission during which Deng finally secured support for his reform policies. At this meeting, academics, retired public servants and relatives of former senior Party and government officials heard Hu Deping, an economist who chairs the Chinese National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, commend the way in which protests in the village of Wukan in Guangdong province had been handled. He argued that the time was right to extend Deng's 'reform and opening' policy to political reform.⁹

Access to the higher positions in the CCP and the government is by a combination of bureaucratic progression and personal connections. Appointments to the leadership are made initially on the basis of rank order in the hierarchy of the *nomenklatura* (*zhiwu mingcheng biao*). As its Russian name suggests, it emulates the system that existed in the Communist Party of the former Soviet Union; and it is managed by the CCP's Organisation Department.¹⁰ Individuals rise in status and authority according to their rank and with the availability of positions, but their progress is modified by personal, historical or factional connections, which can increase or reduce their chance of

⁸ Supporting evidence is provided in the detailed accounts of the careers of Xi and Li in 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 respectively below.

⁹ *South China Morning Post*, 20 January 2012. For details of the confrontation in Wukan, see below 5.2.

¹⁰ John P. Burns, 'China's Nomenklatura System', *Problems of Communism*, vol. XXXVI, September–October 1987, pp. 36–51 and John P. Burns (ed.), *The Chinese Communist Party's Nomenklatura System* (Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1989).

promotion. Like all personnel matters in the CCP, this is not a transparent process. Those at the apex of the political structure have arrived there through an ascending spiral of successive rotations between central and provincial Party and government appointments.

2 Senior Political Appointments

Party and government appointments at the highest level are formally approved at the five-yearly National Congresses of the CCP, which take place in the autumn. Government posts are ratified at the annual meeting of the National People's Congress in the following spring. Although it is always possible for appointments to be revoked, the expectation is that they will be confirmed. There is a consensus that to avoid a repetition of the chaotic Cultural Revolution, conflict should be confined within the Chinese Communist Party and its decision-making bodies – the CC and the Politburo – and that in public the CCP should present a united front, in line with the Leninist practice of 'democratic centralism', in which full debate before a decision should be followed by uncritical adherence after that decision had been agreed on. Thus 'barring accidents, the CCP 18th National Congress will renew its [Politburo] Standing Committee with Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang as its leading members.'¹¹

Higher-ranking officials are promoted on the basis of service in government or Party organisations at senior levels. This practical experience of management is supplemented by training in Party schools, especially upon promotion to higher-level posts. Many of the highest-ranking officials have served as provincial Party secretaries or governors in the regions: hardship postings in the deprived and problematic north-west (Tibet, Xinjiang and Gansu) attract particular esteem. Overseas experience and knowledge are not valued in the same way.¹²

The cultivation of Chinese leaders is a blend of traditional Chinese values, perceived devotion to the common people, superior knowledge of the nature of the party and above all, loyalty. The CCP wants to avoid at all costs the rise of a Chinese Mikhail Gorbachev who may

¹¹ Waican bianji bu [Editorial Department of *Waican Magazine*], *Zhong Gong shibada zhi zheng* [The Struggle for Chinese Communists' 18th Congress] (Hong Kong: Waican Publishers, 2011), p. 92.

¹² For example, Zhang Dejiang, who replaced Bo Xilai as Party Secretary of Chongqing in March 2012, is a fluent speaker of Korean. He studied the language at Yanbian University in Jilin and later in Pyongyang. He has clearly been a key player in negotiations with the North Korean leadership, but this has not been emphasised by the CCP.

introduce any kind of reforms that could threaten its iron grip on power.¹³

The current system of replacing the collective leadership has been developed by the CCP in order to maintain maximum political stability and to have minimum impact on China's society and economy. It is intended as well to prevent the ossification of the power structures and to allow for the routine renewal of senior personnel as the older generation retires. The intended outcome of this arcane process is that the change in personnel will not precipitate dramatic changes in the direction of policy. But this does not mean that there will be no change at all.

Bitter struggles for position and power in the Party are based on political commitment and differing views of China's political direction as much as on personal ambition. The superficial smoothness of the planned transition to March 2013 masks deep conflicts. Some have argued that the Hu-Wen administration was in crisis and that changes at the top of the leadership could lead to a 'dangerous and unpredictable' mood in Beijing. The manner of the dismissal of Bo Xilai on 15 March 2012 is clear evidence that such conflicts remain.¹⁴

Interest focuses primarily on candidates for the top two positions, the assumption being that 'the fate of the Party and the state is in the hands of one or two individuals'. This is the opposite of the view of Deng Xiaoping, who had argued that the future of China should depend on a new collective leadership, that it was wrong to exaggerate the role of individuals and that there should be no appointments for life. There are now no appointments for life, and the distrust of strong or charismatic leaders has led to the emergence of relatively unknown and bland individuals at the apex of the CCP.¹⁵

Denied the level of inside information that is available in democratic societies, Chinese and Western commentators have been obliged to speculate on the views of candidates for the top positions and their likely impact on policy. For example, two of the probable new entries to the Politburo, Wang Yang and Bo Xilai, were characterised as offering diametrically opposed models – the Guangdong and Chongqing models – for China's development. Wang Yang, as

¹³ 'Not much will change under China's next leaders: scholar', *China Post* (Taiwan), 13 May 2010.

¹⁴ Shi Hua, *Hu Wen weiji* [The Hu Wen crisis] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Cultural Press, 2004), p. 15.

¹⁵ Tan Tian, *Shiba da qian de xiaoyan* [The Smell of Cordite before the 18th Party Congress] (Hong Kong: New Culture Press, 2010), pp. 16–17.

CCP Secretary of Guangdong province, the economic powerhouse of southern China, has been promoting a 'Happy Guangdong' campaign. It seeks to appeal to an emerging middle class that might have 'a stronger appetite for political participation and rights protection', although there is little concrete evidence for such an appetite. In Chongqing, the capital of China's western Sichuan province, the former Party Secretary, Bo Xilai, was behind a campaign for 'red culture', marked by nostalgic television programmes harking back to the Maoist era of the 1950s and 1960s and the singing of revolutionary songs evoking the CCP's 'long march' to power. Bo Xilai attracted far more attention than Wang Yang, in the West as well as in China, but whether these opposite perspectives reflect genuine differences of policy rather than regional interests and the personalities of the two individuals is difficult to determine. Since Bo's political demise in March 2012, this is largely of academic interest. Some Chinese writers have also speculated at great length on the probable policies of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang upon coming to power but there is no reliable basis for what is essentially guesswork.¹⁶

3 Political Generations in China

The successive leaderships of the CCP are now expressed in terms of political generations. Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin made up the first three, but the identification of them as separate 'generations' is mainly retrospective, although the media began to refer to Jiang as the 'core of the third generation' while he was still in power.

The current fourth-generation leadership team of Hu Jintao, President of the PRC, General Secretary of the CCP and Chairman of the CCP and the PRC Central Military Commission (CMC), and Premier Wen Jiabao has worked effectively, despite persistent rumours of serious conflict and some obvious differences of personality. They had previously worked together in Gansu province in the 1980s, which may have strengthened their relationship.

The 'core leadership' of the fifth generation will be elected at the 18th CCP National Congress towards the end of 2012, and their government posts will be formally confirmed at the meeting of the NPC scheduled for spring 2013. It is

¹⁶ Qiu Feng, Unirule Institute of Economics (an independent think tank in Beijing), quoted in Louisa Lim, "'Cake theory' has Chinese eating up political debate", *NPR*, 6 November 2011 and Tania Branigan, 'China's leaders break ranks in readiness for new dawn', *Guardian*, 26 November 2011.

assumed that Xi Jinping will be confirmed as President and CCP General Secretary and take over from Hu Jintao, on the basis of the rank order of election to the Politburo at the 17th CCP National Congress in October 2007 and Xi's subsequent promotion as Vice-Chairman of the CMC. Li Keqiang will become Premier, replacing Wen Jiabao. On the level below that, Li Yuanchao, Wang Qishan, Wang Yang and Yu Zhengsheng are assumed to be the most likely candidates for vacancies that will occur on the Standing Committee of the Politburo, the most powerful political body in the country, after existing members retire when their term of office expires. The Standing Committee has a current membership of nine; but that has not always been the case, and it cannot be assumed that it will remain at that level.

As the sixth generation will not be chosen until the 19th CCP Congress in 2017 and the NPC of 2018, identifying potential successors to Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang with any certainty is impossible. Any of them could encounter political crises. For example, Wang Yang, the CCP Secretary in Guangdong province, who is tipped for membership of the Politburo Standing Committee at the 18th Congress, was caught off guard by riots of migrant workers in June 2011 and issued a belated statement offering 'social construction as a priority' in response to the rioters' complaints. However, he regained ground after successfully handling the Wukan protests of autumn 2011.

Others who are sufficiently senior in the nomenklatura but have not yet come to prominence might still emerge. Some names raised by political analysts in China and Hong Kong include Hu Chunhua (Inner Mongolia), Sun Zhengcai, Zhou Qiang (Hunan), Li Xiaopeng, Zhang Qingwei, Baikeli (Nur Bekri, a Uighur from Xinjiang), Lu Hao (Communist Youth League), Sun Jinlong, Chen Min'er, Zhao Yong, Su Shulin, Wan Qingliang, Yang Yue (Qinghua), Pan Yue, Zhang Shaoming, Li Zhiqun and Xia Yong. Many others could be included in a list of possible rising stars.

4 CCP Factions and the Succession Process

With more than 80 million members and a complex organisation that extends downwards to the provincial level and below, the CCP is, not surprisingly, riven by internal conflicts although they are usually concealed.

Names for factions used to describe different patronage groups in the CCP include the Communist Youth League, the Shanghai gang or clique, the Qinghua

clique, the Beijing University clique and the ‘princelings’ (or ‘crown princes’), the latter designating the sons and daughters of former senior officials. As the names suggest, these are based on local origins, education or social connections and they have replaced pre-Cultural Revolution factions that were based on service with field armies in the Long March of 1935–36 and the civil war of 1946–49. Willy Lam argues that ‘Factionalism is still a strong factor behind promotions in the CCP such as with the Communist Youth League faction versus the so-called “Gang of Princelings” or descendants of heroes of the communist revolution.’¹⁷

However, the usefulness of factions as a guide to the workings of the CCP, and specifically to promotions to the Politburo Standing Committee, is questionable. The possibility of cooperation between factions on senior appointments limits their usefulness to analysts, and a number of the most successful leaders command loyalties that transcend factional boundaries. An analysis of Chinese politics based on factions must be complemented by detailed historical and biographical studies that reveal the complexity of these relationships.

The commonly used factional names do not reflect the real political differences that exist within the CCP. One tendency, the ‘internal democrats’ or ‘internal democratic liberals’ (*dangnei minzhu pai* or *dangnei minzhu ziyou pai*), is rarely mentioned although its voice can be heard through journals, including the monthly *Yanhuang chunqiu* [Spring and Autumn Annals of the Emperors Yan and Huang], which combines political comment, historical analysis and reminiscences of Hu Yaobang and other reformist icons. Although terms such as *taizidang* (‘princelings’) and ‘CYL faction’ are often used, they simply designate the political and social origins of a section of the elite and their likely patrons and allegiances. They are not very informative about the similarities or differences of their political views.¹⁸ The intricate and often deliberately obscured family and personal relationships within the CCP need to be

¹⁷ ‘Not much will change under China’s next leaders’, Willy Lam lecture, *China Post* (Taiwan), 13 May 2010.

¹⁸ There are interesting parallels with the factional structure of the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), raising the question of whether East Asian cultural factors play an important role. The LDP, a conservative party, held power in Japan almost without interruption from 1955 to 2009. Although it has acknowledged factions based on the patronage of powerful individual politicians, it is difficult to determine any differences of political ideology among them. The LDP and the CCP have little in common politically but both insist on governing by consensus and ensuring that disputes and policy differences are hammered out in private.

considered in order to permit a more nuanced and complete understanding of conflicts that are conventionally viewed as factional.

5 Key Issues

The main domestic policy issues facing the incoming leadership concern the speed of economic growth and the ways of dealing with its social consequences, particularly inequality, conflicts over rural development, corruption and Taiwan.¹⁹ It has long been accepted that there is an informal social contract between the CCP and the people of China: as long as the Party delivers prosperity and continuing economic growth, people will turn a blind eye to the lack of democracy.

Because of the established principle of 'democratic centralism', it is not always possible to link policy differences with specific individuals. One obvious exception is the premier, Wen Jiabao, whose openly populist approach to pollution, corruption and natural disasters has marked him out in the eyes of some commentators as a more open and 'liberal' figure in the tradition of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang.

The background of the incoming fifth-generation leadership is not significantly different from that of the Hu-Wen leadership, and that calls into question overoptimistic expectations of a new and more liberal political era. None of the incoming leadership has experience of working or studying abroad to assist them in judging key issues of international relations. One exception is the Korean specialist Zhang Dejiang, but this only underlines the lack of other leaders with significant international experience in the West.²⁰

5.1 Taiwan

The question of Taiwan's political reunification with the Mainland is a constant source of tension. It escalated with the victory of the Democratic People's Party candidate Chen Shuibian in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. Since the election of Ma Ying-jeou in 2008, tension has eased, as his Guomintang (Kuomintang) party formally favours the eventual unification of Taiwan with the rest of China (although not under a communist government). President Ma's re-

¹⁹ Taiwan is considered to be a domestic policy issue in Beijing but not in Taipei.

²⁰ Shi Hua, *Hu Wen weiji* [The Hu Wen crisis], pp. 4–7.

election on 14 January 2012 with a smaller but clear majority has reassured Beijing that there will be no move towards a declaration of Taiwan's independence during the leadership transition on the Mainland. Ma has indicated that he does not expect any significant change in relations between Beijing and Taipei and has argued that his re-election is Taiwan's 'best gift' to the Mainland and that it could encourage democracy in the PRC. During Xi Jinping's career in Fujian, he is reported to have formed useful working relationships with Taiwanese businessmen, who were being encouraged to invest in the province. This should stand him in good stead for national-level negotiations with Taiwan.

On 29 June 2010, China and Taiwan signed an economic cooperation framework agreement that is designed to reduce tariffs and trade barriers and to encourage bilateral commerce. Opposition groups in Taiwan protested that this was a move towards reunification and that Taiwanese businesses would suffer at the hands of larger Mainland enterprises. Premier Wen Jiabao sought to reassure businessmen and investors in Taiwan that they would be treated on an equal basis with Mainland investors. A recent announcement – that Beijing has proposed the establishment of a joint administration to develop the island of Pingtan off the coast of Fujian – is likely to trigger more protests in Taiwan.

Formal contacts between the PLA and the Taiwanese military have also been proposed as part of confidence-building measures to reduce cross-strait tensions, but there has been little response to this from Taiwan, and China continues to increase its expenditure on the military. Agreements on cross-strait policing and cooperation between the two judicial systems are also being implemented.²¹

5.2 Corruption and rural protests

China has experienced serious corruption scandals at the highest levels of the government and the CCP that have led to prosecutions and even the execution of those found guilty. The current leadership and its successors are committed to weeding out corrupt senior officials but the greatest problems of dishonesty and the abuse of power are at the grass-roots level, where local Party and government officials and the police are intimately involved with business and

²¹ *South China Morning Post*, 1 April, 15 May, 6 July 2011, 12 and 26 January and 19 March 2012 and *Washington Post*, 15 August 2011.

development. Corruption at this level has been at the heart of 'mass incidents', protests in the Chinese countryside.

During the 1990s, rural unrest was predominantly the result of farmers protesting against an unpopular agricultural tax, and those protests were silenced by the repeal of that tax from the beginning of 2006. Since then, the focus of peasant discontent has shifted to land seizures and corruption. The standoff between the villagers of Wukan in Guangdong province and local officials between September and December 2011 following the death of a popular village leader in police custody is one of many thousands (at least 100,000 but some put the figure as high as 180,000) of 'mass incidents' that have erupted in China in recent years. There is no commonly accepted definition of 'mass incident', or understanding of how many people these incidents usually involve, but their existence has been officially recognised for many years. The CCP can conceive of only two possible strategies to deal with the level of defiance that has occurred. Massive repression by armed police and troops is its primary response. Political concessions at either the local or the national level, the only realistic alternative, have been viewed with suspicion as a potential threat to the authority of the regime, although unusually this was the route chosen in the Wukan case.

The present leaders of the CCP are apprehensive that a movement similar to the one that brought the Party to power could also become the agent of their downfall. The current protests are fragmented and, although they have much in common, uncoordinated: they are local responses to local grievances. The CCP and its government have ensured that any attempt to link these protests, or to create a nationwide movement that might give political support to them, has been crushed at the outset. If they amalgamated, these rural protests could have the same effect on the CCP that their predecessors between the 1920s and the 1940s had on the Guomindang nationalist government of the time.

China has a well-established system of elections for village representatives but these elections are far from open and free. There is a procedure for voting, and only the names of candidates chosen or approved by the local branch of the CCP can appear on the ballot paper. In theory, recent changes in the regulations have permitted independent candidates to put their name forward, but in practice many genuinely independent individuals who have tried to do so have been harassed and obliged to withdraw from the contest. Nevertheless, there is

a structure in place that the CCP could use to promote a degree of representative democracy in the Chinese countryside.

Farmers in Wukan moved beyond protesting at land seizures and demanded genuine representative government at the village level. Initially this was not conceded but, in a move that may increase the chances of Wang Yang, the governor of Guangdong, in the race for membership of the Politburo Standing Committee, major concessions were made to the villagers. Independent candidates were elected to the village committee in elections that the *South China Morning Post* has agreed were ‘as free and fair and transparent as a democratic vote can be’. Wang Yang has argued, unconvincingly, that there was no real difference between these elections and similar elections elsewhere in China. But as villagers in Wukan are complaining of continued harassment and the presence of police spies, the jury is still out on whether the elections in Wukan mark a turning point for the rest of China.²²

5.3 Popular protest and demands for democracy

In the wake of the ‘Arab Spring’, some Chinese émigré organisations and their supporters (allegedly with the assistance or interference of foreign intelligence services) began to circulate online demands that Chinese citizens should follow the Arab world and launch a ‘jasmine revolution’ for an end to the dictatorship of the CCP. This had virtually no impact on the Chinese population, apart from a few unfortunate individuals who turned up for non-existent demonstrations and were promptly hustled off by plain-clothes police and state security officers. However, it did have a profound effect on the security services and the government. Fearing that the usual ‘hostile, foreign forces’ were behind these demands, they launched a clampdown on the media and detained a small number of dissidents and independent lawyers, creating an atmosphere of paranoia.

Chinese activists and their supporters seem fixated on the idea of a wave of democracy flowing into China from outside as the only solution to China’s problems. It is also precisely what members of the Chinese government and the security apparatus fear. Courageous individuals and informal groups have emerged from the general public to defend individuals and communities harmed by the conduct of the government, and a genuinely democratic and

²² *South China Morning Post*, 8 and 10 March 2012.

anti-authoritarian movement could emerge from this trend. For years the CCP has been co-opting the wealthy and influential from the mushrooming urban middle class by allowing some business people to join the CCP in a departure from the practice of the pre-Deng era, but it prohibits the establishment of genuinely independent mass organisations. Those within the Chinese elite, including members of the CCP, who wish to develop programmes for reform and human rights will have to decide whether to oppose emerging grass-roots movements or to encourage them. It is not clear how the next generation will respond.

5.4 China and the EU

Relations between China and the EU have been relatively positive, especially in comparison with Sino-US contacts. China appreciates the importance of its trading relationship with the EU and Europe's potential role as a counterweight in what could otherwise be a bipolar global structure. However, the EU continues to draw attention to human rights and the Tibet issue. This does not please Beijing.

Tensions over international issues are often viewed by China in terms of territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Recently China has differed with the EU on responses to Iran's nuclear policy. On 23 January 2012, the EU agreed to support an immediate embargo on the export of Iranian oil and a freeze on the Iranian central bank's assets in the EU. China imports from Iran a large volume of oil that it needs for its rapid industrialisation and Beijing has strong diplomatic relations with Tehran. China argues that differences over the nuclear issue should be resolved by negotiation rather than by force or even economic sanctions. During a visit to Doha on 19 January 2012, Premier Wen Jiabao insisted that Beijing's continued trade with Tehran, which has benefited from the withdrawal of Western businesses after the imposition of sanctions, was both legitimate and essential. There is no reason to suppose that any of the incoming leadership will take a different view. On this issue, as on others that bear on the security of Asia and the Middle East, China has moved closer to Russia, its former ally in the 1950s and early 1960s.²³

²³ BBC News, 23 January 2012; *South China Morning Post*, 26 January 2012; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, 19 January 2012.

The Western banking and financial crises, and particularly the continuing crisis in the eurozone, have overshadowed these longstanding issues. As members of the G20 met in Cannes on 3 November 2011, they faced an unexpected call by the Greek prime minister for a referendum to approve the European bailout proposal for his country's stricken economy. President Hu Jintao was present at the meeting amid growing expectations that China would support the euro by buying bonds and other securities in the currency.²⁴ This matter was also raised by the German chancellor Angela Merkel during her visit to China in early February 2012. At a joint news conference, Premier Wen indicated that China was considering greater involvement in European financial stability processes but that this would require more preparatory work by Europe. Chancellor Merkel attended an economic forum in Guangzhou and, pursuing the EU's interest in human rights, met church leaders; but a planned visit to the independent-minded newspaper *Southern Weekly* was cancelled and civil rights lawyers were prevented from meeting members of her delegation. However, she did meet the editor of the reformist journal *Yanhuang Chunqiu* [The Spring and Autumn Annals of the Emperors Yan and Huang].²⁵

6 Key Players

6.1 The third generation

6.1.1 Jiang Zemin

Jiang Zemin (85) was the surprise candidate for the CCP leadership in the aftermath of the military suppression of the Beijing Democracy Movement on 4 June 1989. He had been intending to take up an academic post at Shanghai Jiaotong University but because he was perceived to have managed the parallel demonstrations in Shanghai successfully, Deng Xiaoping chose him to replace the reform-minded Zhao Ziyang, who had been dismissed for being too sympathetic to the student demonstrators. Derided for his awkward 'Three Represents' theory and often thought to be underperforming as Party and state

²⁴ BBC News, 2 November 2011.

²⁵ *South China Morning Post*, 28 January and 3 and 5 February 2012 and *Die Zeit*, 3 and 4 February 2012.

leader, he nevertheless paved the way for the broadening of the CCP's membership to include the business community.²⁶

Although Jiang Zemin retired as General Secretary of the CCP in 2002 to make way for Hu Jintao and the fourth generation, his retirement was gradual: he did not finally relinquish his last appointment, as Chairman of the Central Military Commission, until March 2005. He was the 'core' of the third-generation leadership but his influence was such that he remained a shadow member of the fourth generation. This position was strengthened by his leadership of the 'Shanghai faction' in the CCP, whose influence is now regarded as limited. Jiang was unwilling to relinquish power both for himself and on behalf of the faction but his position was undermined by the enforced retirement in October 2007 of his Shanghai protégé Zeng Qinghong, who had been seen as a potential future Party chief.²⁷

However, Jiang continued to influence the policies of the fourth generation from behind the scenes, as illustrated by the consternation caused by rumours that circulated in 2011 that he was seriously ill or had even died. He has made no public appearances since December 2010, but appeared on television with Hu Jintao on 9 October 2011 during the celebrations of the centenary of the 1911 revolution. Asia Television, which had carried the report of his death on 6 July, was fined an unprecedented HK\$300,000 [€ 31,000 approximately] for irresponsible broadcasting. In April 2012, Jiang provided the calligraphy for a new airport in Yangzhou, his hometown, and he met Western businessmen in Beijing in May. Although Jiang has been reported to be in poor health, rumours persist that Hu Jintao felt obliged to consult him before approving the dismissal of Bo Xilai.²⁸

²⁶ In a speech at the 16th CCP National Congress in November 2002, Jiang had argued that the CCP should be 'a faithful representative of the requirements in the development of advanced productive forces in China, the orientation of the advanced culture in China, and the fundamental interests of the broadest masses of the people in China'.

²⁷ Wen Yu, 'Zeng Qinghong: a potential challenger to China's heir apparent', *China Brief*, vol. 1, issue 10, 2001.

²⁸ Willy Lam, 'National People's Congress maneuvers: Jiang on top', *China Brief*, vol. 3, no. 5 (2004); *South China Morning Post*, 31 October, 5 December 2011 and 21 April and 10 May 2012; and Shi Hua, *Hu Wen weiji* [The Hu Wen crisis], pp. 17–24.

6.2 The fourth generation

After the political crisis of 1989, Jiang Zemin was appointed personally by Deng Xiaoping to lead the party and the country. The fourth generation, which followed Jiang's drawn-out retirement between 2002 and 2005, emerged from a new process of selecting the top leadership, a process that was secretive but was clearly based on intense lobbying by factional and other interest groups within the most powerful party organs.

6.2.1 Hu Jintao

Hu Jintao (69), who succeeded Jiang as President in 2003, is a classic product of the 'double-burden' system of technological education and political training that has produced most of the current CCP leadership. He graduated from Qinghua (Tsinghua) University in Beijing as a hydroelectric engineer. He worked in water conservancy and power, and his key political postings were to Gansu and Tibet. At the latter he was CCP Secretary and responsible for the imposition of martial law. He also served as the head of the Central Party School and is the senior member of the Communist Youth League faction, having served as First Secretary of the CYL, which he still cultivates, in 1984–85. He was recalled from Tibet in 1992 to become a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and became President in 2003. His reserved public manner is the approved style for a Party head and his pronouncements tend to be restricted to theoretical and general policy issues, notably on 'scientific development' and China's 'peaceful rise', and to his commitment to a 'harmonious' society. He made a point of strengthening his power base in the military after Jiang Zemin's retirement from the Central Military Commission in 2005 but also continued with Jiang's strategy of recruiting more business leaders to the CCP.

As head of state, Hu has made many high-profile visits abroad, including to the United States, and his pragmatic and conciliatory approach has generally prevailed over the more hawkish demands of senior military officers in Beijing.

Jiang Zemin's gradual withdrawal from power, using the precedent of Deng Xiaoping's retention of his CMC post, is considered by Willy Lam to be the likely model for Hu Jintao's departure in 2012–13.

'While Hu will be stepping down as General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CCP), the official leadership position, he is expected to retain his position as Chairman of the Central Military Commission, or commander-in-chief of the armed forces. In this

position, Hu is expected to continue to wield considerable influence over policy and in deciding who will fill the top positions of authority in the sixth generation.'

However, in spring 2012 informed sources in Beijing were suggesting that Hu did not want to emulate Jiang and would prefer to retire from political life.²⁹

6.2.2 Wen Jiabao

Wen Jiabao (69) is the most popular of the fourth-generation leadership.³⁰ He is certainly the most consciously populist of the group: he never misses an opportunity to associate himself with victims in times of tragedy and loss – notably after the Wenchuan earthquake in May 2008 and when he rose from his sickbed to visit the scene of the high-speed train crash near Wenzhou in July 2011 – and to align himself with the common people against official corruption and incompetence. Before becoming Premier, his image was that of a meticulous, even dull, functionary; but unlike Hu Jintao, his personality has become important for his political activity. His man-of-the-people style and the ease with which he deals with the public and publicity have gained him popularity. Comparisons have been drawn with the respected Zhou Enlai, whose style he often seems to emulate, but some question the genuineness of this approach. He has been described as 'China's best actor' and been criticised for hypocrisy in his professed espousal of democratic values.

Wen came from a poor family. His father, a teacher, was sent to the countryside to look after pigs because of his suspect class background in 1960 – years before the Cultural Revolution. Wen was trained as a geologist and with Hu Jintao spent part of his career in Gansu. His national profile was enhanced when he developed policies on agriculture, finance and the environment for China's 2001 World Trade Organization application. He was associated with the reformists Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, and accompanied Zhao during his fateful visit to the hunger strikers in Tian'anmen Square in 1989.

In August 2010, Wen Jiabao visited Shenzhen, the pioneering special economic zone in Guangdong province, and called for political reforms in order to reinforce its economic success. He made several speeches in 2011 in China and

²⁹ Willy Lam, 'Not much will change under China's next leaders', *China Post* (Taiwan), 13 May 2010; Willy Lam, 'Hu's State Visit Exposes Rift in Chinese Foreign Policy', *China Brief*, vol. 11, no. 2 (28 January 2011); and *South China Morning Post*, 19 January, 16 April and 6 May 2012.

³⁰ This judgement is based on coverage of Wen in the Chinese- and English-language press and on conversations that the author has had in China over a number of years.

also in Malaysia and Indonesia, arguing that internal reform is essential for the survival of the CCP. Since the crushing of the Democracy Movement in June 1989, open discussion of meaningful political reform has been virtually impossible other than about measures to strengthen the CCP. (Hu Yaobang had been forced to step down as CCP General Secretary in 1987 because of his reformist views and Zhao Ziyang was purged in 1989 because of his sympathy for the student demonstrators, who responded to news of Hu's death.) Since 4 June 1989, most CCP leaders have simply avoided the issue.

Wen appears to be a lone voice, but he has not been silenced. This could reflect an increasingly powerful movement for political reform from within the Party and from associated government and academic think tanks, concerned that economic modernisation cannot continue without a move away from the one-party state. His critics include conservatives, nationalists opposed to Western values, including open elections, and the political elite, who fear the loss of their privileges. Hu Jintao has refrained from backing Wen; and both Wu Bangguo, the head of the National People's Congress, and Zhou Yongkang, who controls security policy for the CCP, have rejected the possibility of meaningful political reform.

In January 2011, Wen met petitioners in Beijing and heard their complaints of maladministration and injustice. The petition system is used by individuals with grievances that have not been redressed locally or through the formal legal system, and a petitioners' settlement has been established at Fengtai in southwestern Beijing.³¹ Wen's visit there was the first by a state premier since 1949, but there is no evidence that many petitioners were helped by his presence. In the following month, a tribute to the reformer Hu Yaobang that Wen had written for the journal *Beijing Literature* on the twenty-first anniversary of the former leader's death was praised as the best prose work of the year. It almost certainly endorsed his political sentiments as much as his writing style. His call for 'political restructuring' and institutional change was repeated at the end of the National People's Congress in March 2011; and on 25 March, he made a speech to the State Council demanding an increased emphasis on battling corruption. Although all leaders feel obliged to attack corruption from time to time, Wen's criticisms have been consistent and trenchant.

³¹ Michael Dillon, *Contemporary China: an introduction* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 88.

Premier Wen has not restricted himself to domestic issues. He has used official visits overseas to defend China's policies on economic growth and the valuation of the renminbi, to warn against the renewed interest of the United States in Southeast Asia and to bolster China's energy security by securing sources of oil in the Middle East and backing international cooperation in the construction and operation of refineries. In January 2012, he defended China's 'legitimate trade' in oil with Iran while affirming its opposition to Tehran's acquisition of nuclear weapons technology. This patriotic defence of China's interests externally has protected him from more damaging criticism of his advocacy of democracy and populist policies.³²

6.3 The fifth generation

6.3.1 Xi Jinping

Of all the candidates for promotion in the new round of leadership changes, Xi Jinping's position as the president-in-waiting in succession to Hu Jintao appears to be the most secure. According to Willy Lam, 'Xi is regarded as a candidate acceptable to all sides because of his lack of strong charisma or a large base in the party, not based on his achievements. As a loyal party member, Xi is expected to toe the party line and is unlikely to do anything radical while Hu Jintao remains commander in chief (until 2017).'³³

Xi (58) is the subject of an increasing number of biographies and critical studies, and no concerns have been aired publicly about his ability to fulfil his prospective role. However, there were 'explosive reports' [*baoliao*] in the media before the 4th Plenum of the 17th CC in September 2009 that suggested that Xi Jinping did not wish to take over from Hu Jintao. By the end of that meeting, he had not been named as Deputy Chairman of the CMC. This surprised observers and strengthened rumours about his unwillingness to succeed. Xi was eventually appointed as Deputy Chairman in the CMC on 18 October 2010 at

³² Yu Jie, *Zhongguo yingdi: Wen Jiabao* (subtitled in English *China's Best Actor: Wen Jiabao*) (Hong Kong: New Century Press, 2010). Yu Jie, a high-profile dissident, was unable to publish this in China and was interrogated and brutally treated by the police for criticising Premier Wen. See *South China Morning Post*, 26 January, 28 January, 13 February, 6 April, 9 May, 28 July, 3 November and 18 November 2011 and 19 January 2012; BBC News, 14 March 2011; Ian Johnson, 'Rumblings of Reform in Beijing?', *New York Review of Books* blog, 20 October 2010; and *Financial Times*, 27 January 2009 and 7 October 2010.

³³ 'Not much will change under China's next leaders: scholar', report of Willy Lam lecture, *China Post* (Taiwan), 13 May 2010.

the 5th plenum of the 17th CC. It is assumed that Hu Jintao will retain his position as Chairman of the CMC when he steps down as President in 2012, following the precedent established by Jiang Zemin.

At the 17th Party Conference, Xi Jinping suddenly emerged as the crown prince, apparently put forward by Jiang Zemin and Zeng Qinghong with the intention of countering Hu Jintao's protégé Li Keqiang and pushing Li into the number two position as 'assistant crown prince'. Xi was acceptable to many of the old guard because of his political pedigree. His father was Xi Zhongxun (1913–2002), a former CCP guerrilla leader in Shaanxi and a Party elder and founding father [*yuánlǎo*] of the PRC. He served as Deputy Prime Minister from 1959 to 1962. Xi Zhongxun was persecuted and purged on Mao Zedong's orders in 1962 on account of a tenuous association with a novel, *Liu Zhitan*, that appeared to play down Mao's role as a guerrilla leader. He was imprisoned and not fully rehabilitated until 1978; and between 1978 and 1981, he served as Governor and Party Secretary of Guangdong. He is reputed to have been a mentor to both Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. His son, Xi Jinping, also maintained good relations with Hu Jintao, and this may be one reason for his preferment.³⁴

6.3.1.1 Factional allegiance

Xi is usually included in the 'princeling' [*taizidang*] faction, but he also has a Shanghai background: he was Party Secretary there from 2007 after occupying senior posts in Fujian and Zhejiang. Although this does not qualify him as a member of the Shanghai faction, it did give him useful experience of its workings. 'Princelings', mostly the sons and daughters of previous senior leaders, have acquired the reputation of being arrogant and corrupt but Xi Jinping has been described as the 'princeling' with the common touch [*zui you pingmin qinghuai de taizidang*]. By contrast, Li Keqiang is a quintessential product of the CYL. Xi does not like people to bring up the 'stars in the political firmament' [*zhengtan mingxing*] of families of other senior cadres; and if anyone 'violates this prohibition', he is said to become somewhat heated and flushed with anger. In CCP political circles, he is well known for maintaining distance between himself and other members of the 'princelings'. Because of his father's political downfall when Xi Jinping was only 10 years old, he grew up

³⁴ Tan Tian, *Shiba da qian de xiaoyan* [The Smell of Cordite before the 18th Party Congress], pp. 8–9, 17–18 and BBC News, 18 October 2010.

with the understanding that people in his father's generation had brought disaster on his family.³⁵

6.3.1.2 Rustication at the end of the Cultural Revolution

In 1969, when he was barely 16 years old, Xi Jinping was sent to the Liangjiahe (Liang Family River) Production Brigade in the Wen'anyi Commune, which is in Yanquan County in northern Shaanxi, as part of a school group engaging in agricultural labour. Recalling this experience with the peasants to a reporter in later years, he said,

'For almost a whole year I did not rest at all unless I was actually ill. In rain and wind I chopped up hay for fodder in a cave and at night I watched over the animals. I took the sheep out to pasture and did all kinds of jobs and at that time I would carry 200 *jin* (100 kilo) of wheat on my shoulders for ten *li* (5 kilometres) along a mountain road without shifting it from one shoulder to the other.'³⁶

He was unable to cook for himself and preferred studying; one of the villagers prepared his meals. (In 1994, when he was a senior Party official in Fujian, he helped with medical expenses that this villager could not afford.) Together with almost 30,000 other Beijing students who had been rusticated, he joined the CCP in Yan'an in January 1974, and became the first to become the Party secretary of a Production Brigade branch. He was then approved as a 'worker-peasant-soldier student' and was enrolled in the chemical engineering department at Qinghua University from 1975 to 1979. His father had still not been politically rehabilitated at this time.

6.3.1.3 Rise to power

Xi Jinping's rise to prominence is far from accidental. He was relatively unknown when he was assigned to the post of Secretary of the Shanghai Party Committee in March 2007 after the dismissal and imprisonment for 18 years of his predecessor Chen Liangyu for the misuse of social security funds. This was a brief stint for Xi, as he was appointed to the Politburo Standing Committee in October 2007 and was replaced in Shanghai by Yu Zhengsheng, a contender for a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee in 2012.

³⁵ *Duowei Times* Beijing correspondent.

³⁶ Xia Fei et al., *Taizidang he gongqingtuan: Xi Jinping PK Li Keqiang* [Crown Prince Party and Communist Youth League Faction: Xi Jinping competes with Li Keqiang] (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2007), pp. 92-3.

When Chinese Central Television profiled the new Standing Committee, they contrasted the bespectacled Li Keqiang, always willing to discuss and explain policies, with Xi Jinping, ‘either lost in thought or listening attentively’. At a discussion on ‘scientific development’ (Hu Jintao’s signature theory) with the Shanghai delegation at the 17th Party Congress that lasted over two hours, Xi did not make a speech; and at the question and answer session with the media afterwards, he made only general comments, avoiding any detailed policy issues. The Beijing correspondent of the Korean daily *Chosun Ilbo* noted that Li Keqiang grasped the microphone and was willing to answer question after question but that Xi ‘just adopted the classic pose of inclining his head and listening’.

Nevertheless, Xi had powerful supporters in the Party hierarchy, particularly He Guoqiang, who until October 2007 was the head of the Central Organisation Department [*zhongzubu*], which controls the *nomenklatura* system of appointments and promotions. He Guoqiang subsequently became the head of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, which addresses corruption inside the Party and can make or break political careers. When Xi was appointed to lead Shanghai, He Guoqiang praised him unstintingly as ‘politically strong and with a high level of ideology and policy’ and complimented him on his experience, leadership style, work methods and commitment to democratic centralism, as well as on his honesty, concern for the masses and his ability to bring people together.

6.3.1.4 Fujian

When Xi Jinping graduated from university in 1979, he became secretary to Geng Biao, a former ambassador and a future minister of defence, who at the time was a member of the Politburo, Vice-Chairman of the State Council and Secretary General of the Central Military Commission, in whose offices Xi worked in Zhongnanhai.

Xinhua’s report of Xi’s crucial appointment to the Deputy Chairmanship of the Central Military Commission emphasised his military connections. However, these were essentially political commissar roles although technically he was a serving officer while working in the offices of the CMC.³⁷

From 1982 to 1985, he was Deputy Secretary and then Secretary of the CCP Committee of Zhengding County in Hebei province. In 1985, he was transferred

³⁷ Xinhua, 18 October 2010.

to Fujian province, where he was to spend 17 years. He took up his new posts as Deputy Mayor of Xiamen and a member of the local CCP Standing Committee on his thirty-second birthday. In contrast to his father's career, his progress was smooth; and after three years, he had advanced to the post of CCP Secretary of the prefectural-level city Ningde, south of Fuzhou. In 1990, still only 37, he became Party Secretary of Fuzhou City and the chairman of the Fuzhou Municipal People's Congress. During his time in Fuzhou, he was noted for his lack of interest in prestigious construction projects and, in particular, for his opposition to a new Fuzhou airport during the provincial airport boom of the 1990s. He was also well known for regular inspection visits to the countryside.

In 1995, he also took on the role of Secretary of the Fujian Provincial Party Committee, and two years later became an alternate member of the CCP 15th Central Committee. In 1999, at the age of 46, he was appointed as Deputy Party Secretary and Deputy Governor and then as Acting Governor of Fujian province. He was formally adopted as Fujian's governor in the following January but was rapidly transferred to the neighbouring province of Zhejiang as Deputy Party Secretary.

Xiamen and Ningde both had troubled histories of corrupt relations between officials and local business, and local officials had fallen from grace in several high-profile cases. Xi Jinping appears to have emerged from his appointments in those cities without a stain on his character and with a reputation for incorruptibility that went back to 1988 in Ningde, when he ordered that over 2,000 officials should be investigated for building private houses, in contravention of the regulations.

6.3.1.5 Zhejiang

In 2002, on the eve of the CCP 16th Congress, there were rumours that Xi Jinping was on the verge of being admitted to the Politburo. This did not materialise, but he was elected as a full member of the Central Committee and as Zhejiang Party Secretary. He replaced Zhang Dejiang, who had been promoted to membership of the Politburo and to the post of CCP Secretary of Guangdong province. The following year Xi was appointed as the chairman of the Peoples' Congress in Zhejiang province.

People who knew Xi well reported that in 2002, when he was transferred from Fujian to Zhejiang, this move vastly exceeded his expectations of his prospects, as he thought that he might be sent to Shaanxi, a much less prestigious posting. He assiduously cultivated the local leadership of the Zhejiang region by

travelling widely and visiting as many counties as possible. Even allowing for the hyperbole of the official media, it is clear that he had acquired a reputation for working tirelessly on behalf of his province and for not enriching himself. One paper referred to his 'two planks': 'boss during the day, hard bed at night' [*baitian zuo laoban, wanshang shui diban*].

Xi's reputation and political standing also benefited from the success of the Zhejiang economy, regarded by many outsiders as a model for provincial development. He is credited personally for building on an existing strong private sector of small businesses to develop industry and external investment and for promoting the integration of the economies of the Yangzi Delta provinces. This strategy was so highly regarded that he led a Zhejiang delegation to Shanghai to report on it in March 2003. He spoke again on this topic in November 2006, giving him the opportunity to demonstrate that his vision went beyond the purely provincial.

6.3.1.6 Peng Liyuan

Xi Jinping's first wife was Ke Lingling, the daughter of Ke Hua, China's ambassador to the United Kingdom from 1978 to 1983, but they divorced after three years. Xi and his second and current wife, Peng Liyuan, were introduced by friends when he was the deputy mayor of Xiamen. They married in 1987, although her parents were unhappy about the consequences of her marrying into the political hierarchy. Peng did not have a political background, but she was already well known as a singer of traditional folksongs and appears regularly on television. She had joined the PLA at the age of 18, her career developing through military song-and-dance troupes, and she was a civilian member of the PLA, reputedly with a military-equivalent rank of major-general.

Xi, in common with many of the rising generation of CCP leaders, has no genuine military experience, apart from his time at the CMC. His wife's connections have been useful, and he took every opportunity to visit military units near his political bases in Fujian and Shanghai. After the announcement of his promotion to the Deputy Chairmanship of the Central Military Commission, many photographs of Peng Liyuan appeared, glamorous in her PLA uniform as well as civilian clothes, and this further increased his popularity. Xi and Peng have lived apart for much of their married lives. This has led to speculation that they are separated, but in this respect they are typical of many professional couples in contemporary China.

6.3.1.7 Shanghai

Xi Jinping was transferred to the powerful position of Shanghai Party Secretary in March 2007, to replace the disgraced Chen Liangyu, who had been a longstanding member of the 'Shanghai faction'. Among the reasons for this move were his 22 years' experience working in the developing economies of the east coast provinces and his interest in integrating the Yangzi Delta. He also had close connections with the political elite of Shanghai but had never been implicated in the activities of the 'Shanghai faction', which had dominated China's national politics during Jiang Zemin's tenure as CCP General Secretary. Nor did he have a coterie in the city. He had a reputation too for cleaning up corruption and reforming official practices. His approach was low-key and his factional allegiances were ambiguous, so he had few obvious opponents. At a time when the 'Shanghai faction' was in retreat and the 'CYL faction' was unpopular for being overbearing and arrogant, Xi Jinping with his 'princeling' background was an ideal compromise candidate.

6.3.1.8 The Politburo Standing Committee

The director of the Central Organisation Department, He Guoqiang, made it clear that Xi's appointment to head the Shanghai Party Committee had been made on the basis of the 'overall national interest'. The significance of this remark became apparent at the 17th CCP Congress in October 2007. Xi Jinping was elevated to the Politburo Standing Committee, apparently with the full support of Hu Jintao, who may have wished to demonstrate that the higher echelons of the CCP were not entirely dominated by the 'CYL faction'. By this promotion, Xi appeared to have overtaken that faction's 'two Lis': Li Keqiang and Li Yuanchao, Head of the CCP Organisation Department since 2007 in succession to He Guoqiang. His ranking at number six in the Politburo after the 17th Congress marked him out as the likely leading figure in the post Hu-Wen administration. The Shanghai post automatically qualified Xi for a seat on the Politburo at the 17th Congress, and it was assumed that he would remain in Shanghai for a decent interval before being moved to Beijing. In the event, he was appointed to the Politburo Standing Committee within six months, which meant that he could not remain in charge of Shanghai.

6.3.1.9 Connections: Hu Yaobang, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping

The tortuous path that brought Xi Jinping to power was influenced not only by the political past of his father Xi Zhongxun but also by the legacy of Hu Yaobang. Hu was the reform-minded CCP General Secretary who was forced from power in 1987 and whose death on 5 April 1989 led to demonstrations that were the

immediate precursor of the 4 June Democracy Movement. Xi's background demonstrates the power of complex interpersonal ties rather than simple factional links in Chinese politics.

President Hu Jintao was a protégé of Hu Yaobang, who made a point of spending the Spring Festival with him in Guizhou in February 1986, boosting Hu Jintao's morale and enabling Hu Yaobang to assess the progress of China's poorest province. Hu Jintao greatly admired and respected Hu Yaobang; and after his CYL mentor's death in 1989, he visited his grave in Gongqing, Jiangxi to pay his respects. Hu Jintao was acutely aware of how highly Hu Yaobang thought of Xi Zhongxun and his political integrity. He had decided early on to champion Xi Jinping in his political ambitions, although he did not give his 'imperial endorsement' [*qin dian*] to any specific successor at the 17th CCP Congress.

Hu Jintao has frequently called for greater 'democracy within the Party' [*dangnei minzhu*], which may have assisted Xi Jinping's rise to power. Li Datong, the managing editor of *Freezing Point* [*Bingdian*], a weekly supplement published by *China Youth Daily*, argued (before he was dismissed and his publication was temporarily suspended in January 2006) that China was moving from autocracy towards democracy and that internal Party democracy was the first step.³⁸ He suggested that 'nomination by the leadership' [*you lingdao timing*] was being replaced by 'everything could be changed by voting' [*you toupiao neng gaibian yiqie*]. This may have been over-optimistic but it probably represented the aspirations of many younger members of the CCP: votes within the Party now play an increasingly important role in the decision-making process.³⁹

In 2012, the Central Organisation Department is reported to have carried out a survey by questionnaire of 20 per cent of the leading officials in Shanghai and of members of the National People's Congress and the CPPCC, a total of 2,000 people. It found overwhelming support for Xi. According to some sources Xi had gained the majority of votes in Party elections in the regions, and other sources indicated that he had obtained 90 per cent of the votes in the first ballot in Shanghai and that he had unanimous support from the heads of Party

³⁸ Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 79–80, 92 and 94.

³⁹ An experimental poll of 370 members and alternate members of the Central Committee was held in May 2012 to assess the popularity of possible leadership contenders. *South China Morning Post*, 8 June 2012.

committees [*dangwei shounao*]. His reputation within the Party was that of a virtuous official; he was said to 'embody the traditional Chinese virtues of filial piety, respect for elders and caring for the young' and to have a clean record, invaluable at a time when concern about official corruption was high on the Party's agenda.⁴⁰

It is tempting to link this evaluation of Xi to his father's track record of 'pursuing the ideals of democracy and freedom' [*zhuiqiu minzhu ziyou linian*] and 'reform and opening' and therefore to the reformist current exemplified by Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. But in view of the political fate of Hu, Zhao and their supporters, it is not surprising if Xi and others choose to keep their reformist powder dry and place economic development and political stability ahead of democracy, at least in public.

Xi Jinping's cautious public pronouncements have concentrated on familiar themes of the Hu and Wen administration, for example measures to combat corruption and the promotion of 'harmonious economic development' [*jingji hexie fazhan*], and this can be seen as appropriate behaviour for a Party leader in waiting. He has also warned about demonstrations in the universities and demanded tighter management of educational institutions in the run-up to the 2012 Party Congress so as to ensure 'harmony and stability'. This does not prevent some commentators from hoping that he is a closet democrat who plays his cards very close to his chest and may permit political reform during the second half of his term in power once the influence of conservatives of the older generation has waned.

Xi is not without his critics. One Zhejiang official speaking off the record described him as 'simple and honest to a fault' [*hanhou youyu*] and not always consistent when problems arise. He has a tendency to implement what his subordinates propose if there are no major issues raised in discussion. His grasp on power when he was in charge of Zhejiang was not as firm as that of Zhang Dejiang, who preceded him and whose Politburo seat was awarded on the basis of the economic success of Zhejiang. Others take a more positive view of Xi's management style, arguing that his ability not to offend people unnecessarily created better and more stable relationships and that even if there were no

⁴⁰ In the voting for membership of the Central Committee in 1997, he finished last, joining it as an alternate member only. However, this can be seen as a protest against 'princelings' in general rather than as a reflection on Xi's popularity or suitability.

great successes, there were no great disasters either. He was a safe pair of hands.⁴¹

Insiders have revealed that in March 2007, when Xi Jinping went to Shanghai to take up his post as Secretary of the Municipal Party Committee, he was met with ‘sugar-coated bullets’ [*tangyi paodan*]. On 28 March, the Shanghai Municipal Committee Hospitality Department took him to a detached ‘British-style’ three-storey house on South Xiangyang Road that was over 800 square metres in area and had a garden. Regulations limit the floor area of accommodation for provincial-level officials to 250 square metres, and even members of the Politburo are not supposed to have more than 300 square metres of living space. It was reported that Xi went into his luxury home, took one look and walked out, saying that it should be used as a convalescent home for elderly cadres. It is not possible to verify this account; but if it is true, it raises several questions: was this the normal treatment of a new Party Secretary; did the officials misread Xi’s reputation and his likely response; and were they trying to entrap this incorruptible?

On another occasion, when Xi was due to visit Hangzhou, his subordinates had arranged for a private train to take him there from Shanghai, but Xi insisted on changing this for a seven-seat vehicle. Relatives of his who had business interests in Shanghai reportedly moved their businesses elsewhere when he became Party Secretary, to forestall possible criticism. Similar stories are routinely published in order to indicate the positive qualities of officials, but they tend to support his reputation for old-fashioned frugality and an unwillingness to be compromised by corrupt practices.

After his appointment to the Politburo Standing Committee in October 2007, Xi Jinping moved back to Beijing where, in addition to his political duties, he could spend more time with his wife and daughter and also devote more attention to his elderly mother, in keeping with his filial reputation. At the same time, he also became more subject to closer scrutiny and sharper criticism. Commentators wondered how he would manage to work with Bo Xilai: Bo’s father Bo Yibo was diametrically opposed to the political approach of Xi Zhongxun, and some have suggested that the enmity has continued into the next generation. There is no evidence that Xi was instrumental in the downfall

⁴¹ See Wu Ming, *Xi Jinping zhuan: Zhongguo xin lingxiu* [Biography of Xin Jinping: China’s new leader] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Cultural Press, 2010), pp. 287–325 for an account of Xi Jinping in Zhejiang and his relations with Zhang Dejiang.

of Bo Xilai but it is unlikely to have distressed him unduly. Xi Jinping benefited too from the conflict between Hu Jintao's CYL supporters and Jiang Zemin's 'Shanghai faction'. But being a counterweight to the two factions was something of a millstone, and his future relationship with the CYL 'crown prince' Li Keqiang is critically important.

6.3.1.10 International profile

Xi Jinping has undertaken a series of diplomatic missions in order to create an international presence for himself and his future leadership. In December 2011, he visited Vietnam, a former ally with which China fought a war in 1979 and a potential antagonist in the long-running dispute over maritime borders in the South China Sea. From Vietnam he travelled to Thailand, underlining China's desire to consolidate its influence in Southeast Asia at a time when the United States has shifted its international focus to the Asia-Pacific region.

This potential diplomatic flashpoint was also on the mind of both sides during Xi's visit to Washington at the invitation of the US Vice-President Joe Biden in February 2012. Statements by Xi about Sino-US relations have focused on the need for cooperation so as to avoid conflict in the region. An announcement by the White House that Xi would meet President Obama there on 14 February to 'discuss a broad range of bilateral, regional and global issues' confirms Beijing's view that Xi will succeed Hu Jintao as President of China in 2012. As President Obama faces re-election in November 2012, his political future may be less secure than that of Xi. Predictably the visit proceeded smoothly and was regarded as a public relations success by both sides. Talks on trade and the dollar-renminbi exchange rate took place offstage and Xi acknowledged that there was 'always room for improvement' in China's human rights record.⁴²

⁴² Xia Fei et al., *Taizidang he gongqingtuan: Xi Jinping PK Li Keqiang* [Crown Prince Party and Communist Youth League Faction: Xi Jinping competes with Li Keqiang] (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2007), pp. 89–122. There is a more complete account of Xi's life and career in Wu Ming, *Xi Jinping zhuan: Zhongguo xin lingxiu* [Biography of Xin Jinping: China's new leader] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Cultural Press, 2010), pp. 13–15 and passim. This account is copiously illustrated, and there are no major disagreements about the broad outline of his political career. See also *Waican bianji bu* [Editorial Department of Waican Magazine], *Xi Jinping mianlin de tiaozhang* [The challenge facing Xi Jinping] (Hong Kong: Waican Publishers, 2011), pp. 83–91, 342–47 and passim; Geoff Dyer, 'The People's Princeling', *Financial Times*, 23 October 2010; *South China Morning Post*, 14, 21, 22 and 29 December 2011 and 17, 23 and 25 January 2012; and BBC News, 24 January and 14 and 17 February 2012.

6.3.2 Li Keqiang

Li (56) was born in Dingyuan County in eastern Anhui in 1955. His father was a low-level CCP cadre at the county level. Li joined the CCP in 1976 and studied in the Faculty of Economics at Beijing University, where he was an in-post research student [*zaizhi yanjiusheng*] and graduated with the equivalent of a BA in law and a PhD in economics.

6.3.2.1 Cultural Revolution

In 1974, at the age of 19, he was sent to live in the Damiao Commune Brigade in Fengyang County, Anhui province as part of the post-Cultural Revolution ‘rustication’ [*xiafang*] programme. Fengyang, although a backwater, became celebrated in 1978 after the decision to end the Peoples’ Commune system there and replace it with individual household contracts in one of its villages, Xiaogang.⁴³ Within two years, Li had become Secretary of the Damiao Production Brigade Party Committee. He is remembered by older residents of Damiao as a resourceful young man who moved stones in order to help build his own accommodation, as there was nowhere else for him and his colleagues to live. He became Secretary of the local CYL branch and joined the CCP while he was in the village. Anecdotes of his experiences as a young man are remarkably similar to those of Xi Jinping.

6.3.2.2 Beijing University law student

Li left Damiao in March 1978 as part of the first cohort to pass the revived entrance examinations to Beijing University (Beida). This first Law Department cohort after the Cultural Revolution was particularly energetic and determined. Li Keqiang is believed to have entertained liberal ideas during his student years and he had an interest in ‘legal culture’ under the influence of Gong Xiangrui (1911–96), an academic lawyer who had studied at the London School of Economics in the 1930s. This has encouraged hopes that Li might champion greater openness and democracy. He became Secretary of the Communist Youth League branch at Beijing University, and this began his move away from a possible academic career, for which he had seemed destined, into politics.⁴⁴

Unlike most of the senior leadership of the CCP, Li Keqiang has a useful command of English, which he acquired as a student, although he has never

⁴³ For the 2008 celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the Fengyang reforms, see www.fengyang.gov.cn; *People’s Daily*, 27 December 2000.

⁴⁴ Zhao Lei, ‘Beida falúxi “huangpu yiqi” neibanren’ [Members of the ‘Huangpu first class’ at Beijing University Law Department], *Nanfang zhoubao* [Southern Weekend], 7 June 2007.

lived or worked in the English-speaking world. His commitment and 'tireless' application to studying the language marked him out from other students at the time.⁴⁵

The intellectual ferment at Beijing University had a lasting effect on him and the value of books and learning remain important to him, but Beida has a political inferiority complex in relation to Qinghua University. There is a popular saying that can be translated on one level as 'Great world for Qinghua, Beida is a wasteland' because Qinghua graduates dominate the leadership. In the nine-man 17th Politburo Standing Committee there are three Qinghua alumni: Hu Jintao, Wu Bangguo and Xi Jinping. Li Keqiang, from the 'Beida wasteland', has joined the Standing Committee, and there are other graduates of Beida in the full Politburo: Li Yuanchao and formerly Bo Xilai (whose downfall is described in sub-section 6.3.4). In the provinces at the deputy governor level and above (and therefore eligible for Politburo status in the future), Beida graduates now outnumber those from Qinghua by 57 to 37.⁴⁶ The 'Beida faction' is beginning to catch up with the 'Qinghua faction', and this may change the balance of Party factions in the future.

6.3.2.3 The Communist Youth League

Li owes his rise to power primarily to his association with the Communist Youth League, the recruiting ground for CCP members. He remained at Beida after graduating in 1982 to run the university's CYL, becoming a member of the CYL Standing Committee and then the head of its Universities Department and National University Liaison Committee Secretary. Wang Zhaohua, the head of the CYL Central Organisation Department, nominated him to the CYL 11th Congress. He was also elected to the CYL Central Committee Standing Committee.

This was Li Keqiang's fast-track entry to the political world and a concrete example of the operation of patronage in selecting leading cadres. In May 1993, after almost 10 years in the CYL Secretariat, Li, at the age of 38, became First

⁴⁵ Xia Fei et al., *Taizidang he gongqingtuan* [Crown Prince Party and Communist Youth League Faction], pp. 131–63; Alice Miller, 'The Preparation of Li Keqiang', *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 31 (Winter 2010) pp. 1–7; Chris Buckley, 'China premier-in-waiting schooled in era of dissent', Reuters, 28 October 2011; Zhao Lei, 'Beida falüxi "huangpu yiqi" neibanren' [Members of the 'Huangpu first class'], 7 June 2007.

⁴⁶ This saying is a complicated pun in Chinese. Literally, *Da Qing shijie bei dahuang* means 'the great northern wastes of the Qing dynasty world' but it is used politically as an allusion to the influence of the graduates of the two universities in the CCP hierarchy. Xia Fei et al., *Taizidang he gongqingtuan* [Crown Prince Party and Communist Youth League Faction], pp. 131–63.

Secretary of the CYL for a five-year period. He had also followed a parallel academic career, taking his Master's degree in the Beida Faculty of Economics and completing a PhD there in 1995.

6.3.2.4 Henan province

In 1997 at the 15th CCP Congress, Li Keqiang was elected to the CC. He was transferred from the CYL Secretariat to Henan province in June 1998 as Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee of the province. He was soon appointed as Deputy Governor, then Acting Governor, and within six months he had become Governor in his own right. At the conclusion of the 16th Party Congress in 2002, he was also elevated to the position of Henan Party Secretary; and in the following year, he became Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Henan People's Congress. Establishing such a suite of powerful positions in one of the provinces is a *sine qua non* for potential senior leaders of the CCP.

A series of unpredictable events in Henan and difficulties in dealing with complex political relationships in the province left him politically bruised. Li had left his family behind in Beijing in order to shield them from the inevitable political socialising and moved to Zhengzhou on his own. He acquired a reputation for declining invitations to banquets that had no connection with his official role and dined simply, alone or with his private secretary.

Soon after his appointment as Governor, there were two serious fires. Seventy-four people died in Jiaozuo City on 29 March 2000 while watching a film and a further 309 people perished on 25 December 2000 when fire took hold of a dance hall in the city of Luoyang. As Li had been Governor for only a short time, he avoided any direct blame for these disasters and attended personally to direct operations. The death toll, the second highest in a fire since 1949, and the revelation that the local fire brigade had warned that the dance hall was unsafe reflected badly on the provincial government. Li Keqiang accepted responsibility and wrote to the central government offering his resignation, but it was not accepted. The effects of these fires and a series of mining disasters taxed him mentally and physically between June 1998 and 12 December 2004, when he left Henan to take up new challenges in Liaoning province.

Other political headaches included the scandal of contaminated noodle flour and the popularity of the Falun Gong. Worst of all was the wilful neglect by local medical authorities of the illegal sale of blood. This led to an unprecedented epidemic of HIV and AIDS. The commercialisation of blood supplies had begun before Li arrived in Henan, probably as early as 1992, but he was severely

criticised for the news blackout and cover-up, which may have exacerbated the outbreak. He enforced a clampdown on illegal sales, established a network of model blood-collection stations and visited one of the worst-affected areas, Wenlou village in Shangcai County, three times. Li publicly shook hands with AIDS sufferers, announced free medical treatment and met AIDS activists, who had previously been silenced by the authorities, to discuss the problem of AIDS orphans and treatment. The timing suggests that he might have been waiting for a change of heart at the Party centre before he acted. (The newly installed central administration, led by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, was beginning to make a serious commitment to deal with China's HIV/AIDS problem at the national level.) At the beginning of 2004, he organised work teams of his own officials to go to the 38 worst-affected villages and give 'help and support'. The official media claimed that by 2004, the HIV/AIDS epidemic had been brought under control and that the number of AIDS-related deaths had fallen significantly.

Commentators differ on Li's effectiveness in developing the economy of Henan. He promoted agricultural production and the processing of agricultural products, and Henan certainly became known for famous brands of foodstuffs. But critics argued that the 'cities of the central plains' were not well managed and had difficulty in attracting investment. Although not all these problems were the result of Li's policies, he was the top man [*yibashou*] at the time and much of the blame fell on him.⁴⁷

6.3.2.5 Liaoning province

On the morning after his formal send-off from Henan, Li flew to the Liaoning provincial capital Shenyang; at 3.30 that afternoon he gave his 'appointment speech' [*jiuye jiangyan*] to a meeting of Liaoning's leading cadres. He was introduced at the conference by Li Jingtian, Deputy Director of the CCP's Central Organisation Department and himself a former CYL official, on behalf of the central leadership in Beijing. Li Jingtian's speech at the meeting can be seen as an endorsement and appraisal of Li Keqiang. It praised the new Party Secretary's achievements in his previous post, failed to mention the problems that had beset him and emphasised his open and democratic style of work and the close alignment of his ideas with those of the leadership in Beijing.

⁴⁷ Xia Fei et al., *Taizidang he gongqingtuan* [Crown Prince Party and Communist Youth League Faction], pp. 131–63. The most thorough treatment of the Henan blood scandal in a Western language is Pierre Haski, *Le sang de la Chine: quand le silence tue* (Paris: Grasset, 2005).

Liaoning is one of northeastern China's traditional industrial heartlands, known for its oil and mining industries and an impressive record of growth in GNP. Its Party and government hierarchies also have a record of supplying members of the highest CCP bodies, notably the three Lis of Liaoning in the second half of the 1980s: Li Tieying, President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 1998–2003 and Vice-Chairman of NPC Standing Committee, 2003–); Li Guixian, President of the Bank of China, 1988–93; and Li Changchun, a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo in 2002. It also supplied Bo Xilai, CCP Secretary of Chongqing, 2007–12. Liaoning could be seen as another fast track to the top but it faced severe economic and social challenges. These stemmed mostly from the move away from the planned economy and state-owned enterprises, from the resulting pension burden and from changes in development strategies. Li Keqiang made full use of the state's policies of revitalising the northeast, which were initiated under the Hu-Wen administration, to improve the living standards of local people.⁴⁸

In Liaoning, Li found a major project with which he could be publicly associated – the shanty town districts [*penghu qu*]. These were temporary constructions in declining mining areas, originally erected in the 1960s for mine and factory workers but taken over by the poor and destitute. In a television interview with the well-known presenter Wang Xiaoya, Li vowed that he would transform the shanty town districts if it was the last thing he did [*zaguo maitie*]. He quoted Archimedes and argued that his fulcrum to change them was the CCP Centre and the power of the people, but the shanty towns were also a fulcrum for his own rise to power. He was able to raise substantial funds from the State Development Bank to build new housing for 1,200,000 people. Redevelopment started in 2005; and by 2007, relocation was well under way. Li was praised for solving this long-standing problem, but it was possible only because of his powerful connections with the centre. He included an account of this programme in his report on the economic revitalisation of Liaoning to the 17th CCP Congress on 17 October 2007:

For instance, under the province's ambitious shanty town reformation plan, large expanses of slums dating back to the 60s have been

⁴⁸ Xinhua, 8 September 2004 and Zhiyue Bo, 'The 16th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: Formal institutions and factional groups', *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 13, no. 39 (May 2004), pp. 223–56. Bo identified Li Keqiang as the best-connected member of the Central Committee.

replaced with rows and rows of low-rise residential buildings which now accommodate more than 1 million urban residents.⁴⁹

On the eve of the 2007 Spring Festival, Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the 10th NPC, visited Liaoning. Premier Wen Jiabao followed hard on his heels, his second visit to Liaoning in three years, in an unusual show of support for Li Keqiang's policies. Lee Kuan-yew, the elder statesman and 'Minister Mentor' of Singapore, also visited the province,⁵⁰ and Lian Zhan, Chairman of the Taiwan Guomindang, spent four days in Henan in 2007 and commented on Li Keqiang's contribution to the economic progress of the province.⁵¹

However, Li Keqiang's standing in Liaoning and his political prospects were affected by several disasters, especially the explosion at a dance hall in Fuxin in which 25 people died. Because some of these events occurred during the 'two meetings', that is the high profile meetings of the NPC and the CPPCC, that Li was attending in Beijing, this brought them to the attention of a wider public. Li ordered officials in Liaoning to make a full report to the media, deftly avoiding criticism of any cover-up. He travelled to the scene and assumed control of the rescue operations, avoiding criticism from the bereaved relatives. This effective crisis management won him approval but there was also, on the orders of the Central Propaganda Department, a ban on criticism of Li in the media. The leadership wished to protect the reputation of the man who was about to join their ranks.

6.3.2.6 Rise to power

As a student, Li Keqiang had identified the essential prerequisites for a successful official: serve the masses but be assertive when necessary; intellectual organisation and political vision; and a sense of justice and loyalty. Some Beida contemporaries, including the dissident Wang Juntao, had doubts about his ability, believing that Li suffered from typical Beida academic aloofness and might not be able to handle the Party machinery. Wang also pointed to former high-fliers from the 'liberal' or 'reformist' wing of the CCP, notably Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, who had been forced from office.

On the eve of the 17th CCP Congress, Xi Jinping suddenly emerged to seize the top Party post from Li's grasp. Li Keqiang is clearly behind Xi Jinping, and this

⁴⁹ *China Daily*, 14 February and 21 February 2007 and english.cpcnews.cn/92375/6284736.html.

⁵⁰ *People's Daily*, 15 May 2006.

⁵¹ *China Daily*, 9 March 2007.

order of rank will probably be maintained until the 18th CCP Congress in autumn 2012.⁵² In 2009, a source close to the State Council, but also close to Li's rival Bo Xilai, argued that Li Keqiang was very lucky to have got as far as he has, and some commentators in China and Hong Kong argue that he is not up to the job. The politics and news magazine *Kaifang* [Opening] 'revealed' in July 2010 that Li's abilities had been called into question at the highest level of the Party and that he might even be moved to take the chairmanship of the National People's Congress, an important position but not as politically sensitive as that of Premier. This rumour was given additional currency when Wikileaks documents revealed that 'Singapore's Li Kuan Yew (Li Guangyao) believed that Wang Qishan was much more suited to succeed Wen Jiabao as premier than Li Keqiang'. In addition, Jiang Zemin, the former CCP Secretary General and elder statesman of the 'Shanghai faction', is said to have argued that Li Keqiang, from the rival CYL faction, should take the post of NPC chairman, on the basis of the precedents set by Li Peng after the 15th CCP Congress and Wu Bangguo after the 16th CCP Congress. Possible alternatives to Li as Premier could be Zhang Dejiang, Wang Qishan, Yu Zhengshen, Li Yuanchao and Wang Yang from among the present members of the Politburo, but at the time of writing his position seems secure, especially since the unexpected fall of Bo Xilai.⁵³

This speculation reflects the opaque bureaucratic manoeuvring and long-standing factional conflict within the CCP leadership. Li Keqiang is unlikely to be prevented from succeeding to the premiership, especially after Bo Xilai's political demise when stability is even more vital to the CCP leadership. At an economic policy conference on 18 March 2012, Li set out his policies on strengthening economic reforms by increasing domestic demand and 'pursuing structural reforms to ensure growth was steadier and more balanced', signifying increasing confidence in his succession.⁵⁴

6.3.2.7 International profile

Li has undertaken diplomatic missions abroad, including in Europe, and visited Hong Kong in August 2011 to give a presentation on new policies for extending the use of the renminbi in international trade. These visits are designed to give

⁵² Xia Fei et al., *Taizidang he gongqingtuan* [Crown Prince Party and Communist Youth League Faction], pp. 131–63.

⁵³ Personal communication, Beijing 2009; Waican bianji bu (Editorial Department of *Waican* Magazine), *Zhong Gong shibada zhi zheng* [The Struggle for the Chinese Communists' Eighteenth Congress], pp. 92–93; and *Kaifang*, No. 6, 2010. The careers of some of these rivals are outlined below.

⁵⁴ *South China Morning Post*, 19 March 2012.

him a higher public profile internationally and to prepare him to succeed Wen Jiabao as Premier.

In October 2011, he visited both Koreas, a delicate but necessary mission to balance Beijing's relations with the North, its erstwhile political ally, and the South, with which it has important economic links.⁵⁵ It was also necessary to build confidence between the two, as Beijing has assumed the role of honest broker between Pyongyang and Seoul. Li met the North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang on 24 October 2011 to discuss the resumption of six-party talks on Korean security from which the North had withdrawn on 14 April 2009. Kim Jong-il's son and heir, Kim Jong-un, was present at this meeting. In talks with the North Korean premier Choe Yong Rim, Li emphasised the Chinese government's commitment to improving bilateral ties; and following the sudden death of Kim Jong-il on 17 December 2011, Beijing agreed to provide Pyongyang with additional supplies of food and oil in order to ensure the stability of the new government.⁵⁶

6.3.3 The fifth-generation leadership: the Politburo Standing Committee

It can be assumed that the appointment of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang to the two most senior posts will be confirmed unless something extraordinary occurs before the 18th CCP Congress in autumn 2012. There is more scope for adjustment and surprise in the appointments to the Politburo Standing Committee, which is the jumping off point for the next, sixth, generation of the leadership. At the time of writing the following Politburo members appear to be under serious consideration for promotion to the Standing Committee.

6.3.3.1 Li Yuanchao

Li Yuanchao (61), a mathematician and economist, serves as CCP Secretary of Jiangsu province and was appointed as the head of the Party's powerful Organisation Department at the 17th Congress in 2007. He is a likely candidate for Vice-President in the 2012–13 transfer of power and, because of his connections to Hu Jintao through his service on the secretariat of the Communist Youth League, he could even become number three in a new triumvirate.

⁵⁵ Li Keqiang, 'The world should not fear a growing China', *Financial Times*, 9 January 2011 and *South China Morning Post*, 20 October 2011.

⁵⁶ *South China Morning Post*, 25 October 2011 and 30 January 2012 and a PRC Foreign Ministry press release, 24 October 2011.

In spite of his CYL connections, he is sometimes characterised as a chameleon: he can also support the ‘princeling’ faction (his father Li Gancheng was a senior provincial Party official), the ‘Shanghai faction’ (he grew up in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution and studied at the city’s Fudan University but left Shanghai before Jiang Zemin’s arrival) or even a ‘Beijing University’ faction as the situation requires. He has not had a high profile but has been active in backroom jobs. As the head of the Organisation Department, he was responsible for commissioning a major internal report from its Party Building Institute in collaboration with the Shanghai Party School and Shandong University on the international experience of communist parties to see what lessons could be learned for ‘the construction of our party’. At a time when the nature of the CCP’s control is in question and there are demands both externally and internally for political reform, this expertise could be extremely useful at the highest level of the CCP. The report does not minimise the difficulties faced by different types of communist party around the world during the period of ‘low tide’ from 1991 onwards but suggests that in the long term, they can build on opposition to globalisation and economic liberalisation.

Li Yuanchao, from his observation platform in the Organisation Department, has a more international perspective than most of the incoming leadership, who have been immersed in provincial politics. During 2010, he embarked on an energetic travel programme around China promoting activities in line with his ally Hu Jintao’s mantras of ‘scientific development’ and ‘social harmony’. The content of these activities is somewhat obscure but appears to be connected with possible changes to the CCP to take into account the new circumstances. The official media have reported his speeches in terms that indicate powerful support for his pragmatic approach. His background and training is within the mainstream of the CCP but there are reports that he briefly attended a leadership course at Harvard. He has certainly delivered lectures there.⁵⁷

6.3.3.2 Wang Qishan

Wang Qishan (63) was CCP Secretary of Hainan, the head of the China Construction Bank from 1994 to 1997 and Mayor of Beijing before his election to the Politburo in 2007 and his promotion to Vice-Premier with responsibility for the economy, finance and energy in March 2008. A historian by training with

⁵⁷ Jia Yumin, *Di Wudai: Zhonggong shibada zhujue* [Fifth Generation: Leading players in the CCP 18th Congress] (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2010), pp. 98–128; Li Cheng, ‘China’s Two Li’s: Frontrunners in the Race to Succeed Hu Jintao’, *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 22, 5 October 2007; and *Financial Times*, 30 September 2009.

publications on the early People's Republic, he is noted for his financial expertise and promotion of China's stock exchanges, as well as for having been Zhu Rongji's gatekeeper during Zhu's premiership from 1998 to 2003. His political style is remarkable for its openness and he is regarded as a safe pair of hands and useful trouble-shooter who can be relied on in a crisis. When he visited New York City in January 2011, he was given a Fire Department helmet, as his nickname is 'Firefighter'. He is a favourite for promotion to the Politburo Standing Committee; and as late as 2010 he was still being flagged up as a potential challenger to Li Keqiang for the premiership.

Wang has been described as a member of the 'princeling' faction but also flippantly as a member of the 'son-in-law faction'. His wife Yao Mingshan is the daughter of Yao Yilin, who was a first vice-premier from 1988 to 1993 and who previously had led the State Council Leading Group on Finance and Trade and also served as Minister of Commerce. He was a conservative who was associated with Li Peng's hard-line policies against the democracy demonstrators in June 1989.

Wang's reputation for calm trouble-shooting was reinforced by his management of the Guangdong banking crisis in 1998 and the SARS crisis in 2002. As Mayor of Beijing, he succeeded Meng Xuenong, who had been dismissed for covering up the seriousness of the SARS outbreak. Wang also served as Executive President of the Organising Committee for the 2008 Olympic Games. His international experience includes participation as China's senior 'economic track' representative in the US-China strategic and economic dialogues held in 2009, 2010 and 2011.⁵⁸

6.3.3.3 Wang Yang

Wang Yang (57) moved from Chongqing in 2007 to become Secretary of the CCP Committee in Guangdong province, and Bo Xilai's high-profile campaign against organised crime in Chongqing was interpreted as a criticism of his rival. Wang's policy of an open and tolerant Guangdong has given encouragement to supporters of reform in both China and nearby Hong Kong and has been contrasted with Bo Xilai's call for a return to 'red culture'. In December 2010, Wang Yang agreed publicly with Bo that 'lessons drawn from the brutal civil war' between the CCP and the Guomindang were still relevant. The context of this was the publication of a substantial two-volume book on the 1945–49 *War*

⁵⁸ Jia Yumin, *Di Wudai Zhonggong shibada zhujue* [Fifth Generation], pp. 129–62 and *China Daily*, 5 November 2011.

of Liberation. Wang also seems to have been following in the footsteps of Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, who publicly endorsed Bo's crackdown on crime and to some extent his appeals to the CCP's revolutionary legacy. With the dismissal of Bo from his Chongqing position, the Guangdong model could be said to have triumphed over the Chongqing model, which can only have strengthened Wang Yang's position.

Wang's success in defusing the crisis over land confiscation in Wukan brought him praise. However, orders issued in Guangdong in summer 2012 to crack down on protesters, control the media and prevent future 'mass incidents' have been construed as attempts by him to demonstrate that he is tough enough for a Politburo Standing Committee place.⁵⁹

6.3.3.4 Yu Zhengsheng

Yu Zhengsheng (67) has a low political profile. As the son of Yu Qiwei (later known as Huan Jing, who became the mayor of Tianjin in the 1950s), Yu is seen as a 'princeling'. His father had been a CCP member since 1932. He had at one time lived with (some even say was married to) Jiang Qing and had proposed her for Party membership in 1933.

Yu has a professional background in electronic engineering, ballistic missile control systems and research administration. His early political roles were as mayor in the cities of Qingdao and Yantai in Shandong province. After a setback in 1992 when he failed to secure promotion to the Central Committee, he served as CCP Secretary in Qingdao. He was CCP Secretary of Hubei province and then served on the staff of Deng Xiaoping's respected economic adviser Zhu Rongji when Zhu ran Shanghai between 1987 and 1991. Yu joined the Politburo in 2002 and succeeded Xi Jinping as CCP Secretary in Shanghai after the 17th CCP Congress in 2007.

His family connections helped him in his early career but they also caused a serious reversal when his brother Yu Qiangsheng, a senior official in the Ministry of State Security (the Chinese intelligence service), defected to the United States via Hong Kong in late 1985 or early 1986. This precipitated the exposure of Chinese agents in the US, including Larry Wu-tai Chin, a translator for the CIA's *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, who was due to be

⁵⁹ *South China Morning Post*, 27 December 2010 and 9 June 2012; Wang Shuzeng, *Jiefang zhanzheng [1945 nian 8 yue – 1948 nian 9 yue] [14 nian 10 yue – 1950 nian 5 yue]* (War of Liberation [August 1945 – September 1948 and October 1948 – May 1950]), two volumes (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 2009 [2011]). Wang Shuzeng is also a PLA officer and popular novelist.

imprisoned for espionage and tax evasion in 1986 but died, possibly by his own hand, before he was sentenced.

Yu Zhengsheng survived because he was protected by close connections to Deng Xiaoping's family, in particular to Deng's eldest son Deng Pufang, a wheelchair user since the Cultural Revolution. When the Kanghua Development Corporation, a company with which Deng Pufang was closely associated through his chairmanship of the China Welfare Fund for the Handicapped, became embroiled in a tax evasion controversy during an anti-corruption drive, Yu was recommended by one of his elder brothers, Yu Minsheng, to help Deng Pufang. He arranged for Kanghua to be wound up with minimum collateral damage to the Deng family in 1987 and as a result became their informal representative in internal CCP politics. Insiders report that Yu behaved decently and was above reproach in this murky affair, and his name was never publicly associated with the scandal. Deng Xiaoping was pleased by how Yu had handled the affair and is said to have promised that he would be elected as at least an alternate member of the Central Committee at the 13th CCP Congress in 1987.

Although Yu Zhengsheng had played no part in his brother's disappearance, he was advised by Deng Pufang to take a back seat while the older generation of the leadership cooled off after such a major embarrassment in China's intelligence and foreign policy world. He remained in lower-level posts in Shandong until his recall to Beijing in 1997, when he became Deputy Minister and then Minister of Construction.

Opinions on how he will fare at the 2012 Congress are divided. By the 18th Congress, Yu, who was born in 1945, will be 67 years old. Even by China's gerontophile standards, this may be considered old for a first appointment to the Politburo Standing Committee – still, he is only two or three years older than some of his rivals. Although his age and the decline of the Deng family's political influence are against him, his experience would be a useful counterweight in what is likely to be a young Politburo Standing Committee and would be a stabilising presence in the wake of the Bo Xilai debacle. Yu's re-election as Shanghai Party Secretary in May 2012 strengthens his claim to a

place on the Standing Committee. In addition, he is being suggested as a possible chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.⁶⁰

6.3.3.5 Zhang Dejiang

Vice-Premier Zhang Dejiang was until recently considered to be an outside candidate for the Politburo Standing Committee. He graduated in Korean from Yanbian University in Yanji, the capital of China's ethnic Korean region in Jilin province, and then studied economics at Kim Il-sung University in Pyongyang. With this background he has been able to play a key role in negotiations with North Korea. His position changed when he was chosen to replace the disgraced Bo Xilai as Chongqing Party Secretary.⁶¹ Since Zhang already ranks as a vice-premier, his appointment may be a stopgap measure intended to maintain stability in the municipality, and he could be promoted in the next leadership round. He is not attached to any faction but is thought to be close to Hu Jintao and the Communist Youth League.⁶²

6.3.3.6 Other possible promotions

Other possibilities for promotion to the Politburo Standing Committee include Liu Yunshan, the head of the CC Propaganda Department; Liu Yandong, the only female member of the Politburo; Zhang Gaoli, the Tianjin Party Secretary; and Meng Jianzhu, Minister of Public Security.

6.3.4 The Bo Xilai affair

Bo Xilai (63) was a member of the Politburo and CCP Secretary of Chongqing Municipality but his historic powerbase was in China's north-east, where he was the mayor of Dalian and the governor of Liaoning province. He is deemed to be a member of the 'princeling' faction as the son of Bo Yibo, a former minister of finance and one of the long-serving senior Party members, the 'Eight Immortals', who were Deng Xiaoping's closest allies in the CCP during his later years. Bo Xilai was regarded variously as a dark horse or loose cannon and made no secret of his ambition to occupy a leading position.

⁶⁰ Jia Yumin, *Di Wudai Zhonggong shiba da zhujue* [Fifth Generation], pp. 262–63 and 263–95 passim; Willy Lam, 'Jockeying for Position Intensifies among Candidates for the Politburo Standing Committee', *China Brief*, vol. 11, issue 20 (28 October 2011); and Benjamin Lim, 'China princeling emerges from defection scandal', Reuters, 19 June 2007. Yu Minsheng and Deng Pufang were at primary school together, and Deng and Yu Zhengsheng may have known each other at university although Deng is one year older. *South China Morning Post*, 23 May 2012.

⁶¹ *South China Morning Post*, 19 June 2012.

⁶² Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *Chinese politics in the Hu Jintao era: New leaders, new challenges* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), pp. 19–20.

He moved to Chongqing as Governor in January 2007 and became CCP Secretary in November 2007, replacing his great rival Wang Yang, who was transferred to Guangdong. Bo consolidated his position in Chongqing by bringing in Wang Lijun, his former colleague from Liaoning, as deputy mayor in 2008 to run his campaign against triad ('black') gangs. This campaign was controversial because of allegations of corruption, the abuse of civil rights and even torture. But in spring and summer 2011, it was eclipsed by the 'red culture' campaign. Television programming in Chongqing was dominated by 'red' subjects and Bo's officials encouraged the singing of revolutionary songs and the sending of students to the countryside to learn old-fashioned (Maoist) values. These two campaigns, the 'red' and the 'black', were linked together in the media and were endorsed by members of the senior leadership in Beijing, including Wu Bangguo, the Chairman of the National People's Congress.

The personal rivalry between Bo Xilai and Wang Yang for a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee has been presented as a contest between two political models: the Chongqing model of 'red culture' and the Guangdong model of openness and democracy. There was some popular support for 'red culture', especially from the older generation, which had experienced the revolution and did not welcome the vulgarity of youth culture and commercialisation. The campaign spread beyond Chongqing, and a campaign against criticisms of Mao Zedong was briefly successful in the media. Yet grandiose plans for the construction of a China Red Classic theme park were abandoned abruptly in July 2011 after mounting criticism from the general public and the intervention of the Party centre in Beijing. The *People's Daily* endorsed Bo and his 'red' and 'black' campaigns in October 2011 but just after the National Day holiday, national flags were on display in Chongqing with little evidence of any 'red culture' campaign. Most citizens appeared to be dedicated to commercial activity. The celebratory edition of *Chongqing wanbao* [Chongqing Evening News], published on 1 October, carried stories about Bo Xilai with his photograph but these were in connection with improved rail travel and, ironically in the light of what later transpired, a meeting with the former US President George H.W. Bush. There was no mention of 'red culture'.⁶³

⁶³ Waican bianji bu [Editorial Department of Waican Magazine], *Xi Jinping mianlin de tiaozhang* [The challenge facing Xi Jinping], pp. 159–66; *South China Morning Post*, 13 April, 20 April, 28 May, 30 June, 2 July, 9 July and 14 October 2011; Eric Li, 'Chongqing Rising', *South China Morning Post*, 1 December, 2011 and 6, 7, 10 and 18 March 2012; and *Chongqing Evening News*, 1 October 2011. These observations are informed by the author's visit to Chongqing in October 2011.

The fifth annual plenary session of the 11th National People's Congress was held in Beijing between 5 March and 14 March 2012. The centrepiece was the formal Report on the Work of Government, delivered by Premier Wen Jiabao, his last before standing down in 2013. However, the carefully planned proceedings were overshadowed by dramatic developments in Chongqing. Wang Lijun, Deputy Mayor of the city and the man appointed by Bo Xilai to clean up organised crime, had stayed overnight in the United States consulate in Chengdu, the Sichuan provincial capital, and was apparently trying to defect with damaging information about Bo and other senior Party leaders. Wang left the consulate and was taken away by security officials – they were not from the Central Discipline Inspection Commission, which deals with routine infractions by senior Party members, but from the powerful Ministry of State Security. Bo attempted to distance himself from Wang and from allegations about corruption and the ill treatment of suspects during the anti-crime campaign. As late as 10 March, when he gave an impromptu press conference, he appeared to be riding out the crisis.

However, Bo was dismissed as Party Secretary of Chongqing on 15 March, nominally by the CCP's Organisation Department but with the unanimous approval of the current Politburo Standing Committee and Party elders. Bo continued to try to distance himself from the scandal but his membership of the Central Committee and the Politburo was suspended on 10 April and his chance of securing a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee evaporated.

It was then alleged that Bo and his wife, Gu Kailai, were connected with the death of Neil Heywood, a British businessman and associate of the Bo family, whose body had been found in a Chongqing hotel room in November 2011. Gu Kailai was tried for the murder and sentenced to death with a two-year commutation (effectively life imprisonment). Little evidence was presented at the trial as she pleaded guilty. Bo Xilai was not charged but has remained incommunicado and, to the surprise of many commentators, has so far retained his membership of the Communist Party. The CCP leadership has attempted to isolate the case and to treat it as a criminal act by Gu Kailai, unconnected with the political process or the leadership transition: it is not yet clear how the Party will deal with Bo.

In Chongqing, one local official has committed suicide while senior Party figures have spoken of treachery and described Wang Lijun's visit to the US consulate as an incident that 'skirted a diplomatic crisis'. On 5 September Wang Lijun was

charged with defection, abuse of power and bribe-taking but, contrary to the expectations of many commentators, not accused of treason. Senior Party and government officials have been reshuffled, officials at all levels were summoned to meetings to pledge their loyalty to the incoming Party Secretary, Zhang Dejiang, and associates of Bo Xilai have been dismissed. There have been suggestions that political coups involving the military have been planned but these are based on rumour rather than reliable evidence.⁶⁴

In the short term, the Bo Xilai crisis has not undermined the likely succession of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang. Bo, who was seen by some as a possible rival to Li for the post of Premier, had always been regarded as a loose cannon. His fall reinforced the prevailing consensus that, as a charismatic machine politician, rapidly developing his own 'cult of personality', he was not suitable for the highest leadership positions. This crisis will not derail the transition to the fifth-generation leadership but it may have delayed the process and has cast a cloud over the CCP and its government. The current leadership is insisting on Party unity and solidarity and, at the time of writing, there has been no announcement of the date of the 18th National Congress of the CCP.

⁶⁴ *China Daily*, 15 March 2012; *South China Morning Post*, 18 March, 25 and 26 May and 4 June 2012; Ian Johnson, 'A Chinese Murder Mystery', *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 59 No. 10, 7 June 2012. Some reports suggest that Zhou Yongkang, who has overall responsibility for state security and was a political ally of Bo, voted against his dismissal at the Politburo Standing Committee meeting.

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