

66
JANUARY
2013

CHINA'S FIFTH GENERATION OF LEADERS: an Iron Fist in a Velvet Glove

Seán Golden, Senior Research Associate, CIDOB

After a year of dramatic political scandals --the Bo Xilai affair, the fatal Ferrari car crash of the son a close ally of Hu Jintao, the unexplained disappearance of Xi Jinping for two weeks in September, the debate over removing references to Mao Zedong from the political report--as well as unforeseen delays in its organization, the 18th National Congress of Communist Party of China has chosen a new Central Committee, Politburo and Standing Committee. The "mise en scène" was very classical and Cartesian but what is happening behind the scenes might not match with the image of endless straight rows of disciplined and faithful party members, all looking alike to a western eye.

Figures, chronologies and affiliations

The 2012 Central Committee has 205 members --the same result as the last National Congress in 2007. They were elected by 2,270 National Congress delegates from forty constituencies (57 more delegates and two more constituencies than in 17th National Congress in 2007). Only ten members of the Central Committee are

women (there were 13 in 2007) and only ten belong to national minorities (versus 16 in 2007). The Central Committee Politburo continues to have 25 members (only two women, no minorities, although there is one Mongolian member of the parallel Secretariat). The Standing Committee, which was increased from seven to nine members in 2002 in order to allow more room for representation from competing factions, has been reduced from nine to seven (all men, no minorities). Each member is responsible for major governmental functions. Those that have been "demoted" include Party Discipline and Party Promotions.

The 18th National Congress of Communist Party of China has replaced half the members of the Central Committee..

The Red Guard generation born after the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 have come to power.

There was a strong internal struggle between the children of veteran revolutionaries (*taizidang*) and the meritocrats who had risen to power through the Party's selection processes (*tuanpai*).

The *taizidang* promote liberalization in order to generate more wealth; the *tuanpai* promote redistribution of wealth to combat social inequality.

The results of the 18th National Congress seem to indicate that the *taizidang* faction is winning the struggle.

There are signs of political change in China: the social media allow people to organise themselves and publicise information the official media suppress.

One of the most significant aspects of the renewal of the leadership of the Party-State is the fact that half of the Central Committee has been replaced, due to Party policy that requires leaders to step aside once they reach their mid-to-late-sixties. (Something similar will happen in 2017, when five of the seven members of the new Standing Committee will have to step down and the true renovation of the highest leadership will take place.) The *hong er'dai* 红二代, the "second generation of reds", have

come to power, the generation of the Red Guards, those who were born after the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. These include the *guan er dai* 官二代 ("second generation / children of cadres of the Party") and the *fu er dai* 富二代 ("second generation / children of the rich") but perhaps not the *qiong er dai* 穷二代 ("second generation / children of the poor"). Although the general population may be divided into the pre- and post-1949 generations, the leadership has been characterised by five generations: Mao Zedong (1893-1976), Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), Jiang Zemin (1926-), Hu Jintao (1942-) and now Xi Jinping (1953-).

Hu Jintao's political report dashed any hopes of an immediate opening up on the political front. He defended the policies enacted under his ten-year mandate and explicitly called on the Party to continue along the path defined by "Mao Zedong Thought", as well as by "Deng Xiaoping Theory", by Jiang Zemin's "Three Represents" and by his own "harmonious society" and "scientific development". Whatever he may have written in the past, Mao Zedong Thought now means adapting any policy to Chinese historical, social, economic or political circumstances: "Chinese characteristics". Deng Xiaoping Theory means "reform" (economic, not political: in-

The fall of Bo Xilai and his "Chongqing Model" that revived Maoist egalitarianism and ideological fervour as alternatives to the neoliberal model that has dominated the current interpretations of "reform and opening up" has left many of these children of Yan'an feeling like ideological orphans with the apparent victory of Xi Jinping's faction (even though he shares their social origins).

centives to productivity, privatisation of State-owned enterprises, controlled liberalisation of the market) and "opening up" (economic, not political: allowing foreign direct investment, abandoning Maoist autarchy). Jiang Zemin's Three Represents doctrine allows capitalists to join the Chinese Communist Party and writes a form of private property into the Constitution of a Party whose name in Chinese means "the Party of Collective Property". Hu Jintao's "harmonious society" promotes the redistribution of wealth and his "scientific development" promotes better environmental management and sustainable development. Each of these leaders has attempted to add some theoretical or doctrinal element to the Party Constitution in order to preserve his "legacy" and his place in history. Hu failed to do so five years ago but has succeeded now (this may be the result of bargaining: more immediate power for Xi Jinping and more representation for his supporters in return for formalising Hu Jintao's legacy and the inclusion of some of Hu's supporters on the Politburo). Over the last couple of years the outgoing Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, made "seven calls for political reform" in speeches that were censored by official Party media, but Hu Jintao's political report made no concession to Wen Jiabao's insistence on the need for political reform to guarantee the civil rights of the people and to limit the power of

the Party. Wen repeatedly warned that the lack of political reform could undermine the Party-State, but in ten years as Prime Minister was either unable or unwilling to introduce serious change.

Internal struggle and the status quo

We knew there was a strong internal struggle going on in the Party between the "princelings" (太子党 *taizidang*), children of veteran revolutionaries, the aristocracy or *nomenklatura* of the Party) and the meritocrats who had risen to power through the evaluation and selection processes of the Party beginning with their membership of the Communist Youth League (团派 *tuanshipai*). We knew that the former had been brought up to believe that they were the rightful heirs to power and that many of them had become wealthy thanks to their networks of contacts with the apparatus of power, while the latter tended to come from humbler families and had to demonstrate their achievements by improving the standard of living of the provinces of the hinterland (provinces that must compete in conditions of inequality with those of the east coast where the *taizidang* tend to govern).

The *taizidang* promote efficiency in the liberalization of the market economy in order to generate more wealth: the creation of a "modestly prosperous society".

The *tuanshipai* promote equity in the redistribution of the wealth created in order to combat social inequality and provide purchasing power for the people who live in the countryside (which is a vital

prerequisite to establishing a domestic consumer market and protecting the Chinese economy from the turbulences of global capitalism): the creation of a "harmonious society". The results of the 18th National Congress seem to indicate that the *taizidang* faction is winning the struggle (they include five of the seven members of the new Standing Committee).

The *taiziidang* are the stars of the second generation of revolutionaries. Some of them have formed an association known as the "Children of Yan'an Classmates Fellowship". Yan'an was the site in Shaanxi province where Mao Zedong led the Long March and is known as the cradle of the Chinese communist revolution, where the veteran revolutionary leaders of the "first generation" were "tempered" by their revolutionary experience. For many of their sympathisers, such as the now disgraced Bo Xilai, the Hu Jintao – Wen Jiabao leadership of the past decade has been too timid and they are calling for more radical political reform. Their rhetoric, like Bo's, is full of Maoist and Cultural Revolution echoes. Their guru is Zhang Musheng, who advocates new democracy to save the Chinese Communist Party: "Only the Chinese Communist Party can save China; only *new democracy* can save the Chinese Communist Party". The "New Democracy" they refer to is a term that was current prior to

1949, which combined aspects of socialism and capitalism, a term that Mao Zedong himself used before radicalising the revolution between 1956 and his death in 1976. They drafted an open proposal to the 18th National Congress calling for political reforms in the composition and the election of the Central Committee and the National People's Congress and Consultative Committee. The Children of Yan'an reject the *taizidang* and *hong er'dai* labels and are distinct from the "New Left" current that advocates social justice and redistribution of wealth (suggesting that the main role of a Leninist political party that has abdicated central planning of the economy to market forces must be to guarantee social justice). The fall of Bo Xilai and his "Chongqing Model" that revived Maoist egalitarianism and ideological fervour as alternatives to the neoliberal model that has dominated the current interpretations of "reform and opening up" has left many of these children of Yan'an feeling like ideological orphans with the apparent victory of Xi Jinping's faction (even though he shares their social origins).

Room for political change?

Wen Jiabao's calls for political opening up were vehemently rejected by Wu Bangguo, the second ranking member of the outgoing Standing Committee and President of the People's National Congress (Wen ranked number three, Hu Jintao was number one), who proclaimed "the five will nots": "China will not do rotational multiparty rule; will not do diversity of guiding ideologies; will not do 'separation of powers' and a bicameral system; will not do privatization [of property]". Deng Xiaoping also rejected the "separation of powers" and Hu Jintao's political report continued this line of denial.

Despite the intransigence of the "Old Guard" and the fall of Bo Xilai (1949-), there are signs of political change in China. The existence of social media has made it possible for people to organise themselves and to publicise information the official media tries to suppress. Despite the best efforts of "the Great Firewall of China" to control the Internet, Chinese "netizens" are finding ways to circumvent State control. Kaiser Kuo, spokesperson for Baidu, China's most popular Internet search engine, has said: "Today we're seeing really for the first time, the old 100 names [the ordinary people], able to articulate their ideas in a kind of public sphere. Their voices are now heard, in cyberspace at least. And that has come to function as a kind of public spirit, which China has never in its very long history actually had. I think that this is absolutely unprecedented, and it has given the Chinese leadership itself a vantage point on the feelings of ordinary citizens that I think perhaps has made it a more responsive and deliberative and participatory leadership". There is evidence that social protest provokes policy changes on matters such as residence permits, family planning and environmental issues. There have been a number of very successful protests against the building of chemical plants near residential neighbour-

hoods (which represents the emergence among China's new middle class of the NIMBY syndrome already well known in the West: Not In My Back Yard).

One of the rising stars of the new generation is Wang Yang (1955-), until recently Party Secretary of Guangdong (Canton) Province. He did not make it to the Standing Committee this time but he is a member of the Politburo, is well situated to become a member of the Standing Committee in 2017 and may be named Vice-President in the Spring. For some commentators he is the "great liberal hope" but his record on reform is mixed. On the one hand he successfully negotiated the late 2011 "Wukan Incident" in which villagers ousted their local government and Party leaders for abuse of power and formed their own provisional government, which Wang Yang eventually recognised as legitimate. On the other hand, in 2011 he intervened to prevent a series of civil society initiatives in Guangdong. But by the end of 2011 registration rules for "mass organizations", including associations, federations and charities closely aligned with the government were relaxed, and since July 2012 social organizations can now register directly with the Ministry of Civil Affairs without needing the sponsorship

The new rules put into effect by Wang Yang have liberalized the process of social construction of an emergent civil society in what is now being referred to as "the Guangdong model", another alternative to the status quo defended by Hu Jintao's political report.

of a government institution. Previously, all social organisations had to find an official sponsor.

The new rules put into effect by Wang Yang have liberalized the process of social construction of an emergent civil society in what is now being referred to as "the Guangdong model", another alternative to the status quo defended by Hu Jintao's political report. Even so, what is referred to as "social system reform" is still subject to "social management", and the lack of authentic "social self-governance" still impedes the development of a "civil society" whose terminology is still in the process of evolution among Chinese thinkers, who refer to the concept as "citizen society" or as "informal" or "unofficial" or "folk society". At the same time conservative Party leaders like Zhou Benshun warn that "civil society is a Western pitfall" designed to bring down the Party-State (as it did in Eastern Europe).

Liberalization or redistribution

We knew that Xi Jinping, the new number one, is *taizidang* and an ally of former leader Jiang Zemin (who favours economic liberalization), and that Li Keqiang, the new number two, is *tuanpai* and an ally of former leader Hu Jintao (who favours redistribution), but we did not know who would win the struggle to include more of their supporters in the highest realms of power. Now we know more.

The political report of the outgoing President, Hu Jintao, defended the correctness and the continuity of his ten year mandate and threw cold water on the calls for political reform, while recognizing the great danger to the continued power of the Party that corruption represents. And that is the key. The Party's top priority is to stay in power. The second priority is to modernize the country and improve the living standards of the people. The first priority hampers any attempt to introduce significant changes in the way the country is governed. The stability and control that the Party-State ensures promote the second priority.

The reduction of the Politburo Standing Committee from nine members to seven (five of whom are *taizidang*), must be a victory for Xi Jinping, who has already been appointed Chairman of the Military Commission, the real source of power –as Mao Zedong wrote, “political power grows from the barrel of a gun”; he also said that the Party must control the gun and the gun must never be allowed to control the Party). There had been speculation beforehand that Hu Jintao would maintain this position for two more years, as Jiang Zemin had done when Hu became number one. Next

The Party's top priority is to stay in power. The second priority is to modernize the country and improve the living standards of the people. The first priority hampers any attempt to introduce significant changes in the way the country is governed. The stability and control that the Party-State ensures promote the second priority.

March, Xi will become President of the State Administration, thereby apparently consolidating the three pillars of power (Party, State, and Army) under his control. So, it seems clear who is winning the struggle for power.

The discourse and style of Xi Jinping are fresher and more populist than those of Hu Jintao. His acceptance speech highlighted something that could indicate a willingness to open the door a little more to political reform, when he said, “Inside the party, there are many problems that need be addressed, especially the problems among party members and officials of corruption and taking bribes, being out of touch with the people, undue emphasis on formalities and bureaucracy and other issues”. The reference to “undue emphasis on formalities and bureaucracy” might seem to run in the line of liberalising “social construction” that Wang Yang has permitted in Guangdong.

He promised “better schooling, more stable jobs, more satisfying incomes, more reliable social security, higher levels of health care, more comfortable housing conditions and a more beautiful environment”, all of which would respond to the need to be very sensitive to people-orientated issues (also an aspect of Hu Jintao's “scientific development”). Part of the internal Party political debate has to do with whether the people delegate power in the Party (and could therefore withdraw power from the Party if unsatisfied, *pace* Thomas

Hobbes, John Locke or Abraham Lincoln) or whether it must always be the Party that tutors the people (*pace* Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping). But he also said that “to forge iron, one must be hard oneself”. This sounds suspiciously similar to Mao Zedong's call for the Red Guards to “temper” themselves in “the crucible of the revolution”.

Xi began by saying, “We have every reason to be proud”. Several days later Xi said he shared “the Chinese dream” (“to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation... in modern times”), and added that, “We, this generation of Communists, must take what has been left to us by our predecessors as a departure for forging ahead into the future”.

A recent science fiction novel set in the very near future, *The Fat Years* (盛世中国 *Shengshi Zhongguo*; literally “Rising China”) by the Hong Kong-Taiwan author Chan Koonchung, depicts the policy of catering to the needs of the people, distracting the people's attention towards their improving standards of living --creating a harmonious society-- , and the rise of a populist nationalism with militaristic ticks, in the context of a

Brave New World type utopia (for many commentators, a better parallel for the PRC than 1984). Banned in China but readily available there, it offers a portrait of the new generation of leadership worth reflecting upon.

The Guangdong Model seems to have served to defuse the most recent test of Party stamina staged by many Chinese journalists and communications media who protested the censorship of the outspoken newspaper Southern Weekly by the Party's propaganda chiefs. Hu Chunhua (1963-), Wang Yang's replacement as Guangdong Party Secretary and another contender for the mantle of “rising progressive”, has been credited with a liberal solution to the impasse.

Whether the new style and discourse of the “fifth generation” of leaders, bred from the “second generation of reds” represents an iron fist in a velvet glove or the human face of the Party-State, time will tell.