

BULLETIN

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Recent Factional Struggles in the Chinese Communist Party

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After the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in the fall of this year, a new Politburo and Standing Committee, the most important party organs, will be appointed. The first openly public struggle inside the party since 1989 is a signal of preparations for a power transition. It is assumed there are two main factions inside the party—the reformist wing known as the Communist Youth League and a conservative group called the “princelings”. Recent events, including the downfall of Bo Xilai of the “princelings”, could be interpreted as a strengthening of the liberal group. Nevertheless, until the next congress, both factions will endeavour to obtain more seats in crucial party bodies.

Factions in the Party. It is alleged there are two main factions within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Both have common views on the further modernisation and reunification of China and the status of the PRC as a great international power. It seems the main differences between these groups are related to political issues connected with their personal experience as CCP members or in administrative posts.

The Communist Youth League (CYL), or *tuanpai*, is identified as a reformist wing of the CCP. It is assumed this group was established by Hu Yaobang, a former general secretary of the CCP known as a liberal politician, who, after a struggle inside the party, was dismissed from his post in 1987 (he was replaced by Zhao Ziyang, whose assistant was current PRC Prime Minister Wen Jiabao) and whose death in April 1989 was the starting point of the student protests in Tiananmen Square. The mentor of this faction is Hu Jintao, a former secretary of the CYL. Members of this group are seen as liberal and more inclined to reforms but without clear explanations of their intentions. The current Chinese leaders—Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao—are regarded as CYL members and have coined such slogans as “harmonious society”, “people first” and “scientific development”, which could be seen as the essence of CYL’s egalitarian policy. Although these notions are vague, they generally refer to a people-oriented approach, which means shifting the focus from purely economic growth (the core of the Jiang Zemin administration) to social issues. This approach is most likely connected with their experience as party leaders in relatively underdeveloped provinces, e.g., presumed to be fifth generation *tuanpai*, current vice-premier and incoming Prime Minister Li Keqiang was a governor in mostly rural Henan province, while the current party secretary of Guangdong province, Wang Yang, was governor of Chongqing, a municipality where the Western Development Policy aimed at China’s western province is still being implemented.

The second group called the “princelings”, or *taizidang*, includes the children of former influential Chinese party leaders of the Maoist era and close Deng Xiaoping, conservative counterparts (e.g., they took a hard stance during the Tiananmen protests). It is also assumed there is a caucus inside the “princelings” faction called the Shanghai Gang or *haipai*, whose mentor is former PRC Chairman Jiang Zemin. This elitist “princelings” group is seen as conservative, with a high appraisal of Maoist ideology and interested in strong state-control. The exemplification of the *taizidang* approach was the policy of Bo Xilai (whose father, Bo Yibo, participated in the Long March and was a close Deng ally, a supporter of Zhao Ziyang’s dismissal and the Tiananmen crackdown) in Chongqing, e.g., draconian anti-mafia campaign and the revival of some Maoist-style actions such as the singing of revolutionary songs. It is alleged that members of the “princelings” include Wu Bangguo, the current chairman of the Chinese parliament; Jia Qingling, the chairman of the People’s Political Consultative Conference; Xi Jinping, the incoming general secretary; and Vice-Premier Wang Qishan.

Recent Signals of the Factional Struggle in the Chinese Communist Party. Several recent events are seen as evidence of an open struggle inside the CCP and indicate the party is not a cohesive monolith. The internal, personal struggle usually intensifies before a change of power in the CCP. In October, after the 18th National Congress, the Central Committee (CC) at the 1st Plenum will elect a new Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC)—the most important party organs. Because of age limits, candidates for institutions in the upcoming Congress should be born after 1945. That means 14 of 25 Politburo and 7 of 9 Standing Committee members will retire.

Some indirect signs of a party scramble have been noticeable in recent years. A decision at the 4th Plenum of the CC in 2009 not to appoint Xi Jinping to the post of vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), as was done with Hu Jintao three years before he became party general secretary, could be seen as an expression of Hu's doubts concerning the "princelings". Eventually, Xi was appointed to this post a year later. Moreover, during the prime minister's tour to the south of China in 2010 (the 30th anniversary of the Shenzhen economic zone), he highlighted a need for more liberal reforms, which was interpreted as indirect criticism of the conservative approach held by the "princelings". On the 21st anniversary of Hu Yaobang's death, 15 April 2010, Wen Jiabao published an article in *Renmin Ribao* praising him as a party leader—seen as another attempt to strengthen the liberal faction. A noticeable symptom of the factional divide was the fact that neither Hu Jintao nor Wen Jiabao visited Chongqing under Bo Xilai's rule. However, gestures by the "princelings" in the CCP were visible during Xi Jinping's visit to Chongqing in 2010, where he supported the policy pursued by Bo Xilai. Moreover, the presence of Jiang Zemin at a ceremony marking the 100th anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution in October 2011 could be interpreted as a manifestation that the mentor of the elitist group still holds influence with the CCP.

The first public party scramble since the downfall of party secretary Zhao Ziyang in 1989, openly began in February. The Chongqing policy chief nominated by Bo Xilai, Wang Lijun, was alleged to have sought asylum in the U.S. consulate in Chengdu a few days before Xi Jinping's visit to the U.S. During a parliamentary session in March, Wen Jiabao noted that some mistakes from the Cultural Revolution had not been eliminated—a broad hint to Bo Xilai's policy. A day after concluding the parliamentary session, Bo Xilai was dismissed from his post as party secretary of Chongqing (replaced by Zhang Dejiang, a potential PBSC member) and a month later was sacked from the CC and Politburo. Additionally, Bo Xilai's wife has been accused of involvement in the murder of a British businessman.

Conclusions. These recent events in the CCP could be seen as further proof that the common perception that China is ruled by one or two leaders, e.g., the PRC chairman (who is also the party's secretary general) and the prime minister is not accurate. The numerous party posts in various regions (e.g., in provinces, counties, villages), complicated CCP apparatus, experience drawn from previous and current party or administrative positions, differing views on future socio-economic or even political situations, and even personal ambitions play roles in the emergence of factions within the party and the more intense process of coalition building before the CCP congress. Apart from personal factors and factional memberships, it could not be excluded that the recent socio-economic situation in China—the need for an economic transformation to a more internal-demand-oriented economic model, rising social pressure for more equal income distribution, fights against corruption, and other issues—have aggravated the internal divide on views about the direction of future reforms. The strong state-control models, together with Cultural Revolution-like slogans, promoted by the "princelings" are perceived as factors that could ignite social instability and are unacceptable to the more-liberal CCP faction. The current leaders' memories of the chaos of the Maoist Revolution and personal observations of the situation in the party and society during the Tiananmen protests could explain their dislike of some of the practices supported by the "princelings".

It seems the recent events have strengthened the CYL faction. Nevertheless, both factions will endeavour to obtain more seats in the Politburo and PBSC. It could be assumed that, similar to the power transition process from the third to the fourth generation of Chinese leaders, Hu Jintao will remain at his post as chairman of the CMC for about two years (especially taking into account that Xi Jinping became vice-chairman of the CMC only two years ago), which allows him to have leverage on the fifth generation of leaders. But the first predictions concerning future Chinese policy may only be made after the establishment of the new Politburo and Standing Committee, probably in late October of this year.