

# China's Midterm Jockeying: Gearing Up for 2012 (Part 2: Cabinet Ministers)

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The 18<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012 will select a new Politburo and Standing Committee. The members of these two supreme leadership bodies will concurrently occupy the top positions of all other important Party, government, and military organizations. The most important of these institutions is the State Council, China's cabinet. Not only do its members hold a significant number of seats in the Politburo, but many of the council's key players—premier, vice premiers, and ministers—work on the front lines of China's domestic and foreign affairs. While the Party holds the role of ultimate decision-maker, the State Council is the source of many important policy initiatives.

What are the demographic backgrounds, career paths, educational credentials, and factional affiliations of the 35 members of the State Council on the eve of its reshuffling? As Premier Wen and a few other senior government leaders will retire in two or three years, what will the post-Wen State Council look like? Who will be out, in, or up? What are the Chinese public's main concerns regarding this upcoming governmental change of the guard? What are the most daunting challenges that the new leadership team will confront? This essay aims to shed light on these timely questions.\*

Any attempt to forecast Chinese government policies—including monetary, trade, industrial, environmental, energy, and foreign investment—must take into account the upcoming leadership transition, especially as it will affect the State Council, which is primarily responsible for making and executing these policies. This leadership turnover in the State Council will occur in the spring of 2013, a few months after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, which is scheduled for the fall of 2012. At that time, senior government leaders who are not elected to the new Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will have to vacate their seats to make way for newcomers.<sup>1</sup> Of the 10 members of the Executive Committee of the State Council, which consists of the premier, vice premiers, and state councilors, as many as seven are expected to retire or move to a different leadership organization.

This does not necessarily mean that the Chinese government will abstain from announcing important new policy initiatives between now and 2012. At a time when China faces many daunting economic and sociopolitical challenges at home and a rapidly changing international environment, Chinese decision-makers must become increasingly adept at adjusting to global financial, economic, and political realities. Furthermore,

some current leaders preparing to depart, most prominently Premier Wen Jiabao, may want to seize their last opportunity to carry out what they believe the essential policy initiatives for the country's future development. Nevertheless, most politicians in the country, especially those rising stars in the so-called fifth generation of leaders, will be exceptionally cautious over the next two years. Indeed, major policy changes will likely occur after, rather than prior to, the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. It is not surprising, then, that the center of gravity of Chinese politics has recently shifted to personnel issues.

Make no mistake, power in the People's Republic of China (PRC) ultimately resides not in the government, but in the ruling CCP—not in the State Council, but in the Politburo and especially its Standing Committee. As Part 1 of this series explained, a majority of current Politburo and Standing Committee members advanced their careers through provincial leadership rather than ministerial administration under the State Council. Although the Party plays the role of leading decision-maker, many important policy initiatives and measures, as well as most activities relating to policy implementation, take place in or through *government* institutions, not CCP organizations.

Furthermore, experience in the central government often enhances an official's credentials for a top leadership position. Ministers of the State Council constitute an important pool of candidates for Politburo membership, perhaps surpassed only by provincial party secretaries and directors of the central departments of the CCP. A few current members of the Executive Committee of the State Council who are not incumbents of the Politburo, along with two or three ministers, are among the leading contenders for membership in the Politburo or the Secretariat in 2012.

One of a larger body of political norms that have developed over the last two decades is that the top two leaders on the State Council—premier and executive vice premier—sit concurrently on the seven- or nine-member Politburo Standing Committee, and all vice premiers (along with several state councilors) also serve concurrently on the Politburo. The State Council coordinates China's domestic and foreign policies, and the premiership has always been one of the most powerful positions in the country. Several premiers in PRC history—Zhou Enlai, Zhao Ziyang, Zhu Rongji, and Wen Jiabao—have been widely perceived to be the “face” of China, due in part to their extensive leadership activities. They have sometimes provided deep comfort to the Chinese people at home and earned respect abroad for China's achievements.

An understanding of China's post-Wen State Council, particularly of the key players—their political backgrounds, factional affiliations, administrative credentials, and foreign experiences; how they differ from their predecessors and each other; and the policy initiatives they may propose—is profoundly important for both China and the outside world. Examining the backgrounds and credentials of these new leaders will not only provide some clue as to their policy preferences, but will also help us to assess whether they are prepared to deal with such economic and sociopolitical challenges as employment pressures, income inequality, and rampant corruption as well as with the likely complications accompanying resource scarcity, energy shortages, environmental degradation, and climate change. Without a capable and coherent administrative team in

the central government, China will have a difficult time managing these complex challenges on both the domestic and international fronts.

This essay begins with an examination of the current members of the State Council, including the 10 members of the Executive Committee and 27 ministers (two of whom concurrently serve on the Executive Committee as state councilors).<sup>2</sup> It provides comprehensive empirical analysis of the biographical backgrounds, educational credentials (including experience studying abroad), career paths, and political networks or factional identities of these 35 senior leaders in the central government. With the exception of some information concerning these individuals' patron-client ties and family backgrounds, which is based on the author's interviews and non-official Chinese media, all data are derived from the website of the government-run Xinhua News Agency.<sup>3</sup>

The essay then narrows its focus to three specific lines of inquiry: 1) who will be *out* (retired or removed); 2) who will likely be *in* (to replace the incumbents); and 3) who will be *up* (promoted to a higher post and obtaining a seat in the Politburo Standing Committee, Politburo, or Secretariat in 2012). The essay concludes with a discussion of some of the most challenging issues facing the upcoming leadership succession in general, and the turnover of the State Council in particular.

## The State Council: "China's Cabinet"

The State Council is the Chinese government's cabinet. Headed by the premier, the State Council is a gigantic bureaucratic institution with multiple layers of decision-making bodies. Its two most important venues are the State Council executive meeting (*guowuyuan changwu huiyi*) and the State Council full meeting (*guowuyuan quanti huiyi*). The former is generally held every week and the latter is held every six months. Those who are entitled to attend the executive meeting informally make up the "Executive Committee" of the State Council, which currently includes one premier, four vice premiers, and five state councilors, one of whom serves concurrently as secretary general (also called chief of staff). These 10 leaders are the top government administrators, with broad responsibilities. The secretary-general manages the day-to-day business of the State Council.

Those who are entitled to attend the State Council full meeting include all members of the Executive Committee and ministers of China's 27 ministry-level administrations, each of whom heads a functional agency such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the People's Bank, or the National Audit Office. In January 2010 China established the State Energy Commission, headed by Premier Wen Jiabao, which is now listed alongside the other 27 ministries and commissions. All members of this commission, however, are ministers or chairmen of other ministries and government agencies, so this study excludes the newly founded commission.

In addition, the State Council directly manages the following four sets of central government agencies:

- Special Organization under the State Council (total number = 1), namely, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC);
- Organizations under the State Council (16), including the General Administration of Customs and the State Administration of Taxation;
- Offices of the State Council (7), including the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council and the Research Office of the State Council; and
- Institutions Directly under the State Council (14), including the Xinhua News Agency, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), and the China Banking Regulatory Commission (CBRC).

Heads of these four sets of central government agencies occasionally attend the full meetings of the State Council. A large number of these leaders (31 out of 38, or 81.6 percent) currently serve on the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP as full members (23) or alternate members (3) or are members (5) of the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Commission of Discipline Inspection (CCDI). But with only a few exceptions, these 38 leaders of the four sets of central government agencies are less prominent than the 27 ministers, and they are therefore usually considered the third tier of the State Council, next to the members of the Executive Committee and ministers.<sup>4</sup> This study focuses on the first two tiers of State Council leadership.

Table 1 shows the membership of the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP among the State Council's current senior leaders (members of the Executive Committee and ministers). Premier Wen Jiabao and Executive Vice Premier Li Keqiang currently serve as members of the Politburo Standing Committee. Three other vice premiers (Hui Liangyu, Zhang Dejiang, and Wang Qishan) and one state councilor (Liu Yandong) serve as members of the Politburo. A majority of other leaders are full members of the Central Committee (CC). Minister of Commerce Chen Deming is an alternate member of the CC because he was one of the few candidates (8 percent) who were on the ballot for full membership in the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress but failed to get elected. The newly appointed Minister of Education Yuan Guiren is a member of the CCDI. At present, all but two of these individuals belong to the CCP (the exceptions being Minister of Science and Technology Wan Gang and Minister of Health Chen Zhu). The recent appointment of these two non-CCP leaders to ministerial positions is largely symbolic, since they will hardly represent competing interests and contrasting policy agendas vis-à-vis the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

Yet, all these 27 ministers, regardless of CCP membership status, are the key players in the decision-making and policy implementation in the functional areas in which their ministries or commissions are responsible. They are therefore important in their own right, but some are also in line to serve on the Executive Committee of the next State Council, and a precious few have the potential to obtain seats in the new Politburo or Secretariat. A more detailed analysis of their biographical, educational, and career backgrounds will help to paint a more vivid picture of them.

**Table 1**

*Current State Council Senior Leaders' Membership in the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (2010)*

<i>Membership Status</i>	<i>Number of Leaders</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
PSCM	2	6
Politburo Member	4	11
Full Member	25	71
Alternate Member	1	3
Member of CCDI	1	3
Non-CCP Member	2	6
<i>Total</i>	35	100

NOTES: CCP = Chinese Communist Party; CCDI = Central Commission for Discipline Inspection; PSCM = Politburo Standing Committee Member

## An Empirical Analysis of the 27 Ministers

### *Gender, Ethnicity, Age, and Birthplace*

Table 2 (next page) provides an overview of the basic biographical characteristics of the 27 ministers in question. Although there are only three female ministers, the female percentage of China's full ministers (11.1 percent) is much higher than that of provincial chiefs (1.6 percent). Among these three female ministers, Minister of Supervision Ma Wen (born in 1948) and Minister of Justice Wu Aiyong (b. 1951) are the two leading candidates for seats in the next Secretariat. Minister of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission Yang Jing (b. 1953), the only minister with an ethnic minority background, is Mongolian. Yang concurrently serves as executive deputy director of the Department of the United Front Work of the CCP Central Committee. Since the only ethnic minority member in the current Politburo, Vice Premier Hui Liangyu (b. 1944) will step down due to age at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Yang Jing is one of the most likely candidates to assume his seat in the Politburo.

Only one leader, Minister of Defense Liang Guanglie (b. 1940), belongs to the age cohort (born between 1940 and 1944) that will surpass the age limit in 2012 and thus have to retire. The youngest in this prominent leadership group is Director of the National Audit Office Liu Jiayi (b. 1956). Twenty-three ministers (85.2 percent) were appointed to their positions in 2007 or thereafter, and thus will not have exhausted their two five-year term limits by 2013. These age considerations suggest that the turnover rate among ministers will be less drastic than that of the Executive Committee of the State Council.

In terms of birthplaces, these 27 ministers hail from 17 provinces or province-level cities. Eleven (40.7 percent) were born in East China. Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi (b. 1950), Commerce Minister Chen Deming (b. 1949), Finance Minister Xie Xuren (b. 1947), Health Minister Chen Zhu (b. 1953), and governor of the People's Bank Zhou

Xiaochuan (b. 1948) were all born in Shanghai or nearby areas. The dominance of leaders from the East China region within the central government has been the norm for decades, and it will likely continue for years to come.

**Table 2**

*Biographical Characteristics of State Council Ministers (as of April 2010)*

	Number	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Males	24	88.9
Females	3	11.1
Total	27	100
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Han	26	96.3
Minority	1	3.7
Total	27	100
<i>Age range in years / (birth year range)</i>		
66–70 / (1940–1944)	1	3.7
61–65 / (1945–1949)	12	44.4
56–60 / (1950–1954)	13	48.1
51–55 / (1955–1959)	1	3.7
Total	27	100
<i>Top seven birth provinces</i>		
Jiangsu	4	14.8
Hebei	3	11.1
Anhui	2	7.4
Heilongjiang	2	7.4
Hubei	2	7.4
Shanghai	2	7.4
Zhejiang	2	7.4
Total	15	52.9

SOURCES: Xinhua News Agency. Calculated by the author.

### *Educational Backgrounds and the Rise of Western-Educated Returnees*

As can be seen in Table 3 (next page), 17 ministers (62.9 percent) received post-graduate degrees, which is roughly the same proportion as provincial chiefs (64.5 percent); when it comes to Ph.D. degrees, however, seven ministers (25.9 percent) received degrees, which is much higher than the percentage of provincial chiefs (11.3 percent).<sup>5</sup> These ministers who hold doctoral degrees are: Commerce Minister Chen Deming (management), Culture Minister Cai Wu (international politics and law), Health Minister Chen Zhu (medicine), Science and Technology Minister Wan Gang (engineering), Governor of the People's Bank Zhou Xiaochuan (engineering), Director of National Audit Office Liu Jiayi (finance), and Chair of the State Population and Family Planning Commission Li Bin (economics).

**Table 3**  
*State Council Ministers' Educational Backgrounds (as of April 2010)*

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Education level</i>		
Ph.D.	7	25.9
Master's Degree	10	37.0
4-Year College	6	22.2
2-Year College	3	11.1
High School / Technical School	1	3.7
Total	27	100
<i>Academic majors</i>		
Economics / Management	7	25.9
Engineering	6	22.2
Politics, CCP Affairs	4	14.8
Law	3	11.1
International Affairs	2	7.4
Philosophy	2	7.4
Chinese	1	3.7
History	1	3.7
Medicine	1	3.7
Total	27	100

SOURCES: Xinhua News Agency. Calculated by the author.

In contrast to the third and fourth generations of Chinese leaders, which were dominated by engineers-turned-technocrats, a majority of the State Council's current ministers were educated in non-engineering academic subjects. Those who studied engineering only constitute about 22 percent. Those who were trained in the fields of economics and management top the list, constituting 25.9 percent of the total. The areas of politics, law, and humanities are also well represented.

Director of the NDRC Zhang Ping (b. 1946) is the only minister who did not attend college. At a time when a large number of Chinese political leaders earned their advanced degrees through part-time graduate programs (which sometimes did not imply serious academic training), Zhang Ping's lack of an academic degree actually earns him more respect in the eyes of the Chinese public. Of course, not all ministers obtained their advanced degrees through the part-time programs. It is also fair to say that some of these part-time programs, including those mid-career degree programs in the Central Party School, might maintain high or at least decent academic standards.

In contrast to the third generation of leaders, many of whom had the experience of studying in the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, the fifth generation includes a significant number of Western- or Japan-educated returnees. According to the Chinese official definition, 'returnee' (*haigui*) refers to an individual born in the PRC who left to study overseas as a student or a visiting scholar for more than one year, and then returned to China to work on either a temporary or permanent basis. Not considered

returnees are those who participated in short-term educational programs abroad, foreign-born ethnic Chinese, or Chinese immigrants to foreign countries who did not pursue educational opportunities and have now resettled in China.

Four ministers studied abroad as degree candidates, exchange students, or visiting scholars early in their professional careers. Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi was an exchange student in the United Kingdom from 1973 to 1975, first at the University of Bath and then at the London School of Economics. Governor of the People's Bank Zhou Xiaochuan was a visiting scholar at the University of California at Santa Cruz from 1987 to 1988. Two ministers in the State Council who are not CCP members—Wan Gang, minister of science and technology, and Chen Zhu, minister of health—both spent many years in the West. Wan received his Ph.D. degree in physics from Technische Universität Clausthal in 1991 and worked as a senior manager at the Audi Company in Germany for over a decade between 1991 and 2002. Chen received his doctoral degree in medicine from Université Paris 7 in 1989. He is one of the world's leading hematology experts and holds memberships in several prestigious academies, including the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World, the United States National Academy of Sciences, and the French Academy of Sciences.

The presence and growing power of Western-educated elites in the Chinese leadership is an important indicator of increased openness and political progress. Table 4 illustrates returnee representation in the current ministerial leadership by three top ranks, namely ministers, vice ministers, and assistant ministers. It is interesting and important

**Table 4**

*Returnee Representation in Ministerial Leadership (as of April 2010)*

<i>Position</i>	<i>Total number</i>	<i>Number of returnees</i>	<i>Percentage of returnees</i>
Full Minister	27	4	14.8
Vice Minister	148	30	20.3
Assistant Minister	18	7	38.9
Total	193	41	21.2

SOURCE: The author's database.

to note that the percentage of returnees rises as the ranks lower. Since the future full ministers will be likely chosen from current vice ministers and assistant ministers, who are usually five to 10 or 15 to 20 years younger than the current full ministers, it is likely that the representation of ministers with returnee backgrounds will significantly increase in the years to come. This projection is also supported by the fact that many executive vice ministers are returnees. Examples include Executive Vice Minister of Education Chen Xi (b. 1953, visiting scholar at Stanford University from 1990 to 1992; he was also a classmate of Vice President Xi Jinping at Tsinghua University in the late 1970s),



Executive Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Guangya (b. 1950, exchange student at the London School of Economics from 1973 to 1975 and visiting scholar at Johns Hopkins University from 1981 to 1982), Executive Vice Minister of Land and Natural Resources Lu Xinshe (b. 1956, visiting scholar in Germany from 1987 to 1988), Executive Vice Minister of Industry and Information Technology Xi Guohua (b. 1951, visiting scholar in the AT&T advanced program in the United States, 1990 to 1991), and Executive Vice Director of the State Population and Family Planning Commission Zhao Baige (b. 1952, Ph.D. from Oxford University, where she studied from 1985 to 1989).

The percentage of returnees working at the highest levels of party leadership is still small. In the 17th Central Committee of the CCP, formed in 2007, returnees occupied 10.5 percent of seats, 6.2 percent higher than their representation in the 16th Central Committee in 2002 (see Table 5). In contrast to the 15th Central Committee, in which most returnees were trained in the former Soviet Union or other Eastern European countries, an overwhelming majority of the returnees in the 17th Central Committee were educated in the West or Japan. These Western-educated returnees include several prominent decision-makers, including Wang Huning, secretariat member and director of the CCP's Central Policy Research Center (visiting scholar at University of Iowa and University of California, Berkeley, 1988 to 1989); Cao Jianming, procurator-general of the Supreme People's Procuratorate (visiting scholar at Ghent University of Belgium and the University of San Francisco, 1988 to 1990); Liu Mingkang, chairman of the China Banking Regulatory Commission (MBA, London University, 1987); Zhou Ji, former minister of education and current deputy party secretary of the Chinese Academy of Engineering (Ph.D. in engineering, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1984); and Lu Yongxiang, president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (Ph.D. in engineering, Aachen Industrial University, 1981). Partly due to the fact that a number of rising stars at the ministerial level are returnees, and partly because of the recent CCP policy to recruit more returnees to various levels of leadership, one can expect that returnee representation will continue to increase at the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP.

**Table 5**

*Returnee Representation in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committees of the CCP*

<i>Membership</i>	<i>16<sup>th</sup> Central Committee (2002)</i>			<i>17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee (2007)</i>		
	<i>Total number</i>	<i>Number of returnees</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total number</i>	<i>Number of returnees</i>	<i>%</i>
Full Member	198	9	4.5	204	17	8.3
Alternate Member	158	13	8.2	167	22	13.2
Total	356	22	6.2	371	39	10.5

SOURCE: The author's database.

Returnees usually serve in such administrative fields as education, finance, trade, and foreign affairs. To a great extent, returnees have already dominated these important areas.<sup>6</sup> For example, among the five top leaders of the Ministry of Science and Technology (minister and four vice ministers including the Party secretary), four hold Ph.D. degrees from Western countries and Japan. Of China's senior decision-makers in financial administration, most are returnees. In addition to the aforementioned Zhou Xiaochuan, other heavy hitters with returnee backgrounds include Jiang Jianqing, chairman of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (visiting scholar, Columbia University, 1995); Guo Shuqing, chairman of China Construction Bank (visiting scholar, Oxford University, 1986 to 1987); Xiao Jie, director of the State Administration of Taxation (visiting scholar in Germany, 1987 to 1989); Xie Fuzhan, director of the State Council's Research Office and former director of the State Statistics Bureau (visiting scholar, Princeton, 1991 to 1992); Liu He, deputy office director of the Central Financial Leadership Group (MPA, Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, 1994 to 1995); Yi Gang, vice governor of the People's Bank and new director of the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (Ph.D. in economics, University of Illinois, 1986); and Zhu Min, vice governor of People's Bank (MPA, Princeton University, 1988; Ph.D. in economics, Johns Hopkins University, 1993). The first four—Zhou, Jiang, Guo, and Xiao—also currently serve on the 17th Central Committee as members or alternates. Xie is a member of the 17th CCPI, Liu is often portrayed as “China's Larry Summers” by the media; Yi is a leading candidate to succeed Zhou Xiaochuan; and Zhu was recently appointed to be an advisor to the International Monetary Fund and is expected to be influential within the institution. Also, three newly appointed members of the Monetary Policy Committee of the People's Bank are all returnees: Zhou Qiren (Ph.D., UCLA, 2000), Xia Bin (visiting scholar, Japan Nomura Securities, 1983 to 1984), and Li Daokui (Ph.D., Harvard, 1992, and professor at University of Michigan, 1992 to 2009).

As the number of Western-educated returnees has increased in the Chinese national leadership, especially in some of the important areas such as finance, trade, science and technology, education, and foreign policy, more thoughtful and fact-based scholarly research on this distinct elite group would benefit students of Chinese politics both in China and abroad. One needs to ask whether the growing presence of these U.S.-educated Chinese policy-makers will lead them to better communicate with the outside world and keep abreast of international norms and standards, thus resulting in a more cooperative policy approach toward the United States in various domains.

#### *Career Paths, Leadership Experiences, and Political Associations*

Table 6 shows the promotion patterns of the 27 current ministers of the State Council in terms of their most recent prior position. Ten of them (37 percent) were promoted from the same ministry, and all of these promotions were from the position of vice minister. Another 10 leaders were transferred either from other ministries where they previously served as vice ministers or from the State Council's third-tier organizations, where they headed offices. Altogether almost three-fourths of the current ministers of the State Council were promoted from within the central government.

**Table 6**  
*Promotion Patterns of Current State Council Ministers*

<i>Promotion / transfer experience (from most recent prior position)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
From the same ministry	10	37.0
From another ministry	10	37.0
From provincial leadership	4	14.8
From a central party organ	1	3.7
From academic & research institutions	2	7.4
Total	27	100.0

SOURCE: The author's database.

Four ministers were transferred from the provincial leadership. State Councilor and Public Security Minister Meng Jianzhu was previously Jiangxi Party secretary; Minister of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission Yang Jing was Inner Mongolia's governor, Agriculture Minister Han Changfu was Jilin's governor; and Water Resources Minister Chen Lei was executive vice governor of Xinjiang. Han and Chen, however, both had previously served as vice ministers of Agriculture and Water Resources, respectively, prior to their provincial assignments. They now run the ministries with which they were already quite familiar.

Only one minister was transferred from a CCP central organ. Supervision Minister Ma Wen has advanced her career largely through party discipline work. She was deputy secretary of the CCDI, the position that she now continues to hold after being appointed as minister of supervision. Two ministers were promoted directly from leadership positions in academic and research institutions: Prior to their ministerial appointments, Science and Technology Minister Wan Gang was president of Tongji University in Shanghai and Minister of Health Chen Zhu was vice president of China's Academy of Sciences.

Table 7 exhibits the main work experience of the 27 current ministers. Based on their official biographies, the author has coded their experiences into 10 functional or administrative areas: provincial leadership, rural work, industrial work, foreign trade, finance, CCP organizational (personnel) work, propaganda, academic research, *mishu* experiences, and the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL) official experiences. The table shows that 11 ministers (41 percent) have had provincial leadership experiences. In addition to those aforementioned ministers who were directly promoted from the provincial leadership, several other ministers also served previously as governors, mayors, or in other top provincial posts. For example, Commerce Minister Chen Deming previously served as Shaanxi's governor; Transportation Minister Li Shenglin was Tianjin's mayor; Director of NDRC Zhang Ping was executive vice governor and deputy party secretary of Anhui; and Justice Minister Wu Aiying was deputy Party secretary of Shandong.

**Table 7**  
*Experience and Expertise of State Council Ministers*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Provincial experience</i>	<i>Rural work</i>	<i>Industrial work</i>	<i>Foreign trade/Affairs</i>	<i>Finance</i>	<i>Organizational work</i>	<i>Propaganda work</i>	<i>Academic research</i>	<i>Mishu experience</i>	<i>CCYL official experience</i>
Yang Jiechi				X					X	
Liang Guanglie										
Zhang Ping	X			X	X				X	
Yuan Guiren								X	X	
Wan Gang			X					X	X	
Li Yizhong			X							
Yang Jing	X	X				X			X	X
Meng Jianzhu	X	X					X		X	
Geng Huichang				X				X		
Ma Wen							X			
Li Xueju	X	X				X			X	X
Wu Aiyong	X	X								X
Xie Xueren		X		X	X				X	
Yin Weimin						X			X	
Xu Shaoshi		X	X						X	
Zhou Shengxian	X	X							X	
Jiang Weixin			X	X	X			X		
Li Shenglin	X		X	X					X	
Liu Zhijun			X						X	
Chen Lei	X	X	X					X	X	
Han Changfu	X	X			X		X	X	X	X
Chen Deming	X		X	X					X	
Cai Wu				X			X		X	X
Chen Zhu								X		
Li Bin	X						X		X	
Zhou Xiaochuan					X			X	X	
Liu Jiayi				X	X				X	

SOURCE: The author's database.

One-third of ministers had rural work experience and eight (30 percent) had industrial work experience. One-third had administrative experience in foreign trade and foreign affairs and six ministers (22 percent) had leadership experience in finance. Only three ministers had some sort of leadership experience in CCP organizational work, and five (19 percent) had work experience in propaganda. In addition to Wan Gang and Chen Zhu, who advanced their careers directly from academia, several others used to work in higher education or at research institutions.

As many as 20 ministers (74 percent) had *mishu* experience early in their careers, including serving as personal assistant, office director, assistant minister/assistant governor, or chief of staff. Some of them advanced their professional and political careers primarily through their work as *mishu*. For example, Director of the NDRC Zhang Ping served as a *mishu* in Anhui's provincial government office in the early 1980s, as an assistant governor of Anhui in the mid-1990s, and as deputy secretary general for the State Council between 2005 and 2008—three important periods in his career, each of which served as a stepping-stone for a far more important leadership position. Minister of Human Resources and Social Security Yin Weimin spent almost two decades of his career as a *mishu* or office director before assuming the position of vice minister in 2000. Some of these ministers served as *mishu* to top leaders. For example, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi served as a *mishu* and an English interpreter to Deng Xiaoping; Agriculture Minister Han Changfu served as a *mishu* to Premier Zhu Rongji on financial and macroeconomic policies; Minister of Land and Natural Resources Xu Shaoshi coordinated *mishu* work for Wen Jiabao from 1993 to 2007, first as a bureau-level rank *mishu* and then as a vice minister-level deputy secretary general of the State Council; and Civil Affairs Minister Li Xueju was a *mishu* to Song Defu when Song was in charge of the CCYL.<sup>7</sup> Although *mishu* turned political leaders can be quite capable, as in the cases of Premier Wen Jiabao and former Vice President Zeng Qinghong, the widespread phenomenon of former *mishu* rising to leadership positions reflects the important role of patron-client ties and political favoritism in elite recruitment in today's China.

Table 7 shows that five ministers (19 percent) had provincial and/or central leadership experience in the CCYL, which is significantly lower than the proportion of current provincial governors (52 percent).<sup>8</sup> Justice Minister Wu Aiyong, Civil Affairs Minister Li Xueju, Culture Minister Cai Wu, and Agriculture Minister Han Changfu belong to the so-called *tuanpai*, the leaders who advanced their careers in the CCYL provincial or central leadership in the early 1980s when Hu Jintao was in charge of the CCYL.<sup>9</sup> The relatively small representation of *tuanpai* among the State Council ministers reflects the fact that most of the leaders with CCYL backgrounds pursued careers in local administration (often in less developed inland regions) and CCP functional areas such as organization, propaganda, and the united front work, rather than in the leadership of economic and financial affairs.

Among the 27 ministers only one, Governor of the People's Bank Zhou Xiaochuan, can be identified as a princeling, a leader who comes from a high-ranking official background. By contrast, princelings are well represented in the Executive Committee of the State Council, as Vice Premier Wang Qishan, State Councilor Liu Yandong, and State

Councilor Ma Kai all come from high-ranking official families (vice minister or above). Five ministers are either members of the so-called Shanghai Gang (the leaders whose careers depended on the political network formed in Shanghai when Jiang Zemin was in charge, first in the city and then in the national leadership) or have strong ties to the Shanghai Gang. They include Public Security Minister Meng Jianzhu, Commerce Minister Chen Deming, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, Health Minister Chen Zhu, and Science and Technology Minister Wan Gang.

It is reasonable to argue that Hu Jintao's populist coalition (including primarily *tuanpai*) and Jiang Zemin's elitist coalition (including primarily princelings and the Shanghai Gang) maintain a balance of power in the State Council.<sup>10</sup> The strengths of the two coalitions, especially their leaders' expertise and administrative skills, seem to complement each other. In a broader sense, competing factions and coalitions will have to share power, now and in the near future, as the ruling Communist Party faces an increasing number of daunting challenges.

### Forecasting the Leadership Change of the State Council (2012–2013)

Table 8 (next page) provides the entire list of 35 senior leaders of the State Council with a focus on their age and career prospects after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012 and the National People's Congress (NPC) in 2013. Wen Jiabao and Hui Liangyu will surely step down from both the Politburo and the State Council. According to the current lineup, Li Keqiang will become premier and Wang Qishan will serve as executive vice premier and both will hold seats on the next Politburo Standing Committee. But this lineup could change anytime in the next two or three years because, as I will elaborate later in the essay, concerns have emerged in the Beijing political establishment that the premiership may be beyond Li's capacity and the executive vice premiership may not do justice to Wang's high caliber. Vice Premier Zhang Dejiang will likely obtain a seat on the next Politburo Standing Committee because he will probably be one of the three remaining Politburo members with longest tenure since the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2002.<sup>11</sup> It is expected that he will move from the State Council to head another leadership body.

All five state councilors will likely either retire or get promoted, as occurred with the state councilors in the first term of Wen Jiabao's administration. Unless the mandatory retirement birth year changes from 1944 to 1945 for the next central committee, State Councilor Liu Yandong will be among the candidates for the Politburo Standing Committee and may obtain the top post of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). State Councilor Ma Kai was considered for both vice premiership and Politburo membership at the last Party congress, but he received strong opposition from some in the political establishment, especially those from the NPC and top provincial leaders. It remains to be seen whether he will be able to overcome these obstacles in this upcoming round of political jockeying. It has been speculated, both in

**Table 8***Current State Council Members' Career Prospects after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012*

<i>Position</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 2012</i>	<i>Tenure since</i>	<i>Likely political standing after 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress</i>
Premier	Wen Jiabao	1942	70	2003	Retired
Executive Vice Premier	Li Keqiang	1955	57	2008	Remaining (PSCM) and promoted to Premier
Vice Premier	Hui Liangyu	1944	68	2003	Retired
Vice Premier	Zhang Dejiang	1946	66	2008	Promoted to PSCM, moving to another post
Vice Premier	Wang Qishan	1948	64	2008	Promoted to PSCM & Executive Vice Premier
State Councilor	Liu Yandong	1945	67	2008	Promoted to PSCM and Chair of CPPCC
State Councilor	Ma Kai	1946	66	2008	Promoted to Politburo and Vice Premier
State Councilor	Liang Guanglie	1940	72	2008	Retired
State Councilor	Meng Jianzhu	1947	65	2008	Promoted to Politburo, moving to another post
State Councilor	Dai Bingguo	1941	71	2008	Retired
<i>Minister/Chair of:</i>					
Foreign Affairs	Yang Jiechi	1950	62	2007	Remaining or promoted to State Councilor
Defense	Liang Guanglie	See Liang's State Councilor entry, above			
NDRC	Zhang Ping	1946	66	2008	Promoted to Politburo and State Councilor
Education	Yuan Guiren	1950	62	2009	Remaining
Science & Technology	Wan Gang	1952	60	2007	Remaining
Industry & Info. Technology	Li Yizhong	1945	67	2008	Retired
State Ethnic Affairs Comm.	Yang Jing	1953	59	2008	Promoted to Politburo and State Councilor
Public Security	Meng Jianzhu	See Meng's State Councilor entry, above			
State Security	Geng Huichang	1951	61	2007	Remaining
Supervision	Ma Wen	1948	64	2007	Promoted to Secretariat
Civil Affairs	Li Xueju	1945	67	2003	Retired
Justice	Wu Aiyong	1951	61	2005	Promoted to Secretariat
Finance	Xie Xuren	1947	65	2007	Remaining
HRSS	Yin Weimin	1953	59	2007	Remaining
Land & Natural Resources	Xu Shaoshi	1951	61	2007	Remaining or promoted to State Councilor
Environmental Protection	Zhou Shengxian	1949	63	2008	Remaining
HURD	Jiang Weixin	1949	63	2008	Remaining
Transportation	Li Shenglin	1946	66	2008	Retired
Railways	Liu Zhijun	1953	59	2003	Moving to another position
Water Resources	Chen Lei	1954	58	2007	Remaining
Agriculture	Han Changfu	1954	58	2009	Promoted to Politburo and Vice Premier
Commerce	Chen Deming	1949	63	2007	Promoted to Politburo and Vice Premier
Culture	Cai Wu	1949	63	2008	Remaining or promoted to State Councilor
Health	Chen Zhu	1953	59	2007	Remaining
SPFPC	Li Bin	1954	58	2008	Remaining
People's Bank	Zhou Xiaochuan	1948	64	2002	Moving to another position
National Audit Office	Liu Jiayi	1956	56	2008	Remaining

NOTES: **Shading** indicates members of the Executive Committee of the State Council. Comm = Commission; HRSS = Human Resources and Social Security; HURD = Housing and Urban-Rural Development; NDRC = National Development and Reform Commission; PSCM = Politburo Standing Committee Member; SPFPC = State Population and Family Planning Commission.

China and abroad, that State Councilor Meng Jianzhu will get a promotion. He seems to be a leading candidate for the next Politburo and will move on to another prominent position in the central or provincial leadership, although he may obtain a vice premiership. State Councilor and Minister of Defense Liang Guanglie and State Councilor Dai Bingguo are both expected to retire after the 2013 National People's Congress. If the above analysis is valid, out of the current 10 members of the Executive

Committee of the State Council, only two (Li Keqiang and Wang Qishan) or three (the third being either Ma Kai or Meng Jianzhu) will remain. The top leadership of the next State Council will consist largely of newcomers.

In contrast, ministerial leaders at the State Council may not encounter such a large-scale turnover. Table 8 shows that among 27 ministers only Liang Guanglie was not eligible for membership on the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee and thus he will surely step down from his position. Only four leaders will have exceeded the retirement age (65) as full ministers in 2012. They are Director of the NDRC Zhang Ping, Minister of Industry and Information Technology Li Yizhong (b. 1945), Civil Affair Minister Li Xueju (b. 1945), and Transportation Minister Li Shenglin (b. 1946). Zhang Ping may follow his predecessor Ma Kai's path of serving as state councilor and secretary general of the State Council for the new administration. Three Li's will likely retire to less important, symbolic leadership positions in the NPC special committee or the CPPCC. Two ministers, Railways Minister Liu Zhijun (b. 1953) and Governor of the People's Bank Zhou Xiaochuan, have to vacate their seats, not because of their age, but because they will have reached the 10-year term limit. Both of them are likely to be assigned to other senior positions in the central and provincial government.

While it may be beyond the scope of this essay to identify leading contenders for each and every one of these soon-to-be-vacated ministerial positions, it is necessary to discuss both the contenders in the current State Council for the next Politburo and the possible candidates for the Executive Committee of the post-Wen State Council.

#### *State Council Contenders for the Next Politburo*

Table 9 (next page) lists the top 14 State Council contenders for the next Politburo. Some of these leaders will remain in the post-Wen State Council, while some may move to head other leadership bodies and acquire membership in the Politburo Standing Committee, the Politburo, or the Secretariat. Li Keqiang and Wang Qishan should have no problem maintaining or obtaining seats on the Politburo Standing Committee in 2012. Liu Yandong and Zhang Dejiang also have a good chance to be promoted to the Standing Committee. Meng Jianzhu and Ma Kai are among the leading candidates to acquire Politburo seats, although Meng seems to have a better chance than Ma for the reasons explained above.

Among the eight ministers that stand a chance for further promotion, probably only two or three of them will be able to obtain seats in either the Politburo or the Secretariat. The order of their names does not necessarily reflect their political weight because it is not clear which minister(s) have advantage over others. The minister of the State Ethnic Affair Commission, Yang Jing, is Mongolian and previously served as governor of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region for five years. He is also younger than most of his peers in the State Council. Zhang Ping has followed a career path very similar to his two predecessors, Zeng Peiyan and Ma Kai. Both Zeng and Ma served as minister of the NDRC and then became vice premier or state councilor, and Zeng also served one term as a Politburo member before his retirement. Although close to the retirement age for minister-rank leaders, Zhang may be able to advance once more in 2012.



**Table 9**  
*Top State Council Contenders for the Next Politburo (2012)*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Current position</i>	<i>CC member status/ since</i>	<i>Prospects for next Politburo &amp; Secretariat</i>	<i>Main leadership experience</i>	<i>Factional identity</i>
Li Keqiang	1955	Executive Vice Premier	Full/since 15 <sup>th</sup> PC	Standing Committee	First Secretary of CCYL ('93-98), Henan Governor & Secretary ('98-04), Liaoning Secretary ('04-07)	Populist ( <i>tuanpai</i> )
Wang Qishan	1948	Vice Premier	Alternate/since 15 <sup>th</sup> PC	Standing Committee	Vice Governor of People's Bank ('03-04), Hainan Secretary ('02-03), Beijing Mayor ('03-07)	Elitist ( <i>princeling</i> )
Liu Yandong	1945	State Councilor	Alternate/since 15 <sup>th</sup> PC	Standing Committee	Secretary of CCYL ('82-91); Vice Director, CCP United Front (1995-2002), Director ('02-07)	Populist ( <i>tuanpai</i> , but also <i>princeling</i> )
Zhang Dejiang	1946	Vice Premier	Alternate/since 14 <sup>th</sup> PC	Standing Committee	Vice Minister of Civil Affairs ('86-90), Jilin Sec. ('95-98), Zhejiang Sec. ('98-02), Guangdong Sec. ('02-07)	Elitist
Meng Jianzhu	1947	State Councilor	Alternate/since 15 <sup>th</sup> PC	Politburo	Shanghai Vice Mayor & Deputy Secretary ('93-01), Jiangxi Secretary ('01-07)	Elitist (Shanghai Gang)
Ma Kai	1946	State Councilor	Full/since 16 <sup>th</sup> PC	Politburo	Dep. Sec. Genl., State Council ('98-03); NDRC Chairman ('03-08); Sec. Genl., State Council ('08-present)	Elitist (but also favored by Wen Jiabao)
Yang Jing	1953	Minister, State Ethnic Affairs	Alternate/since 16 <sup>th</sup> PC	Politburo	Sec., Neimenggu CCYL ('93-96); Governor, Neimenggu ('03-08); Vice Chair, United Front ('08-present)	Populist ( <i>tuanpai</i> )
Zhang Ping	1946	Minister, NDRC	Alternate/since 16 <sup>th</sup> PC	Politburo	Anhui Vice Governor ('96-03), Executive Deputy Secretary General of State Council ('05-08)	Unclear
Chen Deming	1949	Minister, Commerce	Alternate/since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC	Politburo	Mayor and Party Secretary, Suzhou ('97-02); Governor, Shaanxi ('04-06); Vice Minister of NDRC ('06-07)	Elitist
Zhou Xiaochuan	1948	Governor, People's Bank	Full/since 16 <sup>th</sup> PC	Politburo	Assistant Minister, MOFTEC ('86-91); Vice Governor, Bank of China ('91-96); Chair, CSRC (2000-02)	Elitist
Han Changfu	1954	Minister, Agriculture	Full/since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC	Politburo	Director, CCYL Rural Dept. ('90-?); Vice Minister of Agriculture ('01-03), Jilin Governor ('06-09)	Populist ( <i>tuanpai</i> )
Xu Shaoshi	1951	Minister, Land & Natural Resources	Full/since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC	Politburo	Director, Geological Bureau of Shenzhen ('91-92), Deputy Secretary General, State Council ('00-07)	Populist (Wen Jiabao's protégé)
Ma Wen	1948	Minister, Supervision	Full/since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC	Secretariat	Standing Member of CCDI (1997-2004), Deputy Secretary of CCDI (2004-present)	Unclear
Wu Aiyong	1951	Minister, Justice	Alternate/since 14 <sup>th</sup> PC	Secretariat	Shandong Vice Governor & Deputy Secretary (1993-2003), Vice Minister of Justice (2003-05)	Populist ( <i>tuanpai</i> )

NOTES: Shading indicates members of the Executive Committee of the State Council. CC = Central Committee; CCDI = Central Commission for Discipline Inspection; CCYL = Chinese Communist Youth League; CSRC = China Securities Regulatory Commission; Dep. = Deputy; MOFTEC = Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation; NDRC = National Development and Reform Commission; PC = Party Congress; PSCM = Politburo Standing Committee Member; Sec. = Secretary.

As China has become a global economic powerhouse, expertise and experience in finance and trade have become increasingly valuable leadership qualifications. Commerce Minister Chen Deming and People's Bank Governor Zhou Xiaochuan, and especially their patrons (former president Jiang Zemin and former vice president Zeng Qinghong) and supporters in the current Politburo Standing Committee (Wu Bangguo, Jia Qinglin, and Zhou Yongkang), may argue that their status as heavyweights in economic policy should earn them seats on the next Politburo. Chen's two predecessors, Wu Yi and Bo Xilai, both obtained Politburo membership after serving as commerce minister. But it is important to point out that neither Chen nor Zhou has scored particularly well in previous intra-Party elections or during the NPC confirmations. As discussed earlier, Chen is the only alternate member of the CCP Central Committee among all cabinet members (except two non-CCP members). All others hold full membership seats. As for Zhou Xiaochuan, rumors have been circling for a while that he would be demoted to a less crucial position in the central and provincial leadership. Nevertheless, it still seems likely that Zhou will be assigned to head a province or a major city along with a membership seat in the next Politburo.

Agriculture Minister Han Changfu and Land and Natural Resources Minister Xu Shaoshi could be dark horses at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Han Changfu advanced his political career from the CCYL and served as department head of the CCYL Central Committee for many years. He is, moreover, one of the very few *tuanpai* leaders who can claim expertise in the field of finance, as he served as deputy director of the Office of the CCP Central Small Leading Group on Finance and Economics headed by Premier Zhu Rongji in the 1990s. It should also be noted that both Han and Xu received strong support from Premier Wen when being appointed to their current positions. Both had previously worked under Wen for many years. In the case of Xu Shaoshi, he began to work as a junior colleague and a *mishu* to Wen in the early 1980s when both worked in the Policy and Law Research Office in the Ministry of Land and Resources. It will remain to be seen whether Wen will use his influence and power as a departing premier to help those leaders he favors—including Han and Xu as well as the aforementioned Ma Kai—rise to even more important positions.

Supervision Minister Ma Wen and Justice Minister Wu Aiyong are two rising female stars in China's national leadership. Ma is a top contender to take over the seat left by He Yong (b. 1940) in the Secretariat, representing the CCDI in this important day-to-day decision-making body of the CCP Central Committee. Wu has served on the Central Committee as an alternate since 1992, and her tenure in the CC is even longer than Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang. She is among the leading candidates for a seat in the next Politburo or the Secretariat.

With the exception of Ma Wen and Zhang Ping, who do not have strong factional identities, the other 12 leaders listed on Table 9 have all been known for their backgrounds as *tuanpai*, Wen's protégés, princelings, or members of the Shanghai Gang. They can be evenly divided in terms of political coalitions: six belong to the populist coalition and six to the elitist coalition. The most likely scenario is that two leaders will obtain Politburo Standing Committee Seats, four to six will be elected to the Politburo,

and two will be new members of the Secretariat. It remains to be seen whether the membership in each of these leadership bodies will remain evenly divided in the factional line as it is now. The factional balance of power is one of the most important political norms in present-day China and any forecasting of personnel changes in the next few years must take it into consideration.

*Candidates for the Next Executive Committee of the State Council*

While some of the current members of the State Council will move to other leadership bodies within the Party, the NPC, the CPPCC, and provincial administration, leaders from other institutions at both the central and provincial levels will take over some of the most important positions in the State Council in 2012–13. It is highly likely that all of the four provincial Party secretaries who currently serve on the Politburo (and who were born after 1945) will return to Beijing to serve in the central leadership. Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang (b. 1955), Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai (b. 1949), Shanghai Party Secretary Yu Zhengsheng (b. 1945), and Tianjin Party Secretary Zhang Gaoli (b. 1946) are among the top contenders for the Politburo Standing Committee. Since not all of them will be able to obtain a seat, one or two of them may end up serving as vice premier (and retaining a Politburo membership). For these four political heavyweights, a vice premiership would be more of a consolation prize after having lost out in the major political jockeying. However, if for some reason the Li Keqiang-Wang Qishan ticket as premier and executive vice premier changes (either Li surrenders the premiership for Wang and then moves to head, for example, the NPC, or Wang takes a top position in another leadership body), one of these four heavyweights may fill in the vacancy of executive vice premier.

Each member of the State Council Executive Committee is responsible for specific administrative areas.<sup>12</sup> The division, or a combination, of responsibilities bestowed upon vice premiers and state councilors varies from one administration to another, depending more on the individual leader's background than the position itself. Nevertheless, such a division in the current State Council may provide some clues as to the selection and composition of the next State Council. While patron-client ties and factional deal-making constitute the most crucial factors for the selection of these senior leaders in the Chinese government, a candidate's previous leadership experience and credentials also play a role, especially at the time when policy decisions in the government are increasingly professionalized or specialized.

For the post of vice premier responsible for agriculture and water resources (the post that Hui Liangyu currently holds), there are a number of strong candidates with substantive leadership experience in agriculture, including Director of the CCP United Front Work Du Qinglin (b. 1946), State Councilor and Public Security Minister Meng Jianzhu (b. 1947), Jilin Party Secretary Sun Zhengcai (b. 1963), Beijing Mayor Guo Jinlong (b. 1947), and Agriculture Minister Han Changfu (b. 1954). Du and Sun each previously served as minister of agriculture. Meng and Guo were also in charge of agricultural affairs in various provinces and cities early in their careers. Sun is a protégé of elitist coalition patrons such as Zeng Qinghong and Jia Qinglin and he is often

considered to be one of the two most promising rising stars in the sixth generation of leaders. The other is Inner Mongolia Party Secretary Hu Chunhua (b. 1963), a protégé of Hu Jintao and former secretary of the CCYL. If Hu Chunhua receives a seat in the Politburo and/or the Secretariat responsible for party affairs, Sun will have a good chance to obtain a Politburo seat along with the position of vice premier in charge of agriculture.

For the post of vice premier responsible for industry, energy, transportation and telecommunications (the post that Zhang Dejiang currently holds), Tianjin Party Secretary Zhang Gaoli, Shanghai Party Secretary Yu Zhengsheng, State Councilor Ma Kai (b. 1946), and Liaoning Party Secretary Wang Min (b. 1950) are the leading candidates. Each of these four leaders has administrative experience in some or all of these industrial sectors.

The main contenders for the post of vice premier responsible for trade and finance, which Wang Qishan currently holds, are Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang, Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai, Commerce Minister Chen Deming, Governor of the People's Bank Zhou Xiaochuan, and Chairman of the China Banking Regulatory Commission Liu Mingkang (b. 1946). If Wang Qishan serves as executive vice premier, as is expected, he may wish to continue to be in charge of financial and trade issues, which would thus change the administrative responsibility of this vice premier position. It is more likely, however, that Wang would find someone in the Executive Committee to assist him on this important economic area, especially someone who can be responsible for the strategic and economic dialogue with the United States and other major economic powers.

As for the state councilors, the possible successor to Liang Guanglie and the military leadership turnover at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress will be discussed in a later installment of this series. Dai Bingguo has been responsible for China's foreign policy and reports directly to President Hu Jintao. His upcoming departure signifies a major personnel change in China's foreign policy establishment. Two leading candidates to succeed Dai are Director of the CCP Central Office for Taiwan Affairs Wang Yi (b. 1953) and Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi, although one cannot eliminate the possibility that a new vice premier or state councilor with a strong political background, but relatively weak professional diplomatic experience, will take over Dai's job.

There are several possible candidates to replace Ma Kai (state councilor and secretary general of the State Council), including the aforementioned director of the NDRC Zhang Ping, Sichuan Party Secretary Liu Qibao (b. 1953), Minister of Land and Natural Resources Xu Shaoshi (b. 1951), and Deputy Secretary General of the State Council You Quan (b. 1954), all of whom have served as deputy secretary general of the State Council.

It is very difficult to speculate on who will succeed either State Councilor Liu Yandong (who is responsible for education, science and technology, culture, sports, the united front work, as well as Hong Kong and Macao affairs) and State Councilor Meng Jianzhu (who is responsible for public security, state security, and legal affairs). The

areas of responsibility for Liu's position may change drastically and give more weight to ethnic issues; and Meng's successor may be a provincial chief who does not have much prior experience in public security, which was true of Meng when he was appointed in 2007. There are many possible candidates for one of these vacancies: Director of the CCP Policy Research Office Wang Huning (b. 1955), Minister of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission Yang Jing, Justice Minister Wu Aiyang, Deputy Director of the CCP United Front Work Department Quan Zhezhu (b. 1952, Korean), Culture Minister Cai Wu (b. 1949), Beijing Mayor Guo Jinlong, Shaanxi Party Secretary Zhao Leji (b. 1957), Henan Secretary Lu Zhangong (b. 1952), Fujian Party Secretary Sun Chunlan (b. 1950), Shandong Party Secretary Jiang Yikang (b. 1953), and Qinghai Party Secretary Qiang Wei (b. 1953).

Of course, no one can predict with confidence who will fill these two vacancies, or others, because the factional deal-making is a very complicated process with multiple stages of consideration and behind-the-scenes negotiations, and deals are often cut at the last minute of the Politburo Standing Committee meeting. One thing is certain: the post-Wen State Council Executive Committee will consist of a large number of first-timers. In the Wen administration, only Li Keqiang was born in the 1950s, but the next Executive Committee will surely have more leaders from Li's age cohort. Their life experiences, educational credentials, foreign contacts, leadership skills, and worldviews differ profoundly from those of their predecessors. The nature of collective leadership and the dynamics of factional politics will also shape the way in which they formulate and implement policies. Collectively and individually, they will be thoroughly tested as they are now moving into the driver's seat of the national leadership.

## Final Thought: The Daunting Task for Xi and Li to Prove Their Capacity

One of the most crucial questions concerning the upcoming political succession in China is whether Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, the two designated successors to President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, respectively, can fit into these formidable roles. The fact that Xi Jinping did not obtain the much-anticipated vice chairmanship of the Central Military Commission last fall seems to reflect some concerns and reservations at least from certain top leaders or interest groups in the political establishment. Xi may well receive that seat this fall and become Hu's successor in two years, but it is fair to say that as with other prominent figures in the fifth generation, his capacity and leadership skills have yet to be tested. Some of Xi's remarks, such as his harsh comments accusing Western politicians of "interfering in China's domestic affairs" during his visit to Mexico last year, were characterized even by many Chinese bloggers as "undiplomatic" and "non-statesmanlike."<sup>13</sup>

In the case of Li Keqiang, there are fears that he has neither Zhu Rongji's political guts nor Wen Jiabao's charisma and human touch. Zhu and Wen were already known for their leadership talents and administrative achievements when they were vice premiers or even earlier in their careers. Wen Jiabao worked as a chief of staff for three secretary

generals of the CCP, two of whom were purged while he managed not only to survive, but to continue to rise. Even more remarkable is the fact that Wen never earned a reputation for betraying his bosses. His recently published article commemorating former secretary general Hu Yaobang, which disclosed that Wen has visited Hu's family every Spring Festival since Hu's death 21 years ago, establishes the premier's integrity and decency as a human being.<sup>14</sup> It is also interesting to note that Wen had gained broad administrative experience before becoming premier—coordinating power transitions, commanding the anti-flood campaign in 1998, supervising the nation's agricultural affairs, and overseeing financial and banking reform. Wen's talent as a superb administrator and his role as a coalition-builder explain his legendary survival and success. In particular, Premier Wen has been known, both at home and abroad, for his remarkably quick response during natural disasters and other crises. For instance, for each and every major earthquake that hit China over the past decade (including the periods when he was vice premier or a member of the Secretariat), Wen always arrived at the disaster area most promptly.

In contrast, Li has become known for his slow reaction to crises, including the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 and the Yushu earthquake early this year. One may argue that as a rising star, he needs to be cautious and avoid receiving too much publicity, but this was certainly not the case for other leaders such as Zhu Rongji and Wen Jiabao when they served as vice premiers, and Wang Qishan when he was a province-level leader. During Li's tenure as Henan's governor and party secretary, the province was notorious for its "AIDS villages," coal mine explosions, and widespread counterfeiting of various sorts of goods. In the case of AIDS villages in Henan, only after then-vice premier Wu Yi visited some of these villages did Li begin to acknowledge these problems. AIDS activists and NGOs have been very critical of Li's lack of action as a provincial chief.<sup>15</sup>

Li Keqiang, of course, has his strengths. His humble family background, low-profile personality, legal education, familiarity with economic issues, reputation for loyalty, strong political network (CCYL), and especially his provincial leadership experience will prepare him for the job. But it will be difficult for him to claim any major achievements as a provincial chief or vice premier. During his tenure as vice premier, he has been responsible for the structural reform of the major ministries and commissions (*dabuwei gai*), but this seems to have gone nowhere, which stands in sharp contrast to the substantial personnel changes and strong impact on the efficiency of the central government under Zhu Rongji's bureaucratic restructuring as vice premier. More recently, Li has taken a leadership role to handle the property bubbles in the country, and time will tell whether Li can gain political capital from this formidable task.

Also of concern is that, in the eyes of the Chinese public, Li may appear too "soft," even softer than Premier Wen Jiabao. It has been widely noted that the State Council has become less effective in controlling China's provinces, major cities, and even key state-owned-enterprises when it comes to economic policies. A recently circulating barb, that "the premier cannot control a general manager" (*zongli guanbuliao zongjingli*), reflects this serious problem of the administrative capacity of the central government.<sup>16</sup> Having a

new premier with such a soft image would not fit well with the need for a more efficient and effective central government to coordinate all of the various policy initiatives.

Not surprisingly, some in the Chinese political establishment argue that Li Keqiang should give up the premiership to Wang Qishan, who is known for his toughness, and instead take the position of chairman of the NPC, which is technically number 2 in the Politburo Standing Committee but attracts less of a spotlight.<sup>17</sup> The problem with this approach is that Xi and Wang, two princelings, would become the dual successors to Hu and Wen. Given the rising resentment against princelings and political nepotism, such an arrangement would resonate very badly with the Chinese public.

All of these delicate political calculations are probably in the minds of China's top leaders, including Hu, Wen, and the still-prominent patrons Jiang and Zeng. Such doubts and concerns almost surely create both a high degree of uncertainty and a sense of urgency to advance the interests of leaders' coalitions or factions at this time of "midterm jockeying" in Chinese elite politics.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of those ministers who are not CCP members.

<sup>2</sup> At present, the general secretary of the State Council concurrently serves as a state councilor, as do the minister of Defense and minister of Public Security.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.xinhuanet.com>. The information about the family backgrounds and patron-client ties of provincial chiefs is based on the author's interviews in China and non-official online media sources in the PRC, Hong Kong, and overseas.

<sup>4</sup> The exceptions are usually those heads of the agencies who concurrently serve as heads of the CCP organizations. For example, Wang Yi, director of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, concurrently serves as director of the CCP Central Office for Taiwan Affairs.

<sup>5</sup> For the data on provincial chiefs, see Cheng Li, "China's Midterm Jockeying: Gearing Up for 2012 (Part 1: Provincial Chiefs)," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 31 (Winter 2010), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> For more discussion on the growing influence and power of returnees in the foreign policy establishment and the financial leadership of the PRC, see Cheng Li, "Shaping China's Foreign Policy: The Paradoxical Role of Foreign-Educated Returnees," *Asia Policy*, no. 10, July 2010.

<sup>7</sup> For more information about their *mishu* work for top leaders, see Meng Jun, *Zhonggong mishubang* [The Chinese Communist Party's *mishu* cohort] (Hong Kong: Xiafeier International Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Li, "China's Midterm Jockeying (Part 1)," p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Yang Jing was CCYL secretary of a prefecture in Inner Mongolia in the early 1980s, and served as Inner Mongolia CCYL secretary from 1993 to 1996.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion of the elitist coalition and populist coalition, see Cheng Li, "China's Communist Party-State: The Structure and Dynamics of Power," in William A. Joseph (ed.), *Politics in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 165–191; and Cheng Li, "China's Team of Rivals," *Foreign Policy*, (March/April 2009): 88–93.

<sup>11</sup> Among the possible leaders who will remain in the next Politburo, only three began to serve on this leadership body since the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2002. They are Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng, and Liu Yunshan.

<sup>12</sup> For the division of work in the second term of the State Council under Premier Wen Jiabao, see [http://news.dayoo.com/china/news/2008-04/01/content\\_3348809.htm](http://news.dayoo.com/china/news/2008-04/01/content_3348809.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Vice President Xi Jinping made the following remarks during his visit to Mexico in 2009: "It seems there are some foreigners who've stuffed their bellies and don't have anything else to do but point fingers. First,

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China does not export revolution. Second, we're not exporting hunger or poverty. And third, we aren't making trouble for you. What else is there to say?" The quote was based on Joshua Cooper Ramo, "Hu's Visit: Finding a Way Forward on U.S.-China Relations," *Time*, April 8, 2010. Also see <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1978640-5,00.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Jason Dean, "Chinese Eulogy Bares Party Intrigue," *Wall Street Journal*, April 15, 2010. Also see <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304628704575185861979803430.html?KEYWORDS=JASON+DEAN>.

<sup>15</sup> Based on the author's interviews with NGOs and AIDS activists in Beijing.

<sup>16</sup> *Shijie ribao* (World Journal), April 19, 2010, p. A10.

<sup>17</sup> Nan De, *Zhulu Shibada* [The Competition for the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress] (Hong Kong: Art and Culture Press, 2010), p. 9.