

# Princeling Generals in China: Breaking the Two Career Barriers?

Bo ZHIYUE

*The term "princeling generals" in China refers to those military officers with the rank of major general and above who are the descendants of high-ranking Chinese Communist Party (CCP) military and civilian leaders of the first generation. Until very recently, these princeling generals were faced with two major barriers in their military and political careers: Many of them ended their military career in deputy positions, and very few of them ever entered the CCP Central Committee.*

*A new cohort of princeling generals has emerged recently. A few elite members of the cohort have broken through the first barrier and moved into positions as heads of military regions or their equivalent in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Some of them are also likely to break the second barrier and enter the 17th Central Committee in 2007.*

**KEYWORDS:** princeling generals; deputy position phenomenon; Central-Committee hurdle; 17th Central Committee; new cohort.

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Some of China's princelings, the descendants of high-ranking first generation Chinese Communist Party (CCP) military and civilian leaders, became generals in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet these princeling generals faced two major barriers in their military and political careers: first, they tended only to be appointed to deputy positions; second, they were excluded from the CCP Central Committee. In the twenty-first century, especially under the new leadership of Hu Jintao (胡錦濤), a new cohort of princeling generals appears to be breaking through these barriers: a few of them have been promoted to be chiefs of their units and it is likely that some of them will enter the CCP Central Committee at the 17th Party Congress in 2007.

### Princeling Generals in China

Princeling generals in China are military officers holding the rank of at least major general/rear admiral (少將) in the PLA. They are the descendants of military leaders who were awarded the rank of at least major general<sup>1</sup> between 1955 and 1964<sup>2</sup> (10 marshals, 10 senior generals, 57 generals,<sup>3</sup> 177 lieutenant generals,<sup>4</sup> and 1,357 major generals<sup>5</sup>), or of civilian leaders holding deputy provincial/ministerial rank before 1966.

<sup>1</sup>The PLA did not introduce ranks until 1955, and they were abolished in 1965 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Ranks were not reinstated until 1988.

<sup>2</sup>In 1955, China appointed 10 marshals, 10 senior generals, 55 generals, 175 lieutenant generals, and 801 major generals. See [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-06/30/content\\_1556923.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-06/30/content_1556923.htm).

<sup>3</sup>Two lieutenant generals—Wang Jian'an (王建安) in 1956 and Li Jukui (李聚奎) in 1958—were later promoted to the rank of general. See <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/29999/2808298.html>.

<sup>4</sup>Two major generals—Nie Heting (聶鶴亭) in 1956 and He Cheng (賀誠) in 1958—were later promoted to the rank of lieutenant general.

<sup>5</sup>Between 1955 and 1964, 558 senior colonels were promoted to the rank of major general. For details, see [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-08/17/content\\_1804216.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-08/17/content_1804216.htm).

Here, descendants include sons, daughters, nephews, nieces, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law.

There are a few individuals in this study who do not strictly fit the criteria. For example, the "general couple"—Major General Deng Xianqun (鄧先群, former director of the Mass Work Department of the PLA General Political Department [GPD], 總政治部群眾工作部) and Lieutenant General Su Qianming (粟前明, former deputy commander of the PLA Second Artillery Corps 第二砲兵)—are the half sister and brother-in-law of Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平)<sup>6</sup> and Major General Liang Biqin (梁必駁), a senior research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences (軍事科學院), is a cousin of Lieutenant General Liang Biye (梁必業, former political commissar of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences).

Also, several of the princelings' fathers were "patriotic generals" or "national heroes," rather than CCP generals. Rear Admiral Feng Hongda (馮洪達, former deputy commander of the PLA Navy's North China Sea Fleet) is the son of Feng Yuxiang (馮玉祥), a "patriotic general" who worked with the CCP; Major General Ma Guochao (馬國超, former deputy political commissar of the PLA Naval Air Force)<sup>7</sup> is the son of Ma Benzhai (馬本齋),<sup>8</sup> a "national hero." A few others, as will be discussed later, are children of either revolutionary martyrs or PLA leaders with a rank lower than that of major general by 1964.

Finally, this study has excluded a few cases in which the alleged princeling generals were not princelings at all. The most prominent example is Lieutenant General Dong Liangju (董良駒, former director of the General Office of the Central Military Commission [CMC], 中央軍事委員會). He was rumored to be the son of Dong Biwu (董必武), former vice president of the People's Republic of China (PRC), but that is not the

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<sup>6</sup>For a brief introduction to Deng Xianqun's family, see <http://shang.cnfamily.com/199706/ca22470.htm>.

<sup>7</sup>For an interview with Ma Guochao, see [http://www.gmw.cn/content/2005-02/08/content\\_179469.htm](http://www.gmw.cn/content/2005-02/08/content_179469.htm).

<sup>8</sup>For a brief biography of Ma Benzhai, see <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/3174254.html>.

case. Only one of Dong Biwu's children, Dong Liangyu (董良羽), served in the PLA, but he retired in 1993 at the age of 55 as a senior colonel.<sup>9</sup>

### "Deputy Position" Phenomenon

Many former princeling generals seem to have retired from the PLA having achieved only deputy positions (see table 1).<sup>10</sup> Out of fourteen lieutenant generals/vice admirals, eleven fall into this category:

- Li Lun (李倫), son of General Li Kenong (李克農), retired as a deputy director of the General Logistics Department (GLD, 總後勤部)<sup>11</sup>
- Su Qianming (Deng Xiaoping's brother-in-law) and Zhang Xiang (張翔, son of former defense minister, General Zhang Aiping 張愛萍) both retired as deputy commanders of the Second Artillery Corps
- Luo Dongjin (羅東進), son of Marshal Luo Ronghuan (羅榮桓), retired as a deputy political commissar of the Second Artillery Corps

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<sup>9</sup>For an interview with Dong Liangyu about his family and his career, see <http://www.china-bright.com.cn/gotone/g10/family.htm>.

<sup>10</sup>It is very important to make a distinction between positions and grades. In some cases, there are barely any differences. For instance, a deputy commander of a military region obviously has the grade of military region deputy leader (大區副職) and a commander of a military region has the grade of military region leader (大區正職). In other cases, however, the link between the position and the grade is not so obvious. For instance, deputy directors of the General Logistics Department (GLD) have the grade of military region deputy leader (大區副職), while deputy directors of the General Political Department (GPD) have the grade of military region leader (大區正職). This paper will clarify cases where there may be confusion about the distinction between positions and grades, but this study focuses on positions rather than grades.

<sup>11</sup>Li Lun's grade was that of a military region deputy leader (大區副職) since deputy directors of the GLD all have that grade and have to retire at 63. Lieutenant General Wen Guangchun (溫光春), former deputy director of the GLD, was born in October 1941 and retired at the end of 2004. For Wen's details, see <http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/common/dbxx.jsp?label=DB&id=102973&lx=RDDDB&pdmc=null>.



Table 1  
Former Princeling Generals

Name	Home/ Birth	Unit/ Title	Rank	Relative	Status
Chen Zhijian (陳知建)	Hunan	Chongqing Garrison/ Deputy Commander	Major General	Chen Geng (陳賡)	Retired
Deng Xianqun (鄧先群, female)	Sichuan/ 1935	GPD/ Department Director	Major General	Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平)	Retired
Deng Yousheng (鄧佑生)	1940	COSTIND/ Bureau Chief	Major General	Luo Ruiqing (羅瑞卿)	Retired
Ding Henggao (丁銜高)	Jiangsu/ 1931	COSTIND/ Director	General	Nie Rongzhen (聶榮臻)	Retired
Fang Jiangnan (方江南)	Hunan	Armed Police/ Political Department Director	Major General	Fang Qiang (方強)	Retired
Feng Hongdia (馮洪達)	Anhui	North China Sea Fleet/ Deputy Commander	Rear Admiral	Feng Yuxiang (馮玉祥)	Died
He Daoquan (何道泉)	Hubei/ 1935	NDU/ Vice President	Lieut. General	He Changgong (何長工)	Retired
He Jiasheng (賀捷生, female)	Hunan/ 1935	AMS/ Department Deputy Director	Major General	He Long (賀龍)	Retired
He Pengfei (賀鵬飛)	Hunan/ 1945	Navy/ Deputy Commander	Vice Admiral	He long	Died

Table 1 (Continued)

Name	Home/ Birth	Unit/ Title	Rank	Relative	Status
He Yi (賀毅)	Shaanxi	Armed Police/ Department Director	Major General	He Jinnian (賀晉年)	Died
Hong Bao (洪豹)	Anhui	Tianjin Garrison/ Deputy Commander	Major General	Hong Xuezhi (洪學智)	Retired
Hua Zhongliang (華鍾亮)	Jiangsu/ 1943	GAD/ Department Deputy Director	Major General	Song Shilun (宋時輪)	Retired
Li Lun (李倫)	Anhui	GLD/ Deputy Director	Lieut. General	Li Kenong (李克農)	Retired
Liu Taihang (劉太行)	Sichuan/ 1940	Air Force Academy/ Department Chair	Major General	Liu Bocheng (劉伯承)	Retired
Luo Bin (羅斌)	Hubei	Defense Ministry/ Office Director	Major General	Wu Xiuquan (伍修權)	Retired
Luo Dongjin (羅東進)	Hunan/ 1939	Second Artillery Corps/ Deputy Political Commissar	Lieut. General	Luo Ronghuan (羅榮桓)	Retired
Luo Jian (羅箭)	Sichuan/ 1938	GAD/ Department Deputy Political Commissar	Major General	Luo Ruiqing (羅瑞卿)	Retired
Mia Guochao (馬國超)	Hebei/ 1939	Navy Air Force/ Deputy Political Commissar	Major General	Ma Benzhai (馬本齋)	Retired
Nie Li (聶力, female)	Sichuan/ 1930	COSTIND/ Department Director	Lieut. General	Nie Rongzhen	Retired

Table 1 (Continued)

Name	Home/ Birth	Unit/ Title	Rank	Relative	Status
Peng Gang (彭鋼, female)	Hunan/ 1938	CMC/ Discipline Deputy Secretary	Major General	Peng Dehuai (彭德懷)	Retired
Qin Tao (秦濤)	Hubei	Beijing Garrison/ Deputy Commander	Major General	Qin Jiwei (秦基偉)	Fired
Su Qianming (粟前明)	1933	Second Artillery Corps/ Deputy Commander	Lieut. General	Deng Xiaoping	Retired
Su Rongsheng (粟戎生)	Hunan/ 1942	Beijing MR/ Deputy Commander	Lieut. General	Su Yu (粟裕)	Retired
Tan Dongsheng (譚冬生)	Hunan/ 1941	Guangzhou MR/ Deputy Commander	Lieut. General	Tan Zhenlin (譚震林)	Retired
Wang Jianghuai (汪江淮)	Anhui	NDU/ Professor	Major General	Wang Shaochuan (汪少川)	Retired
Wang Sumin (王蘇民)	Jiangsu	Central Guards Bureau/ Deputy Director	Lieut. General	Wang Zheng (王諱)	Retired
Xiao Xinghua (肖星華)	Hunan/ 1939	Armed Police/ Discipline Secretary	Major General	Xiao Ke (肖克)	Retired
Xu Yanbin (許延濱)	Hunan	Armored Forces Engineering Academy/ President	Major General	Xu Guangda (許光達)	Retired
Ye Xuanning (葉選寧)	Guangdong/ 1938	GPD/ Department Director	Lieut. General	Ye Jianying (葉劍英)	Retired

Table 1 (Continued)

Name	Home/ Birth	Unit/ Title	Rank	Relative	Status
Ye Zhengda (葉正大)	Guangdong	COSTIND/ Deputy Director	Lieut. General	Ye Ting (葉挺)	Retired
Zhang Xiang (張翔)	Sichuan/ 1943	Second Artillery Corps/ Deputy Commander	Lieut. General	Zhang Aiping (張愛萍)	Retired
Zhang Xiaoyang (張小陽)	Hunan/ 1941	PLA Luoyang Foreign Languages Institute/ President	Major General	Zhang Zhen (張震)	Retired
Zhang Xuedong (張學東)	Hunan/ 1934	COSTIND/ Deputy Director	Lieut. General	Zhang Shuzhi (張樹芝)	Retired
Zhang Zhenqian (張振乾)	Hunan/ 1934	GSH/ Bureau Chief	Major General	Zhang Zhen	Retired
Zhong Jiafei (鍾嘉飛)	Guangxi	Guangxi Military District	Major General	Zhong Fuxiang (鐘夫翔)	Retired
Zhou Borong (周伯榮)	Anhui/ 1945	Navy/ Deputy Chief of Staff	Rear Admiral	Zhou Fatian (周發田)	Retired
Zhou Erjun (周爾鈞)	Zhejiang	NDU/ Political Department Director	Lieut. General	Zhou Enlai (周恩來)	Retired

Sources: Author's database.

Acronyms: **AMS**: Academy of Military Sciences; **CMC**: Central Military Commission; **COSTIND**: Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense; **GAD**: General Armament Department; **GLD**: General Logistics Department; **GPD**: General Political Department; **GSH**: General Staff Headquarters; **MR**: Military Region; **NDU**: National Defense University.



- Tan Dongsheng (譚冬生), son of former Vice Premier Tan Zhenlin (譚震林), retired as a deputy commander of the Guangzhou Military Region (廣州軍區)
- He Daoquan (何道泉), son of He Changgong (何長工), retired as vice president of the National Defense University
- Wang Sumin (王蘇民), son of a former deputy chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Wang Zheng (王諍), retired as a deputy director of the Central Guards Bureau
- Zhang Xuedong (張學東) (son of Major General Zhang Shuzhi 張樹芝) and Ye Zhengda (葉正大, son of Ye Ting 葉挺) both retired as deputy directors of the Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (COSTIND, 國防科學技術工業委員會)

Vice Admiral He Pengfei (賀鵬飛), son of Marshal He Long (賀龍), died in 2001 at the tender age of 56. He was a deputy commander of the PLA Navy.

The case of Lieutenant General Su Rongsheng (粟戎生), son of Senior General Su Yu (粟裕),<sup>12</sup> is noteworthy. Su Rongsheng began his "military career" in 1943 when he was only one year old. His military training began with swimming lessons at the age of two when his father dropped him into a stream, and at the age of five his father gave him a pistol and began teaching him to shoot.<sup>13</sup> After graduating from the Harbin Institute of Military Engineering (哈爾濱軍事工程學院, "Hajungong") in 1966, Su was sent by his father to the border area in Yunnan Province (雲南省), where he started his career from scratch. Three years later, when his troops were transferred to the interior, his father sent him to the Sino-Soviet border where military clashes were most likely at the time. He is one of a very few Hajungong graduates who worked their way up through

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<sup>12</sup>[http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2005-08/11/content\\_270869.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2005-08/11/content_270869.htm).

<sup>13</sup>He Pin (何頻) and Gao Xin (高新), *Zhonggong taizidang* (CCP princes) (Toronto: Canada Mirror Books, 1992), 359-66. See also <http://www.zbnews.net/zhuanti/20050526tj/tj52.htm>.

the ranks, serving as squad leader, platoon commander, deputy company commander, company commander, regiment commander, division commander, group army chief of staff, group army commander, and eventually deputy commander of the Beijing Military Region (北京軍區)<sup>14</sup> in November 1997.<sup>15</sup> As a group army (集團軍) chief of staff with the grade of army deputy leader (副軍), he was awarded the rank of major general when ranks were reinstated in 1988. Although he was promoted to the grade of military region deputy leader in November 1997, he did not receive the rank of lieutenant general until 1999. He served as deputy commander of the Beijing Military Region for eight years until his retirement in December 2005.<sup>16</sup>

This "deputy position" phenomenon is also evident among princeling generals with the rank of major general/rear admiral. Some notable examples are as follows:

- Hong Bao (洪豹), son of General Hong Xuezhi (洪學智), retired as deputy commander of the Tianjin Garrison (天津衛戍區)
- Chen Zhijian (陳知建), son of Senior General Chen Geng (陳賡), retired as deputy commander of the Chongqing Garrison (重慶衛戍區)<sup>17</sup>
- Ma Guochao, son of Ma Benzai, retired as a deputy commander of the PLA Naval Air Force
- Zhou Borong (周伯榮), son of Major General Zhou Fatian (周發田), retired as deputy chief of staff of the PLA Navy<sup>18</sup>
- Luo Jian (羅箭), son of Senior General Luo Ruiqing (羅瑞卿),

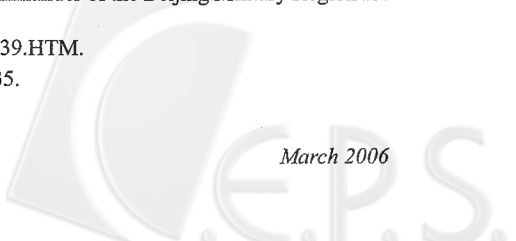
<sup>14</sup>He was one of four or five deputy commanders of the Beijing Military Region at the time.

<sup>15</sup>[http://www.lovenudt.com/biography/general/list/040919\\_surongsheng.htm](http://www.lovenudt.com/biography/general/list/040919_surongsheng.htm).

<sup>16</sup>A widely circulated story on the Internet has it that Su Rongsheng, son of an ever-victorious general, met his Waterloo in 1985 while he was directing a division in his capacity of chief of staff of the 67th Army in the war against Vietnam. However, this story does not explain why he had to stay in the position of deputy commander of the Beijing Military Region for eight years.

<sup>17</sup><http://hlj.rednet.com.cn/Articles/2004/10/627839.HTM>.

<sup>18</sup><http://www.ahxf.gov.cn/shownew.asp? ID=5535>.



retired as a deputy political commissar of the General Armament Department's (GAD, 總裝備部) second-level Logistics Department<sup>19</sup>

- Luo Jian's colleague, Hua Zhongliang (華鍾亮), son-in-law of General Song Shilun (宋時輪), retired as a deputy director of the GAD's second-level Logistics Department<sup>20</sup>
- Feng Hongda, son of Feng Yuxiang, probably died while he was a deputy commander of the PLA Navy's North China Sea Fleet

Major General Qin Tao (秦濤), son of a former defense minister, General Qin Jiwei (秦基偉),<sup>21</sup> presents a unique case. He was removed from office as deputy commander of the Beijing Garrison (北京衛戍區) due to an incident in his jurisdiction. On September 20, 1994, ten days before the 55th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, Lieutenant Tian Mingjian (田明建), a deputy commander of 12th Company, 3rd Division, Beijing Garrison, first killed four leaders (including the political commissar) of his regiment and injured a number of others. He then took to the streets killing dozens of people, including an Iranian diplomat and his son, and injuring many others.<sup>22</sup>

As a result of this tragic incident, the Beijing Garrison leadership was reshuffled. He Changgong's son, Lieutenant General He Daoquan, who was a deputy commander of the Beijing Military Region and concurrently commander of the Beijing Garrison, was demoted to be a deputy chief of staff of the region. He was replaced by Major General Liu Fengjun (劉逢君), a deputy chief of staff of the Beijing Military Region at the time. In

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<sup>19</sup>For an interview with Luo Jian, see <http://www.zbnews.net/zhuanti/20050526tj/tj43.htm>. Luo Ruiqing named his three sons Luo Jian, Luo Yu (羅宇), and Luo Huan (羅寰). He was hoping that China would produce its own rockets (箭, *huojian*), spaceships (宇, *yu*), and atomic bombs (寰, *huan*).

<sup>20</sup>[http://www.js.xinhuanet.com/zhuannlan/2005-06/20/content\\_4474041.htm](http://www.js.xinhuanet.com/zhuannlan/2005-06/20/content_4474041.htm).

<sup>21</sup>Qin Jiwei was awarded the rank of lieutenant general in 1955 and general in 1988 while he was defense minister. For his biography, see <http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/zhuanti/208078.htm>.

<sup>22</sup>For details of the Tian Mingjian incident, see <http://www.beiming.info/html/88166.html>.

addition, Major General Zhang Baokang (張寶康), who was born in 1941 in Zhejiang Province (浙江省),<sup>23</sup> lost his position as political commissar of the Beijing Garrison and was demoted to deputy director of the Political Department of the Nanjing Military Region (南京軍區). Major General Qin Tao was removed from his position as a deputy commander of the Beijing Garrison, and his career probably ended there.<sup>24</sup>

### The Central Committee Hurdle

The second impression one may get from table 1 is that few of the princelings have ever made it on to the CCP Central Committee. There are only two exceptions. One is Ding Henggao (丁衡高, son-in-law of Marshal Nie Rongzhen 聶榮臻 and husband of Lieutenant General Nie Li 聶力). He is exceptional in three senses, being the only full general in the group, the only leader (head of the Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense), and the only princeling to have served on several CCP central committees. A native of Nanjing, General Ding was a renowned scientist. He became an assistant research fellow in the Chinese Academy of Sciences (中國科學院) in 1952 after graduating from the School of Engineering, Nanjing University. He later studied in the Soviet Union, at the Leningrad Institute of Precision Machinery and Optical Instruments, between 1957 and 1961. Over the next 23 years, Ding was involved in the research, design, and testing of strategic missiles and satellites. In 1985, he was appointed head of the Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense. In September of the same year, he was elected as an alternate member of the 12th Central Committee. He was a member of both the 13th and 14th central committees.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup>For his biography, see [http://www.hzqz.com/intro/bnxs4\\_intro.asp](http://www.hzqz.com/intro/bnxs4_intro.asp).

<sup>24</sup><http://www.beiming.info/html/88166.html>.

<sup>25</sup>Shen Xueming (沈學明) and Zheng Jianying (鄭建英), eds., *Zhonggong diyijie zhi dishi-wujie zhongyang weiyuan* (The CCP Central Committee members from the first through the fifteenth central committee) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2001), 4-5.

The second exception is He Daoquan. Interestingly, He's father, He Changgong (1900-87), was a prominent communist revolutionary from Hunan Province (湖南省), a former vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, 中國人民政治協商會議) who never made it to the CCP Central Committee.<sup>26</sup> He Changgong was four years older than Deng Xiaoping and joined the CCP two years before Deng. He worked closely with Mao Zedong (毛澤東) in the early years of Mao's military and political career. He was one of the three designers of the Red Army's first military flag,<sup>27</sup> he participated in the Autumn Harvest Uprising (秋收暴動) of 1927 under Mao's leadership, and he helped Mao bring a local military force (in reality, bandits) in Jinggangshan (井岡山) under the leadership of Wang Zuo (王佐) into the Red Army in 1928.<sup>28</sup> He Changgong was one of the most important military leaders of the Red Army at the time. He was Party representative of the 28th Regiment, the 4th Army of the Red Army in 1928, Party representative of the 32nd Regiment in 1929, commander of the 8th Army of the Red Army and member of the General Front Committee of the 1st Route Army of the Red Army in 1930, and political commissar of the 13th Army, 5th Army Corps of the Red Army in 1932. He participated in all five anti-military campaigns as well as the subsequent Long March. His military career stagnated after 1938 when he was appointed provost of the Anti-Japanese University (抗大, Kangda).

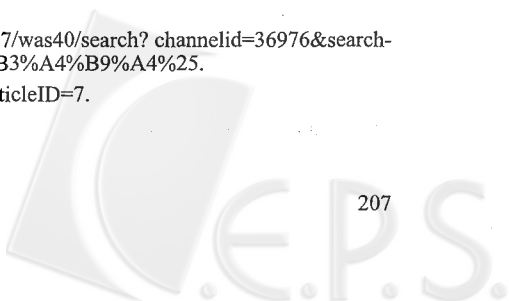
In contrast, Deng's military career took off in 1938: he became political commissar of the 129th Division in 1938, Party secretary of the Taihang Bureau (太行局) of the CCP Central Committee in 1942, acting secretary of the North Bureau (北方局) of the CCP Central Committee in charge of military affairs of the 8th Route Army in 1943, a member of the CCP's 7th Central Committee in 1945, secretary of the General Front

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<sup>26</sup>For his biography, see <http://202.106.161.5:7777/was40/search?channelid=36976&searchword=%B1%EA%CC%E2=%25%BA%CE%B3%A4%B9%A4%25>.

<sup>27</sup>[http://url.xiushui.net/qg/Article\\_Show.asp?ArticleID=7](http://url.xiushui.net/qg/Article_Show.asp?ArticleID=7).

<sup>28</sup><http://szlib.szptt.net.cn/jgs/wj5.htm>.



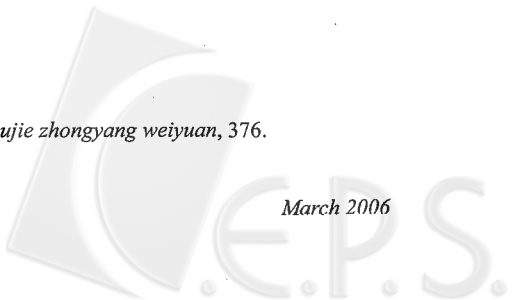
Committee of the Huaihai military campaign (淮海戰役) in 1948, first secretary of the Southwest Bureau (西南局) of the CCP Central Committee in 1949-50, member of the Politburo in 1955, and standing member of the Politburo and general secretary of the CCP in 1956.

It is not clear why Mao did not use He Changgong in his military campaigns of the late 1930s and 1940s. He was involved in military education first in Yan'an (延安) and later in Jilin Province (吉林省). His absence from substantial military campaigns between 1938 and 1949 was in sharp contrast to his active involvement in the late 1920s and early 1930s. He never made it on to the CCP Central Committee, even as an alternate member, and his positions in the central government were mostly deputy positions. He was vice minister (but also acting minister) of heavy industries, vice minister of geology, vice president of the PLA Military and Political University, vice president of the PLA Military Institute, and vice chairman of the CPPCC National Committee.

It seems that his son, He Daoquan, reached a higher position than his father did in the PLA. He Daoquan joined the PLA at the age of 16 in 1951, and over the next 36 years, he climbed the ladder of success from platoon commander, through staff officer (*canmou* 參謀) at various levels, to an army commander. At the 13th Party Congress in November 1987, he was elected as an alternate member of the Central Committee. When ranks were reinstated in 1988, he was awarded the rank of major general. At the age of 53, He Daoquan's future looked bright. Although he failed to get a seat on the 14th Central Committee in 1992, he was nevertheless promoted to be a deputy commander of the Beijing Military Region and concurrently commander of the Beijing Garrison in 1993.<sup>29</sup> The above-mentioned Tian Mingjian incident ended his political career. He later retired as vice president of the National Defense University with the rank of lieutenant general.

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<sup>29</sup>Shen and Zheng, *Zhonggong diyijie zhi dishiwujie zhongyang weiyuan*, 376.



## The "Red Family" Background: Asset or Liability?

Their "Red family" background has often proved to be an asset for the princeling generals. Although future sons- and daughters-in-law of first generation CCP leaders may have different individual stories, direct descendants of the revolutionary leaders benefited from their status as princelings in at least two ways.

First, it was easier for them to join the PLA than it was for the children of ordinary families. Some princelings saw their fathers as role models and they wanted to follow in their footsteps and make their own way in the military. This was the case for Lieutenant General Fan Xiaoguang (范晓光), son of General Wang Ping (王平), for example.<sup>30</sup> For some princelings, their family background helped them avoid being sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, and enabled them to join the PLA instead. Liu Yazhou (刘亚洲), for instance, was sent to the PLA by his father, Liu Jiande (刘建德), who was a deputy political commissar in a PLA division at the time.

The second benefit was that princelings had easier access to Hajungong, which was established in 1953.<sup>31</sup> Senior General Chen Geng was the founding president of Hajungong, and princelings constituted a major source of students. At a meeting of the Preparatory Committee for Hajungong in 1952, Marshal Chen Yi (陈毅), a vice premier at the time, called for CCP leaders to support Senior General Chen Geng by sending their children to Hajungong.<sup>32</sup> As a result, many princelings were later enrolled there. Out of ten marshals, seven had children or grand-children trained at Hajungong, and six out of ten senior generals sent their children there.<sup>33</sup> Chen Danhui's (陈丹淮) case is illustrative. When he was ad-

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<sup>30</sup><http://dcw.435000.com/html/1/2005/12/news15579.html>.

<sup>31</sup>For details, see Teng Xuyan (滕敘究), *Hajungong zhuan* (The history of the Harbin Institute of Military Engineering), three volumes (Changsha: Hunan keji chubanshe, 2003).

<sup>32</sup>"Hajungong' jishi" ("哈軍工"紀實, The story of "Hajungong"), <http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/zhuanti/181418.htm>.

<sup>33</sup><http://www.chinanews.com.cn/n/2003-02-23/26/275317.html>.

mitted to Hajungong in 1961,<sup>34</sup> Chen Yi was so happy at the news that he dedicated a poem to him.<sup>35</sup>

Among the thirty-seven former princeling generals identified in table 1, twelve are Hajungong graduates. They are Chen Zhijian, Deng Xianqun, Hua Zhongliang, Liu Taihang (劉太行), Luo Dongjin, Peng Gang (彭鋼), Su Qianming, Su Rongsheng, Wang Sumin, Xu Yanbin (許延濱), Ye Xuan-ning (葉選寧), and Zhang Xiang.

Princeling generals are also likely to have joined the Party earlier and been promoted faster. Generally speaking, sons-in-law and sons of the first generation leaders were promoted for different reasons: sons-in-law mostly for their own talents and sons mostly for their connections.<sup>36</sup> For example, among the former princeling generals, there are five sons- or brothers-in-law of leaders:

- Ding Henggao, son-in-law of Marshal Nie Rongzhen
- Su Qianming, brother-in-law of Deng Xiaoping
- Luo Bin (羅斌), son-in-law of Wu Xiuquan (伍修權)
- Deng Yousheng (鄧佑生), son-in-law of Senior General Luo Ruiqing
- Hua Zhongliang, son-in-law of General Song Shilun

These five are recognized as outstanding professionals in their own right. This enabled them to win the hearts of "princesses" and the endorsement of "royal" families (especially the mothers). Hua Zhongliang, for instance, was the first military man from the city of Wuxi (無錫) to undertake nuclear research. A graduate of Hajungong, Hua was an outstanding student and a distinguished nuclear scientist. He later married General Song Shilun's daughter and was promoted to be a deputy director of the

<sup>34</sup>[http://www.chinaedunet.com/jcyy/cgjj/2005/4/content\\_2178.shtml](http://www.chinaedunet.com/jcyy/cgjj/2005/4/content_2178.shtml).

<sup>35</sup>Chen Yi, "Shi Danhuai" (示丹淮, A poem to Danhuai), <http://past.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/252/6165/6169/20010821/540568.html>.

<sup>36</sup>No such comparison can be made of daughters-in-law and daughters. Among the former princeling generals, the only women are two daughters and one niece.



GAD's Logistics Department in the PLA.<sup>37</sup>

The sons are more likely to get promoted because of their family ties. One great example is He Pengfei, son of Marshal He Long. He Pengfei, born in 1945, joined the CCP in 1965 when he was a student at Qinghua University (清華大學). Due to his family background, he was imprisoned briefly in 1970 during the Cultural Revolution, but with the help of his father's friends, he joined the PLA in 1977 and rose rapidly. He was awarded the rank of rear admiral when ranks were reinstated in 1988 and was appointed a deputy commander of the PLA Navy in 1992.<sup>38</sup> He was promoted much faster than many officers with much longer military careers.

The career of General Cao Gangchuan (曹剛川), currently defense minister and vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, for instance, provides a sharp contrast to that of He Pengfei. Cao joined the PLA in 1954 and the CCP in 1956. He studied in the Soviet Union for seven years (November 1956-October 1963) and served as an assistant in the GLD's Armament Department for twelve years.<sup>39</sup> By 1977, Cao had risen to a regiment-grade staff member position in this department. It took him 23 years, including his seven years of study in the Soviet Union, to get to this position. He Pengfei, however, was appointed as a staff member with the same grade in the same office on his very first day in the PLA. From then on, Cao's and He's careers ran in parallel. They were both promoted to be deputy section heads in 1980 and to be deputy department directors in 1982. In February 1986, He was appointed as director of the GLD's Armament Department, while Cao remained a deputy director of the Armament Department.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Hua was a native of Xingzhu Village, Nanzhan Township, Binhu District, Wuxi City, Jiangsu Province (江蘇省無錫市濱湖區南站鎮興竹村). <http://www.wxrb.com/rjxz/wxsc/wxmr/gsl116.htm>.

<sup>38</sup><http://www.pladaily.com.cn/gb/pladaily/2001/04/05/20010405001062.html>.

<sup>39</sup>[http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2002-01/21/content\\_246248.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2002-01/21/content_246248.htm).

<sup>40</sup>For details, see Gao Xin (高新), *China's Top Leaders: Bios of China's Politburo Members* (in Chinese), 2 volumes (Carle Place, N.Y.: Mirror Books, 2003), 2:722-24.

Their "Red family" background could also be a liability for the princeling generals. First, fear of accusations of nepotism meant that they were usually kept in deputy positions. Second, they mostly failed to enter the CCP Central Committee because of the bad reputation gained by princelings in general in the 1980s and 1990s. When most veteran leaders were rehabilitated (posthumously in some cases) after the Cultural Revolution, their offspring took advantage of their restored social status and reaped huge political and economic benefits. As a result, their reputation in society suffered. Thus deputies to the Party congresses tended to reject the names of princelings when they came up as candidates for the Central Committee. Of those that did become alternate members of the 15th and 16th central committees, several came bottom of the poll.<sup>41</sup> For example, Deng Pufang (鄧朴方) (son of Deng Xiaoping) and Xi Jinping (習近平) (son of Xi Zhongxun, 習仲勳) ranked 150th and 151st out of 151 alternate members of the 15th Central Committee. Five years later, Deng Pufang ranked 154th out of 158 alternate members in the 16th Central Committee.<sup>42</sup>

### Persistence of the Barriers

It is evident that the two career barriers identified above have persisted for the princeling generals who are still on active duty (see table 2). Until very recently, the "deputy position" phenomenon still appeared to be prevalent among those who had reached the rank of lieutenant general/vice admiral:

- Wu Shengli (吳勝利), a deputy commander of the Guangzhou Military Region and concurrently commander of the South China Sea Fleet until July 2004, when he was promoted to be a deputy

<sup>41</sup>For a systematic study of princelings on the 16th Central Committee, see Zhiyue Bo, "The 16th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: Formal Institutions and Factional Groups," *Journal of Contemporary China* 39, no. 13 (May 2004): 223-56.

<sup>42</sup>[http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2002-10/29/content\\_629567.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2002-10/29/content_629567.htm).

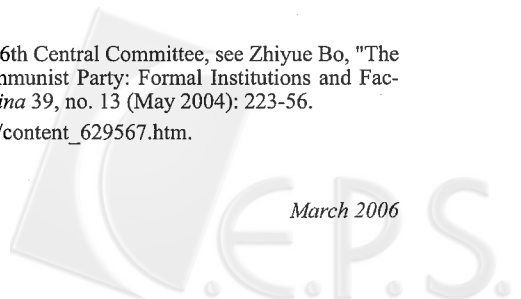


Table 2  
Current Princeling Generals in the PLA

Name	Home/ Birth	Unit/ Title	Rank	Relative	Career prospects
Chen Danhuai (陳丹淮)	Sichuan/ 1943	GAD/ Department Director	Major General	Chen Yi (陳毅)	Fair
Chen Yong (陳勇)	Jaingxi/ 1952	Nanjing Army Academy/ President	Major General	Chen Fangren (陳坊仁)	Fair
Chen Zhishu (陳知庶)	Hunan	Gansu Provincial Military District/ Commander	Major General	Chen Geng (陳賡)	Good
Chen Zhiya (陳知涯)	Hunan/ 1949	AMS/ Research Fellow	Major General	Chen Geng	Fair
Duan Miyi (段沫毅)	Hunan/ 1953	GSH/ Department Director	Major General	Duan Suquan (段蘇權)	Fair
Han Dongjun (韓東軍)	1950	Anti-Chemical Weapons Academy/ Vice President	Major General	Han Huaizhi (韓懷志)	Fair
He Ping (賀平)	Hunan/ 1946	GSH/ Department Director	Major General	He Biao (賀彪)	Fair
Hu Xiangui (胡先貴)	Hubei/ 1944	East China Sea Fleet/ Deputy Commander	Rear Admiral	Hu Zhengping (胡正平)	Retirement
Huang Bin (黃彬)	Hunan 1943	NDU/ Department Chair	Major General	Huang Shengming (黃勝明)	Retirement

Table 2 (Continued)

Name	Home/ Birth	Name	Unit/ Title	Rank	Relative	Career prospects
Huang Gaocheng (黃高成)	Jiangsu/ 1949	Inner Mongolia Military District/ Commander	Major General	Yan Chuanye (閻川野)	Fair	
Jia Danbing (賈丹兵, female)	Hebei/ 1955	211 Hospital/ President	Major General	Wang Minggui (王明貴)	Fair	
Jia Xueyang (賈雪陽)	1949	Anti-Chemical Weapons Academy/ Deputy Political Commissar	Major General	Jia Yiping (賈一平)	Fair	
Li Nanzheng (李南征)	Henan	Shijiazhuang Army Academy/ Vice President	Major General	Li Desheng (李德生)	Fair	
Li Suolin (李鎖林)	Hebei/ 1952	Chengdu MR Air Force/ Deputy Chief of Staff	Major General	Li Lanmao (李蘭茂)	Fair	
Li Xiaojun (李小軍)	Jiangsu/ 1945	Shijiazhuang Army Academy/ President	Major General	Li Guangjun (李光軍)	Fair	
Liang Biqin (梁必駁)	Jiangxi	AMS/ Research Fellow	Major General	Ling Biye (梁必業)	Fair	
Liu Miquan (劉彌謙, female)	Sichuan/ 1944	Air Force Academy/ Vice President	Major General	Liu Bocheng (劉伯承)	Fair	
Liu Sheng (劉勝)	Hunan	GAD/ Department Deputy Director	Major General	Liu Peishan (劉培善)	Fair	
Liu Taichi (劉太逸)	Sichuan	Air Force/ Department Deputy Director	Major General	Liu Bocheng	Fair	

Table 2 (Continued)

Name	Home/ Birth	Unit/ Title	Rank	Relative	Career prospects
Liu Weiming (劉維明)	Sichuan	GAD	Major General	Liu Huaqing (劉華清)	Fair
Liu Xiaorong (劉曉榕)	Henan/ 1950	Army Corps/ Political Commissar	Major General	Liu Peishan	Good
Liu Zhenlai (劉振來)	Beijing	Beijing MR Air Force/ Political Commissar	Major General	Liu Baiyu (劉白羽)	Fair
Liu Zhuoming (劉卓明)	Hubei	Navy/ Department Director	Rear Admiral	Liu Huaqing	Fair
Qin Tian (秦天)	Hebei/ 1957	Anti-Chemical Weapons Academy/ Vice President	Major General	Qin Jiwei (秦基偉)	Good
Qin Weijiang (秦衛江)	Hubei/ 1956	Beijing MR/ Deputy Chief of Staff	Major General	Qin Jiwei	Good
Qiu Ming (邱明)	Hunan	GAD/ Department Deputy Director	Major General	Qiu Chuangcheng (邱創成)	Fair
Ruan Chaoyang (阮朝陽)	Fujian/ 1947	GAD/ Department Director	Major General	Zhong Qiguang (鍾期光)	Fair
Wang Hongguang (王洪光)	Shandong/ 1949	Nanjing MR/ Deputy Commander	Major General	Wang Jianqing (王建青)	Good
Xie Mingbao (謝名苞)	Jiangxi/ 1942	Manned Spaceship/ Office Director	Major General	Xie Youfa (謝有法)	Retirement

Table 2 (Continued)

Name	Home/ Birth	Unit/ Title	Rank	Relative	Career prospects
Xu Xiaoyan (徐小岩)	Shanxi/ 1948	Nanjing MR/ Deputy Commander	Major General	Xu Xiangqian (徐向前)	Good
Xu Yuanchao (許掇朝)	Henan/ 1953	Anhui Provincial Military District/ Commander	Major General	Xu Shiyou (許世友)	Good
Yan Xiaoning (顏曉寧)	Hunan/ 1951	Nanchang Army Academy/ Political Commissar	Major General	Yan Jinsheng (顏金生)	Fair
Yang Dongming (楊東明)	Fujian/ 1949	Air Force/ Deputy Commander	Major General	Yang Chengwu (楊成武)	Good
Yang Dongsheng (楊東勝)	Fujian/ 1946	Second Artillery Corps/ Department Director	Major General	Yang Chengwu	Fair
Yang Jiping (楊冀平)	Hunan	Chongqing Garrison/ Commander	Major General	Yang Yong (楊勇)	Fair
Yang Junsheng (楊俊生, female)	Fujian/ 1943	Armed Police/ Department Director	Major General	Yang Chengwu	Retirement
Zeng Haisheng (曾海生, female)	Jiangxi/ 1947	GSH/ Deputy Political Commissar	Major General	Zeng Shan (曾山)	Fair
Zeng Qingyang (曾慶洋)	Jiangxi/ 1945	COSTIND/ Department Director	Major General	Zeng Shan	Fair
Zeng Qingyuan (曾慶源)	Jiangxi/ 1950	Air Force/ Department Political Commissar	Major General	Zeng Shan	Fair

Table 2 (Continued)

Name	Home/ Birth	Unit/ Title	Rank	Relative	Career prospects
Zeng Xiaolan (曾曉安)	Jiangxi	Navy Air Force/ Political Department Director	Major General	Zeng Kelin (曾克林)	Fair
Zeng Xiaodong (曾小東, female)	Hunan	GSH/ Department Director	Major General	Zeng Xisheng (曾希聖)	Fair
Zhang Guangdong (張光東)	Guangxi/ 1946	Shijiazhuang Army Academy/ Vice President	Major General	Zhang Yunyi (張雲逸)	Fair
Zhang Youxia (張又俠)	Shaanxi/ 1950	Beijing MR/ Deputy Commander	Major General	Zhang Zongxun (張宗遜)	Good
Zheng Qin (鄭勤)	Henan/ 1951	65th Army Corps/ Commander	Major General	Zheng Weishan (鄭維山)	Good
Ding Yiping (丁一平)	Hunan/ 1951	Navy/ Deputy Chief of Staff	Vice Admiral	Ding Qiusheng (丁秋生)	Good
Fan Xiaoguang (范曉光)	Hubei/ 1944	Chengdu MR/ Deputy Commander	Lieut. General	Wang Ping (王平)	Fair
Huang Xin (黃新)	Jiangxi/ 1944	Air Force/ Deputy Political Commissar	Lieut. General	Yang Dezhi (楊得志)	Fair
Liu Weidong (劉衛東)	Hubei/ 1942	Nanjing MR/ Deputy Political Commissar	Vice Admiral	Liu Zhen (劉震)	Retirement
Liu Xiaojiang (劉曉江)	Jiangxi/ 1949	GPD/ Deputy Director	Lieut. General	Hu Yaobang (胡耀邦)	Fair

Table 2 (Continued)

Name	Home/ Birth	Unit/ Title	Rank	Relative	Career prospects
Liu Yazhou (劉亞洲)	Anhui/ 1952	NAir Force/ Deputy Political Commissar	Lieut. General	Li Xiannian (李先念)	Good
Liu Yuan (劉源)	Hunan/ 1951	AMS/ Political Commissar	Lieut. General	Liu Shaoqi (劉少奇)	Star
Ma Xiaotian (馬曉天)	Henan/ 1949	Air Force/ Deputy Commander	Lieut. General		Star
Pan Ruiji (潘瑞吉)	Zhejiang/ 1945	Shenyang MR/ Deputy Political Commissar	Lieut. General	Rao Zijian (饒子建)	Fair
Peng Xiaofeng (彭小楓)	Henan/ 1945	Second Artillery Corps/ Political Commissar	Lieut. General	Peng Xuefeng (彭雪楓)	Star
Wu Shengli (吳勝利)	Hebei/ 1945	GSH/ Deputy Chief of Staff	Vice Admiral	Wu Xian (吳憲)	Star
Xu Qiliang (許其亮)	Shandong/ 1950	GSH/ Deputy Chief of Staff	Lieut. General	Xu Lefu (許樂夫)	Star
Ye Aiqun (葉愛群)	Hubei/ 1945	Jinan MR/ Deputy Commander	Lieut. General	Ye Jianmin (葉建民)	Fair
Zhang Haiyang (張海陽)	Hunan/ 1949	Chengdu MR/ Political Commissar	Lieut. General	Zhang Zhen (張震)	Star

Sources: Author's database.

Acronyms: See table 1 above.



chief of the General Staff<sup>43</sup>

- Xu Qiliang (許其亮), a deputy commander of the Shenyang Military Region (瀋陽軍區) and concurrently commander of the Shenyang Military Region Air Force until July 2004, when he was promoted to be a deputy chief of the General Staff
- Liu Yuan (劉源), a deputy political commissar of the General Logistics Department until December 2005, when he was promoted to be political commissar of the PLA Academy of Military Sciences
- Peng Xiaofeng (彭小楓), son of Peng Xuefeng (彭雪楓, a communist revolutionary martyr who was killed in 1944 at the age of 37), deputy political commissar of the National Defense University until December 2003, when he was promoted to be political commissar of the PLA Second Artillery Corps<sup>44</sup>
- Ding Yiping (丁一平), deputy commander of the Jinan Military Region (濟南軍區) until he was demoted in June 2003<sup>45</sup>
- Fan Xiaoguang, deputy commander of the Chengdu Military Region (成都軍區)
- Liu Weidong (劉衛東), deputy political commissar of the Nanjing Military Region
- Liu Yazhou, deputy political commissar of the PLA Air Force
- Pan Ruiji (潘瑞吉), deputy political commissar of the Shenyang Military Region
- Ye Aiqun (葉愛群), deputy commander of the Jinan Military Region
- Zhang Haiyang (張海陽), deputy political commissar of the Beijing Military Region until December 2005

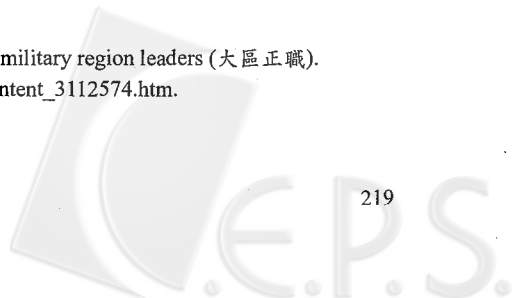
There are also many princeling generals with the rank of major general/rear admiral who hold deputy positions, including:

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<sup>43</sup>Deputy chiefs of staff have the same grade as military region leaders (大區正職).

<sup>44</sup>[http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2005-06/21/content\\_3112574.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2005-06/21/content_3112574.htm).

<sup>45</sup>This will be discussed in detail later.



- Wang Hongguang (王洪光), deputy commander of the Nanjing Military Region
- Xu Xiaoyan (徐小岩), deputy commander of the Nanjing Military Region
- Yang Dongming (楊東明), deputy commander of the PLA Air Force
- Zhang Youxia (張又俠), deputy commander of the Beijing Military Region
- Hu Xiangui (胡先貴), deputy commander of the East China Sea Fleet
- Yang Jiping (楊冀平), deputy commander of the Tianjin Garrison until January 2004

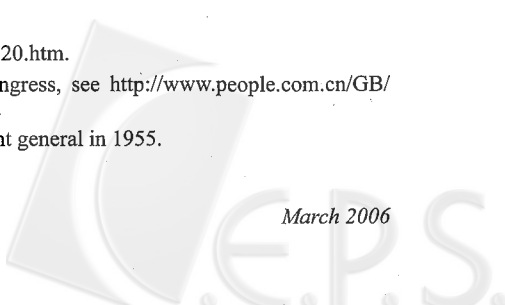
It is very likely that those princeling generals who are currently close to their retirement age will retire in their deputy positions. For example, Vice Admiral Liu Weidong, son of General Liu Zhen (劉震), reached his retirement age of 63 in 2005.<sup>46</sup> He will retire from his current position of deputy political commissar of the Nanjing Military Region, if he has not already done so. Lieutenant General Fan Xiaoguang, son of General Wang Ping, is currently a deputy commander of the Chengdu Military Region. Aged 62 in 2006, he has only one year left before his mandatory retirement, and it is difficult to imagine that he will get promoted any further. Rear Admiral Hu Xiangui, nephew of Major General Hu Zhengping (胡正平), is a deputy commander of the East China Sea Fleet and will reach his mandatory retirement age of 63 in 2007.

The "Central Committee hurdle" is also still evident: only three princeling generals managed to become members of the 16th Central Committee in November 2002. One is Ding Yiping,<sup>47</sup> son of Lieutenant General Ding Qiusheng (丁秋生),<sup>48</sup> who made it on to the 16th Central Committee

<sup>46</sup><http://202.84.17.11/world/htm/20000928/146720.htm>.

<sup>47</sup>For his biography before the 16th Party Congress, see <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/junshi/192/8190/8192/20020517/730718.html>.

<sup>48</sup>Ding Senior was awarded the rank of lieutenant general in 1955.



as an alternate member. In December 2000, he was appointed commander of the PLA Navy's North China Sea Fleet and concurrently deputy commander of the Jinan Military Region with the grade of military region deputy leader and the rank of vice admiral. Aged 51 at the time, Ding appeared to have a bright future ahead of him. However, he soon lost his positions due to an incident in April 2003 in which 70 officers and men aboard a Ming-class submarine died due to "improper command."<sup>49</sup> Ding is currently a deputy chief of staff of the PLA Navy.<sup>50</sup> At the age of 55 in 2006, he still has a chance of making a comeback.

Another is Xu Qiliang, son of Lieutenant General Xu Lefu (許樂夫). Xu Lefu was initially awarded the rank of colonel in 1955 and was promoted to the rank of senior colonel in 1962;<sup>51</sup> so in this sense, his son is not strictly a princeling in the first place. However, Xu Lefu was awarded the rank of lieutenant general (air force) in 1988. Here we have a fascinating case of a son catching up with and eventually surpassing his father in the army and in politics. When Xu Junior joined the PLA at the age of 16 in 1966, Xu Senior had already served in the army for more than 27 years and had gained plenty of combat experience. Twenty-two years later, when Xu Senior was conferred the rank of lieutenant general (air force) as deputy political commissar of the PLA Air Force, Xu Junior became an acting deputy army commander in the PLA Air Force after his graduation from the National Defense University. Xu Lefu was a deputy to the 12th Party Congress in 1982 and the 13th Party Congress in 1987. His son became an alternate member in the 14th Central Committee elected in 1992 at the age of 42, an alternate member of the 15th Central Committee elected in 1997, and a full member of the 16th Central Committee elected in 2002 at the age of 52. Xu Qiliang was awarded the rank of major general (air force) in 1991 and the rank of lieutenant general (air force) in 1996. His military and

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<sup>49</sup><http://tw.people.com.cn/GB/14810/14860/1915302.html>.

<sup>50</sup>He was reportedly demoted to the grade of army leader with the rank of rear admiral from the grade of deputy military region with the rank of vice admiral. See <http://www2.qglt.com.cn/wsrmlt/wyzs/2003/06/16/061601.html>. However, a different source says that he has retained his rank of vice admiral.

<sup>51</sup><http://www.sd-china.com/people/jxdai/28.htm>.



political career took off after his father's retirement in 1990. He became deputy chief of staff of the PLA Air Force in 1993, chief of staff of the PLA Air Force in 1994, deputy commander of the Shenyang Military Region and commander of the Shenyang Military Region Air Force in 2000, and finally a deputy chief of the General Staff of the PLA in 2004. He is the first air force officer since 1973 to have been appointed as deputy chief of the General Staff of the PLA.<sup>52</sup>

The third princeling general to gain a seat on the Central Committee is Ma Xiaotian (馬曉天). Ma is reportedly the son of a former high-ranking official (or officer), but it is not clear which one. Ma's experience is similar to that of Xu Qiliang. One year older than Xu, Ma also joined the PLA at the age of 16 (in 1965). He attended the Second Aviation Preparatory School (空軍第二航空預備學校) of the PLA Air Force (in Baoding, Hebei Province 河北省保定市) in July 1965, while Xu went to the First Aviation Preparatory School (空軍第一航空預備學校) of the PLA Air Force (in Changchun, Jilin Province 吉林省長春市)<sup>53</sup> the following year. After one year and five months of basic training, Ma moved on to the Twelfth Aviation School of the PLA Air Force (in Shanxi Province 山西省). Upon graduation, Ma taught at the aviation school for two years, and in December 1970, he was selected to receive further training at the Fifth Aviation School of the PLA Air Force (in Jinan, Shandong Province 山東省濟南市). Although Ma Xiaotian was one year older than Xu Qiliang and he joined the PLA one year earlier, he lagged behind Xu by four years in later promotions. Xu was awarded the rank of major general (air force) in 1991; Ma was awarded the same rank in 1995. Xu was awarded the rank of lieutenant general (air force) in 1996; Ma was awarded the same rank in 2000. Xu

<sup>52</sup> Wu Faxian (吳法憲), commander of the PLA Air Force between 1965 and 1973, was the first air force officer to hold this position. Wu was appointed deputy chief of the General Staff in 1967 (concurrently with his position as air force commander) and was removed in 1973. For more details, see Zhiyue Bo, "The General Departments of the PLA: An Update," *Chinese Military Update* 2, no. 2 (July/August 2004): 9-12.

<sup>53</sup> This school was renamed the First Aviation Foundation School of the PLA Air Force (空軍第一飛行基礎學校) in 1986 and its name was changed again in 1993 to the Changchun Aviation Academy of the PLA Air Force (空軍長春飛行學院). See <http://www.h-edu.com/htm/200507/2005070615495316.htm>.

became a deputy chief of staff of the PLA Air Force in January 1993; Ma was appointed to the same post in March 1997. Xu became an alternate member of the 14th Central Committee in 1992, but Ma did not enter the Central Committee until 10 years later.

Beginning in 1999, however, Ma Xiaotian seemed to be catching up. While Xu was appointed as a deputy commander of the Shenyang Military Region and concurrently commander of the Shenyang Military Region Air Force in February 1999, Ma became a deputy commander of the Lanzhou Military Region (蘭州軍區) and concurrently commander of the Lanzhou Military Region Air Force just four months later. In November 2002, both Ma and Xu entered the 16th Central Committee as full members. After having served in the Lanzhou and Nanjing military regions for two years each, Ma was promoted to be deputy commander of the PLA Air Force in July 2003.<sup>54</sup> He was almost on a par with Xu Qiliang at this point.

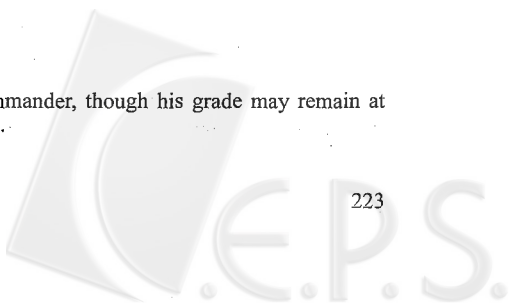
### **A New Cohort of Princeling Generals: Breaking the Two Barriers?**

Led by Peng Xiaofeng, a new cohort of princeling generals is emerging. Some of them have already broken the barrier of deputy positions and are likely to cross the Central Committee hurdle. They will soon be among the most powerful members of the military elite in China.

These rising stars may be divided into two groups. The first group contains the *crème de la crème* of the cohort: Xu Qiliang, Wu Shengli, Peng Xiaofeng, Liu Yuan, Zhang Haiyang, and Ma Xiaotian. Xu Qiliang (deputy chief of the General Staff and member of the 16th Central Committee), Wu Shengli (deputy chief of the General Staff), and Peng Xiaofeng (political commissar of the Second Artillery Corps) are likely to enter the 17th Central Committee as full members. Liu Yuan (son of Liu Shaoqi, 劉少奇) is

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<sup>54</sup>Ma was promoted as an air force deputy commander, though his grade may remain at military region deputy leader (大區副職) level.



also likely to enter the 17th Central Committee since he has replaced Wen Zongren (溫宗仁) as political commissar of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences and Wen is a full member of the 16th Central Committee. Zhang Haiyang (son of General Zhang Zhen 張震)<sup>55</sup> replaced Liu Shutian (劉書田) as political commissar of the Chengdu Military Region.<sup>56</sup> Again, Zhang is also likely to enter the 17th Central Committee to fill the vacancy left by Liu Shutian.

Finally, as the highest-ranking deputy commander of the PLA Air Force and a full member of the 16th Central Committee, Lieutenant General Ma Xiaotian is a good candidate to replace Qiao Qingchen (喬清晨), commander of the PLA Air Force and member of the Central Military Commission.<sup>57</sup> Qiao was born in 1939 and will be 68 years old in 2007. These six princeling generals are likely to be promoted to the rank of general before 2008<sup>58</sup> and to enter the 17th Central Committee.

The second batch includes promising princeling generals. They are Xu Xiaoyan, Liu Yazhou, Qin Weijiang (秦衛江), Yang Dongming, Zhang Youxia, Wang Hongguang, Yang Jiping, Chen Zhishu (陳知庶), Zheng Qin (鄭勤), Xu Yuanchao (許援朝), and Qin Tian (秦天).

Major General Xu Xiaoyan, son of Marshal Xu Xiangqian (徐向前), is currently deputy commander of the Nanjing Military Region<sup>59</sup> as well as a deputy to the 10th National People's Congress (NPC, 全國人民代表大會).<sup>60</sup> Although the official data on Xinhuanet indicate that he was born in

<sup>55</sup>Zhang Zhen was awarded the rank of lieutenant general in 1955 and the rank of general in 1988. See [http://www.cass.net.cn/zhuanti/y\\_party/yd/yd\\_k/yd\\_k\\_219.htm](http://www.cass.net.cn/zhuanti/y_party/yd/yd_k/yd_k_219.htm).

<sup>56</sup>[http://202.82.86.97:82/gate/gb/www.atichinese.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=11518&Itemid=33](http://202.82.86.97:82/gate/gb/www.atichinese.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=11518&Itemid=33).

<sup>57</sup>His competitor in this regard is Xu Qiliang, who is also a good candidate for the position of PLA Air Force commander and membership of the Central Military Commission.

<sup>58</sup>China has promoted ninety-eight officers to the rank of general since 1988: seventeen in September 1988, six in June 1993, nineteen in June 1994, four in January 1996, ten in March 1998, two in September 1999, sixteen in June 2000, seven in June 2002, fifteen in June 2004, and two in September 2004. See <http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/zhuanti/168115.htm>; [http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2004-09/25/content\\_2020509.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2004-09/25/content_2020509.htm); and [http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2004-09/25/content\\_2020509.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2004-09/25/content_2020509.htm).

<sup>59</sup>*Jiefangjun bao* (PLA Daily), October 14, 2005, 1.

<sup>60</sup>[http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2005-03/11/content\\_2683536.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2005-03/11/content_2683536.htm).

February 1947,<sup>61</sup> he is more likely to have been born in 1948, as his elder sister, Xu Luxi (徐魯溪), is known to have been born in February 1947.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, he has been described as entering Qinghua University in 1975, though he actually graduated from the Auto-Control Department of Qinghua University in that year.<sup>63</sup> With a master's degree in computer science from Canada, he is one of very few generals in the PLA with strong credentials in modern technology. He is likely to obtain the rank of lieutenant general and to enter the 17th Central Committee.

Lieutenant General Liu Yazhou, who is the son-in-law of Li Xiannian (李先念) and son of Liu Jiande, is an influential writer and a deputy political commissar of the PLA Air Force.<sup>64</sup> He joined the PLA in 1968 at the age of 16, went to Wuhan University (武漢大學) as a worker-peasant-soldier student in 1972 (where he met his future wife, Li Xiaolin 李小林), and began working at Capital Airport in Beijing in 1975. He has written novels and commentaries since the early 1970s, and he was initially promoted as a professional writer in the PLA. He was awarded the rank of major general in 1996 while he was a political department deputy director of the Beijing Military Region Air Force. He was promoted to be political department director of the Beijing Military Region Air Force in 1997, political commissar of the Chengdu Military Region Air Force in 2002, and deputy political commissar of the PLA Air Force in December 2003. In 2003, he was also awarded the rank of lieutenant general.<sup>65</sup> Liu's rapid promotion over a very short period under the leadership of Jiang Zemin (江澤民), without having any experience as a professional military officer, is more likely to be due to his connection with Li Xiannian than to his in-

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<sup>61</sup>[http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2004-03/17/content\\_1371120.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2004-03/17/content_1371120.htm).

<sup>62</sup>He is son of Xu Xiangqian and his third wife, Huang Jie (黃杰). For Xu Xiangqian's three marriages, see <http://www.chineseliterature.com.cn/jishi/rw-sdys/015.htm>.

<sup>63</sup>He is one of the forty-five "Qinghua generals." For the list, see <http://join-tsinghua.edu.cn/bkzsw/detail.jsp?seq=1018&boardid=1301>.

<sup>64</sup>Liu Jiande was too junior in 1955 to be awarded the rank of major general. He was political commissar of a regiment in 1949. His last position in the PLA was deputy political commissar of the Logistics Department of the Lanzhou Military Region, but it is not clear what his rank was.

<sup>65</sup>For a biography, see <http://chinaway.org/17/lgs.htm>.

fluent writings. His strength is his youth; he will be only 56 in 2006.

Major General Qin Weijiang is also likely to have a bright future mainly because of his age. He was born in 1956, so will be only 50 in 2006. He is among the best educated of this group. Qin received a bachelor of engineering degree from the PLA Nanjing Institute of Communication Engineering in 1982 and a master's degree in military science from the National Defense University in 1998. He was the first military officer with the rank of deputy army commander to have received a master's degree in military science at the time.<sup>66</sup> He was promoted to be a deputy chief of staff of the Beijing Military Region in 2005<sup>67</sup> and is likely to get further promoted in the future.<sup>68</sup>

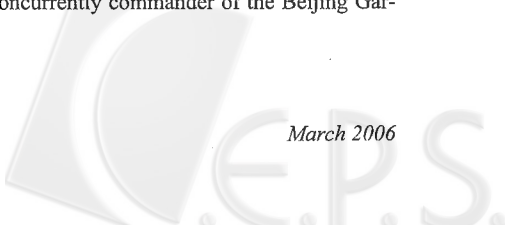
Major General Yang Dongming (son of General Yang Chengwu 楊成武) was surprisingly appointed a deputy commander of the PLA Air Force in December 2005 at the age of 56. Although he had obtained a college degree from the Beijing Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (北京航空航天大学) in 1977 and worked briefly in the PLA Air Force, Yang's work has mainly been in the political field. He worked in the political department of the Taiyuan Military Subdistrict (太原軍分區) as deputy director and director, in the political department of the Beijing Garrison as deputy director, in the Hebei Provincial Military District (河北省軍區) as deputy political commissar, and in the General Logistics Department as deputy director and director of the Petroleum Supply Department. He was awarded the rank of major general in 1994.<sup>69</sup> Although he is quite young for his rank, his potential for further promotion will largely depend on whether he can actually perform.

<sup>66</sup><http://news.enorth.com.cn/system/2002/01/31/000259317.shtml>.

<sup>67</sup><http://media.rednet.com.cn/manage/show.asp?id=650682>.

<sup>68</sup>He is only one step away from the stepping-stone position of chief of staff of the Beijing Military Region. Former occupants of this vital position include Zhu Qi (朱啓), currently commander of the Beijing Military Region; Chang Wanquan (常萬全), currently commander of the Shenyang Military Region; and Qiu Jinkai (邱金凱), currently deputy commander of the Beijing Military Region and concurrently commander of the Beijing Garrison.

<sup>69</sup>[http://www.ctw.cn/article\\_view.asp?id=1100](http://www.ctw.cn/article_view.asp?id=1100).





Major General Zhang Youxia (son of General Zhang Zongxun 張宗遜) has recently been promoted to be a deputy commander of the Beijing Military Region on the retirement of Lieutenant General Su Rongsheng. Zhang reportedly performed well in the war against Vietnam, when he was commander of the 119th Regiment, 40th Division, 14th Army.<sup>70</sup> He later served as deputy commander and commander of the 13th Army Corps in Chongqing between 1993 and 2005. He was promoted to be deputy commander of the Beijing Military Region in December 2005.<sup>71</sup> Zhang Youxia will be 56 in 2006, and he is likely to rise further in the near future.

Major General Wang Hongguang (son of Major General Wang Jianqing 王建青) was promoted to be a deputy commander of the Nanjing Military Region in December 2005.<sup>72</sup> Wang Hongguang was born in 1949 and joined the PLA in 1968. A graduate of Hajungong,<sup>73</sup> he was appointed president of the PLA Armored Forces Engineering Academy (裝甲兵工程學院) in February 1998 at the age of 48.<sup>74</sup> Prior to his latest promotion, Wang was director of the GAD's Equipment Supply Department. He is likely to be awarded the rank of lieutenant general within a year<sup>75</sup> and is likely to be further promoted.

Major General Yang Jiping (son of General Yang Yong 楊勇) is also likely to climb further up the ladder of success in the PLA. In contrast to his colleague, Major General Hong Bao (former deputy commander of the Tianjin Garrison), he has overcome the barrier of deputy positions. He was promoted from deputy commander of the Tianjin Garrison to commander of the Chongqing Garrison in December 2003.<sup>76</sup> However, he is currently

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<sup>70</sup>[http://bbs.ark10.org/printthread.php? s=a710df687185e76c5edef486a8e47e2d&threadid=1224](http://bbs.ark10.org/printthread.php?s=a710df687185e76c5edef486a8e47e2d&threadid=1224). For more details, see [http://bbs.zju.edu.cn/cgi-bin/bbsanc? path=/groups/GROUP\\_6/Military/D98388371/wenxie/D733F69AA/D98521C2F/M.1071479856.A](http://bbs.zju.edu.cn/cgi-bin/bbsanc? path=/groups/GROUP_6/Military/D98388371/wenxie/D733F69AA/D98521C2F/M.1071479856.A).

<sup>71</sup>[http://www.cq.xinhuanet.com/zhengwu/2005-12/20/content\\_5854912.htm](http://www.cq.xinhuanet.com/zhengwu/2005-12/20/content_5854912.htm).

<sup>72</sup><http://www.cnwnc.com/20051221/ca2060673.htm>.

<sup>73</sup><http://www.lovenudt.com/biography/general/index.htm>.

<sup>74</sup><http://www.gmw.cn/01gmr/1998-11/18/GB/17880%5EGM5-1812.htm>.

<sup>75</sup>He was awarded the rank of major general in 1998.

<sup>76</sup>He was in Tianjin in December 2003 (see [http://www.tj.xinhuanet.com/tp/2003-12/11/content\\_1326413.htm](http://www.tj.xinhuanet.com/tp/2003-12/11/content_1326413.htm)). He appeared in Chongqing in January 2004 (see <http://cqtoday>

working at provincial military district level and he needs to go up one level to a military region in order to compete nationally.

Major General Chen Zhishu (son of Senior General Chen Geng<sup>77</sup>) also has a promising future. He was deputy commander of the PLA Hong Kong Garrison,<sup>78</sup> deputy director of the Mobilization Department of the PLA General Staff Headquarters (總參謀部),<sup>79</sup> and was promoted to be commander of the Gansu Provincial Military District (甘肅省軍區) around April 2005.<sup>80</sup>

Major General Zheng Qin (son of Lieutenant General Zheng Weishan 鄭維山) is likely to achieve great things. Zheng Qin used to be deputy commander of the 63rd Army Corps. When in September 2003 Jiang Zemin announced a reduction of 200,000 PLA troops from three army corps, one of which was the 63rd,<sup>81</sup> Zheng was transferred to the Beijing Military Region as deputy chief of staff. He was appointed commander of the 65th Army Corps in August 2005. Aged 55 in 2006, he is likely to rise further.

Major General Xu Yuanchao (son of General Xu Shiyou (許世友)) was appointed as commander of the Anhui Provincial Military District (安徽省軍區) in July 2005.<sup>82</sup> Prior to his current post, he was deputy director of the Armament Department of the Nanjing Military Region.<sup>83</sup> Aged 53 in 2006, he still has a long and promising career ahead of him.

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.cqnews.net/system/2004/01/19/000347978.shtml). Although his title of commander was not mentioned in the report, it is clear from the fact that his name was listed before that of Political Commissar Duan Shuchun (段樹春) that he already held that position. For confirmation, see [http://www7.chinesenewsnet.com/gb/NewsPics/Duowei//Tue\\_Jan\\_13\\_19\\_09\\_12\\_2004.html](http://www7.chinesenewsnet.com/gb/NewsPics/Duowei//Tue_Jan_13_19_09_12_2004.html).

<sup>77</sup>For an article about Senior General Chen Geng from the point of view of his wife, Fu Ya (傅涯), see <http://www.booker.com.cn/gb/paper23/52/class002300001/hwz229683.htm>.

<sup>78</sup><http://www.hkzg.com/06/002.asp>.

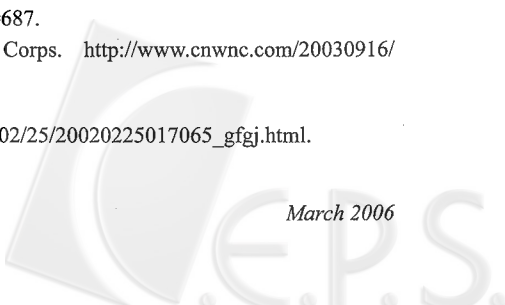
<sup>79</sup><http://www.pladaily.com.cn/item/zgmb/200405/txt/02.htm>.

<sup>80</sup>See <http://www.jnmc.com/show.asp?newsid=687>.

<sup>81</sup>The other two were 23rd and 24th Army Corps. <http://www.cnwnc.com/20030916/ca539222.htm>.

<sup>82</sup><http://www.whrfb.gov.cn/gzdt/062.htm>.

<sup>83</sup>[http://www.pladaily.com.cn/gb/defence/2002/02/25/20020225017065\\_gfgj.html](http://www.pladaily.com.cn/gb/defence/2002/02/25/20020225017065_gfgj.html).



Finally, Major General Qin Tian (another son of General Qin Jiwei) may also have a promising future. He was a regimental commander (235th Regiment, 27th Army under Commander Qian Guoliang 錢國梁 and Political Commissar Xu Yongqing 徐永清) at the age of 29 in 1986.<sup>84</sup> He was vice president of the Anti-Chemical Weapons Academy (防化學院) in 2003.<sup>85</sup> He will be 49 in 2006 and is probably destined for further success.

Because of age limitations, Lieutenant General Pan Ruiji (son-in-law of Lieutenant General Rao Zijian 饒子健<sup>86</sup>) and Lieutenant General Ye Aiqun (son of Major General Ye Jianmin 葉建民) have relatively limited opportunities for further promotion. They were both born in 1945 and will reach their retirement age of 63 in 2008 in their current positions. Pan Ruiji joined the PLA at the age of 18 in 1963.<sup>87</sup> His parents died while he was young, and he grew up with his brother and sister. He became a deputy section head in the PLA at age of 25 and a divisional political commissar at the age of 37. He was awarded the rank of major general in 1993 and the rank of lieutenant general in 2002. He served as political department director first of the Nanjing Military Region and then of the Shenyang Military Region (July 2003-August 2005). He was appointed a deputy political commissar of the Shenyang Military Region in August 2005.<sup>88</sup> He seems to be close to General Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), Chief of the General Staff. When he was political department director of the Nanjing Military Region, General Liang was the commander (December 1999-November 2002). Pan accompanied General Liang on a visit to Argentina, Uruguay, and Cuba from October 25 to November 9, 2005.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup><http://www.9ebook.com/article/explore/war/10364.html>.

<sup>85</sup><http://www2.qglt.com.cn/wsrmlt/jbft/2003/02/022701.html>.

<sup>86</sup><http://army.news.tom.com/general/china/gongchandang/zhongjiang/0089.html>.

<sup>87</sup>Some reports say he joined at 17, but he must have been 18 when he joined in December 1963 because he was born in October 1945. See <http://0086577.cn/gnwzr/view.php?id=1283>.

<sup>88</sup>In July 2004, a reporter saw a photo of Pan Ruiji with then CMC Chairman Jiang Zemin in Pan's office. It is not clear whether he still has the photo on display now. See <http://0086577.cn/gnwzr/view.php?id=1283>.

<sup>89</sup><http://www.plapic.com.cn/html/200601/200601003.htm>.

Lieutenant General Ye Aiqun is well known for an incident that occurred in March 2005, when he and his driver pursued and captured two robbers. The Shandong Provincial Foundation for Stopping Crime (山東省見義勇為基金會) gave him an award of 5,000 *yuan* for his courageous action (he handed the money back), and he was widely admired and emulated as a role model.<sup>90</sup> Ye worked in the Guangzhou Military Region as army commander and chief of staff before his transfer to the Jinan Military Region in August 2003.<sup>91</sup>

### Implications for the PLA: Nepotism or Meritocracy?

What does the emergence of the princeling generals tell us about appointments in the Chinese military? Are the princelings' promotions due to nepotism or their own qualifications and accomplishments?

As noted earlier, princelings (especially sons) have been promoted mostly because of their family connections. It is evident that some princeling generals who are currently on active duty have indeed benefited from their ties to the top leadership. Lieutenant General Liu Yazhou, deputy political commissar of the PLA Air Force, for instance, rose rapidly in the PLA probably more because of his connection to Li Xiannian than because of his accomplishments as an air force officer. However, it is not fair to attribute the promotions of all the princeling generals to their family ties. In many cases, their fathers died when they were very young. In fact, many princeling generals have climbed the ladder of success because of their own qualifications and accomplishments. Examples include Xu Qiliang, Ma Xiaotian, Wu Shengli, Zhang Youxia, Zhang Haiyang, Ding Yiping, Qin Weijiang, and Qin Tian.

In many cases, princeling generals have failed to gain seats on the CCP Central Committee not because of their bad performance but because

<sup>90</sup><http://jczs.sina.com.cn/2005-04-10/1054279797.html>.

<sup>91</sup><http://ics.nccu.edu.tw/frame.php?address=polsun&id=1217&PHPSESSID=9df0d2a2400a44b9cb8b1cd9df389ca5>.

of the bad reputation of princelings in general. A few princeling generals entered the 16th Central Committee partly because they were not known as princelings. Very few people in China knew Ding Yiping as a princeling; even fewer recognized Xu Qiliang and Ma Xiaotian as princelings.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Princeling generals constitute a major part of the military elite in China. As children of high-ranking first generation military and civilian leaders, they have an extensive support network. Yet until very recently, most of them faced two major barriers in their military and political careers: they were limited to deputy positions and they found it almost impossible to gain seats on the Central Committee. The situation seems to be changing for the better for princeling generals in recent reshuffles of military leaders. Several of them have been promoted to key positions in the PLA, and they are likely to be selected as members of the 17th Central Committee in 2007.

The rising stars include Xu Qiliang, Wu Shengli, Peng Xiaofeng, Liu Yuan, Zhang Haiyang, and Ma Xiaotian, as well as Xu Xiaoyan, Liu Yazhou, Qin Weijiang, Pan Ruiji, Yang Dongming, Zhang Youxia, Wang Hongguang, Yang Jiping, Chen Zhishu, Zheng Qin, Xu Yuanchao, and Qin Tian. Ding Yiping should also be included because he is likely to recover from his setback in 2003 and join the winning group in the near future. The emergence of the princeling generals is likely to contribute to the professionalization of the PLA if their future promotions are based not on their family ties but on their own qualifications and accomplishments.

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