



Meet the New Politburo Standing Committee: China's 2012 Party Leadership Transition

Ken Sofer November 16, 2012

For more on what the announcements from the 18th Party Congress mean for China, see CAP Policy Analyst Melanie Hart's new column, "[China Selects Its 7 New Leaders](#)."

Xi Jinping

November 15 appointments: General secretary, Communist Party; chairman, Central Military Commission; Politburo Standing Committee member

Expected additional appointments: President, China People's Government (March 2013)

Previous appointments before November 15: Vice president, China People's Government (will remain until official March 2013 government handover); vice chairman, Central Military Commission (ended November 2012 with promotion); Politburo Standing Committee member (renewed November 2012)

Age: 59

Factional ties: Princeling by birth; considered to be a Jiang Zemin protégé



AP PHOTO/THE QUAD CITY TIMES, KEVIN E. SCHMIDT

The son of a high-ranking People's Liberation Army General, Xi Jinping worked on a farm in rural Shanxi province for six years, until the age of 22, after his father was imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution. Xi managed to leave the farm, join the party, and graduate from the prestigious Tsinghua University with a degree in chemical engineering. After graduation, Xi worked in administrative roles for the People's Liberation Army. After serving in increasingly senior party and PLA roles in Hebei, Fujian, and Zhejiang provinces, Xi was promoted to the standing committee, became party secretary of Shanghai, and took on a series of new titles that suggested he would succeed Hu Jintao as China's next party general secretary and People's Government president.¹

Xi's family ties place him closer to the Jiang Zemin faction, which imply that his approach to economic development will be more market friendly and focused on protecting wealth than some of his Hu Jintao-affiliated peers.² Xi has been relatively opaque, however, about how he would act economically or politically, which has contributed to his positive standing among both factions and enabled his rise to the general secretary.

Xi solidified his position as general secretary in waiting when he was promoted to the Politburo Standing Committee in 2007. In 2008 Xi was appointed as vice president of the Chinese People's government. Since then he has traveled to Latin America, Europe, Asia, and America on diplomatic missions.³ Xi is married to a famous Chinese folk singer, Pei Liyuan, and their daughter is currently studying at Harvard.

Xi Jinping was named party general secretary, China's highest leadership post, at the 18th Party Congress in November and will be named president at the National People's Congress in March 2013.

Li Keqiang

November 15 appointments: Politburo Standing Committee member
Expected additional appointments: Premier, China's State Council (the national cabinet) in March 2013

Existing appointments before November 15: Executive vice premier on China's State Council (the national cabinet); Politburo Standing Committee member

Age: 57

Factional ties: Tuanpai (Youth League) member; considered to be a Hu Jintao protégé



AP PHOTO/LAURENT FIEVET

After working in rural Anhui for four years after graduating from high school, Li joined the party and was accepted to Peking University in the "Class of 1977."⁴ In that year China re-opened many of its universities after nearly a decade of closure during the Cultural Revolution, and 5.7 million students competed for only 273,000 university spots. In the early 1980s Li worked in the Communist Youth League's 11-person governing body directly under Hu Jintao and alongside future Politburo members Liu Yandong and Li Yuanchao. Hu Jintao nominated Li for promotion in the league several times, and he succeeded Hu as the head of the league in 1993.⁵

Following his time with the Communist Youth League, Li was sent to Henan province to gain more provincial experience. Given Li's close ties to President Hu and his work in Henan, as premier he may focus on income equality issues such as the provision of better social services.⁶ Li will not be able to determine policy programs on his own, however, and will instead require consensus with President Xi Jinping and other leaders.

Li's stint as party secretary and provincial government leader in China's coastal Henan province was haunted by a serious AIDS crisis caused by unscrupulous blood plasma buyers.⁷ Li's provincial government covered up the crisis and prevented journalists from visiting sick villagers. Hu Jintao unsuccessfully lobbied for Li to succeed him as China's next party general secretary, but managed to get his protégé the premiership, which was solidified by his 2007 appointment to the Politburo Standing Committee.

Li Keqiang will be named premier of China, the nation's second-highest leadership post, when the National People's Congress meets in March 2013.

Zhang Dejiang

November 15 appointments: Politburo Standing Committee member

Expected additional appointments: Could replace Wu Bangguo as chairman, Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in March 2013

Existing appointments before November 15: Chongqing party secretary; vice premier; Politburo member

Age: 65

Factional ties: Princeling by birth; apparent Jiang Zemin protégé



AP PHOTO/AXEL HEIMKEN

The son of a PLA major general, Zhang worked on a farm in rural Jilin for two years during the Cultural Revolution after graduating from high school. In 1971 he joined the party and was promoted to secretary of his county's Propaganda Department. After graduating from Yanbian University with a degree in Korean studies, Zhang moved to North Korea for two years to study the language. After serving as Yanbian University's vice president and in local and provincial Jilin government, Zhang became the province's party secretary in 1995.

In 1998 he was appointed party secretary of Zhejiang, a rich and economically important province in southeastern China. In 2007 he joined the standing committee and has worked on industrial, telecommunications, energy, and transportation issues.⁸

The party has often deployed Zhang to fix major crises. He headed the disaster relief response and investigation to the July 2011 Wenzhou high-speed rail crash that killed 40 and injured 200 more. Zhang was sent to Western China to replace scandal-ridden Bo Xilai as the party secretary of Chongqing in March 2012.⁹

Zhang Dejiang was promoted to the standing committee at the 18th Party Congress. He is expected to replace Wu Bangguo as head of China's National People's Congress at the March 2013 meeting. Based on his past policy positions, Zhang will likely support a state-centric model of economic growth.¹⁰

Yu Zhengsheng

November 15 appointments: Politburo Standing Committee member

Expected additional appointments: Could replace Jia Qinglin as chairman of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference in March 2013

Existing appointments before November 15: Shanghai party secretary; Politburo member

Age: 67

Known patronage ties: Princeling by birth; apparent Jiang Zemin protégé.



AP PHOTO/EUGENE HOSHIKO

The son of an early party member, Yu became close friends with Deng Xiaoping's son, Deng Pufang, and married the daughter of another People's Liberation Army and Chinese Communist Party veteran. After serving in several party and management roles in a radio factory, he left to work in government planning and oversight of the electronics industry.¹¹ Yu succeeded Xi Jinping as Shanghai party secretary in 2007 following Xi's promotion to the standing committee, a position that in recent years is often given to influential members of the Jiang Zemin faction.

Yu's brother, a senior Chinese intelligence official, defected to the United States in 1985 and exposed Larry Wu-Tai Chin, a Chinese spy in the CIA active for almost three decades.¹² Yu's high-level connections salvaged his political career, but he remains a controversial figure within the party. His family's past did not ultimately prevent him from receiving a seat on the standing committee, as some analysts believed.

Yu Zhengsheng was promoted to the standing committee at the 18th Party Congress, but his portfolio has yet to be named.

Liu Yunshan

November 15 appointments: Politburo Standing Committee member

Expected additional appointments: Could replace Li Changchun as chairman of the Ideology and Propaganda Leading Small Group, which would make him the top party leader in charge of media control and censorship

Existing appointments before November 15: Director, Chinese Communist Party Propaganda Department; Politburo member

Age: 65

Known patronage ties: Tuanpai (Youth League) member



AP PHOTO/XINHUA, XIA YU

After working as a Xinhua reporter and rising through Inner Mongolia's Propaganda department, Liu joined the national political scene in 1993, becoming the deputy head

of the CPC Central Committee's Propaganda Department, the party agency in charge of media censorship.¹³ Along the way, Liu served in the Communist Youth League branch in Inner Mongolia's deputy secretary, but never advanced further in the organization.

As a top official in the Propaganda Department, Liu helped oversee the creation of China's Great Firewall, the world's most extensive Internet-blocking campaign, as well as censorship of the press and television media.¹⁴ And according to a report by The New York Times, Liu coordinated the campaign that eventually drove Google out of China in 2010.¹⁵

Liu's experience developing the Great Firewall might imply he's a political hardliner, but there is little disagreement at the upper echelons of the party about the need for strict media censorship. In early 2012, 16 retired party officials in Yunnan province circulated a petition calling on Liu to step down and accusing him and Zhou Yongkang, China's top security official, of supporting Bo Xilai and using repressive tactics to block reforms.¹⁶

Liu Yunshan was promoted to the standing committee at the 18th Party Congress, but his specific policy portfolio has yet to be named.

Wang Qishan

November 15 appointments: Politburo Standing Committee member; secretary, Central Commission for Discipline Inspection

Expected additional appointments: Still uncertain, but his primary role is settled (discipline inspection head)

Existing appointments before November 15: Vice premier on China's State Council; Politburo member

Age: 64

Factional ties: Princeling by marriage; considered to be a Jiang Zemin protégé



AP PHOTO/GREG BAKER

After studying history at Shanxi's Northwest University and working in a local museum for nearly a decade, Wang joined the Chinese Academy of Social Science, a government-sponsored think tank, as an analyst, and then worked in the government's Rural Development Research Center. In the late 1980s Wang embarked on a stunningly successful career in finance, taking top roles in several Chinese banks,¹⁷ helping them transition to modern financial practices and guiding them through loan restructuring. As the head of the China Construction Bank, Wang helped create China's first joint-venture investment bank, a partnership with Morgan Stanley.¹⁸

After 1997 he rejoined the government, helping Guangdong province through a severe financial crisis as its provincial party secretary. Wang worked with Henry Paulson, then the chairman of Goldman Sachs, to help restructure an important Guangdong firm's

financial obligations.¹⁹ After serving as Hainan's party secretary from 2002 to 2003, Wang became the mayor of Beijing in the midst of the SARS crisis. In a major reversal from initial government efforts to downplay the severity of the epidemic, Wang enforced a quarantine and collaborated with the World Health Organization.²⁰

Wang also planned and managed the 2008 Beijing Olympics as chairman of the Beijing Olympic Committee. Since joining the standing committee in 2007 as a vice premier, he has overseen China's financial system and traveled widely abroad to negotiate with the United States. He reportedly gets along very well with Western leaders²¹ and many see him as a capable and open-minded reformer.

Wang Qishan was promoted to the Politburo Standing Committee and named secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, the party's anticorruption commission, at the 18th Party Congress. Given his prior performance record, some hoped that an economic portfolio would be created for Wang to promote liberalization of the Chinese financial system and greater foreign investment in the economy.²² It appears, however, that Wang's role in the standing committee will be focused on rooting out corruption in the party.

Zhang Gaoli

November 15 appointments: Politburo Standing Committee member

Expected additional appointments: Could replace Li Keqiang as executive vice premier in March 2013

Existing appointments before November 15: Tianjin party secretary; Politburo member

Age: 65

Known patronage ties: Apparent Jiang Zemin protégé

After graduating from Xiamen University with a degree in statistics, Zhang worked in one of China's biggest oil refineries as a party officer and manager. During his seven years at the company, he joined the party and the Communist Youth League, rising through both organizations and the refinery's management. In his political career, Zhang served as the deputy governor of Guangdong and was appointed the party secretary of Shenzhen, China's flagship export processing zone. Zhang is often described as one of Jiang Zemin's protégés in part because of his time in Shenzhen, one of the southern coastal regions often associated with Jiang Zemin loyalists.

In 2000, Zhang joined the Central Committee and left Guangdong to serve in top party roles in Shandong province before moving to become the party secretary of Tianjin, a major Chinese port city.²³ Zhang's Tianjin government has been accused of covering up a June 2012 mall fire.²⁴ Initial reports suggested that only 10 people died, but rumors



AP PHOTO/GREG BAKER

began circulating online that many more lost their lives. Those rumors have been repeatedly denied by the Tianjin and national government, and have generally been disproven as more details have emerged.²⁵

Zhang Gaoli was promoted to the standing committee at the 18th Party Congress but his specific policy portfolio has yet to be named.

Endnotes

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