

## **The Significance of Jiang Zemin's "Attaching Importance to Politics"**

Jiang Zemin, general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), mentioned "attaching importance to politics" (*jiang zhengzhi*) for the first time in September 1995 at the Fifth Plenum of the CCP's Fourteenth Central Committee. On April 1, 1996, the *People's Daily* interpreted the meaning of the term in an editorial. Both the speech and the editorial touched only lightly on the deviations committed by Party and government cadres in implementing reform and opening-up measures. According to Jiang, the real concern was over Westernization caused by reform and opening-up. In other words, he was afraid that the divisive activities of external forces might endanger the CCP's ruling status. Therefore, he prudently required cadres to regard economic construction as mainland China's key task and the focus of government work, but at the same time reminded them not to forget two basic points: the Four Cardinal Principles (which define the government's nature) and the reform and opening-up policies (the guidelines for government work).

Jiang's proposal has incurred two very different reactions: strong advocacy by the military, and severe criticism of government work by dogmatists who have operated under the pretext of stressing politics.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) General Political Department and other departments took Jiang's phrase a step further in an issue of *Jiefangjun bao* (Liberation Army Daily), defining the "limits" of eight categories covering fields of ideology, politics, and work style that Jiang had not elaborated on in his speech. All PLA members were expected to acquire a clear understanding of these limits. The eight categories, published by PLA theorists under the pseudonym of Xie Lixuan, were intended to assist the ideological education of military personnel and were pledges of loyalty to Jiang, as well as the theorists' attempts to defend their own positions and authority.

The CCP organ *Qiushi* (Seeking Truth) also reprinted another

recent speech made by Jiang on March 3 which included the “attaching importance to politics” phrase in its July 1 issue. Around this time, Deng Liqun and other dogmatists unofficially published a “ten-thousand-word letter” (*wanyanshu*) to the CCP Central Committee criticizing reform and opening-up policies’ shortcomings as well as corruption in the Party. The dogmatists quoted from Jiang’s speeches, mentioning his “attaching importance to politics” remark, in the hopes of creating an opportunity for discussion and participation in politics, or possibly even starting a political debate.

Jiang originally hoped to bring about a balance between the leftists and rightists by proposing “attaching importance to politics.” However, contrary to his expectations, the two forces each interpreted the term according to their needs. In other words, Jiang was once again caught in a delicate dispute between the conservatives and the reformists. The reformists feared that “attaching importance to politics” would become a pretext for leftist campaigns, while leftist forces seized the opportunity to criticize certain measures adopted by the current Jiang administration. To prevent the theoretical controversy from escalating, the June 6 *People’s Daily* reiterated Jiang’s main objectives in an article entitled “Firm Adherence to Marxism Is Not Shaken” by Xing Fensi. By doing this, the CCP Central Committee hoped to end the dispute and extricate Jiang from his predicament.

At this time, the debate arising from Jiang’s advocacy of “attaching importance to politics” seems to have subsided. However, Jiang is still faced with three thorny structural problems: the contradiction between one-party dictatorship and economic reform and opening-up; corruption of Party and government cadres; and how to cope with changes caused by external ideas and forces. These problems, which will be difficult for Jiang and future successors to solve, will be the main criteria for qualitative change in the Beijing regime.

(Milton D. Yeh)