



CHINA: DIFFERENCES IN POLITICAL THOUGHT AND STYLES MANIFESTED IN RUN UP TO 18TH CONGRESS

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As Chinese prepare to usher in the New Year of the Dragon — regarded as a symbol of good fortune and sign of intense power — on 23rd January this year, China will usher in major leadership changes at the Eighteenth Party Congress scheduled for this October. The leadership also confronts critical domestic issues that could threaten social stability. In fact, a postage stamp depicting a dragon issued earlier this month itself attracted criticism that the picture was needlessly fierce. Additionally, China's seventh Five Year Plan (2011-2015), which initiates a bold far-reaching attempt to slow down the economy and convert the country's export-led economy to one that promotes domestic consumption, is entering its second year.

Leadership transition is a particularly sensitive phase for all governments and, especially for dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. The winds of change in the form of *'jasmine revolutions'* blowing relentlessly across the Middle East, which have already seen the downfall of some long-entrenched regimes, provide cold comfort to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This is accentuated by the magnitude of the imminent changes. In the CCP's three most powerful bodies, almost 60 per cent of the Central Committee will be replaced, 14 of 25 Politburo (PB) members will relinquish office and 7 out of 9 members of the all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) will retire. The new leadership that emerges will steer China through this decade.

Growing societal restiveness makes the situation more sensitive. A Blue Paper issued by the prestigious Beijing-based Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) cautioned that people are losing confidence in the 'government's capabilities and integrity'. It added: 'masses in urban areas believe real estate

is a racket overseen by governments in collusion with real estate developers. People also have no trust in food and medicine safety'. Volatility is added by the rise in public discontent. There has been a steady rise in the number of mass protests and demonstrations since 2003. A confidential Tsinghua University survey estimated that last year 180,000 disturbances occurred across China, a sharp escalation from the 120,000 protests in 2008 and 60,000 in 2006. Suggestive of their serious concern, the CCP leadership and Public Security authorities enhanced this year's public security budget to over US \$ 95 billion, more than the national defence budget!

It is, however, the domestic political landscape that will present most of the major challenges for the Party in the coming decade. Different trends in political thinking have emerged and, over the past eighteen months, a degree of political ferment is discernible in the ideological straight-jacket that regulates present day China. While the more extreme views, widely criticized domestically as reflecting Western thinking, remain on the ineffectual outer fringes of Chinese society, other strains that deviate somewhat from the current mainstream of political thought are beginning to find resonance. The latter do not strike

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a discordant note with the majority of Chinese who, having grown up in the People's Republic of China and known only CCP rule, have a deep seated fear of *dongluan*, or chaos. For this overwhelming majority, as instilled by the Chinese Communist Party, the latter remains the guarantor of stability and, in the three recent decades, also of economic prosperity.

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and drifted away from purist communist ideology. A middle and upper class has emerged in China which today boasts 120,000 millionaires and 106 billionaires. Private businessmen are Party members and even Deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC). 70 of the Deputies to the Eleventh NPC session held in March 2011, actually accounted for a total wealth of US\$ 70 billion!

Veteran cadres will gather this summer at the seaside resort of Beidaihe to decide most top appointments, but the tradition of them deciding all Politburo (PB) and Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) appointments without wider discussion has got diluted after 'Long March' veterans disappeared from the scene. Most impacted are the Party *apparatchiks*, who traditionally attracted the notice of leaders either through work association, social interaction because of family connections, or during inspection visits. The Party *apparatchik* has, for the most part, risen to higher positions by sacrificing initiative and avoiding taking any action without prior approval of the higher Party authority. Persons aspiring for elevation to higher echelon bodies, however, now require support from the Party Central Committee. This has led to those aspiring for top positions adopting new methods of promoting themselves, or new styles of 'campaigning'. Most significantly, this time the 'princelings', who zealously guard their privacy and whose families wield immense political influence, have chosen to become politically active.

A few illustrative examples of differences in thought and styles of self advancement are highlighted.

Neo-Maoist sentiment, or 'Red Revival' as it is called, has quietly gained strength in recent years and elicited the tacit support of many 'princelings'. On Mao Zedong's 118th birth anniversary on December 26, 2011, for example, an estimated 17.5 million people visited his birthplace and crowds at his mausoleum in Beijing were double the usual. Some top echelon cadres have tapped in to this popular sentiment to shore personal credentials and garner support of the Party's 'Cultural Revolution-era' cadres who number over 30 million. Prior to the National People's Congress (NPC) session in March 2011, these 'neo-Maoist' websites severely criticised some liberal

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personages, including a couple of 'princelings', but were pointedly not shut down. An analysis of the content of twenty seven such identified websites reflects that this nostalgia for Mao has been fuelled by diverse factors including rampant corruption, unchecked inflation, efforts by liberal economists to dismantle State owned Enterprises

(SOEs), grabbing of arable lands of farmers by rural cadres, and perceived dilution of purist communist principles. There is a strong sense that the Party 'has lost its way' and been weakened.

1949-born Bo Xilai, veteran Party leader Bo Yibo's son who is a 'princeling' and Party Secretary of Chongqing Municipality, has positioned himself in the forefront of this 'Red' movement and initiated campaigns to popularize Mao-era revolutionary songs and sayings. He fortified his popular credentials by successfully unleashing 'strike hard' campaigns to eliminate triads and cleanse Chongqing Municipality. He is an aspirant for a position in the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) at the Party Congress in 2012.

Vice President Xi Jinping, who is tipped to succeed Hu Jintao at the next Party Congress in 2012, visited Mao's birthplace in Shao Shan at least thrice in the past eight months and visited Chongqing. Expressing support for Bo Xilai and the 'Red' movement, PBSC member and Security Czar, Zhao Yongkang and PBSC member in charge of Propaganda, Li Changchun, both due to retire at the next Congress, visited Chongqing as did the Director of the powerful General Political Department (GPD) of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Li Jinai. Hinting at the strength of these 'neo-Maoist' sentiments, reports claimed that all but three of the nine Politburo Standing Committee members attended the lavish 90th anniversary celebrations organized by Bo Xilai at Chongqing. Chinese President Hu

Jintao's speech at the Party's 90th founding anniversary also acknowledged the influence of the over thirty million members who joined the Party during the Cultural Revolution and Party entrants, or the *hong er dai*, born between 1960-70.

Wang Yang, a Communist Youth League (CYL) cadre who is 56 years old and Party Secretary of Guangdong province, opted for a different method of attracting favourable attention. In contrast to Bo Xilai, he has sought to project a more 'open' style of governance and

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urged the media to play a watchdog role. The 'peaceful resolution' of the four month-long (Sept-Dec, 2011) stand-off between authorities and peasants in Wukan village netted him a lot of praise and was lauded as an 'act of political courage in a tense situation' by the authoritative Party paper 'People's Daily'. Critics, however, allege that it was the presence of foreign journalists that prompted him to act in this manner. Whether Wang Yang will be able to maintain this 'style' of governance will be tested as protests spread through Guangdong province. If his conciliatory approach leads to more and bolder protests, he could be accused of soft-heartedness and strategic miscalculation endangering the Party's grip. The tough handling recently of a few demonstrations indicates there might be limits to 'gentle' handling. He also allowed Guangzhou, the provincial capital, in October 2009 to publish its budget for the first time. In contrast, Shanghai Party Chief Yu Zhengsheng, a 'princeling' and member of the PB who is also in line for promotion to the PBSC, at the same time preferred the orthodox style of administration and prohibited publication of Shanghai's provincial budget. Wang Yang is close to China's President Hu Jintao with whom he worked in Anhui and the former Vice Premier and veteran cadre, Wan Li, was his mentor.

A notable intervention in the emerging debate on the CCP's rights and prerogatives has been that by Hu Deping, a former Vice Minister of the CCP CC's United Front Work Department and son of former popular reformist CCP CC General Secretary Hu Yaobang. Hu Deping, a 'princeling' who at 69 years is out of the reckoning for any position, commented publicly on the contentious issue of land property rights in the context of the incident in Wukan village. He supported Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang's stance. He criticised as erroneous the thinking of many cadres on local property rights issues, which he described as among the most pressing issues since the period of opening up and reform. Asserting that the sale price of rural land should have the same value as state-owned land, he regretted this was not the case because many cadres believe that all rural land belongs to the state. These cadres, commenting on land belonging to the rural collective, say the collective belongs to the state and that land occupied by individual peasants also belongs to the collective, and the collective belongs to the state, which in turn belongs to the Communist Party. He attributed the forced demolition of rural housing to this distorted thinking. Hu Deping emphasised that the rural land collective system does not suggest that land cannot be transferred,

Lu De, son of Lu Dingyi the former Director of the CCP CC Propaganda Department and close associate of Deng Xiaoping, regretted that party and government officials spent a third of all government revenue on their own luxury cars, travel, healthcare, banquets and other perks. Recently leaked reports claim that the central government's expenditure on luxury automobiles is estimated at US\$ 15 billion!

nor that it cannot follow a business model, adding that this is integral to agricultural modernization. He felt that Guangdong would evolve a good resolution to these problems. This issue is, incidentally, being separately addressed by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao and a pilot programme was initiated a few years ago in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province.

Separately, Liu Yunshan, Director of the CCP CC's powerful Propaganda Department and Politburo member, has attracted favourable notice in the run up to the Party Congress because of the initiatives he took at work. Liu Yunshan's achievements include overseeing the dramatic rejuvenation of the Party's propaganda from a failing policy of control to an energetic policy aimed at actively shaping public discourse. He pro-actively managed the propaganda apparatus during the 2008 riots in Lhasa and successfully drove a wedge between the majority Han population and

Tibetans. The CCP CC's decision to adopt culture and propaganda as the sole item for its agenda at its sixth plenary session (Oct 18-24, 2011) was a singular success for Liu Yunshan. It demonstrated the support for him within the Party's incumbent top leadership. This was reinforced by Chinese President Hu Jintao's declaration, in a signed essay in the Jan 2012, issue of the Communist Party policy magazine 'Seeking Truth', that: "we must clearly see that international

hostile forces are intensifying the strategic plot of westernizing and dividing China, and ideological and cultural fields are the focal areas of their long-term infiltration". His assertion that "we should deeply understand the seriousness and complexity of the ideological struggle, always sound the alarms and remain vigilant, and take forceful measures to be on guard and respond", not only indicated that the major policy initiatives announced at the October plenum would continue through 2012, but that the tough measures introduced by the CCP CC Propaganda Department in the past months had Hu Jintao's approval. Vice President Xi Jinping reinforced this on Jan 4, 2012, by observing that ideological control and political education in universities needs to be strengthened. Liu Yunshan is a Communist Youth League (CYL) cadre reputedly close to Hu Jintao.

Quite unusually, General Liu Yuan, Political Commissar of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) General Logistics Department, espoused a sentiment which related not to the military but the Party's politics. Liu Yuan, appointed full General in 2009, is the son of former President Liu Shaoqi and a 'princeling'. He is tipped for elevation to the Central Military Commission this October and is close to

Vice President Xi Jinping. His essay in a book launched last May, asserted: 'the Party has been repeatedly betrayed by General Secretaries, both in and outside the country, recently and in the past.' The book advocated a 'New Left' to save China and the CCP.

Significant in the run up to the leadership changes imminent at the Eighteenth Party Congress is the initiative taken by the normally reclusive and publicity-shy 'princelings'. Their activism, though low-key, is reminiscent of the move by Chen Yuan, a 'princeling' and son of Chen Yun who was one of the 'Eight Immortals', to safeguard the state's assets (State-owned Enterprises) at a time when after the 1989 'Tiananmen event' the Party was perceived to be under threat. On the present occasion a group of 'princelings', of impeccable revolutionary pedigree and immense influence, reportedly gathered on October 6, 2011 at the China World Trade Centre in Beijing to pay tribute to those who ousted the infamous 'Gang of Four'.

The gathering pointedly expressed concern that the 'Party had lost its way'. Ye Xiangzhen, daughter of Marshal Ye Jianying who along with Deng Xiaoping ousted and incarcerated the 'Gang of Four', said "in today's China we are facing tremendous challenges that range from the rapid decline of moral standards, to poisonous and genetically modified food, to rampant official corruption". Lu De, son of Lu Dingyi the former Director of the CCP CC Propaganda Department and close associate of Deng Xiaoping, regretted that party and government officials spent a third of all government revenue on their own luxury cars, travel, healthcare, banquets and other perks. He added: "and yet we still call it the Communist Party and socialism." Recently leaked reports claim that the central government's expenditure on luxury automobiles is estimated at US\$ 15 billion! Ma Xiaoli, daughter of a veteran communist revolutionary and Head of the Party School Ma Wenrui, observed that "in the '80s when the

Party faced criticism we defended it and explained its actions, in the '90s we sympathised with the critics, but today we almost want to join them." Denigrating efforts to use "methods from the Cultural Revolution to solve the problems of contemporary China", these 'princelings' nevertheless felt that the younger generation "need another force to fight back and balance (those) voices".

A sizeable number of 'princelings' are expected to enter the PB and PBSC when these sentiments will probably find expression in official policy. Some of the other new entrants, having broken out of the mould of *apparatchiks*, will also be cadres with distinct views. It is anticipated that the new leadership is likely to be more uncompromising on matters relating to Party discipline, political education, the Party's grip over the PLA and minority nationalities issues.

Those present at the gathering hosted by Ye Xuanji, Marshal Ye Jianying's nephew described as a 'princeling' in his own right, included Ma Xiaoli, daughter of veteran communist revolutionary and Head of the Party School, Ma Wenrui; Ye Xiangzhen, daughter of Marshal Ye Jianying; Hu Deping, eldest son of late CCP CC General Secretary Hu Yaobang; Lu De son of former Director of the CCP CC Propaganda Department Lu Dingyi; and Xi Qianping, elder sister of Vice

President Xi Jinping. The children of former Party Chief Hua Guofeng, Mao's chief bodyguard Wang Dongxing and former Chinese President, CPPCC Chairman and one of the 'Eight Immortals', Li Xiannian, were also present. Many of them called for democracy, the rule of law and bringing the Party under supervision. Their assembly and views would appear to reflect the sentiments of many other 'princelings' and their elders. An interesting aspect of those assembled at the event is that all of them have close family ties to Vice President Xi Jinping.

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