

China Starts Grooming its Sixth Generation Leaders

BO Zhiyue*

Although the fifth generation leadership has yet to succeed the current leadership, China has already begun to groom its sixth generation leadership.

In a recent reshuffle of provincial leaders, two leaders were particularly noteworthy. Hu Chunhua, former governor of Hebei, was promoted to Party secretary of Inner Mongolia, and Sun Zhengcai, former minister of Agriculture, was promoted to Party secretary of Jilin, as a step forward for top positions in the Party and the government a dozen years in future.

A PERENNIAL ISSUE faced by any political regime is political succession. How China, a rising power on the international stage in the post-global economic crisis, manages its power transition will affect not only the Asian giant's trajectory of economic and social development but also the future of the rest of the world. With recent provincial

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reshuffles, China is preparing for not only the next round of power transfer from the fourth to the fifth generation leadership but also the subsequent political transition from the fifth to the sixth.

Lu Zhangong, new Party secretary of Henan, Sun Chunlan (f.), new Party secretary of Fujian, and Wang Min, new Party secretary of Liaoning, are strong candidates for the new Politburo to be elected in 2012. Hu Chunhua, new Party secretary of Inner Mongolia, and Sun Zhengcai, new Party secretary of Jilin, are strong candidates for not only the next Politburo but also the one following it.

Despite rampant rumours about factional struggles over power transfer, institutionalisation is still the main story within the compound of the Zhongnanhai. The pair is being groomed to be future general secretary of the CCP and premier, succeeding Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang in 2022-2023, respectively.

Grooming Future Leaders

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has gradually formulated its own system of grooming future political leaders in the past three decades. With the assistance of the Central Organisation Department, the Party leadership identifies a contingent of candidates from a large pool of young leaders.

These candidates are sent to provinces (as well as ministries) to gain management experience. They usually start with government positions, and a select few are then promoted to provincial Party secretary positions. The most promising candidates are supposed to have served in a number of provincial units before they are promoted to Beijing for higher positions. They should have accumulated both local management experiences and work experiences in the central government/Party apparatus.

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As China's political system has been institutionalised, provinces have become a training ground for future national leaders. Out of nine members of the 17th Politburo Standing Committee, eight have worked as provincial leaders previously, representing 89 percent. Top leaders in the future will mostly come from provinces.

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TABLE 1 FRONTRUNNERS OF THE SIXTH GENERATION LEADERS IN CHINA (AS OF DECEMBER 2009)

Name	Age	Hometown	Education	17th CC	Current Position
Hu Chunhua*	46	Hubei	Master's	Full	Party Secretary of Inner Mongolia
Sun Zhengcai	46	Shandong	PhD	Full	Party Secretary of Jilin
Zhou Qiang*	49	Hubei	Master's	full	Governor of Hunan
Nur Bekri (Uygur)*	46	Xinjiang	Master's	Alternative	Chairman of Xinjiang
Zhang Qingwei	48	Hebei	Master's	Full	Chairman of COMAC
Lu Hao*	42	Shanghai	Master's	Non-Member	First Secretary of the CCYL, Central Committee

Source: Author's database

*Note: Those with * are people with CCYL background*

First Batch Frontrunners: Zhou Qiang, Hu Chunhua and Lu Hao

Although it is far from clear how power will be transferred from the fourth generation leadership under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao to the fifth generation leadership under Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, great attention has been paid to the likely team of the emerging sixth generation leadership. The *Global People*, a Chinese journal covering global political, economic and cultural elites, featured five rising political stars in Chinese politics in its No. 8 issue of 2009. These politicians have met two characteristics: They were all born in the 1960s and are political leaders of ministerial rank (Table 1).

The first is Zhou Qiang (born in 1960), governor of Hunan Province. A graduate of Southwest Politics and Law Institute (now Southwest Politics and Law University) located in Chongqing with a bachelor of law and a master of law degrees, Zhou represents a new type of political elites in China—lawyer-cum-politician. After a 10-year stint at the Ministry of Justice in August 1985, he was transferred to the Secretariat of the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL) Central Committee in 1995 and became its first secretary three years later, succeeding Li Keqiang (now a Politburo Standing Committee member and the executive vice premier of the State Council).

Eight years later, Zhou was transferred to Hunan as deputy secretary and acting governor in September 2006. He is likely to be promoted to provincial Party secretary in the next few months and to move further up the ladder of success.

Zhou Qiang's successor as the first secretary of the CCYL Central Committee was Hu Chunhua (born in 1963). Three years junior to Zhou Qiang, Hu is a native of Hubei Province. Upon graduation from Peking University with a bachelor's degree in Chinese literature in August 1983, Hu worked in Tibet and spent the subsequent 14 years there.

His Tibetan experience had significant overlap with that of President Hu Jintao, who was Party secretary of Tibet from 1988 to 1992. Little Hu served as deputy secretary of the CCYL Tibet Committee and deputy head of Nyingtri Region in the same period. In the subsequent years, Hu climbed the ladder within the CCYL system. He was secretary of the Tibet CCYL Committee, a member of the Secretariat of the CCYL Central Committee, and later the first secretary of the CCYL.

He entered the 17th Central Committee as a full member in October 2007 and was transferred to Hebei as acting governor in April 2008. Although he had to deal with the effect of the Sanlu tainted milk incident barely six months in office, his political career was not affected.

His new appointment as Party secretary of Inner Mongolia provides him with the platform to experiment with new initiatives in different areas of local governance in preparation for future management of the whole country.

Hu Chunhua's successor, Lu Hao (born in 1967), is the youngest on the list. When he was appointed first secretary of the CCYL Central Committee in May 2008, he was one month shy of his 41st birthday. As the only high school student with a Party membership in Shaanxi, Lu was recruited by Peking University free of the college entrance examinations in 1985. He became president of the Student Association of Peking University through a competitive election in 1987 and began to work in a state-owned enterprise in Beijing upon graduation. At the age of 28, he was promoted to factory director in 1995.

After a short stint as deputy general manager of the Beijing Textile Limited Corporation from December 1998 to August 1999, Lu was appointed deputy director of the Management Committee of the Zhongguancun Science and Technology Park (China's Silicon Valley). He was promoted to director three months later. Due to his exceptional performance as the director of China's Silicon Valley, Lu was appointed vice mayor of Beijing in January 2003 at the age of 35. He was, again, the youngest political leader of a vice ministerial rank in China.

Lu Hao was a deputy to the 16th Party Congress but not a deputy to the 17th Party Congress. He is the only one in this group who is not a member of the 17th Central Committee. However, he is likely to enter the 18th Central Committee as a full member and be sent back to the provinces as a provincial Party secretary in a few years.

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Second Batch Frontrunners: Sun Zhengcai, Nur Bekri and Zhang Qingwei

Sun Zhengcai (born in 1963), minister of Agriculture, has followed a different career path from that of the preceding three politicians who have developed their careers in the CCYL.

A native of Rongcheng, Shandong Province, Sun is an academician-cum-politician. He obtained his bachelor's degree from Laiyang Agriculture Institute in 1984, his master's degree from Beijing Academy of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences in 1987, and his Ph.D. degree from China Agricultural University in 1997. He is also reported to have studied in Britain for one year. Upon graduation from Beijing Academy of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences in 1987, Sun worked in his own institution. He served as deputy director of the Research Institute of the Department of Plants, director of the Department of Earth and Fertilizer, and vice president and deputy secretary of the Academy for the subsequent 10 years.

He began his political career in 1997 when he was transferred to Shunyi County in Beijing as deputy head. He reportedly "chose" Shunyi because it was a county with "good agriculture." He was later appointed the founding head of Shunyi District when the county was converted to a district in April 1999 and was promoted to serve as its Party secretary two years later. He was elected a standing member of Beijing Municipal Party Committee in 2002 and was appointed its secretary general in November. Four years later, he became minister of Agriculture in December 2006, replacing Du Qinglin (born in 1946) who was made Party secretary of Sichuan.

As new Party secretary of Jilin, Sun seems to follow the footsteps of Hui Liangyu (born in 1944), currently vice premier in charge of agriculture. Most significantly, Sun is a strong candidate for premiership after Li Keqiang.

Nur Bekri (born in 1961), chairman of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, is the only minority politician in this group. A native of Bole (Bortala), a municipality located in a Mongolian prefecture in Xinjiang, he is of Uygur nationality. Interestingly, Nur Bekri's career is a combination of the two paths mentioned earlier. He started his career at the universities, but his work was on CCYL affairs. Upon graduation from the Department of Politics in Xinjiang University in August 1983, he was appointed political advisor and secretary of the CCYL General Branch of the Department. He then served as deputy secretary and secretary of the CCYL Committee of Xinjiang University from November 1984 to January 1992. However, unlike Zhou Qiang, Hu Chunhua and Lu Hao, he has never been a member of the CCYL Central Committee.

Nur Bekri later worked as propaganda director of Xinjiang University Party Committee for less than two years and was then transferred to the local government in Xinjiang. He worked in Kashgar Prefecture for two and a half years before his appointment as deputy secretary general of the Xinjiang Regional Government in March 1996.

He served as acting mayor and mayor of Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, from February 1998 to December 2000 and was a standing member and deputy secretary from December 2000 to December 2007. He was appointed acting chairman of Xinjiang in

December 2007, replacing Ismail Tiliwaldi (Uyghur) (born in 1944) (who was later promoted to vice chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee).

Nur Bekri is an alternate member of the 17th Central Committee. He is likely to enter the 18th Central Committee as a full member and to follow the footsteps of Ismail Tiliwaldi and other senior leaders from Xinjiang in the future.

The *Global People*, however, missed another important politician who was also born in the 1960s with a ministerial rank. He is Zhang Qingwei (born in 1961), chairman of Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC). Although his ancestral home is Leting, Hebei Province, Zhang was actually born in Jilin, Jilin Province in November 1961. He studied aircraft design at Northwestern Polytechnic University (located in Xi'an, Shaanxi) from 1978 to 1982.

Upon graduation, he began to work in an Aircraft Design Institution in Xi'an. Three years later, he went back to his alma mater to pursue a master's degree in aircraft control theory and its applications. After having obtained a master's degree, Zhang joined China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation and started his career in rocket design in 1988. He subsequently assumed various positions in the corporation before becoming its general manager in November 2001. Zhang has made great contributions to the development of spaceships and manned spaceships in China. He assisted in the successful launching of numerous satellites for China and other countries; participated in drafting China's plan of manned spaceships and directed the successful launches of Shenzhou series.

In August 2007, he was appointed director of the Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (CSTIND). When the CSTIND was merged into a newly established Ministry of Industry and Information, Zhang was appointed chairman of the new state company, Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China, Ltd. He was given a new mission: create China's own brand of big aircraft.

A full member of the 16th Central Committee, Zhang Qingwei was reelected to the 17th Central Committee in 2007. He has been a technocrat so far. If he is to play a more important role in Chinese politics in the future, he would also need to gain some local management experiences.

New Cohort of China's Leadership and Future of China

A number of other young politicians who were also born in the 1960s may join the pool of the sixth generation leadership (Table 2).

In the 17th Central Committee, 25 people were born in the 1960s. In addition to

As new Party secretary of Jilin, Sun seems to follow the footsteps of Hui Liangyu (born in 1944), currently vice premier in charge of agriculture. Most significantly, Sun is a strong candidate for premiership after Li Keqiang.

**TABLE 2 COHORT OF THE SIXTH GENERATION LEADERS
IN CHINA**

(AS OF DECEMBER 2009)

Name	Age	Hometown	Education	17th CC	Current Position
Chen Min'er	49	Zhejiang	Master's	Alternate	Vice Governor of Zhejiang
Zhu Yanfeng	48	Zhejiang	College	Alternate	CEO of China FAW Group
Cai Zhenhua	48	Jiangsu		Alternate	Deputy Director of State Administration of Sports
Zhao Aiming (f.)	48	Henan	College	Alternate	Party Secretary of Panzhihua City in Sichuan
Sun Jinlong	47	Hubei	PhD	Alternate	Party Secretary of Hefei City in Anhui
Chen Chuanping	47	Shanxi	Master's	Alternate	Chairman of Taiwan Steel Group
Liu Xiaokai (Miao)	47	Guizhou	Master's	Alternate	Party Secretary of Bijie Prefecture in Guizhou
Su Shulin	47	Heilongjiang	Master's	Alternate	CEO of Sinopec
Ji Lin	47	Shanghai	Master's	Alternate	Vice Mayor of Beijing
Tang Tao	47	Hubei	Master's	Alternate	Organisation Director of Shanxi
Danko (Tibetan)	47	Qinghai	Normal	Alternate	Party Secretary of Hebei Prefecture in Qinghai
Yuan Jiajun	47	Hubei	Master's	Alternate	Deputy General Manager of China Aerospace Science and Technology Cooperation
Ulagan (f. Mongolian)	47	Inner Mongolia	Master's	Alternate	Propaganda Director of Inner Mongolia
Liu Shiquan	46	Hubei	College	Alternate	Party Secretary of Sanjiang Space Group
Zhao Yong	46	Hunan	PhD	Alternate	Party Secretary of Tangshan in Hebei
Li Jincheng	46	Anhui	College	Alternate	Chief Engineer of Qing-Zang Railway
Yu Yuanhai (Yao)	45	Guangxi	Master's	Alternate	Secretary General of Guangxi Party Committee
Jin Zhuanglong	45	Zhejiang	PhD	Alternate	General Manager of COMAC
Zhang Guoqing	45	Henan	PhD	Alternate	General Manager of CPOIC
Yang Liwei	44	Liaoning	College	Alternate	Deputy Director of Training Centre for Astronauts

Source: Author's database

Zhou Qiang, Hu Chunhua, Sun Zhengcai, Nur Bekri, and Zhang Qingwei, there are 19 others who are all alternate members. Lu Hao is the only one who is not a member of the 17th Central Committee. In addition to being young, this new cohort has three more characteristics. First, many of them have served (or are currently serving) as CCYL cadres. Out of 26 people, 10 have had such experiences.

Second, they are either local leaders or corporate leaders. Among them, 13 are local leaders and nine corporate leaders. Finally, there are two females and five people of ethnic minority background.

What are missing from the cohort are those who have obtained doctoral degrees from universities overseas. As a responsible global power, China needs a leadership with a global vision and knowledge. It remains to be seen whether and how a contingent of highly educated political elites with experiences abroad will be recruited and groomed in the coming years.

In the next two years, more provincial Party secretaries will retire when they reach the required retirement age of 65. Young leaders in their 40s are likely to fill these vacancies as a stepping stone for their future advancement. These young leaders are strong candidates for not only provincial Party secretary positions now but also national-level positions at the 19th Party Congress in 2017. They would have accumulated enough experiences and credentials in their respective local positions for future national management by 2022. ㊦