

The Battle for China's Top Nine Leadership Posts

There is no better vantage point for understanding Chinese leadership politics than to analyze the nine individuals who make up the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC). Despite the highly diverse and divergent assessments of elite politics which populate the overseas China-watching communities, the last decade has witnessed a surprisingly strong consensus emerge on the pivotal importance of the PSC. The top Chinese leader, General Secretary of the Party and President Hu Jintao, is now understood to be no more than the “first among equals” in this supreme decisionmaking body.¹ Within the People's Republic of China (PRC), a new Chinese term, *jiuchangwei*, was recently created to refer exclusively to these nine political heavyweights.² In line with this development, the Chinese authorities have placed increasing emphasis on “collective leadership,” which the 2007 Party Congress Communiqué defines as “a system with division of responsibilities among individual leaders in an effort to prevent arbitrary decision-making by a single top leader.”³

Given that China is set to undergo a major turnover in leadership at the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the fall of 2012, it is more important than ever to grasp the changes likely to occur to the PSC.

It is expected that seven out of the committee's nine current members, including Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, will step down as a result of retirement age rules. After 2012, the principal figures responsible for the country's political and ideological affairs, economic and financial administration, foreign policy, public security, and military operations will be mostly

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newcomers.⁴ China's emerging leaders are likely to rule the world's most populous country for the better part of this decade and beyond. Meanwhile, they will have to deal collectively with many daunting challenges as the PRC confronts an unstable and complex environment domestically and globally.

The Chinese public seems increasingly aware of the ongoing battle for PSC membership, as well as broader political tensions, ideological disputes, and policy differences within the leadership. Never before has the country witnessed such extraordinarily open political lobbying, as

demonstrated by Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai's aggressive self-promotion campaign.⁵ One does not have to be a political analyst to understand Bo's objective: to obtain a seat on the next PSC. He has not only launched what many critics consider to be a "Cultural Revolution-style campaign" in China's largest city, but has also advocated for the so-called Chongqing model of socioeconomic development that calls for "common prosperity" and rapid urbanization.

In recent months, five of the nine current PSC members have visited Chongqing to endorse Bo's campaign. At the same time, however, Premier Wen has openly expressed concerns over "remnants of the Cultural Revolution" and reservations regarding the Chongqing authorities' seizure of farmers' land for property development in the name of urbanization. Furthermore, the recent publication of four volumes of former Premier Zhu Rongji's speeches is not simply about a retired leader's nostalgia for his earlier administration, but also reflects a growing concern within the political establishment about elite cohesion and leadership capacity, now and with eyes to the future.⁶ In an indirect way, both Wen and Zhu's recent activities seem geared toward shaping the formation—and even the exact line-up—of the next PSC.

The composition of the new PSC—especially the generational attributes and individual idiosyncratic characteristics, group dynamics, and the factional balance of power on the committee—will have profound implications for China's economic priorities, social stability, political trajectory, and foreign relations. Who are the leading candidates? Through what process will they be chosen? How do their political and professional backgrounds resemble or differ from each other? Into which factional alliances or political coalitions are they divided? What political strategies might they adopt to secure one of the nine spots on the PSC in the months leading up to the 18th Party Congress? What economic agenda, sociopolitical initiatives, and foreign policies will each member of this powerful group be likely to promote? Thoughtfully addressing

these questions is essential for the United States and other countries, particularly at a time when China has more influence on the world economy and regional security than perhaps ever before.

The Selection Process and Criteria

It should be noted at the outset that the number of seats on the PSC could very well change, as the CCP Constitution does not specify a fixed number. The PSC formed at the 13th Party Congress in 1987 had only five members, and the PSCs formed at both the 14th Party Congress in 1992 and 15th in 1997 had seven. At the most recent two Party Congresses, both PSCs had nine members. There are two contending views about the next PSC's number of seats: the first holds that because of the need to follow the political norm of the two most recent Party Congresses, the PSC should maintain its 9-member structure. The other view recognizes that the increasing difficulty of cutting deals for membership between a growing number of ambitious political heavyweights may result in an expanded membership of 11 seats. For the sake of clear analysis, this article assumes that the next PSC will retain nine members.

Through what process—and according to what criteria—are the members of the PSC chosen? In theory, as described by the 2007 CCP Constitution, all members of the Politburo (currently 25), including the PSC and the General Secretary of the Party, are elected by the members of the Central Committee of the CCP. The total number of members of the Central Committee varies, but over the last four central committees it has averaged about 350. Based on the CCP Constitution, members of the Politburo should come from the Central Committee, members of the PSC from the Politburo, and the CCP General Secretary should arise from the PSC.

In practice, however, the process is top-down rather than bottom-up: members of these leading Party organs guide the selection of members of the lower-level leadership bodies such as the Central Committee, which then “approves” the slate of candidates for higher-level positions such as membership in the next Politburo and the PSC. To call the Central Committee's selection of the Politburo an election is something of a misnomer: members of the Politburo are actually selected by either the outgoing PSC or, as in the recent past, by paramount leaders like Deng Xiaoping.

Based on recent experience, it is expected that the outgoing PSC will have a closed-door meeting sometime in the summer of 2012 at Beidaihe, a resort near Beijing, to decide the preliminary slate of leaders to be elected to the next Politburo, the PSC, and to the position of General Secretary. Prior to and after its meeting, the outgoing PSC is likely to consult retired top leaders such as former President Jiang Zemin, former Premier Li Peng, former Premier

Zhu Rongji, and other former PSC members. The outgoing PSC will then have another meeting in the fall, a couple of weeks prior to the actual 18th Party Congress convening, to finalize the list of candidates. In addition, the outgoing PSC may conduct a straw poll among the outgoing Central Committee, as well as other newly appointed top ministerial and provincial leaders who are not Central Committee members, to nominate the candidates for the new Politburo to be elected at the 18th Party Congress; this was the practice in June 2007, prior to the 17th Party Congress.⁷

The single most important factor for PSC member selection is patron–client ties.

The outgoing PSC's selection of the next PSC's leadership is an extraordinarily complicated and multifaceted deal-making process. Analysts overseas and even in China might never know the detailed story of how each member ends up being chosen (i.e., the factional bargaining or types of information about the candidates that influence the decisions). Yet, the pool of candidates for the next PSC is quite clear, and the first place to look is the 204 full members of the 2007 Central Committee. After eliminating a few groups of Central Committee members—those who have recently retired or moved to more ceremonial

posts; those who are expected to retire soon based on their age; military leaders who according to recent norms do not serve on the PSC; and leaders without extensive experience, a normal requirement for PSC membership—only several dozen leaders are left standing.

The age factor and previous leadership experience then matter greatly in the selection process for PSC membership. Age is an important indicator of a leader's future political prospects because, according to CCP rules and norms, leaders of a certain rank cannot exceed a set age limit. For example, all provincial chiefs are supposed to step down when they reach 65, and only those under the age of 63 are initially considered for the position. At the 2007 Party Congress, all leaders who were born before 1940, including then-political heavyweight Vice President Zeng Qinghong (born in 1939), were not allowed to continue to serve on the Central Committee.

Extrapolating from this norm, leaders who were born in 1944 or earlier will not be considered for the next Central Committee and are therefore also out of the race for a seat on the Politburo or PSC. These retirement age limits not only generate a sense of consistency and fairness in the retirement and recruitment of leaders, but also make the turnover of Chinese political elites very rapid. For outside observers, the question of who will be up or down in the top leadership at the upcoming Party Congress—the proverbial reading of the tea leaves of Pekingology (or Zhongnanhaiology)—has been made far more reliable.

PSC members not only usually have broad administrative experience, but also generally have established leadership credentials in their assigned area of responsibility. For example, with the exception of China's first premier, Zhou Enlai, all of the PRC's five other premiers, including Wen Jiabao, had previously served as vice premier of the State Council before becoming premier. Most could also boast broad leadership experience, especially in economic affairs.

The single most important factor for the selection of PSC members, however, is their patron–client ties. Departing members usually attempt to exert influence, protect their interests, and maintain the continuity of their policies by making sure some of their protégés serve on this supreme leadership body. Various factions and powerful interest groups tend to form coalitions to nominate their representatives to sit on the PSC. As a result of the new rules of the game in Chinese elite politics over the past decade, factional divides within the leadership—and the balance of power between competing coalitions—will likely shape the new PSC membership.

Emerging Chinese-Style Checks and Balances: “One Party, Two Coalitions”

The transition in China from an all-powerful single leader to collective leadership has been a gradual process over the past three decades. Mao Zedong wielded enormous power as the core leader of the CCP's first generation and was seen as a god-like figure, especially during the Cultural Revolution. He treated leadership succession as if it were his own private matter. During the Deng Xiaoping era, political succession and generational change at the highest ranks of government became a matter of public concern.

Yet, because of his legendary political career, Deng, the core leader of the second generation, maintained his role as China's paramount leader even after the Tiananmen incident, when he did not hold any important leadership positions.

Both Jiang Zemin, from the third generation, and Hu Jintao, from the fourth, are technocrats lacking the charisma and revolutionary credentials of Deng, but both can boast broad administrative experience and a talent for coalition-building and political compromise. Nevertheless, both Jiang and Hu benefited from Deng's endorsement. Due in part to Jiang's firm control of Shanghai during the 1989 political crisis, Deng chose Jiang as his successor. Likewise in 1992, Deng elevated Hu to be “heir apparent” to Jiang. Following

The transition to collective leadership has been gradual over the past three decades.

convention, only one “heir apparent” would be allowed to stand clearly above the rest in his age-cohort.

The top leaders of the fifth generation seem weaker than their predecessors.

During the 2007 Party Congress, however, two front-runners from within the fifth generation, Vice President Xi Jinping and Executive Vice Premier Li Keqiang, were both elevated to the PSC. Their status within this most powerful decisionmaking body is roughly equal. In a way, the top leaders of the fifth generation seem weaker than their predecessors, as power and authority has been diffused among their peers within the leadership.

In the wake of the era of strongman politics, the CCP leadership has been increasingly structured around two informal coalitions or factions that check and balance each other’s power. The two groups can be labeled the “populist coalition,” led by President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, and the “elitist coalition,” which emerged in the Jiang era and is currently led by Wu Bangguo, chairman of the national legislature, and Jia Qinglin, head of a national political advisory body. These individuals are currently China’s top four leaders. Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, who will likely take over the top two posts at the 2012 Party Congress, each represent one of these coalitions. This division of power is sometimes referred to as the “one party, two coalitions” political mechanism.⁸

Factional politics is, of course, not a new development in the PRC. Major events such as the Cultural Revolution and the 1989 Tiananmen crisis were all related to factional infighting and succession struggles within the CCP leadership. But factional politics in present-day China is no longer a zero-sum game in which the winner takes all and the losers are purged or worse. In general, China’s new factional dynamics have three main features.

First, the two coalitions not only compete for power for their own sake, but also compete because they represent different socioeconomic and geographical constituencies. Most of the top leaders in the elitist coalition, for instance, come from families of veteran revolutionaries and high-ranking officials (vice minister-level or above for civilians and major general or above for the military). This group of so-called princelings includes former President Jiang Zemin (whose adoptive father was a CCP martyr) and former Vice President Zeng Qinghong (whose father was head of the Ministry of the Interior during the Mao era), as well as the upcoming leadership’s Vice President Xi Jinping, Vice Premier Wang Qishan, and Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai (all of their fathers or fathers-in-law previously served as vice premiers). These princelings often began their careers in rich and economically well-developed coastal cities

(Jiang in Shanghai, Zeng in Guangdong, Xi in Xiamen and Fuzhou, Wang in Beijing, and Bo in Dalian). The elitist coalition usually represents the interests of China's entrepreneurs.

By contrast, most of the populist coalition's leading figures, such as President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao, and Executive Vice Premier Li Keqiang, come from less-privileged families. They also tend to have accumulated much of their leadership experience in less-developed inland provinces. Many advanced in politics by way of the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL) and

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have therefore garnered the label *tuanpai*, literally meaning "league faction." Hu Jintao worked for several years at the provincial and national levels of the CCYL, and then served as its head in the mid-1980s. Several members of the fifth generation of leaders were Hu's junior colleagues at the CCYL during that period including Li Keqiang, Director of the CCP Organization Department Li Yuanchao, Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang, and Director of the CCP General Office Ling Jihua. The populists often voice the concerns of vulnerable social groups such as farmers, migrant workers, and the urban poor. One may doubt the effectiveness of the implementation of the Hu–Wen administration's policies, but the policies themselves—eliminating the agricultural tax on farmers, supporting more lenient policies toward migrant workers, economically prioritizing inland cities to allow them to "catch-up," establishing basic health care, and promoting affordable housing projects—are all in line with their populist agenda.

Second, these two competing coalitions are almost equally powerful, partly because they often have an equal number of seats in the top leadership organizations, and partly because their leadership skills and credentials complement each other. Within the current 25-member Politburo, princelings occupy seven positions (28 percent) and the *tuanpai* occupy eight (32 percent). The two coalitions have even managed to arrange a near-perfect balance of power among the fifth generation of rising stars (one of each in the PSC, three of each in the Politburo, and two of each in the six-member Secretariat, an important leadership body that handles the Party's routine business and administrative matters).

Leaders of these two competing factions differ in expertise, credentials, and experiences, and they understand that they need to find common ground to coexist and govern effectively. While the *tuanpai* are masters of organization and propaganda, and can generally boast experience in rural administration, they often lack experience and credentials in some of the most important

administrative areas and are short on skills related to handling foreign trade, foreign investment, banking, and other crucial aspects of economic policymaking, which have been dominated by princelings (such as Vice Premier Wang Qishan, Governor of the People's Bank of China Zhou Xiaochuan, and Chairman of China Investment Corporation Lou Jiwei).

Third, while the factions compete with each other on certain issues, they are willing to, and sometimes must, cooperate on others. To a great extent, the relationship between these two informal coalitions is both conflicting and cooperative. Both coalitions share fundamental goals: to ensure China's socioeconomic stability as well as the survival of CCP rule at home and to enhance China's status as a major international player. These common goals often push the two groups to compromise and cooperate with each other. In elevating both Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang in 2007, Hu and other senior leaders signaled the importance of the different constituencies each represents, and the top leadership's stance that only consensus-building, power-sharing, and factional compromise could successfully forestall serious political upheaval among the fifth generation of leaders. Consequently, collective leadership, as embodied in the inner operation of the PSC, has become the defining feature of today's Chinese elite politics.⁹

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But China's "bipartisanship," this new style of elite politics, is still at risk of failure. Deal-cutting, power-sharing, and political compromise is not always easy. The fact that there are more ambitious candidates than available seats may naturally create a sense of winners and losers. The growing openness of self-promotion campaigns by some of these ambitious politicians, their idiosyncratic initiatives and policy interests, and their respective strengths and weaknesses have made this upcoming political succession a particularly challenging one for the CCP leadership.

Who and What to Expect

Based on all of the factors discussed above, 14 leaders stand out among their peers as the leading candidates for the next PSC (see Table 1). Among the 14, 11 currently serve on the 25-member Politburo and two (Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang) are already on the current PSC. They are equally divided by political coalition. Within the elitist coalition, five leaders are princelings, one is the protégé of Jiang Zemin, and one is a prominent member of the Shanghai Gang (the leaders who advanced their political career in Shanghai when Jiang

Table 1: Factional Identities of the Leading Candidates for the Next Politburo Standing Committee

Elitist Coalition				Populist Coalition			
Name	Birth Year	Current Position	Factional Background	Name	Birth Year	Current Position	Factional Background
Xi Jinping	1953	Member of PSC, CMC Vice Chair, PRC Vice President	Princeling	Li Keqiang	1955	Member of PSC, Executive Vice Premier	Tuanpai
Wang Qishan	1948	Politburo Member, Vice Premier	Princeling	Li Yuanchao	1950	Politburo Member, CCP Organization Dept. Head	Tuanpai, (Princeling)
Zhang Dejiang	1946	Politburo Member, Vice Premier	Princeling	Liu Yuanshan	1947	Politburo Member, CCP Propaganda Dept. Head	Tuanpai
Yu Zhengsheng	1945	Politburo Member, Shanghai Party Chief	Princeling	Liu Yandong	1945	Politburo Member, State Councilor	Tuanpai, (Princeling)
Bo Xilai	1949	Politburo Member, Chongqing Party Chief	Princeling	Wang Yang	1955	Politburo Member, Guangdong Party Chief	Tuanpai
Zhang Gaoli	1946	Politburo Member, Tianjin Party Chief	Jiang Zemin's protégé	Ling Jihua	1956	Member of Secretariat, CCP General Office Head	Tuanpai
Meng Jianzhu	1947	State Councilor, Minister of Public Security	Shanghai Gang	Hu Chunhua	1963	Inner Mongolia Party Chief	Tuanpai

Notes: CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CMC = Central Military Commission; PRC = People's Republic of China; PSC = Politburo Standing Committee.

was the party chief there). Within the populist coalition, all seven are *tuanpai* leaders who have strong patron–client ties with Hu Jintao. Two such officials, Li Yuanchao and Liu Yandong, are also princelings in their family backgrounds, but their career experiences and close political association with Hu (who played a direct role in their promotions to the Politburo) make them more loyal to Hu and the populist coalition. It remains to be seen whether their “dual identity” can help them play a mediating role if factional infighting gets out of control, which would likely make them even more powerful.

Table 1 also indicates that while fifth generation leaders will most likely take the top posts in the national leadership after the 2012 Party Congress, a significant number of leading candidates are from the fourth generation, born in the mid-1940s. In general, the leaders from the populist coalition are younger than their elitist counterparts, and thus have an age advantage. It could be argued, however, that the age factor might make some of the elitists even more aggressive in seeking PSC membership because this will be their last chance.

Some leaders are, of course, more competitive than others. Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang will surely retain their seats. Wang Qishan and Li Yuanchao will have no problem obtaining seats, and are likely to be among the top four members (along with Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang). Vice Premier Zhang Dejiang and Director of the CCP Propaganda Department Liu Yunshan are both two-term members of the Politburo, and therefore seem to be more “entitled” for further promotion than their peers. As these six leaders have more or less secured their membership in the next PSC, there will be only *three* seats available for the other *eight* candidates, assuming membership remains at nine.

If the earliest permissible birth year for members of the next Central Committee is 1945, Shanghai Party Secretary Yu Zhengsheng will also be a strong candidate, due to the fact that, like Zhang Dejiang and Liu Yunshan, he has already served as a Politburo member for two terms. Because of Yu’s potentially formidable power, however, Hu Jintao and others leaders in the populist coalition may attempt to negotiate for his retirement at the 18th Party Congress. Yu and Liu Yandong, also born in 1945, might then be eliminated if the outgoing PSC decides to make the supreme decisionmaking body younger and consist primarily of fifth generation leaders.

Three one-term Politburo members who currently serve as Party chiefs in provincial-level administrations—Wang Yang in Guangdong, Bo Xilai in Chongqing, and Zhang Gaoli in Tianjin—are often seen as competing among each other for PSC membership. Wang Yang and Bo Xilai have been anything but quiet, having jointly acquired the nickname the “two cannons.” Ever since he was appointed as Guangdong Party Secretary in 2007, Wang Yang has been advocating a new model of economic growth and insisting on the necessity of political reforms. He personally launched a new wave of “thought emancipation,”

urging local officials to overcome ideological and political taboos. Bo Xilai's self-promotion campaign has garnered even more publicity, as discussed earlier. Bo's approach is remarkably unconventional: he is an elitist who has always been favored and privileged within the Communist regime (except for a few years during the Cultural Revolution), but he now claims the mantle of Maoist populism. He seems to have succeeded in becoming quite popular among the Chongqing public, and his national bravado earned him the title "man of the year" in a 2009 online poll conducted by *People's Daily*. In contrast to the "two cannons," Zhang Gaoli has retained a more conventional, less ostentatious style of leadership. Zhang recently told a foreign visitor that he was more interested in promoting a "down-to-earth style of intense effort with a low profile." His motto (and his strategy) is: "Do more. Speak less."¹⁰

Three other leaders, although they are not current Politburo members, are competitive for other reasons. Ling Jihua, who currently serves as a member of the six-person Secretariat and is Director of the General Office of the CCP Central Committee, is the most trusted confidant of Hu Jintao. Just as Jiang Zemin made Zeng Qinghong a member of the PSC in 2002, Hu will likely push for Ling's two-step promotion. Meng Jianzhu, State Councilor at the State Council, Minister of Public Security, and the Deputy Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, seems to be an ideal candidate to succeed his boss Zhou Yongkang on the PSC. Hu Chunhua, a 48-year-old rising star, belongs to the sixth generation of leaders who were born in the 1960s. If the Chinese top leadership decides to select a young leader for the PSC in order to extend the continuity of leadership beyond the fifth generation, Hu Chunhua will be a leading candidate. Previously, Hu Jintao had served on the PSC for 10 years before he became General Secretary of the CCP in 2002.

New leadership often leads to new policies. Although upcoming leaders will probably not be inclined to show how they differ from their predecessors until they have solidified their positions, it is already evident that both Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang represent new leadership styles and wish to pursue new policy priorities. During the New Year celebrations of 2010, for example, Xi sent a text message with a "personal" greeting to approximately 1 million officials in the CCP's grassroots branches across the country—an unprecedented way for a top Party leader to communicate with local officials. On the economic front, Xi's leadership experience in running Fujian, Zhejiang, and Shanghai, three economically-advanced regions, has prepared him well for pursuing policies to promote the development of the private sector, foreign investment and trade, and the liberalization of China's financial system, all of which have experienced serious setbacks in recent years.

Meanwhile, Li Keqiang has drawn attention for his strong interest in new issue areas such as affordable housing, food safety, public health care, climate

change, and clean and renewable energy. Not one of these issues was a priority for the Chinese leadership 10 years ago. The Chinese official and semi-official media outlets have recently sought to outline the blueprints of governance among the rising stars of the fifth generation of leaders.¹¹ Table 2 presents an overview of the policy priorities and preferences of these 14 candidates for PSC membership. In general, elitists tend to be more market friendly and concerned about GDP growth, while populists are more interested in pursuing social justice, anti-corruption measures, and intra-Party elections. Leaders within each of these two coalitions also vary in what they consider hot button issues.

While the next PSC will most likely be chosen from the 14 candidates discussed above, one cannot eliminate the possibility of a “dark horse” emerging, possibly from among the current provincial Party chiefs. Xinjiang Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian, for one, has recently evinced an “iron fist” approach to dealing with the Xinjiang riots and has also claimed that he could release all income and asset information concerning himself and his family in support of strong measures to deal with official corruption. From the perspective of the CCP leadership, both approaches seem to resonate well in a country that has been beset by serious problems of social unrest and rampant corruption. Among sixth-generation leaders, the aforementioned Hu Chunhua is not the only rising star. Hunan Party Secretary Zhou Qiang and Jilin Party Secretary Sun Zhengcai are both alternative candidates for the PSC. The large representation of princelings and *tuanpai* in the top leadership is also a source of considerable resentment among both the Chinese public and lower levels of cadres. The political authorities may therefore want to select a leader who does not have a strong factional identity. To this end, Henan Party Secretary Lu Zhongong would be a good candidate. He recently launched a set of political experiments to introduce more election methods to select party secretaries and mayors in Henan’s major cities such as Zhengzhou.

Looking Ahead: A Paradox of Hope and Fear

It will be fascinating to observe how the competition for the next PSC shakes out in the months leading up to the 18th Party Congress, and even more importantly, what the “one party, two coalitions” dynamic will mean for China’s political transformation in the years to come. China’s new form of collective leadership is a paradox of hope and fear. Members of the next PSC could make very good partners. They could cut the deals necessary to sustain the rule—and perhaps profoundly improve the governance—of the 90-year-old Chinese Communist Party. Their differences in career experiences, administrative backgrounds, political associations, and policy preferences could make the Chinese leadership more pluralistic and representative. Their competition for

Table 2: Policy Priorities and Preferences of the Leading PSC Candidates

Elitist Coalition		Populist Coalition	
Name	Policy Priorities and Preferences	Name	Policy Priorities and Preferences
Xi Jinping	Development of the private sector, market liberalization in foreign investment, and Shanghai's role as financial and shipping center	Li Keqiang	Development of affordable housing, program of basic health care and social welfare, and promotion of clean energy
Wang Qishan	Liberalization of China's financial system, high-rate GDP growth, and tax-revenue reforms in central-local governments	Li Yuanchao	Political reforms (esp. intra-Party democracy), tougher measures to deal with corruption, promotion of foreign-educated returnees
Zhang Dejiang	Development of state-owned enterprises, promotion of "China's Go Global Strategy," and indigenous innovation	Liu Yuanshan	More effective control over media and the internet, and promotion of China's soft power overseas
Yu Zhengsheng	Promotion of the private sector and urban development, high-rate GDP growth, legal development, and rule of law	Liu Yandong	Greater political participation of interest groups and NGOs in political process, and promotion of China's cultural exchanges overseas
Bo Xilai	Rapid urbanization, radical measures to reduce economic disparities, open political competition, and ultra-nationalism in foreign policy	Wang Yang	Change of economic growth mode, promotion of intra-party democracy, media transparency, and bolder political reforms
Zhang Gaoli	Market liberalization in foreign investment, economic efficiency, and high-rate GDP growth	Ling Jihua	Continuity of Hu Jintao's socio-economic policies
Meng Jianzhu	Sociopolitical stability, and promotion of Shanghai's role as the dual global center of finance and shipping	Hu Chunhua	Promotion of social justice and economic equality, government accountability, and tougher measures to deal with corruption

power, influence, and control over policy initiatives—along with their growing linkages with various socioeconomic forces in Chinese society and different geographic regions—may become a new experiment in Chinese-style checks and balances, constituting an embryonic form of democracy.

The rivalry between these two camps could also get ugly. Increasing diversity among political elites has already spurred concerns about the new leadership's likely degree of unity and elite cohesion. Internal ideological disagreements may become too divisive to reconcile, making the decisionmaking process lengthier and more complicated, perhaps even resulting in deadlock. China is no democracy, but in this regard might develop some characteristic problems of democracies. While collective leadership may be characterized as the absence of a single strong leader, it should not be interpreted as the absence of strong and effective leadership. However, negotiations over personnel appointments, especially when it comes to membership in the PSC, could become viciously contentious and even result in factional infighting spiraling out of control.

The tight competition between elitists and populists does not mean that the most important leadership bodies, such as the PSC, are necessarily closed off to other possible competitors (i.e., ambitious and capable politicians who do not belong to either of these coalitions). The “black box” manipulation of the top leadership—the deal-cutting and trade-offs that occur among a handful of politicians—will be increasingly challenged even among the Chinese political establishment. From a broader perspective, it is difficult to imagine how the new leadership's likely agenda for innovation-led economic growth can be achieved without greater political freedom and openness.

The upcoming political succession, and the competition between princelings and *tuangpai*, is therefore about much more than sheer political power. China's future political and economic direction may well hinge on how well its leaders, particularly the most powerful making up the new PSC, succeed or fail at working together to search for a safe, sound, and sustainable political system.

Notes

1. For example, Alice Miller, “The Politburo Standing Committee under Hu Jintao,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 35, September 21, 2011, p. 5, <http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/CLM35AM.pdf>.
2. Li Bin, Wu Jing, and Tan Jingjing, “Nine Members of the Politburo Standing Committee attended the National Day Celebration,” YNET.com, September 30, 2011, <http://bjyouth.y.net.com/3.1/1110/01/6309804.html>; also see Wang Jianmin, “Nine Members of the Politburo Standing Committee Watched the Launch of China's Space Station,” china.com, September 30, 2011, <http://news.china.com/focus/tgyh/11106738/20110930/16794768.html>.

3. Xinhua News Net, October 15, 2011, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2007-10-15/113314089759.shtml>.
4. These nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee often concurrently occupy the most important government positions such as president of the PRC, chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC), and premier of the State Council.
5. For more discussion of Bo's distinct political drive, see Cheng Li, "China's Midterm Jockeying: Gearing Up for 2012 (Part 1: Provincial Chiefs)," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 31, February 15, 2010, p. 22, <http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/CLM31CL.pdf>; and Dexter Roberts, "China's Sentimental Journey Back to Mao," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, January 13, 2011, http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/11_04/b4212012787534.htm.
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